Between National Cinemas: Reframing Films from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a critical transnational examination of films from three culturally and historically interrelated nations in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Films from these countries are often studied as national cinemas distinct from one another. However, this thesis argues for a theorisation of these cinemas through the concept of Nusantara which speaks to the geographical, social, and cultural patterns of the region before the advent of film and nationalism in Southeast Asia. The overlapping cultural significance of the cinematic representations of these countries is analysed through themes of cultural identity, mobility and belonging. "Nusantara cinema" (or archipelagic cinema) is used as a strategy to evade national political boundaries, thus providing a critical look at transnationalism in film studies (Higbee & Lim, 2010) endeavouring to illustrate such links through motifs that speak to the region's archipelagic culture of mobility, specifically the concept of *tanahair* (literally, 'land and water' meaning 'homeland') and *merantau* (to sojourn), as well as the treatment of borderland populations and cultural cosmopolitanism. Nusantara, a portmanteau for 'between islands' is a Malay word referring to island Southeast Asia. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's theories of in-betweenness, hybridity and liminality, I argue that cultural representation in films from the three countries transcends the ethnonationalist frameworks of national culture and national cinema. Firstly, nusantara is a place where cultures meet and regularly compete in asymmetric power relations among groups and individuals who continually seek a feeling of belonging; it is not just their home, but also a 'contact zone' (Pratt, 2002). However, the multifaceted nature of *merantau* offers a rather complicated sense of place and homeland. Furthermore, the path of sojourners in films reacted to the political and cultural negotiations in the 1960s, 1970s and late 1990s. Currently, films from these countries highlight the borderland communities in liminality, thereby

giving credence to transnational cultural identities, as well as promoting cultural and spatial connections across countries and linking Southeast Asia's diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Towards a Conceptualisation of a Nusantara Cinema: Southeast Asian Cinema Beyond the Nation

The National Cinemas of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

Prevailing cinematic representations of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore and the interpretation of film history are trapped by nationally defined cinematic identities anchored in an outdated division between everyday life realities and national political realities. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that films from these three countries are explainable only within a specific national framework because, from the perspective of the representation of culture in films, little is known about how these diverse and complex cultures of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore form national perceptions and outcomes in the broader context of the history and the complexities of the three national institutions.

Disagreements about national cultural identities and material heritage have gained momentum over the past two decades in many Southeast Asian countries, especially after the inception of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The convention principally aims at safeguarding specific forms of intangible cultural heritage to ensure continuity and preservation.[1] Arguably, such polemical exchanges demonstrate a sense of insecurity characteristic of young nations. What is at issue in this debate is cultural ownership/propriety: claiming something as their own, and it also indicates that national cultural identities are dynamic and subject to consistent development and improvement. Public disagreement occurs when one of these three countries declare that a cultural heritage belongs solely to their national community. Public debates among these three nations regarding cultural

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[1] Read UNESCO's explanation at https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003.

objects, traditions, or expressions have accordingly attracted wide-spread attention in recent years (Croissant & Trinn 2009; Suhardjono 2012; Chong 2012; Clark 2013; Clark & Pietsch 2014). In brief, many of these debates on cultural objects, traditions and/or expressions do not belong to any one national entity because they are all regionally shared and have in some way or form evolved from the crisscrossing migration within the 'Malay Archipelago' a.k.a the 'Indo-Malay Archipelago', the "Sea of *Malayu*",[2] the lands of the "sea-oriented peoples,"[3] or, the Nusantara[4] cultural sphere.

In order to explore this cultural terrain, this thesis reads regional films to gain a better understanding the cultural configurations of Southeast Asian countries since films do not simply represent or express the stable characteristics of a national culture, but are themselves one of the hotbeds of discussions about the principles, objectives, heritage, and history of a country (Hjort & Mackenzie, 2000, p. 4). Sadly, such overlapping of national cultural issues has affected the citizen's sense of cultural belonging owing to various levels of human mobility within this maritime region, compounded by ethnic-racial stratification within the three countries.

This thesis argues for the Nusantara conceptualisation of Southeast Asian cinema based on shared cultural characteristics, regional geography and filmmaking practices. Conceptualising Nusantara cinema is a departure from and a challenge to the ethnonationalist conceptualisation of national culture and national cinemas that have hitherto been dominant in cinema discussions in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. This investigation deals with transnational socio-cultural dynamics, plus space and temporal relations to the point that the selected films shape a regional cultural attitude.

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[2] Read Andaya and Andaya (2014), *'The "Sea of Malayu"'*. In: D. Jones & M. Marion, eds. *The Dynamics of Cultural Counterpoint in Asian Studies.* Albany: State University of New York. pp. 207-219.
[3] The term "sea-oriented peoples" is given by Yuriko Nakata as cited by Perera in her book, *Australia and the insular imagination: Beaches, borders, boats, and bodies* (2009).
[4] In the 1980s, Nusantara became a very popular term throughout Southeast Asia and especially in the 1990s, although the reasons for the resurgence are not clear (Evers, 2016, pp. 8-9).

In defining Nusantara cinema, I draw from the work of prominent Southeast Asian filmmakers who incorporate specific Nustantara themes in their work through an interpretation of the land and water they call home or '*Tanahair*' (literally 'land-water' but meaning 'homeland') and migration or a version known as '*merantau*' (to sojourn) as forming a common experience. In addition, I complicate national borders and mutually-exclusive national territories through portrayals of frontier livelihoods in 'contact zones'. Their films frame the three national spaces as a single cultural space and remind local populations who they are, the locations where they live, and how the past affects the present, by discussing cultural identities, social belonging, and human mobility.

A secure national cultural identity is an important marker of national wellbeing but identifying a specific national culture in a recently divided region that was partitioned by colonial powers is almost impossible. In any case, according to Stuart Hall:

> National cultures are a distinctly modern form. The allegiance and identification which, in a pre-modern age or more traditional societies were given to a tribe, people, religion and region, came gradually in Western societies to be transferred to the national culture. Regional and ethnic differences were gradually subsumed beneath what Gellner calls the 'political roof' of the nation state, which thus became a powerful source of meanings for modern cultural identities (1992, p. 292).

Associated with these ideas of national cultures, the concept of 'National Cinema' emerged out of the expressions of cinematic nationalism in Europe in reaction to the cultural dominance of Hollywood in the early twentieth century. National cinemas were initially established to reflect and represent a national culture and to be produced in a national vernacular by national filmmakers (Higson, 2002, pp. 52-3). When Andrew Higson, who is credited with problematizing the concept of national cinema, saw his idea starting to embrace filmmaking, he began to reconsider national cinema as a philosophy of national film culture and identity. Higson uses Anderson's concept of

"imagined community" to problematise the relationship between nation and cinema. The imagined national community of Benedict Anderson, is problematic as it does not encourage discussion to go beyond regional borders and to restrict the sense of belonging to political limitations (Higson, 2000, pp. 64-7). Higson also reminds us that the nation state, cultural diversity and cultural specificity remain vital in discussing national cinema and the culture of a country. In his view, cultural diversity and cultural specificity regarding film representations are highly dependent on government policies (2000, pp. 69-72).

Following Higson, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean National Cinema(s) are "the product of the tension between 'home' and 'away', between the identification of the homely and the assumption that it is quite distinct from what happens elsewhere" (p. 67). Rather than heterogenous national cinemas, this thesis argues that films from these three countries constitute a homogenous cultural space that is understandable beyond national territories due to shared cultural identities and histories. Also, the films chosen here consistently resist the types of representations that the state emulates or promotes. Instead, they offer narratives and representations that imagine commonalities that transcend the national.

Nevertheless, scholars often provide a static picture of the representational and cultural values of films from these countries and fail to appreciate the importance of culture and its dynamics, which can also reduce the impact of films on regional culture or vice versa (Irawanto, 2014). For instance, in one of the earliest books in English on Indonesian cinema, Salim Said (1991) questions the absence of 'the real face of Indonesia' in Indonesian films of the period. Published in the same year, Karl G. Heider in *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (1991) attempts to search for the possibility of 'Indonesian-ness' in feature films made in Indonesia during the New Order (1966-1998). In Malaysia, Hatta Azad Khan (1997) contends that only Malay language films constitute the national cinema of Malaysia, whereas in Singapore, although the city-state did not have a notable film industry for the first twenty-five years of its existence as

an independent state, Singapore's cinema currently reflects the strengths of the inter-Asian mix of Chinese, Indians, Malays and Eurasians living together (Liew & Teo, 2017, p. xvii). According to Lim (2018), "like nation and identity, Singapore cinema is not singular but a composite of multiple Singapores in multiple films through multiple periods." Lim also suggests that the nation is what Singaporean cinema presents when viewed through the national cinema lens. While nations can be said to be producing their cinemas, it could also be said that cinemas are producing nations.

Therefore, national cinemas based on an idea of national character, images, and values, create boundaries to Southeast Asian diversity. However, it remains useful to examine the symbols used in the representations by the filmmakers to express stories, ideas, and thoughts regarding the questions of national specificity from what Jinhee Choi (2006) calls "a relational account." By comparing films from the three national cinemas using a relational approach, it highlights the fact that national cinema is not a given, but is only marked as such when a collection of recognisable features typical of other national cinemas is available (Choi, 2006, p. 315; Irawanto, 2014, p. 8). Also, the context of "national cinema" affords us the space to appreciate how a nation is represented and though nations can be said to produce their own cinemas, cinemas could also be said to produce nations (Lim, 2018), as well as presenting film as a way to explore nation-building ideologies (Higbee, 2007, p. 81). There has been considerable scholarship evaluating how films from the three national cinemas represent the country's culture and its people, especially during the past twenty years or so that offer new ways of understanding 'national' cinema (see Khoo 2007; Sarji 2006; Ibrahim 2009; Millet 2011; Baumgärtel 2012; Barker 2015).

In Malaysia, the basis for "national cinema" is that it is the face (*wajah*) of "national culture". Cinema as '*wajah*' is found in the debates of parliamentarians over the *Malaysian Film Censorship Act* in 2001 and in the motto '*Filem Kita, Wajah Kita*' (Our Film, Our Image) used for the 3rd Malaysian Film Festival in 1982 (the 32nd Indonesian Film Festival in 2012 also uses the same theme). This rhetorical query was also used in Indonesia in the 1970s (Barker 2011, p. 57-8). The

problem, however, is who does '*kita*' (we/us/our) refer to? According to Ahmad Ibrahim, president of the Film Directors' Association of Malaysia (FAM), the slogan is intended to mean: "a Malaysian film should be in the Malay language, with a Malay-majority cast."[5] For consideration, during a recent congress, Malaysian Cinema scholar Norman Yusoff asked, "Our film, but whose faces?" Imanjaya (2006) contends that even though the cinema may appear to be devoid of local cultural influences due to commercialism, the star system, the culture of plagiarism, and trend imitation, it has been attempting to find its core value as a sovereign country for a long time and many films represent a sense of *"kultural pribumi"* (indigenous culture) (pp. 27-38). That being the case, in these cinemas, the core meaning of 'our' or 'us' usually refers to a particular ethnic group considered to be indigenous or original. It can also be interpreted as expressing the notion that Malaysian and Indonesian cinemas are active players in promoting ethno-nationalism, which further racialises the country's national cultural arguments. Whoever "our" or "us" are in the slogan, they do not represent the multi-ethic and multi-cultural population nor the diverse social structures of the two countries. Indeed, this is also the case with film-based studies from historical, political, commercial, cultural, and artistic perspectives.

Indigenous or "native" people are considered as *Bumiputera*, lit; the 'sons of the soil' in Malaysia or *pribumi* in Indonesia.[6] Such primordial claims to indigeneity justify preferential treatment to certain groups in all facets of public life. The post-colonial nationalist governments gave national citizens, described in these terms, certain privileges in both countries. '*Bumiputera'* in Malaysia is used primarily to describe the Malay people even though it purports to include *orang asal/asli* (indigenous) groups in East Malaysia (Borneo) such as the Kadazan, and Iban (Dayak). Whereas in Indonesia, the term *pribumi* was initially used to differentiate among the native groups

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[5] See *'A report 2010 ICID International Creative Industries Day'* (The Institute of Creative Industry Design (ICID), 2010, p. 9).
[6] Interestingly, Diresh Gosh directed a film titled *Bumiputra* (1965) and the film was produced by the Shaws under the banner of Malay Film Production Limited (MFP). Unfortunately, the film is now inaccessible for viewing.

and originated following Indonesia's independence with the Dutch when the populace was divided into "*asli* and non-*asli* (i.e., *pribumi* and non-*pribumi*)" (Suryadinata, 2017, p. 5). The constructed notion of the *pribumi* nation and the so-called "kinship community" became a "psychological and political ideology" against the Chinese as an internal threat (Brown, 1994, pp. xviii-xix). Initially, ethnic Chinese had a place with the non-*pribumi* group, as did the people of Arab ancestry. However, this policy was modified by the Suharto regime to include just the Arab since they had a similar religion (Islam) with most of the *pribumi*. It is quite logical that the nationalist movements of Nusantara were fuelled by colonialism and anti-colonial resistance, with leaders engaged in nation-building based on ethnic majoritarianism, defining nationality by discriminating against non-core groups, customs, and rituals. The current political situation in Malaysia and Indonesia appears to support the view that the issues of national identity in Nusantara have been and continue to be a hindrance to an effective democratisation process in those countries which, due to the city-state's geographical position and cultural proximity, can easily affect Singapore.

The term *bumiputera* is not found in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, and neither is *pribumi* found in the *Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945 (UUD 1945)*. The introduction of these two 'son of the soil' concepts in the national narratives of the two countries have eroded ethnic relations within these two nations. Scholars such as Anwar et al. (2013) continue to suggest that the Malays are the legitimate 'sons of the soil' by arguing that their ancestors were the earliest people to establish effective administration in Nusantara. They dismiss the uncertainties by highlighting that *Tanah Melayu* (the Malay Land) existed long before the introduction of foreign influences into this region (2013, p. 74). Also, following years of politicisation, the notion of *bumiputera* and *pribumi*, its culture and identity, is deeply implicated in the legitimisation of the country's national cultural identities and cinemas.

Notwithstanding, the way Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean cinemas politicise their cultural identities is, in some way, a reflection of the country's fragile and uncertain national

political environment. Undeniably, as soon as these countries existed, the use of film began to support policies aimed at constructing a face or template for their national cultural identities. However, the notion of 'national cinema' is often, more than simply, a matter of convenience as it is also useful for festivals to catalogue and demonstrate their global diversity by announcing how many countries are represented (Chan, 2011, p. 253). It is relatively simplistic to state that a national film must have a native director, be produced by local companies and shot inside the country's borders (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2010, p. 25). For instance, in Indonesia, *Film Nasional* is principally a product concerning the culture of Indonesia that must serve the country as well as its citizens. In the early 1990s, anthropologist Karl G. Heider declared that Indonesian films are a "fixed thing" offering identical images of a national culture through *bioskops* (cinemas) across the nation (1994, p. 164).

According to Barker (2010) the idea of *film nasional* is a nationalist pretence by the cultural elite to indoctrinate the masses concerning their ideas of national identity and culture. Separately, Muhlisiun (2011) suggests that the Indonesian government nowadays is challenged to define precisely the idea of national cinema since the current principles are based on an obsolete territorial concept thereby showing that the idea of *film nasional* and the New Order era are now passé (p. 159). On the other hand, Muhlisiun sees Indonesian films as evolving because as so many films were made outside Indonesia, many have neglected the country's territorial law, thereby showing that Indonesian films are becoming more transnational (Barker, 2019).[7] It may be argued, however, that the film industry's industrial and structural complexities are not the only reason why the notion of *film nasional* is now problematic, as it may have been so since its inception, given a

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[7] Examples include: *One Fine Day* (Asep Kusdinar, 2017), *Rudy Habibie* (Hanung Bramantyo, 2016), *Surat Dari Praha* [Letters from Prague] (Angga Dwimas Sasongko, 2016), *Merry Riana: Mimpi Sejuta Dollar* [Merry Riana: A Million Dollar Dream] (Hestu Saputra, 2014), *Sampai Ujung Dunia* [Until the End of the World] (Monty Tiwa, 2012), *Love in Perth* (Findo Purwono Hw, 2010)] and by non-citizen [E.g., *Merantau* [Journeying] (Gareth Evans, 2009), *The Raid* (Gareth Evans, 2011), *The Raid 2: Berandal* (Gareth Evans, 2014), *Bukan Cinta Malaikat* [Not Angel's Love] (Aziz M. Osman & Herdanius Larobu, 2017)].

transnational cinematic flow has influenced and generated complex social, economic and cultural forces (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 18).

The face of cinema in Singapore also changed during the revival period of the 1960s to reflect a more Chinese character which was a significant change from the Malay-language films made in Singapore from the 1950s to mid-1960s considered the Golden Age of Malay films. Upon the formation of Malaysia in 1963, filming in Singapore, which had predominantly revolved around Malay language filmmaking, began a new chapter. In 1960, Cathay-Keris released a made-in-Singapore Mandarin film titled *Lion City* followed by *Black Gold* in 1962, both directed by Yi Sui. However, the progress of the industry was unstable due to the 1965 separation of Singapore from Malaysia and the socio-political unrest in the region up to the 1970s due to *Konfrontasi*. Separation in this context means that both countries needed to recreate their national cinema, as somehow distinct but paradoxically relying on the same beginning.

However, against this depressing background, there was a remarkable resurgence of Singaporean cinema during the 1990s when a new generation of Singaporean filmmakers gave the cinema a Chinese face with such work as *Medium Rare* (Arthur Smith, 1991), *Mee Pok Man* (Eric Khoo, 1995), *Bugis Street* (Yonfan, 1995), *Army Daze* (Ong Keng Sen, 1996), *That One Not Enough* (Jack Neo, 1999) and *Eating Air* (Jasmine Ng & Kelvin Tong, 1999). The predominant focus on Chinese Singaporean society, with dialogue mainly in Mandarin and Chinese dialect, erased the memory of past events (Millet, 2011, p. 453). This renewal process was marked in Singapore by the formation of the Singapore Film Commission in 1998 to support the country's film industry. Subsequently, since Millet's study was published, films such as *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (Sherman Ong, 2009), *Sayang Disayang* [My Beloved Dearest] (Sanif Olek, 2014), *Banting* [Slam] (M. Raihan Halim, 2014), *Apprentice* (Boo Junfeng, 2016), *A Yellow Bird* (K. Rajagopal, 2016) and, *Chennai 2 Singapore* (Abbas Akbar, 2017) have helped reduce the "Chinese face" of Singaporean cinema

In 2016, identity politics in the Malaysia cinema took centre stage when the organising committee for the 28th Malaysian Film Festival chose to reclassify the award for *Filem Terbaik* (Best Film) into two separate categories when a Malaysian Tamil film *Jagat* [Bad] (Shanjey Kumar Perumal, 2015) was touted as the leading contender for the main award. The main category was replaced with the *Best Malaysian Film* and *Best National Film* as only Malay language films were to be considered 'national films' according to the National Cultural Policy, which privileges Malay identity and culture over so-called migrant cultures ie. Chinese and Tamil/Indian. This situation is consistent with Malaysian cinema (from 1974 up to the 1990s) described as a 'Cinema of Denial' (Khoo 2006). By this phrase, Khoo argues there is a denial of Malaysia's multicultural identities through the assertion of a mono-ethnic image of the nation and its people.

Moreover, it can be said that Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean histories are national histories, not regional or transnational histories. Much of the recent scholarship continues to fall short in expanding the narrative to include transnational relations, regional cultural identities, social belonging and mobility which may contribute to linking the national cinemas of Southeast Asia closer to people of different nationalities. Even so, scholars such as Khoo (2006), Lim (2012), and McKay (2012) succeed in redrawing the boundaries of Malaysian national cinema and present "a more profound critique of the relationship between Malaysian cinema, state, and society" (Campos, 2016, p. 14). Their studies address multicultural representations within the country and not the connections between regional populations. For Indonesian cinemas, the work of Sen (2006) and Barker (2010) suggest that "the discourse of nationalism set by the New Order continues to be indiscriminately used in assessing Indonesian films even if it can no longer contain or account for the vivacious post-New Order cinema produced by young filmmakers who consider themselves, not as *pribumi* or idealists, but as experimenters" (Campos, 2016, pp. 15-6).

Nevertheless, recent interventions by Southeast Asian film scholars are essential for this type of project, which concerns cultural politics and representation, to establish a complex tapestry of

film studies in this region, commonly built around a reconfigured picture of national politics and identities. Patrick Campos, in *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (2016), writes about the development of film culture in the Philippines during the first decade of the 21st century, but at the same time reveals that many studies in Southeast Asia have shown that films from this region are shaped by the integration of the country's economics and politics into the global system. In the context of Southeast Asian national cinemas, Campos asserts that the condition of not being confined within national spaces is common since "historical-cultural crossings, state intervention and the demands of commercial filmmaking have linked national cinemas with forces and causes beyond national borders" (p. 3).

In the context of a divergence between three national cinemas, nearly all black and white films from the Jalan Ampas studios of Singapore (1950s and 1960s) were produced with a sense of 'cultural proximity' to attract regional audiences (Muthalib 2013, Uhde & Uhde 2010, Barnard 2010, Kahn 2006, Heide 2002, White 1997, Anwar 1988). In accordance with Ezra and Rowden (2006), "transnational cinema imagines its audiences consisting of viewers who have expectations and types of cinematic literacy that go beyond the desire for mindlessly appreciative consumption of national narratives that audiences can identify as their 'own'" (p. 3). The past glory of Singapore's studio era flourished, not only due to the support from outside of Southeast Asia and actors but due to regional viewers who could relate to what they saw. With the creation of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, films became national interests, and the three cinemas took on the official contested sense of national identity through a multitude of changes in national value systems, but continued to fight for their national identities' significance. Today, however, contemporary films stretch national film boundaries, reflecting stories and aesthetics beyond the limits of national cinema. For example, in Chapter Five, the film *Interchange* (Dain Said, 2016) is set in an imaginary Nusantara city. In contrast, *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (Sherman Ong, 2009) from the same chapter depicts a narrative and a city-state that is dependent mainly on non-

citizens. In most cases, these films indicate that the boundaries of one country are not essential in this digital age and that being hyper-connected makes it even more sensible for culturally sensitive citizens and filmmakers to try to overcome national cultural barriers.

One of the reasons that direct my interest regarding the question of cultural identities in films is the concept of "*tanahair*" which in Malay means 'homeland' but has the more literal meaning of 'land-water' (as explained in detail in the next chapter). It is deeply embedded in the consciousness of regional populations across all ethnicities and nationalities. Above all, it is also a word used to instil patriotism in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore and is rooted in a person's cultural belonging and identity. The network of attitudes and cultural beliefs performed repeatedly by regional inhabitants, especially filmmakers, are more significant than what many people may think. These filmmakers suggest an alternative set of identity narratives that counter ethnonationalists' accounts or, in other words, the country's dominant discourse.

In Indonesian novels, the characters' emotional relationship with the term *tanahair* is not only about the land (*tanah*), but also about the water (*air*) around them (Bandel, 2008, p. 3). Likewise, Boomgaard (2007) suggests that water plays a highly significant role within Southeast Asian societies. He says, "it is […] clear that geography, climate, and other water-related natural features have played a powerful role in shaping Southeast Asian histories, cultures, societies and economies" (p. 20). Also, in this thesis, I have chosen the nature-based indigenous wisdom of *tanahair* as a space of inclusivity for all those who live within the region. However, films which embrace this concept in some ways point out that the idea of imagined communities within the three countries has some drawbacks since the concept excludes stateless people among the populations (e.g. *Di Ambang: Stateless in Sabah* (Matthew Fillmore & Vila Somiah, 2014), and *Fragile* (Bebbra Mailin, 2015)). Independent films like Malaysia's *The Tiger Factory* (Woo Ming Jin, 2009) which features a sympathetic portrayal of a Chin (Myanmar) refugee, played by a non-professional actor and real-life Chin refugee challenges this national exclusivity. Following careful

analysis, it appears that both films are trying to show that we inherit prejudices in our thinking about national belonging, and it is vital to question our thinking about national identities and stateless communities in this region.

Starting in the 1990s, filmmakers have been challenging these racial and national categories more than previously in the past. In his paper, Irawanto (2008) argues that in the early 2000s, the new generation of Malaysian and Indonesian filmmakers including Riri Riza, Nia Dinata, Ravi Bharwani, Amir Muhammad, Deepak Kumaran Menon, Yasmin Ahmad, and Tan Chui Mui, challenged their viewers to engage in conversations about the complicated and complex nature of their national identities through their creative spaces. This undertaking is far from rejecting the idea that nationalism is unnecessary for the modern systems of the countries and, labelling a film with national identity is not a hindrance at all. However, limiting the desire to belong only to national majorities and denying national minorities to represent themselves in the public spheres, as well as limiting the definition of cultural identities to only one feature of the national being could very well be.

Nevertheless, there are strong ethno-political movements in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. Such activities have the potential to produce negative results, leading to the idea that fellow citizens do not belong or have fewer rights. According to Clarke (2001), throughout Southeast Asia, ethnic minorities have been exploited by government arrangements, and some have endured merely because of the one-sided approaches towards a particular ethnic group (p. 420). For example, by 1987 every non-*bumiputera* group in Malaysia had been considered as outsiders, and despite government efforts to make Malaysia more inclusive, such as through the 1Malaysia initiative, there was little meaningful reform of the political landscape outside of race-based sentiments and policies (Somiah et al., 2019). Although there is an overwhelming need for institutions of higher learning to have scholars from various cultural backgrounds, there are some places, including universities, where appointing a non-*bumiputera* may face serious questions from

some administrators who wonder whether or not such an individual can be trusted. As a transnational research project, this exploration provides explanations about how films, as well as filmmaking, in these countries, complicate the notion of national cinema in the area of Southeast Asian film studies. The pursuit of national and cultural identities within these national cinemas is sufficient to indicate a new form of transnational enquiry in film studies with particular focus on film narratives and conjoint cinematic properties within the complex body of Southeast Asian film studies.

Moving Beyond National Cinemas in a Transnational-Regional Context

In this thesis, I propose a new approach towards the study of films from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore by focussing on their interconnected cultural characteristics and political issues. The value of a transnational cinematic approach is that "transnationalism offers a multivalent approach to considering the impact of history on contemporary experience" (Ezra and Rowden 2006, p. 5). Although transnational filmmaking is not new to the region, transnational social relations have not been a popular topic for Southeast Asian cinema studies. According to Kaewprasert (2015), who conducted a transnational case study on *Good Morning Luang Prabang* (Sakchai Deenan and Anousone Sirisackda, 2008), *Pleasure Factory* (Ekachai Uekrongtham, 2007) and *That Sounds Good* (Kittikorn Liasirikun, 2010), the future of the transnational Southeast Asian film industry is something to look forward to, as a mix of backgrounds and experiences from filmmakers will encourage audiences to enjoy a variety of outcomes (pp. 242-3).

On the other hand, Higson (2000) suggests that the concept of 'transnational' more accurately explains cinema's cultural and economic formations. According to him, the cinema of any given country should not be autochthonous to the national film industry, and its culture as filmmaking begins with a combination of regional, national and transnational initiatives.

Moreover, Higson contends that films are generally made to appeal to audiences beyond national borders (pp. 67-9). Berry and Pang, as cited in Higbee and Lim (2010), suggest that, "transnational cinematic flow are also, 'contrary to the metaphor the word invokes', not 'a spontaneous force of nature', but shaped and produced by various social, economic and cultural forces" (p. 18). For example, in the case of Singaporean cinema, the city-state is relatively small, and transnational productions, which began in the 1970s when they re-started their cinema after being separated from Malaysia, are something they have to do because they need something that can appeal to broader audiences (non-Singaporeans) and thus pursue external financing, collaborations, and audiences. Similarly, Shaw (2013), in her analysis, argues that "the conception of culture implied [in transnational film studies] is not limited to a "national" framework" (p. 65). National cinema, as indicated above, is not only dependant on the intrinsic energies of the existing national values, but rather by external factors. Because, as we can see, the nationalisation of cinemas within this region becomes apparent when nationalists, driven by regional factors, respond to ethnonational sentiments and domestic political demands by moving up and down the regional cultural-political evolution. Even though Malaysia and Singapore did not establish their national film policies before the early 1980s, the two nations were affected by the implementation of Indonesia's *Presidential Determination No. 1 (1964)* allowing the government to enact film legislation that defines the world within Indonesia's film. As the results of Indonesian films' domination throughout the 1970s, Malaysia and Singapore established their national film laws (Act 22 [Singapore's Film Act] and, Act 244 [Malaysia's FINAS Act] in 1981) to protect the cultural, economic development of the national film industry.

Another transnational phenoma linking these cinemas that evidence transnational socio-cultural dynamics and their spatial and temporal relations were the co-production initiatives (*filem usahasama*) undertaken by Malaysian and Indonesian production companies from the 1970s to early 1990s. Examples of *filem usahasama* include *Korban Fitnah* [Victims of Defamation] (1959)

and *Bayangan Diwaktu Fajar* [Shadows at Dawn] (1963) by Indonesian director Usmar Ismail. Norman Yusoff (2018) writes that the Malaysian-Indonesian collaboration films in that era are identifiable by certain characteristics that reveal the occasional tempestuous relationship between the two nations. The co-productions of the 1970s were simply businesses when Malaysian film companies invited Indonesian actors (Broery Marantika, Farouk Afero, Benjamin S. and Dicky Zulkarnain) to take part in Malaysian martial arts films influenced by Hong Kong martial arts film culture.

Acting on the initiatives of FINAS (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia), the two nations produced several titles in the 1980s. According to Norman Yusoff, the development was controversial given the involvement of Malaysians was minimal: the inclusion of one or two female actresses only and thus these titles were categorised as 'Indonesian films.' He also suggested that films such as *Bayi Tabung* [In Vitro Fertilisation Baby] (Nurhadie Irawan, 1988) and *Dia Bukan Bayiku* [That is Not My Baby] (Hasmanan Pemeran, 1988) could be argued as allegorical stories about relations between Malaysia and Indonesia. The co-production projects mentioned above show that there is a keen awareness amongst filmmakers and policymakers of shared national cultural identities, which ultimately then drive the production of films that represent transnational socio-cultural ties between the populations of the two countries while at the same time trying to ensure consistent national policies. Investigating such films offers many

opportunities to learn about the cultural links between the two national cinemas, in which there are several ways of doing so.

Figure 1: Promotional material from an entertainment magazine emphasises that the 8th Malaysian Film Festival (FFM 8) has a special category for Malaysia-Indonesia co-production films (Yusoff, 2018).

Higbee and Lim (2010) propose three main approaches to theorising the transnational film. The first approach focuses on a national/transnational binary, the second favours the transnational as a regional phenomenon analysis, and the third is about working on diasporic, exilic, and postcolonial cinemas. This thesis focuses on the transnational analysis of films from the three national cinemas as a regional phenomenon by examining film cultures/national cinemas investing

in a shared cultural heritage and geo-political boundaries (pp. 9-10). I work in the same area as Sheldon Lu's *Chinese cinemas (1896–1996) and transnational film studies* (1997), Peter Hames's *Central European Cinema Collection* (2004), Nestingen and Elkington's *Transnational Nordic Cinema* (2005), as well as Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street's *European Cinema of the 1930s* (2007), all of whom propose transnational approaches to the reading of national cinemas. I also look at 'cultural identity' from shared history and ancestry in which both the citizens of the three nations and their surrounding populations have in common. To borrow the words of Stuart Hall, "our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (1989, p. 69).

Towards Conceptualising Nusantara as Regional Cinema

This study aims to conceptualise films from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia based on the concept of Nusantara as a region characterised by a shared worldview, values and principles. It may sound from one aspect like regional cinema is about a common culture in films from different nations. However, in this thesis, regional cinema is more about embodying cultures considered as minorities but which share the same diverse cultural backgrounds, or "[a]s a larger arena connecting the difference" (Berry and Farquhar cited in (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 14). In addition, Berry and Farquhar (2006) contend that "the national informs almost every aspect of the Chinese cinematic image and narrative repertoire," but the old approach of "national cinemas," which took the national for granted as something known, can no longer be adequately used to study Chinese national cinema. Like Berry and Farquhar, I will approach the national as contested and constructed in different ways and focusing on cinema and the regional as a framework for considering a range of national questions and issues (p. 2).

Importantly, Sheldon Lu's expositions of Chinese cinemas and transnational film studies are essential to this undertaking, and his inquiry into the nature of Chinese "national cinema" seems to have similar motives for engaging with national identity in film representations. I agree with Lu that a national cinema can only be understood in a properly transnational context, as transformation in the world film industry complicates the construction of "nationhood" in cinematic discourse (1997, p. 3). For instance, Hassan Muthalib's *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle: A century (and a bit more) of Wayang* (2013), acknowledges that films, similar to many performing arts in Nusantara, underwent changes or assimilated other countries' traditional performing arts. Ironically, the book guides readers to contain Malaysia's cinema as a matter of political space ('in a bottle') yet limiting all films from previous eras with, "only one kind of content" (p. 4), which is somewhat misleading since the cinema has more than one "Malay film." There are other types of cinematic representations that have been practically forgotten about such as films about the Bornean (*The Long House* (Phani Majumdar, 1957), *Cintha Gadis Rimba* [Virgin of Borneo] (L. Krishnan, 1958)) and those that put regional populations on an equal footing in the eyes of filmmakers: *Seruan Merdeka* [Cry of Freedom] (Badar Singh Rajhans, 1947), *Selamat Tinggal Kekasihku* [Goodbye My Love] (L. Krishnan, 1955), *Gerimis* [Drizzle] (P. Ramlee, 1968). Nevertheless, by approaching Malaysia's national cinema, plus Indonesia and Singapore from both transnational and regional cultural perspectives, this research offers not only an overview of transnational cultural relations but also an alternative view of these Southeast Asian national cinemas.

Not unlike the issues that confront Nordic cinema (Elkington & Nestingen, 2005), we in the Nusantara area are at the same juncture where the influence and nature of the transition from colonialism to nationalism were driven by ethno-nationalism if not religious nationalism. However, Elkington and Nestingen advocate that we should not, "simply deconstruct images of nationality on-screen or point out counter national articulations, nor summarily dismiss the category of national cinema altogether." Instead, despite the scale of the theory, the changes

associated with revisionist studies of the nation, criticism of modern social identities, and the vicissitudes of globalisation may also challenge the category of national cinema (pp. 12-4). Elkington and Nestingen also believe that no nation works in isolation, and, given the increasing ability of films to reach an international audience, the factors involved in producing and distributing any film are becoming increasingly widespread geographically, yet increasingly complex (p. 22). The undertaking to merge films from Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean cinemas into one whole was, in itself, a monumental undertaking and could only be born with the expectation that it would help both academically and economically the three national cinemas. It is not a simple task to challenge the national ownership of films and how a particular nation could shape its life, especially in ex-colonial countries where consensus nationalism is maintained at the cost of suppressing and silencing the minorities since it involves a complex interaction that is central to the identity and position of the subject represented. This thesis will not oppose the idea of, and the functionality of, national cinema as a whole, because it is "naïve to assume that the transnational model does not bring its own boundaries, hegemonies, ideologies, limitations and marginalisations, or replicate those of the national model" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10).

Apart from the works mentioned above, I wish to highlight Higbee and Lim's 'critical transnationalism' which they deem as a concept that has more to offer for analysing films. They propose "[…] whether it takes place within a film's narrative and production process, across film industries or indeed in academia. […] critical transnationalism does not ghettoise transnational film-making in interstitial and marginal spaces but rather interrogates how these film activities negotiate with the national on all levels" (2010, p. 18). In exploring transnationalism, they argue the analysis should not be, "merely descriptive because all border-crossing activities are necessarily fraught with issues of power; neither can it be purely prescriptive as this often amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking." Furthermore, it must "scrutinis[e] the tensions and dialogic relationship between national and transnational […], understand the potential for local, regional

and diasporic film cultures to affect, subvert and transform national and transnational cinemas […]" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 18).

With regards to this research, critical transnationalism allows justification of how Nusantarans view themselves through film representations and to determine how to connect groups of people within this archipelagic space. For this research, I will use critical transnationalism to refer to critical approaches to cultural codes in film representations, as well as comparable cinematic styles with little attention to viewing the practices between Southeast Asia's three national cinemas, as I see national cultural identities as ideas that can be challenged and constructed. Through transnational cultural relationships in the regional context, these national cinemas can also be better appreciated. The nature of the transition from the rise of nationalism to transnationalism to globalism requires a new turn to capture all shades of film expression.

The study also "engage[s] in a dialogue with scholarship in other disciplines that also have an investment in the transnational and the postcolonial" (2010, p. 18). In light of Higbee and Lim's argument, Nusantara offers a tangible shared cultural space across islands around Southeast Asia with the potential to create a new paradigm in the area of transnational cinema/film studies. The selected films are readable beyond the boundaries of the three national cinemas because the narrative and meanings from the representations are interchangeable, and shared among the modern Nusantara nations.

In each of the films, I examine the narrative and cinematographic aesthetics, look at *Sinema Nusantara* and recurrent themes of individual human mobility, one's sense of belonging, as well as cultural identities. These films put forward challenges of human mobility and one's identity as a reality lived by the people of Nusantara. However, the narratives also address the discourse of state-endorsed social and cultural belonging that have become entrenched. In most cases, these films capture the spirit of *tanahair* in their narrative, and each presents reasonable representations

in connecting the inhabitants across national borders. Moreover, these films are an important reminder that regional inhabitants sail through life's in-between; we are stuck in the middle, between traditional culture and modern life. We are in the liminal state between the past and present, or between a sense of belongingness to superordinate regional identity and the 'national' of a country.

Thesis Structure

This study comprises eight chapters. This introduction lays out the importance of the research and presents its arguments. I have also mentioned in this chapter, my approach and limitations that may help me to shape the results and the Conclusion will make a case for Nusantara cinema, a new regional concept for the study of Southeast Asian cinema.

Chapter One and Two comprises the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. At the outset, this chapter lays out accounts of the nation, national and nationalist sentiments. It also includes engagement with existing scholarship on transnational film and the nationalisation of culture within Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean cinemas. Here, I resume my assessment of Higson's idea of national cinema before concentrating on Higbee and Lim's critical transnationalism. These chapters' review more specific contributions by cultural anthropologists who may or may not work in film, as well as works of other scholars in the field of transnational film studies.

In Chapter Three, I begin by examining the films in detail and present two films, *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957) directed by Lamberto V. Avellana and *Raden Mas* (1959) by L. Krishnan. In this chapter, based on Bakhtin's theory of chronotope, I argue that both films use metaphors to highlight the coexistence of two different ethnic groups in this archipelago and that the sense of place and belonging of the regional inhabitants prevails through their land (*tanah*) and water (*air*)

connections across the Southeast Asian archipelago, which they call *tanahair*. Both films are also allegories that convey complex narratives in Nusantara societies. In the films, the two elements (land and water) suggest that the spirit of land and water are significant to their culture. *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* tells the story of people from two Nusantara ethnic groups who represent the sea and the land (Bajau and Tausug) who are in love, as well as in conflict. Their representation not only highlights marginal communities but also underlines the fact that one's ethnicity and religion cannot circumscribe human relationships within this region. *Raden Mas* speaks of water as a symbol of cultural fluidity as well as offering regional inhabitants opportunities to explore different avenues in life. Finally, I provide an account of cultural relations and interactions in this Southeast Asia archipelago as well as interpretation of Nusantara identity.

Chapter Four observes individuals' mobility patterns in films from the three national cinemas through the shared experience of *'merantau'*, a Nusantara concept of mobility. It covers three political periods starting with the era of independence from the 1950s to 1960s, a time when nationalism began to spread rapidly across Nusantara, then the 1970s to 1990s because inter-national relations between the three countries underwent a redefinition following domestic political factors and foreign policy change during this era. The final part is the 2000s when many regional filmmakers choose to be within the marginalised cultural groups rather than feel that a nationalist project traps them with a limited vision. I demonstrate how a distinctive regional form of migration called *merantau* (to go on a journey, to wander) provides a way to conceptualise Nusantara as a region of migration or an *ethnoscape*. The close reading aspect will focus on two films, *Sri Mersing* (Salleh Ghani, 1961) and *Tabula Rasa* (Adriyanto Dewo, 2014). Both films tell of two types of Nusantara *perantau* that wander around the archipelago, one that *sedar diri* (self-conciousness) and the other that is egoistic and holds unself-conscious traits. The former is a film about the *perantau* (sojourner) in the Malay Peninsula, and the latter deliberating on the representation of the *perantau* from Papua and Sumatera as well as reflecting on the Minangkabau

migration tradition. The film presents similar socio-cultural issues based on a sense of belonging and cultural identities.

To explain the security of national borders and frontier livelihoods in films from these countries, Chapter Five examines borderland populations which is a theme that continues to gain momentum regionally. The portrayals of Borderlands and peripheries in these films do not just signify that national limits do not cohere completely to the bases on the ground yet, it extends the impressions of *in-betweenness* of the populace which effectively problematise the integrity and homogeneity of national cultural identity. These illustrations will inform us of the complexities that the countries encounter due to arbitrary lines drawn on territories that may separate the populations who happen to live in those areas. This chapter also examines the representation of two border areas from four films. The first two are *Tanah Surga… Katanya* [The Land of Paradise… or So They Say] (2012) by Herwin Novianto and Rudy Soedjarwo's *Batas* [Border] (2011) which are set in Kalimantan-Sarawak border areas whereas the other two, U-Wei Haji Sari's *Jogho* [Champion] (1995) and Dain Said's *Bunohan: Return to Murder* (2012), provide a glimpse of life at the Malaysia-Thailand frontiers. These films convey peoples' impressions of culture, its fluidity, and flexibility in a liminal, in-between space.

Chapter Six deals with contemporary regional films that deal with the construction of cinematic representations that frame the places within this region as modern space, but lacking specificities to identify the players as belonging to distinct national identities. These films also demonstrate how, with their driving forces, cultural and social identities are like ocean tides. In this chapter, I examine three films, the two parts of *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (2009) by Sherman Ong and, *Interchange* (2016), another important work by Dain Said. These films epitomise the contradictions of societal diversity within the three national cinemas, which include class, ancestry, family, and Nusantara attitudes. Aside from representing ethnic marginality and cultural intimacy in modern-day Nusantara, as well as advocating for change in mainstream social

and national political attitudes, it is argued that these films bring into play the need to redefine the concept of nationalism in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore by showing places within them as something of a crossroads of human relations. *Interchange* opens up the modern nation state by bringing back the importance of the Nusantara past and transforming the cinematic city into a nameless Nusantara city (not Kuala Lumpur, not Jakarta, not Singapore). *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, on the other hand, brings the transnational to Singapore, a city with a history of maritime trade strategically located in the Straits of Melaka. One opens the nation by presenting a city that is already Nusantara, and the other brings migrants from the world and Nusantara to the city-state. In this chapter, I will reveal how Nusantara cultural spaces are negotiated and navigated by the characters concerning Nusantara cultural narratives.

CHAPTER ONE

Rethinking Film and Identity Politics in Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean Cinemas

Cinema invites critical discussions about how the people, the narrative backgrounds of the film as well as how the representation and the represented are closely connected with pre-cinematic 'spatial and bodily experiences'. – Thomas Elsaesser[8]

Introduction

In many inter-national conflicts within Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, especially at the community level, the question of national belonging is almost always at the centre of the tension.[9] Living in a maritime region, people are prone to crisscrossing the islands within the archipelago and the peninsula that connects to mainland Asia (see Evers 1988, Bellwood 2007). Most major cities generally exhibit more diverse populations than in rural areas. Nevertheless, there are many different ethnicities from other parts of Asia, including those from China, the Indian subcontinent, as well as the Middle East, who manage to coexist in harmony. In the past, all the port cities in this region were marked as ethnically and racially diverse. However, nowadays, the composite character of the population of the three countries and racial diversity can be found throughout the region.

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[8] Elsaesser, T. (1990), *Early Cinema: Space - frame –narrative*. In: *Film Form: Introduction*. London: BFI, pp. 11-30.

[9] Recently in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, thousands joined supremacist rallies to show their rejection to the commitment and nomination of the "non-native" as compatriots; one is about the ratification of UN's ICERD and the other with reference to Jakarta's gubernatorial election.

A century ago, Rabindranath Tagore in his book *Nationalism* (1917) made a series of cautious but critical observations on the earlier version of national entities (India, Japan, and 'the West') suggesting that underhanded national governance structures based on capital ownership might collapse when the nationalism system no longer exists. Although Tagore's political viewpoint has remained controversial, his efforts to look at nationalism among several models of nation states was a revolutionary stance at that time. While some might argue that Tagore is resisting nationalism, Tagore was actually in favour of and, at the same time, opposed to nationalism (Chatterjee 2015). In Sriparna Chatterjee's view, Tagore is not in favour of drawing nationalism based on geographical boundaries because he alleges that a national boundary is an evil that builds walls that, in turn, separates human beings. She also says that "if nationalism is something imaginary, then humanity has to open up a new panorama by adjusting their minds" (p. 74). Film cultures within the three selected nations focussed on supporting what Tagore says when we nationalise the cinemas, while at the same time we obscure the people's social and cultural relationship that has long been developed with something many are familiar with.

Indonesian author, Seno Gumira Ajidarma (2014) questions the relevance of 'national cinema' because the national polemic in Indonesia's cinema remains unresolved. Indeed, the idea of National Cinema and film is entrenched within Southeast Asian cinema studies, for example, Yahaya (2011) points out that cinemas of the countries being dealt with here significantly maintain their terrain primarily because of the state's political, economic and cultural regimes (pp. 39-40). Although Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean cinemas seem to become distanced from the idea that transnationalism and regionalism are at their core, the representational perspective of culture in many of these nations' films seems to suggest otherwise. The three interrelated cinemas being examined appear to be plagued by the politics of race and ethnicity to different degrees which could be the result of the state authorities exerting some content control over film productions and exhibitions (White, 1995, p. 4). The state censorship institute was notorious in

Indonesia (as well as in Malaysia and Singapore), and the key justification for film censorship was fear of civil unrest, which meant that the censorship board was vulnerable to complaints from religious groups, politicians and influential people (van Heeren, 2012, p. 179). Through political power, directives, and so forth, policymakers in these countries make it almost impossible for films to be distributed overseas. Even so, the film industries of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore may engage in serious efforts to facilitate rational choices of the suitable spirit of nationalism with more extensive regional socio-cultural networks, rather than employing inward-looking political policies and self-centredness.

The goal of this dissertation is to offer alternative views from transnational perspectives based on the analysis of the three national cinemas from four angles: (1) the value of a homeland, (2) aspects of social mobility, (3) representations of border populations, and (4) film representations developed by the digital generation. It also seeks to understand the cultural aspects of regional cinematic representations in a group of films that are viewed as having the potential to blur political and national cultural boundaries. This chapter is, therefore, concerned with gauging the politics of identity in the cinema of the three countries, the idea of national and transnational cinema, as well as examining cultural relationships relating to film representations, the culture it represents, and the implications of these affiliations for the study of film in Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean cinemas.

In the subsequent pages, I will explain why we need to reconsider the way we look at the three national cinemas and how transnationalism enables this research to widen the narrow national cinema lens used to frame the cultural relationships in between the three cinemas. In this way, the films selected for analysis imagine or envision a regional cinema of complex cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. To begin, I will discuss critical transnationalism in film studies followed by the discrepancies between Malaysian and Indonesian ethnonationalism, Singapore's civic nationalism, and how these ideas complicate people's feelings of belonging and identities in Chapter Two. At

the end of this chapter, I will also include the views of Filipino scholars on issues of national identity in Philippine cinema, since I am including the Filipino made film *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies*.

Critical Transnational Approaches to the Study of Identity in Film

According to Higson (2002), the notion of national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as at film production, but he also states that "it becomes insufficient to define national cinema solely by contrasting one national cinema with another […]" (p. 60). Indeed, national cinema is not just about distinguishing the characteristics of a national cinema from another. National cinema's relational account can lead to more productive discussions and we consequently need to look at its transnational aesthetics and relationships to better understand a national cinema (Choi, 2006). As Crofts (1993) points out, the homogenising myths of national cinema discourse may need to be challenged in some contexts, while in others, they may need to be supported (p. 62). Through the transnational lens, films from the three national cinemas are able to explain how the multi-ethnic people of this region can be seen as single-constituent cells of a complex Nusantaran culture.

Notwithstanding, six transnational definitions have significant merit, as identified by Vertovec (1999), and each topic is not exclusive as some rely on others. The six thematic clusters are transnationalism as (1) a social morphology, (2) as a kind of consciousness, (3) as a mode of cultural reproduction, (4) as an avenue of capital, (5) as a site of political engagement, and (6) as a reconstruction of 'place' or locality (p. 448). Moreover, there are overlapping themes as film represents the circumstances in our lives almost accurately, and the issue of identity, mobility, and belonging through film representations that I argue here may encompass more than merely one theme. More importantly, Vertovec's proposals tell me that transnationalism can extend our prior

understanding of film representations from the three national cinemas, providing some insight into what transnational film studies can offer when discussing shared cultural identities from cinematic perspectives.

Vertovec also claims that the analysis of transnational social formations can be viewed as structures or relationship systems, best described as networks and that multi-locality awareness stimulates the desire to connect with others (pp. 449-50). In terms of cultural reproduction issues, transnationalism is often associated with a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions, and everyday practices, all of which are often described in terms of syncretism, creolisation, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity (p. 451). As a site of political engagement, transnational studies often touch upon 'homeland politics' because relationships between immigrants, home-country politics, and politicians have always been dynamic. However, transnationalism can change the relationship of people to space in terms of reconstruction of 'place' or locality, especially when new 'social fields' connect and position people in more than one country (pp. 455-6).

Since the first use of the term to consider the plurality of Chinese cinema, cinematic transnationalism has been widely conceptualised (Lu, 1997, p. 1). Transnational cinema, according to Berry (2010), is based on the awareness that all knowledge originates from and is shaped in a dialectical relationship with particular areas, times and conditions of their production. The ongoing encounter with a variety of national cultures, regulations, economic conditions and more, suggests that transnational cinema contrasts the fantasy of global smooth space which is often associated with globalism's ideological rhetoric (p. 113), or in my case nationalism.

Berry also suggests that, by distinguishing the earlier international order of nation states from the current transnational order of globalisation, the specificity of 'transnational cinema' can be grasped and the primary characteristics can best be understood by examining it as the cinema of this emerging order (p. 124). Thus not only are Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean cinemas

reviving with new generations of filmmakers, but their respective local markets are also evolving with new categories of audiences. Films representing transnational connections between the three nations or between any two, as well as cross-border collaborations, are commonplace today. In terms of viewing and exhibitions, films from the three countries are now available to regional audiences through cable, online streaming, and other forms of digital distribution.

Another primary reference for my thesis is the typology of cinematic transnationalism by Hjort (2010) in which she proposes nine conceptual approaches to transnational cinema studies, namely *epiphanic* transnationalism, affinitive transnationalism, milieu-building transnationalism, opportunistic transnationalism, cosmopolitan transnationalism, globalising transnationalism, auteurist transnationalism, modernising transnationalism, and experimental transnationalism. Questioning national cinema from regional perspectives and emphasising the cinematic articulation of those elements of hidden national affiliations that overlap with aspects of other national identities in order to produce something that resembles deep transnational belonging, is known as *epiphanic* transnationalism. *Epiphanic* transnationalism emphasises regional identities, and the concept is to bring shared culture or a sense of 'transnational belonging' into public awareness, to make it prominent and thus a more significant dimension of the self-understandings of citizens, which may not be fully or focally recognised as such (pp. 16-7).

The second crucial method for this study is affinitive transnationalism, which focuses on similarities, "typically understood in terms of ethnicity, partially overlapping or mutually intelligible languages, and a history of interaction giving rise to shared core values, common practices, and comparable institutions" (p. 17). Here, Hjort also argues that this type of transnationalism must not be based solely on cultural similarities which have long been recognised and which are considered to be substantial. However, this aspect may also arise in connection with shared problems or commitments in a timely manner now or with the discovery of features of other national contexts which are considered relevant to key issues experienced within a home context

(p. 17). While Hjort's deliberations on these two approaches are more on Swedish, Danish, and Scottish film productions, her insights shed light on the institutional comparative issues that concern me. Unlike Vertovec's broad range of transnational topics, Hjort's classifications are quite detailed considering her focus on cinema, and aside from that, these modes may also overlap with each other due to cultural factors. In the same year that Hjort's work was published, Higbee and Lim produced another theoretical criticism of transnational cinema studies.

In determining a framework for this research, I also refer to the concept of 'critical transnationalism' outlined by Higbee and Lim (2010). In mapping out the existing concepts regarding transnational cinema they purport that the study of transnational cinema requires, not only tracing its genealogy in descriptive terms or the prescription of the terms of its use depending on one's politics, but also the self-reflective disclosure of the concept's history, development and transformation. That opinion is in keeping with European cinema scholar Bergfelder's argument that film studies have lagged somewhat behind in accepting cultural hybridisation compared with other academic disciplines (pp. 8-9).

However, Higbee and Lim maintain that transnational cinematic developments do not exist in a vacuum but rather, are shaped and produced by diverse social, economic and cultural forces. Accordingly, transnational cinema cannot be merely descriptive since all cross-border activities necessarily have power issues and cannot be purely prescriptive. Moreover, they propose that 'critical transnationalism' does not shift transnational filmmaking to interstitial and marginal spaces, but instead questions how these filmmaking activities negotiate with the national community at all levels – from cultural policy to financial sources – from the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the self-image of the country. They further suggest that it is related to questions of post-colonialism, politics, and power, and how they, in turn, can uncover new forms of neo-colonialist practices in the form of popular genres and authorship. Not to mention, we might also better understand how film cultures influence, subvert, and transform

national as well as transnational cinemas. Critical transnationalism allows us to analyse the capacity of local as well as various types of audiences to decode films as they circulate transnationally. Lastly, they recommend that this approach must engage in dialogue with scholarship in other disciplines that have an investment in transnational and postcolonial activities (p. 18).

What is important is that their discretions provide a fascinating insight into transnational studies and demonstrate that my attempt to connect the three national cinemas is worthwhile and not alien to the thoughts of people. Moreover, it may not be a popular choice of topics in Southeast Asian Cinema studies at present, but it very well may be soon. The purpose of the dialogue is to open up the discourse "[b]eyond the work of other film scholars" (Higbee in Higson 2016, p. 12). In the same transcriptions, Burgoyne, as cited by Higson, argues that interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema is more about a question of critical perspective. For Burgoyne, the narrative analysis is the soundest approach because "it gives us concrete categories of narrative structure and discrete methods for asking questions about a text" (p. 12).

In a study on Belgian francophone films, Jamie Steele, along with Higbee and Hwee Lim, and Mette Hjort[10] call for critical consideration of national films from regional perspectives. In order to better understand the transnational-national-regional basis of contemporary Belgian Francophone cinema in the context of film production, distribution and exhibition, he proposes the concept of the 'transnational regional' because the cinema was established largely through events and film festivals occurring outside the country. Moreover, Steele (2016) contends that Hamid Naficy's model on transnational analysis of films, plus Elkington and Nestingen's examinations of 'Nordic Cinema' offer proof that it is possible to consider film representations that encompass several sovereign countries (p. 53). Naficy (2008) states that 'Regional Cinema' is about

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[10] See Hjort, *On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism* (2010). In *World cinemas, transnational perspectives*, edited by Ďurovičová & Newman, pp. 12–33. New York: Routledge.

discovering and theorising the many contextual and textual similarities and shared features that run through societies and their artistic productions (p. 98).

To support their theorising of Nordic Cinema, Elkington and Nestingen (2005) propose three areas of inquiry that challenge the category of national cinema. The three areas are, (1) works that elaborate on the ambiguity of the concept of national cinema, (2) exploring the issue of national culture and cinema in film studies methodologically, and (3) raising pressing questions about the nation in times of globalisation and transnationalism (p. 12). With regards to this, I suggest that the social and cultural forces of regional inhabitants as represented in the selected films chosen for this undertaking can help articulate regional dimensions of social and cultural belonging that challenge Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean national cultural identity narratives.

Current trends in transnational cinema studies still linger over the primary questions of what actually the term 'transnational' stands for in cinema studies.[11] Decker (2016) discloses that transnationalism might also reflect "the effect of globalisation, a particular set of films, or even a specific filmmaking ethos" (p. 1). Unlike the views of Higbee and Lim, as well as Chris Berry emphasising people's sense of social and cultural belonging, Decker is suspicious of cinematic aesthetics and representations as an example of the impact of mobility and place on identity through film. In her assessment, transnational studies provide different paths to look at films in term of the relationships between film festivals and cinemas in conjunction with industry plus reception studies. Decker also questions whether transnational is the right term to help us in commenting on the cross-cultural flows that shape the narrative and visual intertextuality (p. 1). Transnational readings of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean films may also enlighten us regarding the critical shades of differences amongst the three types of cinematic representations. Besides, the logic of this transnational examination is about finding a reliable way to escape from

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[11] Noted by the Transnational Cinemas Special Interest Group panel, the 2016 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Atlanta.

the limitations of state-centrism in discussing cinematic arts from these archipelagic countries of Southeast Asia. This research will also validate the continuing importance of films, cinematic knowledge and the cultural practices within this region.

There are a small number of Southeast Asian scholars who deliberate on transnational views of Southeast Asian films, but more recently, there are at least three studies that explore the representations of the Indian diaspora in Malaysian Tamil films (Ravindran 2006a, 2006b, 2008). Another transnational perspective is on Malaysian Chinese films and the study between South Korean and Malaysian digital film cultures (Raju 2008, 2011, 2017). However, a further study by Irawanto (2014) recommends that Indonesian and Malaysian cinemas have "become a site for social imaginings of a just, ethical and egalitarian society amidst the arduous socio-political transformations which extend access to equality and transgress any institutionalised social injustices despite the heightening moral force, widening social cleavages, despairing authoritative regime in both countries" (p. 268). Although he acknowledges inter-related political dynamics between Malaysia and Indonesia, he employs an inter-referencing method that transcends the national framework. Irawanto's work is more about comparative politics concerning film productions and representations and is not intended to look at transnational and transcultural connections between the two. Unlike Raju's study of independent digital film cultures in Malaysia and South Korea (2017), which investigates the construction of partial sovereignty for marginalised groups in both countries, Irawanto does not address the issue of national and transnational formations in today's world.

Notwithstanding, there are also assessments by Baumgärtel (2011) and Aquilia (2006). The former examines the transnational nature of the digital age of independent films from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines whereas the latter compares and contrasts the four narratives told by four directors from separate national backgrounds in *Southern*

Winds (1993). These views, however, remained within the framework of national cinema and not about linking the shared culture of the three nations in which I am focusing on here.

In addition to Van der Heide's viewpoints of border-crossing on Malaysian Cinema (2002), some studies found that transnationalism within the films from these three national cinemas was not unusual. For example, Teo (2013) reveals that the Southeast Asian female ghost figure of the *Pontianak* is an ideal transcultural and transnational representation. While *Pontianak*'s character in Southeast Asia has many faces or looks, it is possible to link the ghost's distinctive personality to the region's cultural as well as religious motifs and become a regional identity. In defence of Aihwa Ong's critiques of gender and *Pontianak* myth, Teo suggests that some regional films that represent *Pontianak* in its narrative use the ghost character as a symbol of opposition to modernity (pp. 100-3).

Mapping the Transnational Context

In the chapters that follow, I argue that national, political, cultural and social boundaries of Southeast Asian countries and communities are consistently being questioned and contested by some regional filmmakers. Although independence and different nationalistic ideas divide these populations of Southeast Asia, the cross-border cinematic sensibilities that gave impetus to the country's cultural life can be seen in the films I am analysing. The cinema of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore have been somewhat hybridised, transnational, and cross-border since its inception (see Pané 1953, Said 1991, White 1997, Heide 2002, Barnard 2008, and Barker 2015) and such cinematic practices and properties complicate the notion of National Cinema of the three countries. Nonetheless, in the following paragraphs, I will explain why the use of the transnational or regional lens opens up the possibility of conceptualising a link to a broader cultural space. The success

stories of the black and white films from Singapore, Bandung, and Jakarta from the late 1930s to 1960s present the close cultural relationship among the three countries.

The introduction of film in this region was viewed as a form of entertainment representing life, whereby the films and the filmmaking express the interests of the people. In other words, in order to resonate with them, the audiences must see themselves represented in the work. Apart from the spectacle, technicalities, and the technological aspects of film and filmmaking, the representational aspects of the larger communities are vital in ensuring acceptance by the nationals across country borders. The audiences saw Nusantara people who looked and spoke like them and who shared an understanding of each other. These films reflect their Nusantaran experience, their relationship with this archipelagic region, and their interactions with other ethnicities in the cultural space. Films such as *Terang Boelan* (Albert Balink, 1937), *Harimau Tjampa* [Tiger from Tjampa] (D. Djajakusuma, 1953), *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (Lamberto V. Avellana, 1957), and *Chinta Gadis Rimba* [The Virgin of Borneo] (L. Krishnan, 1958) also offer an opportunity for the minority to see their humanity in film.

Concerning narrative style, Albert Balink's film *Terang Boelan* [Full Moon] (1937) became a turning point for regional storytelling. The film sets a reliable formula for Indonesian cinema which was to make a film with beautiful scenery, melodious songs, ferocious fights, a handsome hero who must suffer prior to attaining victory, and so forth (Said, pp. 26-7). That formula was also adopted by the Jalan Ampas studios and many films during the golden age of Malay films (the 1950s to 1965), particularly movies by the legendary P. Ramlee. According to Anwar (1988), "[i]n the 1950s Malayan films featuring the late actor P. Ramlee was quite popular in Indonesia. P. Ramlee had a steady core of fans there" (p. 9). Some may argue that the cross-generational reception of P. Ramlee's films was because the Shaw Brothers monopolised regional screens at that time, and the film studios in Singapore seem to have derived an efficient business strategy by

engaging with popular film genres and styles (Fu, 2008, p. 2). P. Ramlee's films, conversely, "seldom aimed at ethnic, racial, political or religious conflicts" (White, 1997, p. 3).

Although regional political, historical and cultural relations have been separated by the formation of the nation-state since the early 1950s, films have somehow been able to cross the invisible lines of nationalities and language to reach audiences in neighbouring countries. If P. Ramlee's films could cross over to Indonesia in the 1950s, the situation was reversed in the 1970s when Indonesian films were given more screen time in Singapore and Malaysia. However, it may also be noted that the films are more inclined towards the Malay language in order to satisfy those who lived in small towns and cities around the archipelago as the *lingua franca* of the different populations is still *Bahasa Melayu* and national languages, as well as national cultures, are not barriers but factors that reassure the sense of unity throughout the region.

Unlike the earlier Southeast Asian cinema, transnational studies explore the connections in film funding, the circulation of cinema, the impact of the diaspora, and the forces of creative workforces and film across the national borders of the three countries. In this thesis, I examine transnational connections hinging on culture expressions, specifically, for the culturally identical groups of Nusantara populations that share the same socio-cultural identities and cinematic sensibilities. In this manner, fictional cinematic works from this region are seen as "material and political practice related to movements between sedimentary and nomadic forces that can mine our understanding of history in many different, mixed and dynamic ways" (Pisters, 2016, p. 157). On the one hand, this study deals with the shifting tide of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean political landscapes which also characterises the work of their filmmakers and investigates cross-national cultural identities that transcend political borders across the Nusantara.

Accordingly, this undertaking differs in three ways from other Southeast Asian transnational studies. First, this reading is not about limiting the notion of national cinema but instead about

expanding it from representational views by looking at the relationship between national politics and national cultural identities formation within the cinema of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. In the following chapters, I will discuss and investigate the imbalance of political and ideological power as well as the politics of difference through film representations and its cinematic properties. In addition, I explore the aesthetic properties and values of both the medium and the cultural codes of Nusantara, and raise important questions regarding the way we judge films from the three countries as representations of national cultural identities. Here, the questions of production, distribution, and exhibition are secondary. Second, although this thesis is investigating a regional phenomenon and examining three national cinemas which share cultural heritages and geo-political boundaries,[12] it will be tied critically to political and historical facts and engage in a dialogue which will relate to other enquiries from other academic disciplines. The third factor is how this thesis looks at national cultural identity in films. My analysis will touch briefly upon the western construct of nationhood and other aspects of modernity but, unlike the representations of people in exile (Naficy, 2001), this endeavour is not be limited to films that sit at the margin of the three film industries (Higbee & Lim, 2010, pp. 9-10).

To conclude, I wish to draw attention to Shaw's criticism concerning the challenges of transnational film studies which include viewing practices, financial strategies, themes, modes of narration, and others. More pointedly, Shaw (2013) advocates that "there is a link between national identities and storytelling at the heart of cinema, even when we take on board all the nuances and questioning of the national that transnational critical approaches have brought" (p. 65). However, Shaw agrees with Ella Shohat and Robert Stam that, 'forms of stories' can crystallise 'origins and evolution of nations.' According to Shaw, "there is a transnational element built into the national,

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[12] In commenting the idea of transnational Chinese cinemas (Lu, 1997), transnational Nordic cinema (Elkington & Nestingen, 2005) and Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris & Sarah Street's study of set design in European cinema of the 1930s (2007), Higbee and Lee (2010) be adamant that these transnational stances speak respectively of a supranational Chinese cinema and regional or pan-European cinema due to lack of the critical purchase of the term 'transnational' (p. 9).

as 'origins and evolutions' which are characterised by intertextual influences and border crossings on many levels […]" (p. 65). This study of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean films will also follow through with a focus on the transnational cultural perspective and how it is represented in feature-length fictional films of these national cinemas. It illustrates the circumstances in which issues of cultural identities, belonging, and mobility are frequently used in films to create the idea of transnational or regional cultural values, practices, and identities in the process of national development.

The Transnational Case in the Philippines Cinema

As all three national cinemas in this study, Philippine cinema encompasses multiple transnational contexts. Before *Loetong Kasaerong, Eulis Atjih* and *Xin Ke*, Thomas Alva Edison created early representations of the Filipinos in a series of short films in 1899 in which he hired African Americans to portray Filipino soldiers.[13] About fifteen years later, two Americans, Albert Yearsly and Edward Meyer Gross produced local films called *Noli Me Tangere* [Touch Me Not] (Yearsly & Gross, 1915) and *El Filibusterismo* [The Reign of Greed] (Gross, 1916). In the subsequent years, a Filipino filmmaker named Jose Nepomuceno produced *Dalagang Bukid* [Country Maiden] in 1919, a musical based on the Spanish lyric-dramatic performance called *Zarzuela*. Thereafter, Nepomuceno continued to make silent films under his Malayan Movies company, but the actual figures are hard to ascertain.[14] Having said that, Deocampo (2017) claimed that the country's cinema industry may represent the last important cultural heritage of Spain

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[13] These newsreels were produced for Edison by James Henry White and titled *Filipino Retreat from the Trenches, U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches before Caloocan, Capture of Trenches at Candaba, Rout of the Filipinos, The Early Morning Attack,* and *Col. Funston Swimming the Bagbag River* (Campos, 2016, p. 347).

[14] The number varies from around 40 to 100 or even as many as 300, according to Tofighian (2008), but his studies show that Nepomuceno has made 38 silent films (p. 78).

stemming from its relationship with the colonisers which were not documented by early film historians.

There are many ways of charting the Philippine's cinematic development (Palis, 2008). It can be chronologically listed as the following: the building of the American Empire (1898-1945), the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the first Golden Age (1946-1959), the decline (1960-1965), the second Golden Age (1956-1986) and the post-Marcos (1986-present) (pp. 70-100). However, there were many vital developments in the country's cinema since the late 1980s. The cinema industry plummeted in the late 1980s when producers sacrificed quality over quantity to match the tastes of the masses. Then, in the late 1990s, the country was struck by the Asian Financial Crisis. However, since the early 2000s, young Philippine filmmakers are trying to revive the local cinema industry. While deliberating on the constitution of 'national cinema' in the Philippines, the practitioners in the country agreed on assigning a distinct national identity to Filipino films. Based on the interviews, focus groups and textual analysis of selected films primarily from the 2000s, Palis concluded that a range of independent films produced in the country questioned the monolithic idea and core beliefs of the Filipino community. Due to the geographical fragmentation of the Philippines archipelago, multiple identities and more concrete regional realities were created (pp. 170-1).

The "discovery" of Cebuano cinema and the writings of its preliminary history (Grant and Anissimov, 2016) have complicated the notion of there being only one "national cinema" that is Tagalog or Manila-based (Deocampo, 2017).[15] Furthermore, a broad historical insight into the dynamics of Philippine cinema was written by Campos (2016). His book provided an eloquent assessment of the national cinema and highlighted the shortcomings of the Philippine nationalist critics. As the book gives a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, it also sometimes supports and

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[15] Cebuano cinema explicitly refers to films made on the island of Cebu, in the country's Central Visayas region.

often opposes nationhood which frequently occurs within or beyond the national narrative of cinema (de Leon Espena, 2018, p. 240). However, Campos marked the end of the country's national cinema through consistent and ongoing cross-collaboration across Southeast Asian nations, among others. For instance, Philippine directors including Eddie Infante, T. C. Santos, Lamberto V. Avellana and Ramon Estella are well-known figures at the Jalan Ampas studios in Singapore who are also informally linked with Malay-language films that thrive across the Nusantara. During the 1970s, when Singapore began to reinvent its cinema, Filipino director Bobby A. Suarez who had directed *The Bionic Boy* (1977), *Dynamite Johnson* (1978) and *They Call Her Cleopatra Wong* (1978) sought to help revive the national cinema industry of the island. With reference to *The Maid* (Kelvin Tong, 2005), Campos argued that the current forms of transnationalism between Singaporean and Philippine cinemas are rooted in market economics and state rhetoric that inform Singapore's definition of a global city and state-funded film producer, Raintree Pictures, as a global film producer. The role of Mr and Mrs Teo's domestic maid in the film portrayed by a Filipino actress Alessandra de Rossi is recognisable and understandable at the heart of international relations between Philippines and Singapore (pp. 524-8). In addition, the 2013 Cannes Camera d'Or award winner *Ilo Ilo* [Mom and Dad Are Not Home] (Anthony Chen, 2013) starring Filipino's Angeli Bayani is another Singapore film that has an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). Bayani also played the role of a domestic maid (Teresa or Terry) hired by Hwee Leng, portrayed by Yeo Yann Yann of Malaysia, to look after her troubled delinquent son, Jiale.

Following the Jalan Ampas era, transnational co-productions with the Philippines continued in Malaysia with the *Malaysian Five* in 1976 by John Aristorenas. A decade later, *Gila-Gila Si Pikoy* [Pikoy Goes to Malaysia] was filmed through a partnership with Gelsio Ad. Castillo, SV Productions of Malaysia with crews and casts assigned from both countries. Next, two co-produced and co-directed low-budget films were released in 2011 namely *Seksing Masahista* and *Untamed Virgins* by John Ad. Castillo and Z. Lokman.

As for the Indonesian cinema, Persari collaborated with Philippine-based LVN Studio and Sampaguita Pictures to produce *Rodrigo de Villa* (Rempo Urip & Gregorio Fernandez, 1952), *Leilani* [Tabu] (Rempo Urip, 1953) and *Holiday in Bali* (Misbach Yusa Biran & Tony Cayado, 1962). Before the co-productions, collaborations in film productions between Indonesia and the Philippines is evident as Persari used to develop their films at the LVN Pictures laboratory. Djamaludin Malik, the founder of Persari, chose LVN as a consultant to found Persari Laboratory because LVN has the most high-tech applications in the Southeast Asia region at the time. To the Indonesian cinema industry, projects involving co-production with Philippine are considered as an opportunity to exchange experiences, as the Philippines film industry was advanced during the 1950s. However, following the release of *Holiday in Bali*, Indonesia faced difficult political turmoil. One of the main reasons for the political unrest at that time was the anti-foreign sentiment, whereby Indonesia restricted American-foreign ties. This sentiment has become a national foreign policy that has affected Indonesian cinema, and co-production with the Philippines in particular (Luik, 2009, p. 23). Apart from Indonesia, film co-productions also involved partnerships of companies from Hong Kong and the U.S.A with the Philippines. For instance, *Pukulan Bangau Putih* (S. A. Karim, 1977) which is a martial arts film was dubbed in English to be released in other countries and titles varied depending on the release country.[16] Besides that, Lav Diaz's *A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery* (2016) which received the Alfred Bauer Prize at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival is the latest co-production between Indonesia's Protocol and Akanga Film Productions with Ten17 Productions, Sine Olivia Pilipinas, and Epicmedia from the Philippines. These examples proved Campos's prediction on the transnational relationship between the country's cinema and other cinemas in the Nusantara region.

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[16] The film uses *The Fierce Boxer, Fierce Boxer and Bruce, White Crane Fist* and *The White Crane Fighter* as alternatives for worldwide releases.

While Campos (2016) performed a thorough analysis concerning the Philippine cinema by covering films from different periods he did not focus on the people living in the Mindanao-Borneo regions. He highlighted the works of Brillante Mendoza but left out Mendoza's film *Thy Womb* (2012) which depicted people on the periphery in Mindanao. Neither did he discuss the works of Sheron R. Dayoc, a filmmaker from Mindanao who has been internationally recognised for *Halaw: Ways of the Sea* (2010) and *Women of the Weeping River* (2016) which represented the Muslim and Badjao people of Mindanao. These people are also culturally connected with the people of Borneo. Thus, the following chapter of this thesis will fill the gap by discussing the film *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (Lamberto V. Avellana, 1957), a film portraying the cultural and regional symbolism for the regional audiences other than the Filipinos.

Conclusion

This chapter utilised approaches and hypothetical structures concerning the idea of national cinema, and the potential of cinematic transnationalism, along with other theories that relate to the subject of this research. Overall, this chapter highlights the gaps and trends in transnational film studies which continue to develop in world cinema scholarships. As described, I offer a critical look at examining transnational representations in films from the three national cinemas as well as demonstrating their relationship with the Philippine cinema. Transnationalism will rejuvenate the way we interpret the representational and cultural ideals of films from the three countries, with a new perspective that transcends national boundaries. The advantage of transnational cultural and film studies is that such joint recognition would make it possible for national cinemas to grow more robustly than they would otherwise have been unable to achieve.

Transnational film studies can also go more in-depth than filmmaking's simplistic views, such as co-productions, financing, casts, and crews. The goal here is to be highly critical of the

previously unchallenged national ideals that inform our point of view. It deals with interlinked cultural and historical subjects that have often been omitted from Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean film studies. This shift is essential because, in the years to come, extremely rapid and expansive technological change will open up new dimensions of cultural identities for people and how they relate to each other in this archipelago. This thesis aims to reel in transnational connections and identities due to the constant integration of migrating people with the diverse cultures that surround the archipelago and beyond and have necessitated as well as promoted cultural exchanges among Nusantara inhabitants.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the 'in-betweenness' of the Malaysian-Indonesian-Singaporean cultural identities and their influence on film and storytelling. The aim is to illustrate and clarify the relationship between nationalism, political change, cultural identity and representation in the films of the three countries.

CHAPTER TWO

Nationalism and the 'In-betweenness' in the Cinemas of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

Introduction

I often find myself in the position of *'in-betweenness'*, as I live in an age when traditional values clash with modern attitudes and practices. I was born to a Malay mother and a Bugis father, and, grew up in a rural area caught between the Malay worldview at odds with Malaysian nationalism and its modernity. However, for the past 20 years or so, I have lived in the city while continuing to move back and forth between the city and the countryside. Moreover, professionally, as a Malaysian cinematographer and film tutor, I have experienced first-hand the shift from celluloid to digital. For Bhabha (1994), such performances usually generate new meaning concerning people's understanding of the differences and contrast between cultural groups (pp. 1-4). Consistent with Bhabha's views on cultural identities, my reality today is framed by a feeling of survival while living on the fringes of the present. Moreover, my cultural identity cannot be certified separately from the interchange of cultural traits as I also interact with others on a global level and, I know that there is only one human race.

Regarding the three countries examined in this research, awareness about nationalism and nation-building has been inextricably tied to the concept of local history. With the establishment of federated nations, a little more than half a century ago, citizenship and national identities became mandatory. On the one hand, citizenship is a privilege, but on the other, the nationalisation of territories, materials, and cultures have somewhat destabilised this long-established society of Nusantara. Essentially, the people of these postcolonial countries felt (and many still do) that they

did not belong to the dominant governing national units because the previous annexation resulted from political resolutions that reflected the views of political elites and not a majority of regional inhabitants. Far from being a marginal problem, conflicts in peripheral areas such as tensions (driven by nationalism) in the southern regions of Thailand and the Philippines, as well as on Papua (Irian Jaya), separatist movements of East Timor and Aceh, which only ended in 2002 and 2005 respectively, are all examples of events that shape many of the region's most pressing inter-ethnic challenges. For example, Indonesian nationalists who, since the colonial period have labelled Indonesia's cultural substratum as 'archipelagic culture' (*kebudayaan nusantara*), have targeted and imposed a standard national culture on isolated groups (*suku terasing*) within the nation. However, it is precisely because they need to assimilate into a pan-Indonesian culture that such programs are forced upon them with scant regard for local self-determination rights (Acciaoli, 2001, p. 17). The problem with the existing national standards of the three nations is that along with it, experiences of national inclusion often led to both cultural and social exclusion.

The selected films are bound up with the contentious matter of nations and nationalism stemming from historical and contemporary relocations within the region up to, and including the present day. The question here is not so much about cinematic practices, but rather, it is about how filmmakers address the issue of social mobility and the feeling of belonging. What are the common traits of those films, and how do these representations inform their audiences as well as problematise each country's idea of national identity? This research will answer these questions and examine the development and the challenges involved in finding regional cinematic identities within the three national bodies.

In this chapter, I will discuss the fundamental concepts that will be used in explaining the transnational behaviour of films from the three different cinemas. In addition, I show the interconnectivity aspects of cinemas of the three countries that highlight the region's common cultural identity and social belonging while dealing with the fluid and dynamic cultural links

among regional inhabitants as seen in films from these national cinemas using Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural *'in-betweenness,'* Arjun Appadurai's dimensions of cultural flows, and Gloria Anzaldua's borderlands. This chapter will explore how these ideas unfold in regional debates surrounding issues of identity and belonging, become entwined in film representations, and are represented in films from the national cinemas of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

In-between the Three National Cinemas

Firstly, is it wrong to have three names? This question was asked after I presented my case in an academic seminar[17] held at Kuala Lumpur about five years ago. It is not wrong, and my transnational and regional perspective does not negate the realities of national frameworks. Instead of three national names (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore), I offer *Sinema Nusantara*, an alternative regional outlook based on the countries' cultural likeness and historicity. The proposed label denotes cultural spaces around the Southeast Asian archipelago which exists beyond political boundaries, well before independence was granted to the three countries. Further, it must be noted that *Sinema Nusantara* can be explained by examining the complex relationships between cinematic productions and film representations by regional filmmakers who share comparable cultural values as well as similar struggles over social and cultural identities.

Discourse on cultural identity across Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore often speaks about contradictions between the public cultural and ethnic identities as opposed to the government-led scripted definitions. Until today, according to Budianta (2011), "we witness the flourishing of scholarly terms such as "hybridity," "blurred genres," "transborder identity," "transnational/translational" condition, and "the postmodern diaspora," which, not only makes

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[17] *Cultural Encounters: Asian Perspectives on Film, Literature, and Society,* (15-16 May 2015) UNMC KL Teaching Centre. Co-organised by the University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus and Yonsei University, South Korea.

sense of, but also validates the ambivalent, contradictory, and mismatched positions as "alternative" spaces for artistic creativity as well as political or ideological resistance" (p. 188). Then again, cultural inquiries regarding the in-between world of the three countries and its social identity, especially via artistic creativity performances and representations such as film are inadequate for understanding and appreciating regional culture. At this stage, it is necessary to re-introduce Bhabha's concept of 'in-betweenness'.

Paul Basu's explanation of what the idea of cultural in-betweenness means in assessing our multi-cultural world is crucial to my argument, and is, therefore, cited at length here.

> The 'inbetween' provides a way to escape the methodological essentialism that continues to dominate Western logic; the relentless search for the singular and true nature of things; the desire to certainty, for dividing the world into *this* or *that* (one 'fixed' essence separated from another). Yet, inbetweenness does not simply posit the opposite and argue that everything is social construction, contingency and flux. Inbetweeness is [...] an 'anti-anti-essentialist' position. Inbetweeness is defined by its 'essential connectedness'; a double-consciousness born from 'histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation, and continual reinscription. This double-consciousness is not characterised by symmetry, however, but by 'syncretic complexity' (2017, p. 2).

'In-betweenness', according to Bhabha (1996), means "baffling both alike and different […], [t]he peculiarity of cultures […], and even metonymic presence lies in articulating those social divisions and unequal developments that disturb the self-recognition of the national culture, its anointed horizons of territory and tradition" (p. 54). According to Hoogvelt as stated in Koc (2006), Bhabha's concept is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (p. 42).

In another view, Pataki (2013), who deals with British Asian novels, suggests that in-betweenness is about dislocation and identity confusion. Concerning the first-generation British

Asians, she argues that their nostalgia for the homeland makes the process of becoming a British Asian more "problematic and painful" because they are stuck between two spheres. She also notes that, for Bhabha, "hybridity is the third space of the in-between" and it is a camouflage related to the translating and transvaluing processes underlying cultural differences (p. 4). Therefore, Bhabha's in-betweenness is crucial in explaining liminal feeling attentive to Nusantaran subjects as exemplified by several leading characters in films that I have chosen. Nusantara has a concept similar to hybrid culture and identity known as '*Kacukan*'. In this region, many '*Kacukan*' people are the product of inter-ethnic marriages, but the most notable are the *Peranakan*(s), one of whom is the '*Jawi Peranakan*' which refers to the Muslim Indian community. The other is the Chinese '*Peranakan*' or '*Baba Nyonya*'. The latter, according to Lee (2008), is a blend of "two dominant cultures – Malay and Chinese – with some elements from Javanese, Batak, Siamese and European (specifically English) cultures" (p. 163). I will explain more about the '*kacukan*' or '*peranakan*' cultures and films in Chapter Five.

Bhabha also emphasises that the concept of hybridity has the ability "to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity" (1996, p. 58). Furthermore, he points out that whoever has an interest in hybridity "deploy[s] the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historical memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions to occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole" (p. 58). Following Bhabha, Leuthold (2011), who explores cross-cultural issues in art criticism, advocates that interstitial has brought the concept of in-betweenness into today's world meaning "the spaces between" including "the spaces between cultures" as well as "the spaces between artistic media" (p. 67).

In reading cultural identities through cinematic representations from three neighbouring national entities, I am following Stuart Hall's advice; what is important is the matter of "becoming" as well as "being" (1996, p. 212). He stresses that it is important to recognise the profound and

significant *difference*[18] between the people, including the details that made us who we are because who we are right now is critical. This view of cultural history is not familiar across all three countries especially in the area of film studies where the master cultural narratives of the three national entities in question always refer to the ancient histories of old kingdoms. In this transnational reading of film representations, we will be able to observe and look at the cinematic arts as the cultural '*play*'[19] of the national cinemas.

After considering all of the above, attention must be given to the 'in-betweenness' in film representations of the three countries and how they play with the long history of cultural relationships among regional inhabitants. The films discussed here occupy a space somewhere among Malaysia's, Indonesia's, and Singapore's national cinemas. Before moving to the next chapter, I will discuss the in-betweenness themes and issues raised between regional films in the next three subsections. Briefly, these films occupy the space between national politics and regional cultural values and between modern technology and local tradition, as well as between cinema as art and cinema as popular entertainment. To borrow Hall's words, the "experience I intend here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity, diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (p. 220). The subject of cultural identity is portrayed as something beyond national boundaries, regardless of whether the film is produced by Malaysian, Indonesian, or Singaporean filmmakers at certain points in our national history.

Here I focus on, (1) *Tanahair* as a local concept of home and belonging, (2) cinematic intervention in intercultural relations, on individual and cultural mobility through the

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[18] For Hall (1996), Derrida's theory on the way of writing 'difference' is "a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding of translation of the concept" yet it does not help as much as it should. However, the conception of 'difference', according to him, is allowing us to rethink the way we 'position' and 'reposition' (positioning) our cultural identities based on critical junctures (p. 216).

[19] The word 'play' according to Hall is suggesting "the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution" and it also hints at "the place where [such] 'doubleness' is powerfully to be heard is 'playing'" (p. 215).

representation of migration traditions and performances, and (3) the interpolated representation of borderland populations.

Nationalism in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

Acciaioli (2001) suggests Geertz's 'primordial' factors in the sense of a nation often require both prehistory and history, namely a sense of the continuity of cultural content from the earliest origins (pp. 1-2). Acciaioli argues that the notion of archipelagic culture (*kebudayaan nusantara*) served as the central attribute of Indonesian nationalism as well as one of the key notions that enabled the nation to postulate the continuity of the national subject throughout history. However, he also finds that the concept has resulted not only in the occlusion of other narratives but also in the marginalisation of certain groups whose beliefs and practices fail to fit the definition of Indonesia's national culture (p. 12).

From an Indonesian perspective, *kebudayaan nusantara* emphasises social and cultural mobility, by focusing on the notion that maritime connectivity of the archipelago's many islands was key to the region's development and acknowledges that people in the hinterland are equally important to people living in coastal areas. Indeed, gaps do exist in this characterisation when the nation is unable to accommodate cultural diversity. The problem in this matter is related to the concept of Nusantara, which is more about a common water culture contributing to the feeling of inconclusiveness and otherness among national populations (p. 12). I will discuss this more when reflecting on the representations of the Bornean Dayaks in Chapter Four.

Unlike Benedict Anderson's illusory make-up of nations, Geertz in *What is a country if it is not a nation?* (1997) suggests the phrase 'nation' denotes, "[a]n extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organised as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory" (pp. 235-7). Following Geertz, we can argue that a nation is composed of groups of people who

are closely related to the others but generally separate in political life. Nusantara as a cultural space is wider than a single nation because the words we use nowadays to refer to the fundamentals of the world political order such as 'nation' and 'country' have serious uncertainties incorporated within their range, intent, and definition (pp. 235-7).

According to Malik (1996), the concept of 'nation' at the end of the 18th century was different from what is understood today because today, individuals (notwithstanding cosmopolitans and their idea of being 'world citizens') are somehow not allowed to identify themselves beyond the boundaries of a community to include every individual or group as a part of universal society. Consistent with Ernest Renan, as quoted by Malik, 'nation' before the 18th century can be defined as 'daily plebiscite' where the term is expressed to mean individual existence is the perpetual affirmation of life. In this context, the nation is a collective agreement that rejects certain privileges and does not emphasise specific ethnicity nor emphasise the history. However, following the revolutions in France, the Netherlands, and America, the concept of 'Nation' changed to mean a political unit based on the 'revolutionary-democratic' territories and promoted the idea of 'nation state' and 'nationhood' as involving citizenship, involvement, and choice within the society (pp. 130-5).

For Geertz (1997), the end of a concept closely resembling components pressed into an all-round characterised structure of intensity and significance has been replaced with the idea that the world is made up of nucleus nationalities that are difficult, if not challenging, to articulate and even harder to safeguard. He contends that the different lines of attachment that transform unique populaces into open on-screen characters discrete and distinct, appears to be reasonably valuable, ethically necessary, and politically practical (p. 238). What seems clear from Geertz's proposals, is that current regional politics require, "a new approach (to comprehend Nation) that depends on gaining a better understanding of how culture, the frames of meaning within which people live and

from their convictions, their selves, and their solidarities, come to us as an ordering force in human affairs" (pp. 245-6).

One might argue that the acceptance of the concept of national identity among the inhabitants within the three countries is relatively consistent despite one or two political incidents in the past. Others may contend that the three countries are within their rights to be moving towards being more modern and dynamic, especially when we look at their economic indicators. Supremacism in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore is about who owns the land (and water) plus the political, economic, and the dominant theological issues which can potentially weaken the spirit of nationalism. In addition, the hybrid character of their cultural identities complicates this push for an exclusive or primordial definition of nation and people.

The concept of the nation that is supposedly central to the human cultural landscape and identity as a unifier has been challenged by theories of globalization and transnationalism, diaspora theory, and cosmopolitanism (Appadurai 1996; Appiah 2006; Beck 2005; Cheah & Robbins 1998). Aligned with this gesture to de-nationalise, the films that I examine reveal that among the three national cinemas, there are works that represent regional cultural values and social orientation which is often beyond national jurisdictions. Moreover, all of these films are associated with individual and social mobility, as well as cultural diversity and belonging within the context of regional identities. Although racial supremacist beliefs are often dominant in Malaysian, Indonesian, and arguably even Singaporean identity politics, it is relatively clear that some filmmakers may view their ethnic identity as cultural rather than racial, and hybrid rather than pure and exclusive. That being said, their cinematic work plays a significant role in the complexities of national cultural formations.

All three nations are tied together by their racial policies that favour dominant groups. If Malaysia has a problem with Malay-centric nationalism, Indonesian nationalism has previously

been "a cover-up for the nascent Javanese nationalism" (Tiro, 1985). In Singapore, the condition is slightly different because, according to Chua (1998), even though multiculturalism is the country's national policy the "discourse of race is inscribed at the centre of the 'culture' of Singapore" (p. 190). As a consequence, "[t]he boundaries of each 'racialized' group were redrawn and (re)enforced in order to attribute to each group a 'homogenized' existence" (p. 190). More recently, Ortmann (2009) argues that national identity in Singapore is still contested, and average Singaporeans have their conceptions of the national identity which, to a certain extent, undermine the viability of an authoritarian form of Singapore's civic nationalism (p. 26). Chua contends that Singapore's authoritarian regime needs "to deemphasise national identity or risk conflicts or, as in case of civic national identity, democratisation" (p. 42). Lily Zubaidah Rahim (2001), in particular, observes that ethnic hostility in Singapore is often linked with ethnic minority displeasure concerning the national imaginings and its political foundations which were fabricated by the political elite. She proposes, "[t]he strongly top-down approach of the nation-building process is characterised by limited public debate and consensus on national cultural policies and the overlooking of contending national visions" (p. 3).

Moreover, Rahim observes that many "intellectuals… 'rediscover' 'collective memories,' transform popular oral traditions and languages into written ones, and portray a 'national golden age' in the far - mythical or historical - past, whose reconstitution becomes the basis for nationalist aspirations." To rationalise her argument, Yuval-Davis expands on Anthony Smith's 'ethnic-genealogical' and 'civic-territorial' nationalism together with three types of German nationalism, namely *Staatnation, Kulturnation,* and *Volknation*. For the three German typologies, the earlier one reflects on nationalism that "focus on citizenship of specific states (in specific territories)," the second type "focuses on specific cultures (or religions)" and, the third, refers to "those which are constructed around the specific origin of the people (or their 'race')" (pp. 21-3). Apart from the above, Yuval-Davis also suggests that:

The mythical unity of national 'imagined communities' which divides the world between 'us' and 'them', is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of what Armstrong (1982) calls symbolic 'border guards', which identify people as members or non-members of a specific collective. They are closely linked to specific cultural codes of style of dress and behaviour as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, literary and artistic modes of production and, of course, language (p. 25).

Observing the codes of Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean culture, as depicted in films dealt with here, reveal cultural linkages. Nusantara culture, hidden between the three countries of nationalism, manifests itself in the work of some regional filmmakers who may be questioning the ethnic nation as the only kind of nation. After all, the term 'nation' has two different but interrelated meanings. The first is a 'nation' such as the nation state, and the other is 'nation' as the people living within the country. Both meanings reflect the general ideology of nationalism (Billig 1995, p. 24). In the Malay language, the word '*bangsa*' means both 'nation' and 'people'. This raises some confusion in Malaysia as to whether the nation is therefore conceived to be an ethnic nation (*kulturnation*) or a more inclusive civic nation that is based on citizenship (*staatnation*) for right-wing Malays who feel that their ethnic privileges are threatened by the concept of a "*bangsa* Malaysia" (a multicultural Malaysia). While nations and national identities are commonly seen as products of modernity (Anderson, 1983), the forms in which they are perceived do not necessarily adhere to the characteristics of modern society.

The concept of cultural identity, as explained by Hall (1990) is twofold. First, among the people, the ideals of "*Volkanation*" are essential and that their rhetoric is always about their origins or roots that could conceal those who share a common history and heritage amongst others - similar to national identity. At the outset, it is an impression that offers the population a belief of "one people." Similarly, cultural identity is also a matter of "becoming" as well as "being" and, is a continuous interplay of history, culture, and power (pp. 223-5). Whereas the first aspect draws

credibility from the past, the second aspect of cultural identity touches on the future, thereby transcending place, time, history, and culture. My cinematic exploration is more about what lies beneath the surface, the political significance of becoming of which transnational relations are mostly hidden within the mainstream arenas of the three national cinemas and, the myth of the homogeneous nation.

Characterisations, like ethnicities, races, and nationalities are fundamental representations that are repeated in our everyday interactions, not unlike national identities which, according to Billig (1995), are "forms of social life" tangled in "the historical processes of nationhood" (p. 24). Nevertheless, it is safe to say that racial discrimination existed within this region following colonisation and is still evident today. It is also widely known that colonialism kept ethnic groups in this region socially divided and disunited. Moreover, the colonial masters held stereotypical views about the roles of the so-called natives and other ethnics, especially the Chinese and Indians (Hussein, 1977). According to Lange et al. (2006), "reigning economic rationale and widespread racism ensured that postcolonial state authorities would largely abstain from sponsoring investment in education or administering social services in the countryside" (p. 1440).

Following a short but intense exposure to Japanese nationalism (1941-45), the idea of uniting this archipelagic region grew rapidly (Reid, 2005). Singapore and Java, saw concentrations of political discussion, gatherings, organisations and disseminated information. After WW2, filmmaking, which was important in both places, could not escape the dominant ideologies. By then, the identity of the nation was a crucial element in films made in Singapore and Java. In response to political pressures that question the legitimacy of cultural aesthetics and values in the local film, both national film industries began to think carefully about what kind of stories they wanted to sell to their audiences as well as who was involved behind each production.

Film Representations in Early Cinema of Nusantara

Before the 1920s, there was little national awareness in the political entities we now know as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (Kahin 1952; Suryadinata 1978; Kahn, 2006). So the young generation drove the "cultural renaissance" in the Dutch East Indies by producing commercial films with nostalgic romanticism and positive illusions about their future intended to make audiences forget their harsh reality. Such initiatives, however, were instigated by non-natives (Pané, 1953, p. 11). G. Krugers, who initially worked with Heuveldorp for *Loetong Kasaroeng* [The Lost Lutung] (1926) and *Eulis Atjih* (1927), collaborated with Tan Koen Yauw to focus on *pribumi* films. Together they produced two films, *Njai Dasima* [Dasima the Housekeeper] (1929) and *Terpaksa Menikah* [Forced Marriage] (1932), and since then, filmmaking in Java began to attract the *pribumi* by adopting stories from Malay Tonil (*Toneel Malajoe*)[20] (Biran, 2009, pp. 97-8).

Similarly in Singapore during the late 1920s, the earliest film producers were the Shanghai-born Shaw brothers who produced Chinese-dialect films for the local market. Then in 1933, the Motilal Chemical Company (a Singapore-based company owned by an Indian trader, named Chisty) released the first film in the Malay language entitled *Laila Majnun* [Layla and Majnun] by bringing actors from *Bangsawan* to the screen. Thereafter, six Malay language films (*Mutiara* [Pearl], *Bermadu* [Polygamy], *Topeng Saitan* [The Devil's Mask], *Hanchor Hati* [Broken Heart], *Ibu Tiri* [The Stepmother], *Mata Hantu* [Ghost Eyes], *Tiga Kekasih* [Three Lovers] and *Terang Bulan Di Malaya* [Full Moon over Malaya]) were released by the Shaw Brothers in 1940 and 1941 (Barnard, 2010, p. 54). Except for Bachtiar Effendi's *Njai Dasima* (1932), all of the above films from Java and Singapore were directed by non-Malays. Filmmaking at the beginning centred on

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[20] *Toneel* is a type of theatre drama performed in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the 20th century, based on spoken dialogue and with less music used during the performance.

entertainment and storytelling, but in the 1940s, when nationalism increased in Java and Singapore, the film industries turned to hiring local directors.

This turn to ethnonationalism was reflected in the formation of *Perusahaan Film Nasional Indonesia* (PERFINI) by Usmar Ismail and *Perseroan Artis Indonesia* (PERSARI) by Djamaludin Malik in 1950 to counterbalance the Chinese film companies operating in Java. According to Said (1992), the disparity between Perfini and Persari in the type of films produced is apparent since Ismail tried to create art-quality films and Malik was obsessed with creating Hollywood in Indonesia. In Singapore, Shaw Brothers began using Malay directors in 1952 when they produced Haji Mahadi's *Permata Diperlimbahan* [Pearl in the Valley], but it was a disappointment. Three years later, Shaw Brothers released *Penarek Becha* [Trishaw Puller] (P. Ramlee, 1955), in which the notion of a nation-state, together with other ethnic groups, was not taken into account. Despite its universality, Barnard notes that the clear and egalitarian message in *Penarek Becha* was intended for Malay audiences, as signalled by the absence of Chinese and Indians in front of the camera whose names appear in the credits and who reflect the degree of plurality of the region at the time (2009, p. 75). With Malay filmmaking relocating to Kuala Lumpur in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Barnard suggests that the Malay film industry entered the era of national cinema (p. 85). However, the forces that shaped the character of the Malaysian national cinema's Malay-centric films were reinforced by the effect of Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965.

It is also evident that when self-administration became a reality, national belonging and national identity became more critical in film representations. For instance, Biran (2009) believed that films made in Java before 1949 lacked a sense of nationalism and therefore, those films were not Indonesian films (p. 45). The problem with Biran's deductions is that he assumed that films from previous eras had nothing to do with Indonesia's cinema and national development. The idea of '*film nasional*' in Indonesia emerged around the same time and was seen as a product of the prevailing politics of the time, and tied to the broader aspirations of Indonesian nationalism

(Barker, 2015). The war film *Darah dan Doa* [The Long March] (1950) by Usmar Ismail was lauded, "as the first such film to reflect national consciousness and signal the genesis of Indonesian film history," as well as the first film "directed by an Indonesian native, produced by an Indonesian production house, and shot in Indonesia" (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2010, p. 25). This connotes that the cinema of Indonesia is determined by territorial perspectives, and films from filmmaking activities since the 1920s in Bandung and other Javanese cities were not counted because the island was not yet a national territory. Such attitudes undermined the richness of Indonesia's film history because they rely on a limited meaning of what comprises "Indonesian films" (p. 25).

As the "first" national Indonesian film at the time, *Darah dan Doa* [The Long March] (1950) may not give Indonesians an equal sense of nationalism due to the incoherent nature of nationalist ideologies and movements. It is well known that the nation has had to deal with various resistances on islands outside Java for many years during and after independence when many people felt that the national government was somehow disconnected from the people. Moreover, according to Choi (2006), the territorial account of national cinema is conceptually problematic since it is based on production and industry: how to account for transnational co-productions (p. 311)? Although political consciousness in Singapore during the 1950s was as intense as in Java, (Muthalib, 2013), ideas of nationalism did not surface in films because the studios had given strict orders for no criticism against the British, and they were not allowed to marginalise immigrants. He suggests that there were no representations of national identity and independence agitations in Malay films at the time, thus creating an 'artificial' situation as the studios built the cultural milieu of the people from their own perspective. However, Muthalib recognises that the entry of respected Filipino directors such as Ramon Estella and Lamberto V. Avellana brought changes in the narratives and styles of Singapore's film (pp. 47-9). From one perspective, Muthalib may be correct in his observations, but apart from the works from the Singapore studios, local audiences were also watching films from Indonesia and the Philippines which emphasised common cultural identity

and belonging. One of the films is from Avellana himself entitled *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957), which tells a story about Nusantara's two marginal ethnic groups (Bajau and Tausug) and indirectly engages in the debate about separation and unification between regional populations. Considering the film's popularity, Avellana's credibility as the Philippine national artist and the expression of ethnic conflict within the archipelago, *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* deserves further attention to determine the extent to which the film intervened within nationalist discourses in this region. Therefore in Chapter Three, where I argue that the film uses metaphor to emphasise how two different ethnic groups from this region coexist in a place where the lands and waters around them are places they perceive as their home.

The region thrived, in part, because of its traditions that enabled outsiders to come and trade. After all, this cultural space is an archipelago further divided into highland and the lowland areas, all of which contributes to a diverse population giving impetus for them to travel from their place of birth. Apart from trading or other economic activities, other factors such as amalgamation, intermarriage, and migration helped to blend these diverse populations into a community. Nevertheless, today, "the Nusantara is divided by regional, colonial and nationalistic histories" (Sutherland, 2003, p. 6). From a national political perspective, this view can be seen at first glance as reliable, but when we look at the shared cultural realities of film representations, the diverse population exhibits the same forms of cross-cultural interactions.

Growth in identity politics is linked to progress in the development of Nusantara nation states. In the aftermath of WWII, many countries struggled to select the appropriate system of governance as well as their political allies to continue as a sovereign nation state. In justifying the chosen political philosophies for the national entity, countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore had to deal with such events as the Communist insurgency from 1948 up to 1989 (Malaysia), the Maria Hertogh riots (Dec 1950), Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (1962-1966), the 30th September movement or G30S political coup in Indonesia (1965), and the 13th May

incident in Malaysia (1969), which nurtured racial division within the country's population. President Diosdado Macapagal convened a summit in Manila in July 1963, where a series of agreements called Maphilindo were signed by the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to resolve disputes over Malaysia's formation. The treaty barely lasted a month before Sukarno launched *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation). In the course of the latter incident, "13th May [1969] also encouraged Indonesian interest in the repercussions that the riots had for their Malay cousins as well as their own indigenous population" (Yong, 2003 pp. 336-7) (and vice versa in the wake of the anti-Chinese violence and rape of Chinese women during the 1998 riots in Indonesia). However, the dynamics shifted again when Suharto took over the Indonesian President office, which initiated "the golden years of Indonesia-Malaysia blood brotherhood" between 1970 and 1975 (p. 350). The era of globalisation has also enhanced the inclusion of societies in which the movement of cross-border people has gained more attention than earlier, but this is not new to Nusantarans because being located in an archipelagic region allows us to adapt to the ever-changing social circumstances and issues. Despite globalisation affecting state politics, it has revived the competitive power of regional cultural networks and Nusantara's spirit of regional belonging.

Furthermore, identity politics among the three countries involving race, religion, and class are seen as hostile with regards to the future social development of the countries and of the entire region. For example, the racial segregation policies propagated among the Nusantarans advocated that there were differences between 'us' and 'them'. These have created tensions and conflicts. Consequently, people become suspicious of their fellow citizens based on the differences while ignoring the similarities, which is the way the modern Nusantara national politics are carried out. For example, a few years ago, a Protestant church was torn down in Aceh, Sumatra. In the Indonesian context, economic and political conflicts appear to develop along ethnic lines or on the basis of competitions between long-established groups, in particular those who consider themselves indigenous and new migrants to the contested area (Acciaioli, 2017, p. 1226).

Malaysia's deepening conservative, ethno-nationalist Islamist trend runs counter to the picture commonly held by the country's international community as a 'moderate' and democratic country with a Muslim majority (Rahim, 2018, p. 180).

These socio-religious issues have become central to the people of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. However, if we look closely at all the political junctures that keep contemporary Nusantarans stuck in close-minded destructive racial behaviours, we should see that each situation is distinct. Nevertheless, the national political behaviour and power of each nation goes a long way towards influencing public interests and shaping individual opinions and interpersonal social networks. Still, there is hope because, given the confusion over the establishment of democracy in Indonesia and Malaysian politics with a variety of interests vying for power and influence and, except for a relatively small number of extreme militant groups, Islamic organisations now seem willing to abide by the rules of the game (Freedman, 2009, p. 124). Remarkably, these humanitarian and socio-political matters are discussed through film representations as in *Badjao*, which might conceivably entice viewers to contemplate issues of ethnic and religious intolerance around the region in the early 1950s as well as today.

In addition to *Badjao*, there are other films that can be connected to national political change that influenced the responses of filmmakers against prejudice and discrimination. The advent of digital and communication technologies, for example, have made it possible for current generations to challenge racism and ethno-nationalism by highlighting minority narratives in film. In the early 2000s, Malaysia produced *Spinning Gasing* [Spinning Top] (Teck Tan, 2000) and *Sepet* [Slit Eyes] (Yasmin Ahmad, 2005) which depict romantic inter-ethnic relations between Malay and Chinese characters. Furthermore, Indonesia has *Ca-bau-kan* [The Courtesan] (Nia Dinata, 2002) the first popular post-*reformasi* film centred on the story of Chinese-Indonesians. Singapore's *Sayang Disayang* [My Beloved Dearest] (Sanif Olek, 2013) was the country's first Malay-language film since the 1970s.

If Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore respect and recognise cultural diversity, the country's concept of national cinema(s) should represent a set of political ideas and beliefs that are not biased, but more importantly, may also allow filmmakers to produce films that represent the characteristics of the population as a whole. Indeed, it is impossible to ignore that access to digital information and its technology used by the latest generation of filmmakers has changed the landscape of regional film production and exhibition (Khoo, 2007; Raju, 2008, 2017). The opportunities provided by digital technologies have had a significant impact on the cultural scene of the three countries. Today, independent films from these three countries are viewed by their audiences in small-scale screening events in various places around the region, not only at independent venues, but also in many national establishments such as public institutions of higher learning, galleries, and museums.

Also, it seems that Hatta Azad Khan's look at Malaysian national cinema is from "a functional account," which identifies instances of national cinema based on what a film embodies at the textual level and how it works within a nation state (Choi, 2006, p. 311). This cinematic differentiation attitude that appeals to Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" is achieved by assuming that viewers acquire a sense of community marked by national boundaries and a sense of shared destiny. In opposing Andrew Higson's proposal that national cinema requires a certain national "flavour" or "tone" rendered by the narrative, setting, or the nationality of the cast and crew, the viewer should be able to form certain conceptions about the "national" brand, presumably based on discernible textual properties (Choi, 2006, p. 313). Even now, the ownership of the classic black and white Malay language films by Cathay-Keris Studio that many Malaysians adore has been challenged successfully by Singapore.[21]

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[21] See Lui (2014), *Cache of Singapore Malay films recognised by UNESCO as part of region's heritage*. Retrieved from http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/cache-of-singapore-malay-films-recognised-by-unesco-as-part-of-regions

Identity Crisis in the Cinema of Malaysia, Indonesia and, Singapore

After 1946, there were at least five Chinese-dialect films released by several local independent productions in Singapore.[22] The first post-World War II (WWII) film from the studios in Jalan Ampas was *Singapura di Waktu Malam* [Singapore at Night] (1948) by B. S. Rajhans (Uhde & Uhde, 2010, pp. 25-8), portraying an interracial romance between Chinese and Malay characters which was highly anticipated by audiences. This positive partnership between the Shaw Brothers of China and the Rajhan of India led them in 1949 to produce another Malay film, *Nasib* [Fate]. Following the era of Jalan Ampas Studios, Singapore attempted to reform its cinemas in the 1970s, but the results of imitating influential Hong Kong and Hollywood cinemas (like other mainstream cinemas in Southeast Asia) proved disappointing.[23]

After WWII, many Singaporean Malay films that were associated with the new Malay cultural elite were given new narratives of identity and new ways of narrating the Malay nation (Kahn, 2006, p. 108), which was in parallel with the efforts made to add national features to the films of Indonesia. For example, referring to several of P. Ramlee's films, as well as others of that era, Kahn suggests that many films merely portrayed stories that revolved around Malay cultural identity. The themes of these stories lingered between rural and urban, the modern and traditional, as well as, Islam and *adat* (pp. 117-20).

Absent from studies on the three national cinemas are the transnational film productions between Singapore and Jakarta in the late 1950s. It is vital to note that the national icon of Indonesian cinema, Usmar Ismail, was active in film collaborations between 1958 and 1963 with film companies based in Singapore. Ismail's production company Perfini partnered with Ho Ah Loke's *Merdeka Film Enterprise* in 1958 and produced *Hilang Gelap Datang Terang* [After Dark

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[22] These Chinese language post-war patriotic films are *The song of Singapore, Souls of overseas expeditions, My second homeland, Unbearable days, Honour and Sin* (Foong Choon Hon in Uhde & Uhde 2010, p. 26).
[23] I draw into this conclusion based what is described in White (1997) about the progress of Singaporean Cinema since 1972 to 1997. The last Malay language film from this era was *Satu titik di-garisan*, directed by M. Amin and produced by Cathay-Keris in 1973.

Comes Light], which was shot entirely in Indonesia. In 1959 he worked with *Cathay-Keris* on *Korban Fitnah* [Victims of Defamation] under the pseudonym "PL Kapur," followed in 1963 by a remake of his first film *Tjitra* (1949) entitled *Bayangan Diwaktu Fajar* [Shadows at Dawn]. These often-forgotten co-productions seem to suggest that, on the one hand, regional filmmakers like him have always tried to maintain transnational relationships between these national cinemas. These co-productions outline a clear cultural relationship and understanding on certain levels: filmmakers may hope for a larger market based on shared cultural values and codes, envision transnational cooperation between transnational workers and actors, as well as represent two national establishments in one film. On the other hand, co-productions have been side-lined not only by the industry but also by film scholars. These films are more like inappropriate realities which interfere with the right of these national cinemas to define their own cultural identity.

From the early 1960s to early 1970s, when Singapore became an independent country, Malaysian and Singaporean local film industries underwent a drastic decline attributed to, among other things, the split up between the island and the peninsula that caused the cultural unity problem and the slow deterioration of the Malay cinema as well as, *Konfrontasi* (1963-66) which was considered to have ruined the film business when films from the newly established Malaysia were not allowed to enter Indonesia. Jan and Yvonne Uhde (2010) have this to say about this development:

> The impact of the 1965 political crisis and the Singapore separation from the Malaysian Federation cannot be underestimated as it tore apart a cultural unity which had existed for generations. […] the film industry based in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur became two independent entities, dividing all the human and material resources typically involved in the filmmaking process. Suddenly, the movement of people and goods across the new border became subject to political and economic barriers. Restrictions on information flow and exchange of ideas soon followed (p. 47).

Moreover, with the introduction of television during this time film production in Singapore fell sharply. In 1966, Malay Film Productions released seven titles, but only five attributable to Cathay-Keris. In total, there were eight films in Singapore in 1967, seven films each in the next two years, and three to four films between then and 1973. The fall in Malay film production ended the golden era that began in the 1950s. Moreover, after M. Amin's *Satu Titek Di-Garisan* [One Point on the Line] (1973), only four Chinese-language films (*Ring of Fury* 1973, *Master of the Family* 1974, *Family Degeneration* 1974, *The Two Sides of the Bridge* 1976) were released in Singapore. The 1977 shift from Chinese to English-language films began with Filipino director Leody M. Diaz's *Bionic Boy* pointing to another massive identity crisis as well as the changing political, social and ethnic focus in Singapore at the time. By 1978, another two English language action/spy movies[24] directed by Bobby A. Suarez (aka George Richardson) and produced by a local entrepreneur, were shot in Singapore, intended for local distribution. Unfortunately, both films flopped at the box office because the films were poor Hollywood imitations.

While some regard the "rebirth" of Singaporean cinema with Eric Khoo's *Mee Pok Man* (1995)" (White, 1997, pp. 4-5), Millet (2011) argues that the "renaissance" of Singaporean cinema began in 1998 when the country established a proper film agency (Singapore Film Commission) to support the industry. That year, *Money No Enough* by Tay Teck Lock was a hit at the box-offices (Millet, 2011, pp. 453-4). Despite the arguments advanced by both White and Millet, the award-winning documentary film *Shirkers* (2018) by Sandi Tan reveals that the cinema actually had a new beginning in 1992. Unfortunately, it was a false start because its director stole the film. However, during its premiere at Sundance in 2018, the *New Yorker* described *Shirkers* as an "exemplary work of counter-lives and alternative histories, an intimate self-portrait and cultural reconstruction, a hard-won empathy and a painful reconciliation" (Hans, 2018).

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[24] *They Call Her Cleopatra Wong* (1978); *Dynamite Johnson* (1978).

Political control over film production and exhibition in Java began as early as the Japanese occupation when Dutch language films were banned from movie theatres (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 2008, p. 103). Japanese propaganda films in the 1940s also "caused a huge shock to the thoughts of Indonesians about the function of film and introduced them to a new way of thinking," added Misbach Biran as quoted in Barker (2010, p. 8). Later, the 1950s Perfini films, which are concerned with regional societies, traditions, and history, were the result of the particular character of Indonesia's regionalism and were in line with the nation's motto '*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*' (Unity in Diversity) (Hanan, 2008, pp. 125-6). During Suharto's New Order, the works of Krishna Sen (1988, 2006) show that a cultural form like 'Culture of Indonesia' can be shaped ideologically in a post-colonial situation through films and in particular by a political regime that was determined to control its image and maintain power (Shoesmith, 1996, p. 334). It is clear that filmmaking throughout the nation shifted at least four times from *pribumi* performances (the late 1920s – early 1940s) to imperialist propaganda (1942-1945) to nationalist ideals (1950s – 1965) to the New Order era (1965 – 1998) before it was reformed after 1998 (Barker, 2019).

The post-confrontation political rejuvenation of Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, in which the political elites of both countries were branded as "brothers," led to something new in regional film productions[25] as evidenced by a series of collaborations between Indonesian and Malaysian filmmakers from the 1970s onwards. For instance, *Sabah Film Productions* of Malaysia produced *Hapuslah Airmatamu* [Wipe Away Your Tears] (1976) and *Pendekar* [Warrior] (1977). M. Amin of Malaysia directed both films with Indonesian co-stars Broery Marantika and Christine Hakim

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[25] During his visit to Jakarta in March 1968, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman says; "Malaysians are blood brothers of the Indonesians. We are few in numbers. I sometimes wonder whether the Malays would have come into being if it had not been for the Indonesians" (Liow, 2005, p. 113). In his earlier study, Joseph Liow suggests that the diplomatic rhetoric of blood brotherhood gained greater credence when Tun Abdul Razak became Prime Minister. This inter-national political reformation was partly because of "growing concern among the Malay élite about the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese population in Malaysia, a problem that resonated with domestic political concerns in Indonesia, and was further aggravated by lingering suspicions of a People's Republic of China that refused to disavow ties with communist elements in both Indonesia and Malaysia" (Yong, 2003, p. 350).

in *Hapuslah Airmatamu* as well as Farouk Afero and Erni Yusnita in *Pendekar*. Runme Shaw in 1976 also produced a revenge action film *Loceng Maut* [Death Bell] directed by Indonesian director Nas Achnas. In the 1980s, there were more co-productions such as *Pernikahan Berdarah* [Bloody Wedding] (Torro Margens. 1987), *Irisan-irisan Hati* [Shreds of the Heart] (Djun Saptohadi & Ismail Sasakul, 1988), *Jurus Dewa Naga* [Dragon God Stance] (S.A. Karim, 1989) and *Pendekar Mata Satu* [One Eye Warrior] (S.A. Karim, 1989).

At that juncture, "there appeared to be a fraternal cosiness in relations between Singapore's two immediate neighbours" (Huxley, 2006, p. 151). Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta political alliances essentially put an end to collaborative filmmaking activities with Singapore by 1978. At this time Singapore's political relationship with both Malaysia and Indonesia was not exactly comfortable and Singaporean cinema was moving towards transnational collaborations but was losing the "Malay speaking audiences" who had previously supported them. That being said, by the 1990s, economic interdependence and subsequent developments encouraged similar fraternal relations between Malaysia and Singapore (Yong & Ying, 1998, p. 113).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Malaysian and Indonesian cinemas were also affected by the process of Islamisation. In Indonesia, even though Suharto began the Islamisation of the country in 1990 (Heryanto, 2014, p. 152), the Indonesian Film Censorship Board in the 1980s had already been established and it "recommended that all aspects of the film should lead to the devotion praise," to the "One and Only God" (Irawanto, 2014, pp. 247-8). Van der Heide (2002), in his investigation, reveals that Malaysian cinema from that era has a propensity for highlighting Islam (p. 100).

The 1990s also saw the cinema of Indonesia experience a decline in local film productions[26] whereas the cinema of Singapore bounced back with renewed energy sparked by the government's

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[26] According to Maulana (2015), the downward trend of the cinema in the early 1990s was due to the establishment of private television, and the Indonesian government at the time was extremely repressive, stifling the creativity of filmmakers, according to Deddy Mizwar's opinion as cited in the same article.

support for the arts. That support started in the 1980s with funds for film-related education programmes, employing international and regional co-productions as well as attracting foreign filmmakers to come to the island (Uhde & Uhde, 2010, pp. 54-65).

The cultural "look" of the three national cinemas was amended again as digital technology offered new ways of film productions and viewing. Furthermore, the investment of national and non-governmental agencies in film education from the late 1970s to the early 1980s started to show results. Film inquiry in this region also began to attract international and local scholars, thereby introducing the films of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to the world.[27] Contextually, the works of Southeast Asian cinema scholars had offered various indications that Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean filmmakers were constantly negotiating the idea of national cinema through their cinematic works. My research shows that many local filmmakers consistently challenged the ethnonational exclusivity of film representations since the beginning.

Today, the cinema of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore continue to make changes regarding the narrative forms, styles, and identities. For instance, there are now numerous films from the three countries that represent ethnic minorities. Furthermore, in the cinema of Malaysia, we now are becoming familiar with interracial romance films thanks to the late Yasmin Ahmad (1958 – 2009) with her works *Sepet* [Slit Eyes] (2004), *Gubra* [Anxiety] (2006) and *Muallaf* [Convert] (2008), as well as Chinese and Indian dialect films showing the multiracial composition of the nation through film representations by contemporary filmmakers. Similar developments have occurred in Indonesia with such films as, *Ca-bau-kan* [The Courtesan] (2002) and *Gie* (2005) which narrate accounts of Chinese Indonesian and *Melody Kota Rusa* [The Melody of Deer City] (2010) that represents the Papuans, plus other groups from the peripheral areas. Today, Chinese

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[27] According to Khoo (2020), local film academics' publications on cinema are uncommon in many Southeast Asian countries, as film studies as a discipline were not offered as a degree programme and governments showed little interest in cultivating film culture (p. 12).

actors and filmmakers are becoming increasingly popular. Actors such as Verdi Soleiman and Joe Taslim are continuing to attract audiences to the cinema, while Ernest Prakasa is making popular films dealing with Chinese themes and scenarios such as *Cek Toko Sebelah* [Check the Store Next Door] (2016) and *Ngenest* (2015).

The current generation of filmmakers learned the trade, not only from their seniors and field experiences with local productions but also externally when they participated in filmmaking workshops overseas. Such transnational factors have introduced the need for critical discussions of film representations, production, as well as matters related to cultural identities and ideologies that re-frame the National Cinema of these countries. In the next section, I discuss the significance of tidalectics in facilitating culture for the regional inhabitants and the impact of cultural diversity when new forms of national society emerge.

Conclusion

At the outset, I discussed the in-betweenness within the context of the racialised politics of the Nusantara world and how the dynamics of ethnonationalism in the regional context poses ascriptive/external barriers to upward social mobility for the citizens of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. The ongoing presence of prejudice and discrimination among citizen groups is thus highlighted with the citizens being questioned when trying to claim some part of their national and cultural belonging. Moreover, these are the main contributing factors that were used in determining whether a film is regarded as belonging to the country's cinema. The representational, as well as cinematic qualities of the film, are often seen as the main determinants as to whether a film that portrays the majority groups of the country will significantly affect its recognition as a national film.

Furthermore, I call attention to the need to reassess how the inhabitants are imagined in cinematic forms in order to connect national films with transnational/regional perspectives. Thus,

my readings of the three national cinemas indicated that nationalists tend to act defensively regarding national cultural identities and go on the offensive against the idea that they are in a constant state of becoming. It seems like playing a diplomatic game, or perhaps the political game, and not really concentrating on building and sustaining a diverse nation. In-between film representations of these countries are seen as being similar to the realities of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean sociocultural conditions. In the following chapters, I will explore how regional filmmakers such as Dain Said, Sherman Ong, Adriyanto Dewo and Herwin Novianto are investigating alternative ways of thinking about how regional inhabitants view themselves concerning others around them through mobility, belonging, and identity. The focus is how my selection of films negotiates with the national community at all levels of the active national cultural policies, the differences, and how the narratives, as well as cinematic aesthetics, reconfigure the self-image of the country. In doing so, I used three factors to identify and explore complex cultural performances of the three national cinemas: the concept of *tanahair*, *merantau*, and the representation of borderlands, on top of film about hybrid identities from the new generation of filmmakers.

In the next chapter, I begin the analysis by examining two black and white films, *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* and *Raden Mas*. Although the former is from the Philippines, both were released for regional viewing around the time of independence with the potential to modify their ways of life profoundly. These films not only highlight the differences between social groups but also used *tanahair* as a metaphor to explain interdependence and intra-dependence, both core principles of this archipelagic population.

CHAPTER THREE

Theorising *Sinema* Nusantara

[…] the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through death, literally and figuratively, the complex interweaving of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood. – (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5)

Introduction

This chapter examines the films *Raden Mas* (L. Krishnan, 1959) and *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (Lamberto V. Avellana, 1957) in order to map the parameters of Nusantara, including the individuals living there unhindered by national boundaries. The aim is to explain that the term '*tanahair'* goes beyond nationalities and languages. Made in the post-war period at different locations in the Nusantara region, the two films trace the unique regional concept of '*tanahair'* which refers to the homeland of the diverse populations of the archipelago. Additionally, these representations reveal how *tanahair* is a social space where groups meet, come into conflict, and get to know one another. These encounters frequently occur in settings with power imbalances dealing with such issues as expansionism, subjugation, or the aftermaths of such, as experienced in numerous present-day geographical areas (Pratt, 2002, p. 4).

Raden Mas and *Badjao* were made and released in an era when post-colonial governments were solidifying cultural borders and identities, often through the lens of ethno-nationalism. Yet *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* illustrate how this archipelagic cultural space contained different sub-communities where people of different ethnicities lived alongside one another and no single ethnic group dominated the diverse population. These communities display a long history with the lands

and waters around them, allowing them to keep moving from one place to another, learning how to cultivate a livelihood, and offering them a powerful sense of home. Hence, this chapter also illustrates the dynamics of associative relations through subject origins using the notion of 'home' and a sense of belonging in dialogue with larger socio-political tensions that are often exacerbated by forces seeking to reshape national identities such as ethnicity, race, and religion.

In the view of Masri et al. (2016), "[t]he Malays viewed the seas as a connecting channel rather than as a divisional factor" (p. 560), I propose that this indigenous model for this earth-honouring word be adopted across the three countries and different ethnicities regardless of where one comes from or what languages they use. One may ask whether the non-native groups, like the Chinese and Indians, have a similar understanding. Of course, they have their cultural traditions and philosophies; however, like the Chinese, their culture "is shaped by the people's experience of living in their respective environment" (Tan, 1988, p. 140). Therefore, the concept of tanahair enables a first cultural understanding of nusantara as a cultural space, inclusive of both native and "non-native" inhabitants.

Suppositions underlying the concepts of *tanahair* are examined to show the considerable association between the inhabitants and the policymakers' idea of home. In 1922, an Indonesian poet-turned-politician, Muhammad Yamin (1902-1962), published the first collection of modern Malay poems *Tanah Air.* His achievement made him the pioneer of modern Indonesian poetry (Dewi, 2005, p. 55). Yamin's *tanahair* in the poem refers to Sumatra where he was from, but after that, the adoration of *tanahair* and the love of the *tanahair* were also used by other nationalist poets such as Roestam Effendi, Sanusi Pané, Armijn Pané, Asmara Hadi, and Hasjmy (Pradopo, 2001, p. 61). Likewise, Usman Awang's (1929-2001) poem, *Tanah Air (menjelang kemerdekaan)* (1956) is also quite significant in Malaysia given that it epitomises the struggle for independence

and hopes of a "new" Malaysia while appreciating freedom, unity, love, and peace.[28] Despite limiting the spaces of the assumed *tanahair* to within the nation, the concept refers to the archipelagic cultural space within this vast region of Nusantara.

Katrin Bandel's review of Pramoedya's *Gadis Pantai* (2008) suggests that the emotional bond between the people, place and identity is not just love for the beauty of nature or love of the *tanahair* as an abstract concept, but it is also closely related to earning a living (p. 3). Alternatively, Yoseph (2013) argues that Indonesian people identify with their *tanahair* as "motherland", and in their imagination, the sea is a "mother" with all the tenderness and compassion of the life-giver (p. 5).

By focussing on the representations of *tanahair* in these two films, this chapter argues that the concept of homeland is not defined by national boundaries nor is it limited to a national territory. Instead, *tanahair* is a transnational cultural space that extends beyond any single national boundary as it predates nation states. Likewise, Nusantara is "the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice [or, what Nusantarans call] 'home' being a place in which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of 'feeling at home'" (Brah, 2005, p. 4). Alternatively, this examination of the cultural-historical space of Southeast Asia considers home as "an on-going project entailing a sense of hope for the future" (Yuval-Davis, 2004, p. 4). Historically, the geographical realities of the Nusantara region have encouraged human mobility between the islands and the Malay (Malaysian) Peninsula via the seas, and via the land that connects to the Asian mainland. Historians writing from socio-cultural and archaeological perspectives agree that the range of trading activities and proximity networks are among the ingredients for enabling human mobility

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[28] Extracted from Sira Habibu (2013), *'Tanah Air' to be jazzed up into song*. Retrieved from - http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/08/24/tanah-air-to-be-jazzed-up-into-song-petronas-picks-poem-to-inject-merdeka-spirit-into-youngsters/

throughout the region (Evers, 1988, 2003, 2014; Bellwood, 2007). As a result, a complex web of interconnectivity exists between people and places and is used by the people to facilitate their participation in their societies.

For these reasons, this study contends that the early films *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* complicate the notion of national cinema by revealing a regional outlook within the area of Southeast Asian cinema studies. In many ways, the social network, places of belonging, and human migration within the area have given a degree of consensus to the meaning of *tanahair*. The ongoing relocation of people has thus created a complex web of lineages that confuse the assumed binary between foreign and local, and national and regional cultures.

Revealing the concept of *tanahair* in these two films suggests a cultural association between the populations of the three countries that corroborate Nusantara as a uniquely Southeast Asian regional cultural space. As far as this study is concerned, these early films propose a concept of Nusantara based on the literal understanding of *tanahair* as images of the sea, water, the physical land, and its contact zones of the beach and sand. These typical images and symbols from nature suggest that the essentials of belonging and connection is archipelagic – between island to island, or Nusantara (*nusa* and *antara*).

In the recent documentary, *Our Land is the Sea* (Swazey & Colaciello, 2018) about the Bajau people living in contemporary Indonesia, Andar, who is the documentary's primary subject, describes the relationship of land and water. In one of his reflective moments, he says:

> My son is going to become a modern man. But what does it mean to be modern? To believe in
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> boundaries that do not really exist? Not just boundaries that separate territories, but also
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> [boundaries] that separate religion from tradition; boundaries that separate the ancestors from their
>
> descendants, boundaries that separate people from their environment. If these imagined boundaries
>
> are the spirit behind modern beliefs, I hope my children will choose Bajau beliefs.

This exploration also deals with those Nusantarans who are marginalised like the Bajau and Tausug who live in the 'Tri-Border' area of territory divided by the nations of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.[29] They are indigenous peoples or 'fourth world' people even more dislocated than newer migrants such as the Chinese and Indians. Andar raises several questions about living separated by superficial boundaries in *Our Land is the Sea*, and he seems to think that their cultural identity and manner of life has been stolen and that the constructed version of their identity does not adequately enable them to develop the ability to move between different cultural contexts without losing their sense of ethnic identity.

In *Raden Mas* and *Badjao*, social mobility is a major factor that reveals the core of relatedness in the social structure of Nusantara communities. Moreover, the portrayal of diverse ethnicities in these films provides a significant response by regional filmmakers to the notion of national identity in the 1950s and contrasts them with ethnonationalism within the region. In a study on Southeast Asian Chinese, Wang Gungwu (1988) indicates that the period during the 1950s brought along national (local) identity, communal identity and cultural identity to regional communities. During that period, the local Chinese in Malaya (then including Singapore) were entirely prepared to leave their Chinese nationalist identity (China as a nation) and replace it with Malayan national identity (pp. 1-4). According to Chun (2017), the variations between the Chinese themselves suggest that they make reasonable choices about cultural affiliation and, more precisely, that they are based on territorial settlement, cultural assimilation or political integration into local society, rather than on their diasporic extension to the former homeland (pp. 198 - 200). The period in which the films are set was a tumultuous time with decolonisation, Cold War geopolitics involving external powers (USA/UK and USSR/China), and the emergence of

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[29] According to Supratman in his thesis *Bentuk dan Motivasi Rantau dalam Budaya Bugis* (2013), the Bajau people otherwise known as *'Bajo', 'Baju', 'Waju',* or *'Bajoo'* are validly were from Sulawesi, they are linked to the Bugis "tau-Wugi" tribe who also served as the sea armada as well as engaged in trading with the Chinese, Persian and Egyptian for the Sivijaya kingdom from the 7th to 14th century.

domestic political movements such as communism, all of which affected local people in terms of cultural identity. Some political scientists have asserted that the term 'Southeast Asia' which started to evolve from the 1950s, originated from the regionalising practices of 'outsiders' rather than from local patterns of interaction or the activities of indigenous actors (Charrier, 2001, p. 315). These external factors affected regional populations with their own defensive political and national cultural identifications, giving rise to ethno-nationalism (p. 319).

Overall, this chapter aims to reassess the understandings surrounding the notion of national and transnational cinema in light of the interaction among regional cultural values of *tanahair* based on chronotopic views at this specific historical juncture. The Bakhtinian concept of time and space is used to explain the textual languages of the films concerning key information.[30] This will be brought forward during the in-depth reading of the selected films. I argue that regional inhabitants' sense of place and belonging prevail through their connections to the land (*tanah*) and water (*air*) across Southeast Asian archipelagic space which they called *tanahair*.[31] In addition, the land and water as well as the space between the two in *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957) and *Raden Mas* (1959) can be understood as being a manifestation of the characteristics of the region as a '*contact zone*' (Pratt, 2002) for its diverse populations and people crossing the archipelagic space. These are examples of how filmmakers are using films to see and understand how the local concept is a viable reflection of who we are today.

As land and water become a metaphor, both films use the two elements on narrative levels and also in several parts of cinematic storytelling. Considering the political and social condition, it is necessary to assess options that not only give significance to cultural meanings but also

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[30] Chronotope is about "foregrounding historical factors, acknowledged as factors that define a given concrete reality" (Brandao, 2006, p. 133).
[31] According to Pearson (2006), "[…] the classic characteristics of littoral society, […] is a symbiosis between land and sea […]" (p. 353).

prioritise the relation and develop the correlation between national politics and its impacts on the cultural identities of peoples.

Imagining Nusantara

This section aims to describe and discuss Nusantara as a regional concept and its relation to film. Previous literature reveals that the spatial range of the Nusantara is wider than a single nation, but its implementation and syntax may vary according to fields of study. The word's origins go back to before the modern era and before the establishment of colonial territories. Nusantara is not only a name for a geographic area, but also, more importantly, an expression of cultural inclusion that accounts for distinct sets of behavioural types in this Southeast Asian archipelagic region. According to Evers (2016), the idea of Nusantara has been used in a variety of ways in modern history, such as being used for political reasons (Greater Indonesia), commercial reasons, and as a model for sharing resources across national borders (p. 12).

Nusantara is a combination of two old Javanese words '*nusa'* and '*antara',* meaning 'island' and 'between'. Its original meaning is 'the other island' as seen from Java or Bali; hence, the general meaning of 'the outside world', or 'abroad' (Vlekke, 1959, p. 6 n.5), which includes the area around Java Island, which is within reach via available water transportation. References to Nusantara can also be found in the old Javanese manuscript *Negarakertagama* that dates as far back as the 12th century (circa 1365) and was most likely written during the era of the Kingdom of Majapahit that ruled from Trowulan, East Java. Today, the word is often used as a synonym for the Indonesian archipelago[32] or, comprehended as the "Malay World", often used in Malaysia and Singapore[33] or the "Malay Archipelago," as stated in the Malaysian *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*

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[32] Read Acciaoli (2001, pp. 3-4).
[33] See Kahn (2006), Rahim (2009).

dictionary.[34] In both countries, in the past, the meaning of Nusantara has been quite different, but it appears to have merged more recently, and the re-emergence of the term in public consciousness, its penetration into mainstream and youth culture, as well as its transformation into a cultural concept, seems to be an interesting subject for further investigation (Evers, 2016, pp. 8-13).

Ernest Francois Eugene Douwes Dekker (1879–1950) reintroduced the concept of Nusantara in the mid-twentieth century in preparing the Dutch East Indies for independence.[35] Regarding Vlekke's first publication on Nusantara (1943), the author himself admitted that the book scarcely touched upon vast sections of the Indies and their peoples, where writing was unknown (Kennedy, 1944, p. 234). Nevertheless, to date, the actual demarcation lines of the Nusantara region are yet to be defined. Several views imply the outer area of Nusantara, covers territories in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans,[36] with the heart of the vast cultural sites being centred in the vicinity around Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the southern part of Thailand as well as the southwestern region of the Philippines.

While this undertaking focuses on film representations, Nusantara has been expanded by archaeologists such as Peter Bellwood, cultural anthropologist Andriantefinanahary and Yanariak, as well as in the area of biological anthropology studied by Stephen Oppenheimer. Bellwood (2007) argues that migration occurred historically between the islands and mainland Asia (Malay Peninsula) and to lands further south. For Bellwood "the "core region" of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago extends from about 7°N (northern Peninsula Malaysia and Borneo) to 11°S (Sumba

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[34] *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka or* 'DBP' is a public organisation formed to establish Malay language as the country's national and official language.

[35] It is worth mentioning that Ernest Francois Eugene Douwes Dekker or *Setiabudi* is an Indo-Eurasian nationalist. A writer/politician, who fought alongside the Dutch-speaking settlers (Boer) in South Africa (1900 - 1903) in his early days, his return to the East Indies from the Netherlands in 1918 brought to light the ideas of anti-colonial resistance against the Dutch in the region. He evoked the concept of Nusantara in order to prepare the East Indies for independence but later this plan was superseded by the actualisation of Indonesia.

[36] See Evers (1988, 2014), Andriantefinanahary and Yanariak (1997), Irawan and Niemeijer (2013), Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (n.d.) and, Institute of Asian and African Studies (n.d.).

and Timor), and from the western tip of Sumatera to the Moluccas" of which "80 per cent lies in Indonesia" (p. 3). According to the Nusantara Society and the Nusantara Research Centre at the Institute of Asian and African Countries in the Moscow State University, the vast region does not only include Southeast Asia, but also includes Madagascar, Oceania, Indochina, and Taiwan.[37] Another significant perspective is held by the Nusantara Study Group at the Institute for Asian and African Studies in the Humboldt-University of Berlin, which uses the title "Southeast Asian archipelago" to refer to Malaysia, Singapore and the islands at the southern region of the Philippines.

Interestingly, the study group also looked at the Southeast Asian countries beyond national spaces.[38] From another account, Bowring (2019) uses 'Nusantaria' instead of Nusantara to denote a maritime region between the northern entrance to the straits of Melaka extending to Luzon and the Banda Islands to the east of the archipelago. In line with Wilhelm Solheim's term 'Nusantao' (Austronesian-speaking peoples of the ancient trading networks of the islands and coasts), Bowring also refers to areas as far away as Taiwan, Madagascar and the Marianas Islands. Bowring includes the Thai, Chinese, Tamil and other coastal communities who developed trade in goods, people and ideas from within the region and to other peoples to the west and north-east. He also argues that the term 'Nanhai' or 'Nanyang' ('South Sea' or 'Southern Ocean') which included the South China Sea is a relatively recent European invention. In response to Chinese claims about almost the entire sea, Bowring points out that the Vietnamese called it the 'East Sea' as it lay to their east and the Philippines also began to refer to the waters adjacent to their islands as the 'West Philippine Sea'. It is also widely known that Indonesia refers to its part of the South China Sea as the 'Natuna Sea', which includes its archipelagic seas north of Borneo (pp. 3-4).

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[37] Retrieved from: http://www.iaas.msu.ru/index.php/ru/ob-isaa1/kafedry-tsentry-i-laboratorii/nauchnye-tsentry-i-laboratorii/obshchestvo-nusantara-malajsko-indonezijskie-issledovaniya/557-nusantara
[38] Retrieved from: https://www.iaaw.hu-berlin.de/en/region/southeastasia/research/networks/studygroups/nusantara-malaysia-indonesia/nusantara

Furthermore, in the field of genetics, Oppenheimer concludes after conducting a Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) analysis on the Malaysian Peninsula subjects, that "[…] these Peninsula Malaysian Malays have deep ancestries on the Sundaland, but they also possess a minority of lineages traced to East Asia and South Asia."[39] On the surface, there are disparities in terms of the 'origin' of the populations, particularly from the Peninsula. In fact, Oppenheimer's laboratory analysis supports the theory earlier proposed by Bellwood concerning regional human mobility in the past. Indeed, human migrations beginning at the end of the glacial period around the archipelago and beyond created a foundation for a social climate that cannot be determined by national borders or territories since people-to-people exchanges are thriving.

Raden Mas and *Badjao* demonstrate aspects of Nusantara culture with objections to the alleged benefits of living in single homogeneous national culture through the features of people's "hybridity" infused with ecosystem-based thinking oriented on the *tanahair* concept. However, these films draw on the cross-ethnic relationships and hybrid identities of Nusantara inhabitants by highlighting inter-ethnic integration through blue-blooded mixed marriages. *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* portray the complexities of interethnic romance between couples whereby the partners are from different ethnicities, and their offspring are bi-racial. These films demonstrate that Nusantara's future depends on hybrid personalities and interracial relationships, which are common in this region. In addition, these films also highlight the region's economic activities and the importance of other ethnicities in shaping the demographic structure of Nusantara. For example, both include significant subplots that feature travelling traders as intermediaries between the two main ethnic groups. The trader is Turkish in *Badjao,* and he needs an interpreter to interact with locals, but the film *Raden Mas* transfers myth to the screen via the travelling Chinese traders who speak the local language. This depiction alone seems to suggest that even in Nusantara local

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[39] As cited by Zain. et al. - *DNA research confirms that majority of Malays originated from the Sunda shelf* (2015). Retrieved from: http://news.usm.my/index.php/english-news/478-ewehoe8

folklore, coexistence among ethnic groups with separate cultural traditions was harmonious. Rather, external and internal flows interact to create a distinctive cultural hybrid of communities in these two Nusantara-based films (Oppenheimer in Zain, et al., 2015; Bellwood 2007).

The formation of the Nusantara as a region is further evidenced by the historical and anthropological accounts that focus on the interweaving of politics, economics, and human interaction. Before the intervention of the West, there were several kingdoms such as the Chola Dynasty (300s BCE–1279 CE), the Jambi (*Melayu*/Malay) Kingdom (3rd – 5th CE), the Srivijaya Kingdom (7th – 12th CE), the Majapahit Kingdom (13th – 16th CE), and the Melaka Sultanate (1400 – 1511). These kingdoms governed the peninsula, the islands, as well as the ocean, which were the trade routes that positioned the region as an important destination for trade and natural resources connecting Europe with East Asia. Studies on these kingdoms have revealed that, in many situations, the peripheral lines between the regional powers overlapped, indicating that the dynamics between the centre and the peripheries at the time were different from what we have today. For instance, the four states in the northern region of present-day Malaysia paid gratuity and was under the influence of Siam until the early 20th century. Thus characters in Dain Said's *Bunohan* who live close to the Malaysia-Thai border traverse the border frequently and are bilingual. These factors support the idea that the trajectory of inter-generational mobility has an impact on social links and the development of their repertoire-awareness of cultural strategies, thus enabling them to develop and retain a sense of self and collective cultural identity.

Nusantara today often manifests in local institutions looking to promote a regional outlook. At the Penang Institute in Malaysia, the 'Nusantara Section' focuses on promoting Penang's status as a hub within the wider Nusantara region. At the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia the 'History of Nusantara' is presented in line with what has been advocated by Vlekke (1943,

1959) in reference to his history of the country.[40] It should be noted that within the three countries, civil society groups have their own views on the meaning of Nusantara. In Malaysia, the idea that Nusantara is the 'Malay World' makes a non-profit group such as the Allied Nexus of Nusantara Communities (HaRUM) restrict their activities to the Malays and Muslim Nusantarans, as the agenda of HaRUM is to "strengthen the bond among Islamic communities" within the context of being concerned about "the future of Muslims" in the region.[41]

Currently, in Singapore, there is no evidence of a particular institution that presents Nusantara as a cultural space, although there are activities that nurture the old ways of life in the region. For instance, an art exhibition held at the National Library of Singapore was named *Islands in Between The seas will Sing and the Wind Will Carry Us (Fables of Nusantara)* by Sherman Ong.[42] The project draws attention to and extemporises forms of social, collective memory, encourages viewers to interpret reality and fiction, and perhaps associates them with the memories and things we find familiar (Tan, 2015). In addition, an earlier event held at the National Museum of Singapore in 2012 brought together films by two Indonesian filmmakers, Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho. The organisers reiterated that there are efforts to preserve films as regional shared cultural material.[43] In a publication related to the programme, Mydin (2012) posits the idea that "[t]hrough the interactions between the island and the archipelago, there have been cosmopolitan and hybrid flows of people, trade and other forms of activities including the circulation of films" (p. 14). Another significant development is a newly established organisation under the name of

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[40] Online references on *'Sejarah Nusantara'* (History of Nusantara) are promoted by the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia via this web link - http://www.sejarah-Nusantara.anri.go.id/introduction/
[41] As stated in the profile of the organisation accessible at:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/15eSBpuSAKN6awBROUuz40wWnzzyCi-IR/view
[42] Although many creative works from Sherman Ong are well received in Singapore, he is actually from Melaka, Malaysia. He frequently raises the issue of the fluidity of culture and I have selected few of his films for this examination which will be discussed later in another chapter. For further details about the artist, he is available through http://www.shermanong.com/.
[43] Foreword notes from the Director of the National Museum of Singapore in *Merdeka! The films of Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho* (Wenjie, 2012, pp. 8-9).

Kabilah Nusantara,[44] a Southeast Asian military unit in the 'Islamic State' (IS) organisation in Syria (Singh, 2015). All the above suggests that, despite the prevailing ideology of nationalism, there are institutions that promote the significance of Nusantara as a regional cultural space.

Other scholars through regional socio-economic and socio-political research in which the socio-historical fragments of the past are woven into the present uncertainties have also discussed Nusantara. For instance, Evers (1988) in his works on the maritime, sociological, and development studies in selected Southeast Asian countries, suggests that the Nusantara trading networks remain active or have been until more recently. He listed eight Nusantara trading networks that provide facts on the on-going development and present-day economic relation in Southeast Asia.[45] In discussions concerning territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Evers (2014) states the need to galvanise "[t]he "Nusantara model" of sharing resources, a patchwork of claims that […] appears to be the best and the fairest solution" in order to ease hostility in the disputed area (p. 16). Others, like Farish A. Noor in religion and politics (2002, 2008, 2011), Anthony Milner in history and politics (2002, 2008, 2016), and Anthony Reid who also focus on history (2004, 2005) are among the few active specialists in their respective area of studies whose work adopts a substantial Nusantara perspective within Southeast Asia. Principally, these researchers corroborate the evidence that reflects common cultural values among the people of the three countries. Although this archipelago is a complex of islands inhabited by different groups of people, it is fundamentally united, belonging to all of them since it is a place they feel at home. However, Kremer (2011) argues that "Indonesia and Malaysia, which occupy the same archipelago and have overlapping

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[44] *Kabilah* – A group of people of the same religion, etc.
[45] According to Evers (1988), the traditional (Nusantara) trading networks are: (1) The northern straits of Malacca (Aceh); (2) The Riau-Singapore network; (3) The Buginese network; (4) The Butonese network; (5) Minangkabau petty trade; (6) The Sulu network; (7) The Trengganu/Kelantan-Thai network; and (8) Networks of the Java sea. (pg. 93) Moreover, he advocates that '[T]he persistence of local trading networks over long periods of time, in fact through several 'world systems' speaks, however, for their relative autonomy' (p. 99).

history and language, have fiercely disputed the ownership of Nusantara ("Archipelago") culture" (p. 29).

In the past, the old kingdoms attracted many groups of people from various areas because the harbours around the region were important points on the sea trade route between the East and the Arab world. As such, "this trade boom induced political, social and economic changes throughout the region" (Wade, 2009, p. 222). Although since then, the settlements appear to be more ethnically heterogeneous than what most Nusantarans believed. For instance, according to Muhammad Haji Salleh (as cited in Khoo, 2006), Melaka in the fifteenth century was a cosmopolitan arena, and taking into consideration the fact that the Malay classical figure like Hang Tuah could speak as many as twelve languages, gives us insight into the diversity of the human population in the region (p. 32). In fact, Andaya and Andaya (2014) advocate that whoever "participated in the common Sea [around the region] were occupants of a "neighbourhood" where every interaction was infused with expectations of respect, priority, and loyalty" (pp. 217-8). Perhaps such an awareness of common respect and shared belonging drives the admission below:

"Saya orang Nusantara." (Lit. I am Nusantaran) – Chong Ton Sing

Chong Ton Sin also known as 'Pak Chong' believes that his cultural identity is Nusantara rather than Malaysia, his birthplace, and not Indonesia where his family resided for several years following their arrival from China, the homeland of his parents. He is a social activist and a book publisher based in Kuala Lumpur who claims that there are many other citizens throughout the three countries who share the same mindset about their sense of integration and connection to the land (Shah, 2010). In his autobiography *Home is not here* (2018), Wang Gungwu points out that he expressed many of these feelings as a Chinese born in Surabaya, and raised in Malaya. He said that he was not the kind China wanted, nor the kind his father had hoped to become (p. 15). Such statements do not undermine national identity and nationality, but rather, reflect the sustainability of the deep-rooted regional personality as well as the urgency to re-examine the homogenous

national identity that is politically motivated for the past sixty years within the three countries. Accordingly, history might teach us about public behaviour between members of the population and the stance concerning outsiders.

The Joint Action of Tides and Currents

> Water, in all its aspects, maybe a given in Southeast Asian society, its role at any given moment is clearly politically, economically, socially and culturally constructed. - Boomgaard (2007, p. 19)

Tides and currents affect and influence the maritime world. People and their culture not only attract and bring merchants and their goods but also ideas that influence conditions within diverse ecosystems. As stated in the quotation above, the ability to understand regional inhabitants implies that one must have the necessary knowledge to comprehend and appreciate the role water plays in their lives and how they interact with the aquatic environment. Water, in its many forms, influences heavily the way regional inhabitants go about their daily lives.

However, this "water culture" (Andaya, 2016) which fluctuates over time, has both advantages and disadvantages. To compare with early modern Europe which was driven by the competitive pressures of "coercion and capital," the long Nusantara tradition of social geography has made water a decisive factor in the three countries' historical development (Sutherland, 2007, pp. 27-8). According to Boomgaard (2007), we now perceive a new "water culture" which already is or in the process of emerging (pp. 19-20). In this analysis, the chosen films purport that the cultural tide and current are symbolic of the effects of the interaction that exists between the social and cultural factors within the changing worlds. Perera (2009) justifies this tide and current approach through her enquiry of the insular stance of Australia, where she employs Brathwaite's aphorism 'tidalectical' to argue that the land of Australia continues to wax and wane with the ocean tides, the seascapes, and beachscapes that characterise the establishment of the country as

a national entity (2009, p. 1). Her critical observations are essential to this research because we can better understand the concept of *tanahair* in the cultures of Nusantara as well as in regional films through tidalectical interpretation, waxing and waning of the social self.

In a similar vein, Paul Battersby, Regina Ganter, and Yuriko Nagata, as quoted by Perera, also argue that the waters between Australia and the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago (which Nagata refers to as the lands of the "sea-oriented peoples") can be, "understood as inextricably interconnected socio-political spaces, and their layered historical conscriptions and complications in and for the present" (p. 4). Perera recognises the multifaceted history of the 'Malay Road' as specified by Matthew Flinders or, the trading networks of Nusantara as offered by Evers (1988). Concerning the duration of the mobility and trade over the "maritime highways of the Indian and Pacific Oceans," Perera focuses on the arrangement of a "shifting and conflictual" zone in which "different temporalities and overlapping emplacements as well as emergent spatial organisations" come to fruition (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, pp. 12-3). But such transregional histories and relations remain mostly unspeakable and unrepresented, especially in the Australian context (Pugliese, 2011, p. 135). Sharing the same maritime characteristics, the modern countries of Nusantara behave in very much the same way. The region, countries, people and their cultural characteristics have evolved to match the growth they seek, the contribution of migration (inward and outward) to population change, as well as the development of political awareness in recent decades and years. Similarly, the existence of film as a means of expression often transmits the shifts mentioned above, whether directly or indirectly.

DeLoughrey (2007) sees tidalectics in that she understands it as, "a dynamic and shifting relationship between land and sea that allows island literature to be engaged in their spatial and historical complexity" (pp. 2-3). Dain Said, the director of *Bunohan* (2012) and *Interchange* (2016), once said that we seem to have lost our focus on history and much of the past. We also restrict ourselves for specific purposes to official history, the history of a particular group of

people. With a deep understanding of the geography, he contrasts local communities and their traditions with the shifting sands that change the beach (in Khoo, 2016). The changing identity, the fluidity of water, are the themes evident in Dain's films, particularly in *Bunohan* and *Interchange*. Here, tidalectics shed light on the history and cultural development of the Southeast Asian archipelago, offering a context for exploring the dynamic and changing interconnectedness of the peoples and cultures of the three countries, films and the three national cinemas, and for understanding their paths and origins. Much of the population growth and social development within these archipelagic countries may be attributed, to a large degree, to human mobility and connectivity.[46]

Moreover, cultural and social identities are like ocean tides and currents in that they each have their driving forces. Social currents, according to Émile Durkheim (1982), refer to the collective consciousness, which also informs our sense of belonging and cultural identity (pp. 52-3). To look at the social change in this region, one does not need to go all the way back to the feudal era because reorganisation has spread across these cultural spaces more than ever over the last century. From old kingdoms to colonialism to nationalism, from maritime to agrarian to industrial times, tides have been driving the inhabitants' sense of belonging to the place, country, and beyond. In this chapter, I show that *Badjao* (1957) and *Raden Mas* (1959), from the black and white era, made film representations viable for the nationalisation effort. In Chapter Six, the way *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (2009) and *Interchange* (2016) utilise nature, plus the natural wonders of Nusantara as metaphors, are consistent with the Nusantara principles which both films have adopted in the same manner as Krishnan and Avellana who attempted to reconcile Nusantara culture(s) with the concept of *tanahair*. Moreover, the social and cultural currents in

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[46] Earlier, the inhabitants travelled by sea, but now, in this globalised era, everyone can fly cheaply around Southeast Asia and beyond via low-cost airlines.

the past 20 years or so bring many challenges, such as how culture can contribute to sustainable national development.

On the multiple dimensionalities of belonging, Krishnan and Avellana show that they have moved on from the mainstream cinematic representations when they unravel the intricacies of a person's identity in a culture that downplays it. In the two plots that I examine in *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, for instance, a person's identity does not depend on the identity of a body, and the director uses this to create more depth to two of his male characters. The two of them, the young Chinese-Singaporean husband and the mixed (Chinese-Japanese) character both have their roots in Nusantara, but the director appears to deliberately not give them names. The next section will examine these two characters and their relationships within the scope of 'translocational positionality' (see Anthias 2001, 2002, 2008). The intention is to shift the emphasis toward chronicles of location and positionality which researchers in the field of Southeast Asian film studies rarely consider when discoursing contemporary Malaysian, Singaporean, and Indonesian national cinema identities. 'Translocational positionality' is defined by Anthias (2008) as:

> … structured by the interplay of different locations relating to gender, ethnicity, race and class (amongst others), and they are at times *contradictory* effects. […] The notion of 'location' recognises the importance of the context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. It also recognises variability with some processes leading to more complex, contradictory and at times dialogical positionalities than others. The term 'translocational' references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations concerning gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation. Positionality takes place in the context of the lived practices in which identification is practised/performed as well as the intersubjective, organisational and representational conditions for their existence (pp. 15-6).

According to Youkhana (2015), belonging for Anthias is arranged at the interface between the local and the global, thus implying it can break down the parallel semantics of ethnicity and citizenship. By this understanding of belonging, Anthias spans the logical hole between structure and agency, between distinctive scales and regions, and sharpens procedures of social prohibition at the crossing point of various orders (p. 12).

In considering the representations in *Flooding in the Time of Drought* and *Interchange*, Anthias's understanding of how humans fit in with the rest of society as well as how location defines positionalities or identities is crucial to this thesis. Significantly, these films feature complex representations of diverse and hybrid inhabitants as well as the fluid and complex performance of one's identity. Both films intersperse the setting of the film narratives with other locations and places. Almost all characters have a connection with another location and with other people in different places, especially from nearby countries. Anthias found that translocational positionality benefits researchers in examining transnational localities of which identification will be assigned using the appropriate position and cultural practices. This concept applies in a situation where representation is set in a vague and undetermined place as well as cross-national boundaries as in *Flooding in the Time of Drought* and *Interchange*. As such, it is important to put it in a broader cultural context to highlight contrasts between national cultures in their ways of socialisation.

The Chronotopes of *Raden Mas* (1959) and *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957)

In this section, I briefly lay out Bakhtin's theory of chronotope since it is the foundation of my spatial and temporal analysis of films in order to understand the influences and meanings of Nusantara. This section also seeks to examine the life behind the two films *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* which were released around the region during the birth of the new nation states by connecting the

narratives and styles of the films with historical events that occurred during that era. The two films were produced during Southeast Asia's advent of independence, decolonisation and the Cold War, bringing dramatic strategic changes to the region and creating cultural divisions within Nusantara since the idea of a nation state has become a driving force towards inequality, detachment and dispossession. The cultural consequences of nationalisation include the degradation of traditional cultural identity and the loss of ethnic culture through the total or at least unnecessary homogenisation of the respective nation states.

Notwithstanding, these works also reflect the filmmakers' position on the cultural split among the inhabitants of the region when nationalism swept through the Nusantara area and the pursuit of power to govern the newly established nations that gave rise to boundary-drawing and identity-generating activities. In light of these factors, discrimination against Chinese minorities living in Nusantara can be seen as political conditions for alienation and hostility that exacerbate racial violence. Indonesia's independence in 1949 brought a severe backlash, with a fiery Sukarno banning Chinese traders in rural areas and enforcing additional restrictions. However, a failed Communist coup in 1965 resulted in a ripple of horrific violence against ethnic Chinese, and when Suharto's new regime took power, prejudice against the Chinese became a cornerstone of the iron fist dictator (Higgins, 2012). Indeed, Malay's exclusive rights policy prompted a Malay minister in the early 1960s to confiscate all Chinese rice millers' licenses to win Malays in northern Perak and Wellesley Province (Koon, 1996, p. 508). By returning to ethnic indigenous subjects, the films represent intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial interconnections through the regional concept of *tanahair*, the reconstruction of ethnic identities, and social mobility between the diverse Nusantara populations.

For Bakhtin, narrative texts are not simply a series of diegetic events and acts of speech, but above all, the creation of a particular universe or a fictional chronotope. The definition of the chronotope is presented as follows:

In the literary, artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84).

Considering Emmanuel Kant's philosophy and Albert Einstein's relativity theory, Bakhtin argued that time and space are essentially categories through which people experience and organise the world around them, and thus "indispensable forms of cognition" (Morson and Emerson in Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p. 4). The chronotope, embedded in the binary subject-object relationship, absorbs and endures diverse and non-homogeneous elements, such as the dialogic roots of Judeo-Christian theological beliefs and early Christian philosophy. However, the theory does not examine the linguistic manifestations of the speaker as the word-speaking is infinitely small and the most standard-bearer of dual, internally dialogic relations. Bakhtin's theory of discourse-utterance is becoming more concrete and audible, given it is possible to discover a variety of previously latent dialogic relationships. Moreover, the theory provides a multi-level hierarchy of artistic joiners in structure and composition, all of which are isomorphic (Perlina, 1984, pp. 14-8). However, Bakhtin fails to set out a formal description or an articulated methodology for defining and evaluating chronotopes and their relationship (Ladin, 1999, p. 213). According to film scholar Stam (1989), films make appropriate chronotopes as moving pictures that tell stories since the "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete" (p. 11). Further, Stam argues that,

The chronotope mediates between two orders of experience and discourse: the historical and the artistic, providing fictional environments where historically specific constellations of power are made visible. […] These concrete spatiotemporal structures in the novel [film] are correlatable with the real historical world but not equitable with it because they are always mediated by art (p. 11).

So for example, while the characters in *Raden Mas* may not be actual historical figures, the tale is based on a local legend representing internally displaced people forced to flee their homes but who can remain within the region. It is a representation of mobility that centres on individuals who inhabit and engage with their new home, community and social institution. Thus the experiences they undergo, of forbidden cross-ethnic relationships/marriages, of constant island-to-island mobility and power struggles can be said to reflect the real-life experiences of those living in the Nusantara.

With regards to *Badjao* as a cinematic chronotope, it is the temporal setting (the 1950s) and geographical location (the border between the Celebes and the Sulu Sea) that show how "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84). As a period film, *Badjao* is related to the social reality of the Tausug and Bajau when the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya embraced nationalism following WWII. However, as new subjects of the nation, *tanahair* carries a more literal and environmental meaning than the metaphorical meaning of homeland for them, thereby lessening the Andersonian "imagined community" which is a distant and abstract concept than an immediate and proximate sense of communal belonging.

Furthermore, the sea (water) plays an integral part in the film since it defines the Bajaus' way of life, giving them their identity. Bajau's wide distribution of populations throughout much of the archipelago, its acceptance of ethnic identity that transcends political groups, and its patterns of cognatic kinship and flexible anchorage rights have made it highly mobile and not readily susceptible to centralised control (Healey, 1985, p. 16). The origins of the people of nomadic Bajau are unclear because most of their stories are based around legends. They had an ambivalent attitude towards their homelands, but most of the stories share the common theme that Bajau had come from outside Sulu, between Johor (Malay Peninsula) and Zamboanga (Mindanao) (Nimmo, 1968, pp. 39-41). *Tanahair* in Nusantara is synonymous with the place of birth or the country of birth of

a person, but many local populations, such as the Bajau, have spread or dispersed beyond their traditional homeland or point of origin. Although contact with the colonialists divided Nusantara into different political territories, given their spiritual, cultural, or historical beliefs and practices, these people still feel deep and real psychological connections or even emotional connections to specific places around the archipelago. As such, leading to a discourse of identity as a critical component of the national and transnational cinemas spectrum in the area of Southeast Asian Cinema's studies. Indeed, the intertextuality, motif, and generic chronotope of the two films evidently involve a broader social discourse that challenges notions of national and transnational cinema.

The intertext of *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* can be composed of at least two types of intertextuality, including inspiring traditional local folklore and, through the living story of the people of Nusantara, where the issue of one's identity becomes a central theme in film narrative cultural discourses and themes where historically specific power constellations are made visible. Drawing on socially shared narratives, such as cross-ethnic marriages, hybrid offspring, and relationships between humans and nature, the films demonstrate common regional cultural motifs that accentuate the archipelagic lifestyle of the people. Here, the characters are continually on the move, which is not to say they never settled in a place, but in foregrounding human mobility, the films highlight the separation or divisional process that have occurred during that period.

Time, space and memory are condensed in the opening sequences of *Raden Mas* and *Badjao,* in which *Raden Mas* commences with a short documentary sequence focussing on Singapore during the 1950s. It is a tracking shot taken from a moving car that passes through several locations related to the legend of Raden Mas and ending at his tomb (*Makam Raden Mas*) at Mount Faber Road. The text reading 'Singapore Today', is superimposed over the footage signifying that *Raden Mas* was made to re-introduce audiences to the Nusantaran way of life that existed before the formation of modern Singapore. Subtly, the film embodies a representation of cross-ethnic ties and

social diversity (Javanese, Malay, Chinese), which is central to building new nations like Singapore and the Malaya Federation (Malaysia). The introductory sequence is the compression of time-space, and the modern Singapore scene becomes black before fading into the mythical past of Raden Mas. 'Singapore Today' means the island in the 1950s, and even though the tracking shots only provide scenery, buildings, cars, one or two extras passing by, and a group of Malays sitting around the tomb, it depicts a harmonious multi-racial and cultural society. The film uses contemporary's footage as a reflection of the inhabitants of the island and its connection to its surroundings. Such incorporation means that contemporary's stories need to reflect past social experiences and cultural memories. The rise of modern politics, indigenous politicians, and race-based politics after 1946 due to decolonisation took the Malayan community to a new kind of solidity in this period (Harper, 1999, p. 86). However, the local government continued the colonial practice of ascriptive ethnicity in which the people are categorised as Chinese, Malay, Indian or others (Hill & Fee, 1995, p. 5). Benjamin, as cited by Hill and Fee (1995), advocates that "multiculturalism can be seen as one of the Republic's founding myths and as a central element [for] Singapore's 'national culture'" (p. 14). This product of Cathay-Keris Studio is just as important as other films such as those from the competing Shaw Brothers that "contained subtle nods toward Malay nationalism in a modern world, qualities that often can be found in the films made after 1955" (Barnard, 2008, p. 169). Unlike other Malay films of the 1950s and 1960s, *Raden Mas* problematises the image and the singularity of the Malays as well as the colonial construction of ethnic categories.

Badjao begins with a montage of the Bajau tribe travelling by sea in their *lepa* (small wooden boats) before picking a place for a break during their journey. This montage comes after a few lines of opening credits that go together with the narration which provides brief impressions about the plot and the subject being represented in the film. At this point, someone from the group hands over a new-born child to an older man (the tribe leader) who lifts the baby into the air and shouts

to announce the birth, as well as to remind others about their tradition of accepting a child. He then tosses the baby into the sea for others to save him from drowning and the tribe leader says that "if the baby is saved, only then will he be accepted as the part of the tribe, if not, their parents should not grieve." Celebrating a birth in the introductory part of the film indicates that the core of the film's narrative concerns the future life of the people themselves. This scene is in parallel with a description by Nimmo (1990) where he states that this tradition only applies if the baby is a boy and is performed to help ensure that the baby will become a successful fisherman. However, he also mentions that if the child is a girl, she will be placed in a *pandan* tree to be a good mat-maker (p. 185). The dialogue aims to embrace the entire cultural traditions of Bajau; however, Nimmo's findings inform us that although the group lives on the waters, they also have a deep cultural and spiritual link to the land, one that is gendered (the female is associated with craft-making from land-based resources - the pandan tree - while the male's livelihood and basic survival is tied to the sea). Tossing a baby into the sea seems cruel, but for the sea nomads, the significance is that it is a test of whether the child can be a worthy Bajau. The baby has to survive in the water as he will spend his entire life on the sea.

*Tanahair***: Cultural Space and Contact Zone**

> […] our ancestors are the only ones who call their habitat *'tanahair'*, […] since centuries ago our ancestors have understood that Nusantara is based on a culture of water and a culture of land […] – W. S. Rendra (2013, pp. 42-3).[47]

Tanahair, the Malayan term formed by the amalgamation of land and water, means nation or birthplace in the official dictionaries of Malaysia and Indonesia and is also understood as a homeland that stems from traditional cultural geography-based values handed down from

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[47] My translation - W. S. Rendra (1935 – 2009) is a renowned Indonesian poet, dramatist, activist, actor, and director.

generation to generation. *Tanahair* serves as a metaphor for a cultural and physical space where cross-cultural connections between the various groups throughout the region are made by crossing both land and sea. In that way, *tanahair* is a vast cultural expanse that underpins the social system in the region. Nusantarans' cultural affiliation rests on this concept that unites the individuals of thousands of islands through interconnected waters and whose members identify with each other based on a shared cultural and historical background. In the past, the ancient kingdoms claimed exclusive land ownership, while the sea was considered common to all.

In this chapter, the examples of *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* not only demonstrate places where water meets the land as a physical *contact zone* but also illustrates the concept of *tanahair,* a metaphor for the homeland and central to Nusantara cultural narrative space. According to Pratt (2002), the term contact zone "refers to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today". She uses the phrase "to reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorising that are under challenge today" (p. 4). In her analysis, she proposes that Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is strongly utopian because he fails to realise that an image of a universally shared literacy (like film) is also part of the written language (pp. 11-2).

In view of Pratt's theory, Melgosa (2010) suggests that "cinema has created both a physical contact zone formed around the industrial practices of production and distribution, and an imaginary contact zone emerging from the dissemination and reception of film narratives" (p. 121). It is Melgosa's view that fictional narrative films have not only been the most pervasive form, symptom, as well as the resonant box of both strands of cultural activities, but it also chronicles the social desires and the fears and resistances that shape approaches to cultural ritual as it attempts to weave ideology into the narrative form. This chapter, in conjunction with Melgosa's interpretation, demonstrates how *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* are both examples of exceptional works

by Nusantara filmmakers who have succeeded in establishing an imaginary contact zone that could bring together viewers from different areas of the region and represent *merantau* as shared local cultural values.

In film, seashores become an important setting in the overall filmic landscape and is a particularly sophisticated and a powerful form of representing this *contact zone*. According to Taussig (2000), seashores are:

> […] prehistoric places of entry and exit where the coast breaks into neither one thing nor the other, anastomoses of islets, lagoons, and peninsulas – natural canals, we could say – seem to have been selected through historically informed nature as the generically fertile zones for generating money and trade, just as the prehistoric space-substance that is neither water nor land is where life began, and to which it will ultimately return (p. 266).

Furthermore, for Toohey (2005), the seashore in *Badjao* is a metaphor of liminality that represents "the state of being betwixt sea and land" (p. 301).[48] The first beach scene is the location of a dispute wherein the Tausugs demand compensation from the Bajau protagonist, Hassan, for landing on their beach. The Tausug sets Hassan's wooden boat on fire, thus creating much anger. However, their leader (Hassan's father) refuses to fight fire with fire. Instead of hitting back, he chooses diplomacy. The question then arises whether the setting represents an identity of the archipelagic region or only a scenic view of a tropical location. I would maintain both while the purpose of showing beautiful landscapes in a film is seen as a simulacrum of cinematic fascinations. It also seems to me, to be a more significant approach to such representations of Nusantara sceneries as an example of the regional cultural dimension and its values. Indeed, film critic Noel Vera (2019) also highlights in his appreciation of the film the tension between land and water as it opens with the image of waves crashing on the shore, the division between land and sea

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[48] In line with Pratt, literalists Richter and Kluwick (2016) suggests that "the beach is a contact zone where a broad array of interactions, from hospitality to hostility, are performed" (p. 2).

diagonally across the frame, which also means "the tension between sand and surf, between people of differing loyalties, communities and ethnicities". *Badjao* as a cinematic chronotope reflects the landscape as a manifestation of a continuously evolving cultural process through which individuals communicate their social, cultural, and environmental structures.

Interestingly, one element in many films of this region is the representation of the natural world through the images of mountains, tropical rainforest, flora and fauna, countless seashores and the beautiful underwater worlds. I put this down to the fact that it is quite apparent that Nusantara's climate and its natural geographical features are different from other places and that films from this region can be well recognised. One import feature in the films is the beach which has been a permanent resource for the region's artists which continues to be represented by filmmakers in their work. Nusantara relies on the ocean, and the beach is where ships arrive or depart as well as where civilisations progress and develop. Beaches attract movers and become highly mobile places. Moreover, beaches are critical settings in both *Raden Mas* and *Badjao*, because beaches are an essential part of everyday life, not only to serve as a place to travel to and attract travellers but also as a place where identity negotiations occur between two or more individuals within a community and between individuals and representatives of ethnic groups. However, in the film *Raden Mas*, the implication is that human wanderings throughout the region have brought about cultural fusion. In fact, there are film critics today who are amazed by its representation of a culturally and ethnically diverse Nusantara nation.[49]

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[49] Muhammad (2010a) said that he was blown away by *Raden Mas* probably because of its multicultural diversity, and for him the film has, "a sprinkling of regional flavour" in it (p. 166).

***Raden Mas* (1959); Water, Cultural Signs, and Fluid Identities in Nusantara**

> Films today limit the audience. They are made for the young, or they are too Malay or too Chinese.
>
> – L. Krishnan[50]

Through the idea of *tanahair*, this section reads *Raden Mas* as a manifestation of Nusantara's mythology in cinematic work and explores how the film creatively portrays the inter-ethnic social and cultural ties that bind people to where they live, far more than we might expect. The film provides illustrative representations of cultural interdependency between Nusantara populations by "deploy[ing] and explor[ing] a mimetic of the real world" (Power & Crampton, 2007, p. 5). For example, the irregular exercise of power caused a Javanese monarch and his daughter to seek refuge in Kerimun Island and Temasek (Singapore) as shown in the film. In 1959, the people of Nusantara were considerably new to modern politics by yet becoming a political community. The film highlights regional cultural identity that is as fluid as the flowing water that connects the people around the region. This analysis shows that the film has an effect on the complexity of social development which is still regarded as work in progress.

The director, L. Krishnan, was a notable personality in the cinema of Malaysia and Singapore. Born in Madras, India, he received his early education in Bukit Mertajam, (then Malaya) before being deported back to Madras by the British after being accused of being a collaborator for working as an interpreter for the Japanese army during WWII. He started filmmaking in Madras, India in 1947 before he was hired by Shaw Brothers to make Malay films in Singapore beginning with *Bakti* [Devotion] (1950) which marked P. Ramlee's debut as an actor. His thirty-third and final film, *Selendang Merah* [The Red Shawl] (1962) was under the banner of Merdeka Film Production.[51] According to Krishnan, "I was Indian, but I spoke and wrote Malay" (Tan, 1998, p. 2). Before directing *Raden Mas*, Krishnan directed two rare multiracial films titled

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[50] Cited from *'L. Krishnan - magic of golden oldies'* by Joceline Tan (1998, p. 1).
[51] *Selendang Merah* is a film about the oppressive poverty of fishermen. Krishnan was supposed to make another film called *'Kembang tak berduri'* with the Shaws, but it never materialised.

Chinta Gadis Rimba [The Virgin of Borneo] (1958) about an Iban girl who goes against the wishes of her parents and runs off with her Malay lover as well as *Selamat Tinggal Kekasihku* [Goodbye My Love] (1955) which is a tragic tale of love between a young Malay man and a Chinese girl. *Raden Mas* premiered at the 7th Asian Film Festival (1960) in Tokyo, Japan. Today, the tale of Raden Mas and her father, Pangeran Agong, has been documented electronically by the National Library Board of Singapore.[52]

Figure 2: The ad says that 'A famous Malay legend ... now becomes the greatest Malay film!' but the legend itself is about the Princess of Java.

Briefly, the film follows Pangeran Agong, a Javanese monarch who moved from Kediri on Java Island to the island of Kerimun and then, Temasek (the site of modern Singapore). He was forced to leave his birthplace and noble rank at Kediri due to the death of his wife, who was a

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[52] Omar in *Keramat Radin Mas*. Singapore Infopedia (Omar, 2006), National Library of Singapore. Retrieved from - http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1079_2010-05-27.html

commoner and considered unfit to be with those upstanding members of the royal family. The Pangeran, while wandering around the island, encounters Chinese traders who help him and his baby Raden Mas Ayu move from Java to Kerimun. After living as commoners for more than a decade, and, by a twist of fate, he becomes part of the royal family of Kerimun and Temasek. At the same time, thanks to helpful information from the traders, his faithful servant Dandiar from Kediri finds them. The Pangeran marries Princess Tengku Halijah, and they later have a baby whom they call Tengku Chik. However, as in Kediri, troublesome identity issues and questions about their social status once again surface. Even though the film ends tragically with the death of the Pangeran owing to wrongful conviction, Dandiar succeeds in convincing the Sultan to acknowledge Tengku Chik as his legitimate heir.

Raden Mas has a connection with the regional socio-political state of affairs such as liberation and good governance that was integral to the daily discourse of the time. The film evokes societal variations within Nusantara society that have been overshadowed by racially-biased policies that have fuelled ethnonational movements with the support of the Colonial Administrations of that era. *Raden Mas* flips Singapore and Malaya's ethno-nationalism discourse by portraying Malays as antagonists and by celebrating hybridity and impurity. The film ends with the Temasek people, from the view of a wide camera angle, chanting "Long Live Tengku Chik" in support of the future king of the country who is a hybrid character composed of two ethnic groups. The *Bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) which was generated by the colonial concept of Malayness in Malaya and Singapore, and fostered by Malay political discourse, is framed by disconnected stories about who and which group of people should obtain the privilege to rule the Federation of Malaya.[53] Characters such as Tengku Chik, Raden Mas, and Pangeran Agong

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[53] There are significant debates on the complexities of the notion of 'race' especially in Malaysia (Hirschman 1986, Brennan 1982, Fee 1995, 2001, Goh 2008). In a recent study concerning Malaysian films, Yusoff (2013) pointed out that the notion "is inextricably tied with religion" (p. 247 n. 396). Race and religion are obviously intertwined in Malaysia and Singapore.

exemplify in the film that the acculturation and development of one's ethnic heritage and culture reveal that the building blocks of identity change over time with new identities emerging.

Raden Mas encapsulates the state of Nusantara as a polity by epitomising human mobility and hybrid identity as the premise of the narrative. What is more, even though the story is based on a legend, the film makes use of images of water as a metaphor for expressing the fluidity of culture among Nusantara subjects. According to D'Aloia (2012), water in narrative cinema is often depicted or evoked as a substance that submerges something destined to re-emerge in front of the spectators' eyes through its semantic fluidity and by infiltrating their limpid gaze (p. 91). The way of life for the protagonist Pangeran Agong and Raden Mas Ayu are shown using cutaway shots (in between story segments) showing a wide variety of water images to signify changes in their lives. It is significant that, in the film, whenever the Pangeran travels by water (with the traders and the Sultan) their lives change significantly; first, from Kediri to Kerimun, and second, from Kerimun to Temasek.

Importantly, water acts as both visual and narrative transitions in several points to exemplify the fluidity of Nusantara livelihoods and to inform the audience regarding an upcoming event or change in the narrative. For instance, a shot of water in the form of a stream or river precedes the scene just after the King of Kediri orders the Pangeran to divorce Mas Ayu and before Wanusugoro kills Pangeran Agong's wife. The flowing water of a river is used again before the Pangeran joins the Chinese traders to sail to Kerimun and before being saved by Dandiar in the final sequence in Singapore. Furthermore, water is also an element that helps move Nusantarans from one stage to another, e.g., water is used to transfer ideas from one community to another, and at the same time represents the various moral codes among the people within the region.[54] Water in *Raden Mas* not

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[54] Gibson (1990) in his analysis asserts that "Southeast Asia is a region in which the sea (waters) serves as the major means of communication and the land forms the major impediment to it. It is often easier to sail long distances from one island to another, than to walk across the smallest island" (p. 126).

only visually highlights the region as a maritime world or, as a substance that marks the transition from one psychological condition to another, but also the identity of the inhabitants of Nusantara can be seen as being fluid or as having fluidity. In contrast to the rigid monopoly of the nation state on the political and cultural life of its citizens, to be a Nusantaran in the film is to live by the ebb and flow of life. When Pangeran Agong is about to go out to hunt, there is a riverside scene between the loyal servant of Mas Ayu and her admirer who asks the servant to meet him later that night because he has a gift for her. She agrees. Although the scene is only part of a simple plot between the servant and her admirer, it strengthens the narrative of the film. For example, when they meet that night, Mas Ayu is on her own with the baby after the Pangeran goes out hunting; later, she is stopped by Wanusogoro (the queen's brother) who sneaks into her house and tries to rape her[55] and instead is strangled to death. At that stage, the scene is intercut with shots from the admirer of Mas Ayu's servant falling from a tree branch and plunging into the river. In that sequence, water is used as a sign of uncertainty in the story as well as in the lives of Nusantarans.

Raden Mas is peculiar in its attempt to associate the film with the concept of *tanahair* that was perceived positively by the people throughout the region. Given the effort by Singapore in the mid to late 1950s to join the Federation of Malaya and the demand by Indonesia for the greater *Indonesia Raya*, this representation appears in regional debates on national, cultural, and racial identities by representing the linkages that bind the people within Nusantara. *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* are very much alike, in representing a relationship between ideas or qualities with conflicting demands or implications of which in this thesis, the notion of land and water as one

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[55] The character of the devil Wanusogoro was marked by a figure of a wooden crocodile at the end of the shot in the scene when he and the Queen discussed on how to make Mas Ayu out of their dignities' league. This is interesting because of it shows how the director is quite sensitive to the Nusantara culture and in giving meaning to his images. In this region, as Andaya (2018) said, crocodiles as water creatures occupy this liminal "in-between" space and thus play an essential cultural role in society (p. 31). According to Laubscher (1977), "crocodile is the prototype for the ancestral beast and is at the same time the carrier of dead souls is widespread in Indonesia" (pp. 239-240). A crocodile within the populace is a symbol of a negative male subject, if one suggests a man as a *buaya* [crocodile], it means that the male subject has a bad attitude or is a scoundrel. Interestingly, Wanusogoro as the antagonist was always presented in a frame within a frame. He was presented within his own space, separated from others of which could resemble his selfishness and egoistic character.

(*tanahair*). In *Raden Mas*, beaches are also essential sites, apart from streams and ponds. In Kerimun, the Pangeran and Raden Mas Ayu establish their new home near a beach and live there as commoners until one day the teenage Raden Mas Ayu encounters the princess of Kerimun and Temasek (Tengku Halijah) while she is bathing in the nearby river. The beaches in the film indicate not only the harmonious relationship between two things and the place where people begin their lives but also the places where people fight each other. The film openly contributed to a continuum of inter-ethnic dialogues, particularly on questions of ethnic identity between Pangeran Agong and his princess wife, Tengku Halijah. At several junctures, the Pangeran is considered as someone who, given his identity is unsure, has no right to decide for his family.

Raden Mas was released to public screenings when the national destinies of the newly established Indonesia, the Federation of Malaya, as well as Singapore, were considerably uncertain and the people were still relatively new to constitutional politics.[56] After all, during the old kingdoms and a few hundred years under European colonialism, territorial sovereignty was not that important. According to Roff (1994), "the barrier between Dutch- and British-controlled territories was a porous membrane" (pp. 154-5). Moreover, Tagliacozzo (2007) suggests that the development of a border in the area between British and Dutch colonial regimes is linked to a large amount of cross-border smuggling (p. 3). The film, through Pangeran and Mas Ayu, shows that love exists independently from social class. The involvement of people with different ethnic backgrounds in the multi-ethnic society also shows that Nusantara is made up of many ethnic groups. Where people come from should not be a question because all of them have lived somewhere between 'here' and 'there'.

In the opening scene, the social class, portrayed by the aristocracy throughout feudal times, is illustrated by the close shot of the royal *keris*, a traditional weapon with a religious-cultural

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[56] In the year 1959, Singapore developed its own Constitution and this created new challenge to the state when the leadership of Malaya was unwilling to accept Singapore's Chinese (Baker, 2008, p. 285).

identity used for struggle and social status.[57] In this scene, Kanjang Ratu will be awarded the *keris*

that would give him the position of King. In the Nusantara, the *keris* is widely accepted as an

important cultural object having different meanings. Moreover, it is viewed as a *pusaka* (heirloom)

for many Indonesian (and Malaysian) societies, and can even "symbolise an entire kingdom or

Sultanate" (Kreps, 2003, p. 318). Furthermore, *keris* "can even stand as symbols of national

identity" in Indonesia and Malaysia (p. 319). The *keris* in this scene is a socio-cultural symbol that

does not only reflect the authority of the ruler, but also carries the king's responsibility to the

people as declared by Kanjang Ratu the King of Kediri,[58] "I vow to sacrifice myself to my country

and my people, and I will uphold our sacred religion and our country's constituency; I will give

absolute rights to the people."[59] Up until that moment, the *keris* is treated with care as a cultural

object that is carried and passed from one another respectfully and without the need to remove it

from its sheath. The film image opens up to a long shot having a greater depth of field when the

keris is being handed over to Kanjang Ratu, the King of Kediri, revealing other Kediri subjects

who are there to witness the ceremony. The opening scene is set in the royal court, where the

people gather to practise their customs and traditions. Even though the *adat* in the Nusantara world

might be as complex as its diverse groups of ethnicities, "it represents a more generalised concern

with a way of life, with ceremonial rites of passage and, in some eyes, with religion" (Nagata,

1974, p. 107). The King's promise to adhere to the constitution and the people, swearing upon the

keris can also be a feudal representation of Malaya's post-Independence government/leadership,

just two years after Merdeka. Surely this scene would trigger Malayan viewers' memory of the

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[57] Farish A. Noor (2006), *Pity the Poor Keris: How a Universal Symbol became a tool for Racial Politics*. This paper is accessible via http://www.othermalaysia.org/2006/11/27/pity-the-poor-keris-how-a-universal-symbol-became-a-tool-for-racial-politics/

[58] Kediri or Kadiri, from 1042 to around 1222, was a Hindu Javanese Kingdom centred in East Java. However, the kingdom's actual territory is not mentioned in the film.

[59] Although *keris* is widely accepted as an important weapon, it does not apply to all Nusantarans. For instance, the Bajau are more familiar with their *Serampang* (three prong fishing pitchfork) and the people of Papua used traditional spear, bow and arrows as their main weapons for survival.

promises of Independence. The *keris* is signifying the King or the leadership/*Kerajaan*/sovereignty of the nation.

When the King offers his pledge, he is placed at the centre of the frame with a medium shot and a generous depth of field. The decision to include the people of Kediri standing together in a wide high angle shot is highly significant to the film's narrative; it represents the Nusantara polity and feudal system because, without the people, the pledge is worthless. Kanjang Ratu keeps his *keris* intact, and unlike his queen, he is wise enough to accept a commoner into the royal family. The way he embraces the *keris* shows how he values it as a cultural symbol and conceals the intimidating and harmful side of a *keris* (the blade). If he pulls the blade out, that would be a gesture of violent provocation. However, later on, he reneges on his pledges when he confronts Pangeran Agong in asking him to divorce Mas Ayu. The Pangeran argues that there is no difference between jasmine and roses; both are flowers, between a commoner and a monarch; they are all human. This scene marks the beginning of a new direction in the narrative of the film, and the story changes with a cutaway panning shot of flowing river water.

The *keris* is loaded with symbolic meanings and expressions in many scenes in this film, for example, when Pangeran Agong decides to distance himself with Kediri, he throws away his *keris* which somewhat resembles his decision to cut ties with the *Keraton* (Javanese Palace). Whenever it is unsheathed, there is tribulation. However, Wanusogoro the antagonist uses the King's *keris* and removes the blade from his sheath to hide his own evilness behind the King's power. Here, it symbolises not only a patriarchal society but also power, rank and violence.

Noor (2006) argues that the weapon is a composite object that has Tantric (old Hindu traditions) influence, whereby the phallic symbolism of the upright blade represents the penetrating element, and the sheath is seen as the *yoni* [vagina/womb]. By removing it from the sheath and showing it to a large group of people (followers) to demonstrate its power negates its more benign

meaning as a cultural symbol that could unite the populace.[60] The clashes in Kerimun only occurred when the prince, Tengku Bagus, removed his *keris* and stabbed one of Dandiar's guards. Pangeran Agong was also in trouble when he uses his *keris* in confronting Tengku Halijah when he shows his anger at what has occurred to Raden Mas Ayu. The *keris* wounds Tengku Chik which leads the Pangeran to the unused well for confinement.

An interesting subplot in the earlier part of the film begins when the Pangeran and his baby encounter a group of Chinese traders near the river to collect fresh water. Unlike the earlier cutaway shot, the river flows in the opposite direction marking the point where their life is about to change yet again.[61] Metaphorically, water is treated to indicate the transformation of Pangeran Agong's character and the film narrative plot as a whole. Here, the camera follows the flow of the rough river water and stops for a long shot of the two Chinese characters (traders) and then cuts to a full two-shot of them from a frontal view collecting fresh water. At this juncture, Pangeran Agong steps in, and they are shocked to see him standing behind them with a baby. They run into the middle of the river but hesitate when Pangeran Agong asks them not to run away from him. The Pangeran walks into the rough water approaching the traders to explain his situation and requests help. Due to the deployment of the camera perspectives between a subjective close up shot of the Pangeran to an objective medium long shot view of them standing side by side in the rough water, the scene intensifies a symbiotic inter-ethnic relation between the Pangeran and the Chinese traders as well as the river as a cultural *contact zone* between regional inhabitants. The traders explain that they want to sail to Kerimun and they invite the Pangeran to join them. He agrees. They join the traders to travel by water to Kerimun Island, and when they land, a machete, some clothes, and

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[60] In the same case that being pointed out by Noor (2006), the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) youth leader waved a *keris* at UMNO's 2005 annual general meeting. Although the *keris* is a symbol of Malay nationalism, taking it out from the sheath and wielding it is offensive to the non-Malays in Malaysia. The act does not help improve interracial relations and has created anxieties among the non-Malay citizens of Malaysia.

[61] Interestingly, according to Klaver (2012), "rivers are the silent witnesses of history. Going downward towards the great meeting with the ocean, they not only carry water but the dreams, memories, stories, and histories of the peoples living in their basins" (p. 24).

rice are given to Pangeran Agong to start anew with his baby girl. This scene is highly significant in highlighting an instance of trans-ethnic solidarity.[62]

In addition to the goodwill efforts of supplying the Pangeran with basic needs in order to survive when they arrived at Kerimun Island, the traders are also accepted in the Nusantara society as exemplified in the scene when, fifteen years later, they are brought before Dandiar in the Keraton and treated just like other Nusantarans with respect, and without discrimination. In this scene, the traders sit in the same space at the same level as the others who may visit the prince and are equal in Dandiar's eyes.

The film then brings in Chinese subjects who not only provide assistance to Pangeran Agong and his baby but also become responsible for providing vital information that helps Dandiar find his leader in Kerimun. The Chinese traders are not portrayed stereotypically with particular attitudes towards profit and selfishness and are unable to speak Malay. A kind gesture that gives Pangeran Agong strength to rebuild his life is when the traders give him what he needed to begin a new life (the Pangeran uses the machete given to him to build the structure of his new home). This representation of Chinese traders is important in light of political instability which stirred up ethnic tensions among the Nusantara inhabitants. Furthermore, the director's vision, in giving form to contact and interactions among people, envisions how life in a *contact zone,* like Nusantara, changed the trajectory and the dynamics of everyday life. The Chinese traders in the film not only serve to negotiate the otherness ascribed to them, but also provide reassurances to the multiple ethnicities within the Nusantara region. Considering the film's popularity at the time it was released (2 years after the establishment of the Federation of Malaya), such allegorical

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[62] In relation to Malaysia, Mandal (2004) argues that scholars are lagged behind the arts community who he sees as 'the primary intellectuals to articulate or be inspired by transethnic solidarities in their creative work' (p. 50).

representations by Krishnan are not only confronted but also challenged historical narratives and notions of a single cultural or national identity.[63]

Tengku Halijah gives birth to Tengku Chik, but her feelings towards Raden Mas Ayu are unsettled due to envy as she feels that her husband is so lenient towards his daughter. When they set sail together for Temasek, the journey is staged to signify water as a metaphor representing the flow of life as well as to differentiate the two opposite personalities of Raden Mas Ayu and Tengku Halijah. If the flow of river water is a sign of development in the lives of the father and daughter, then travelling by sea is a mark that their life is about to change profoundly. Earlier, they travel with the traders to Kerimun where they manage to build a new home in which they live happily. While travelling in the Chinese junk, they are given food to eat together with the traders. However, in the journey to Temasek, Halijah begins to accuse her stepdaughter Raden Mas Ayu of mistreating Tengku Chik on numerous occasions. Such abuse continues until the end of the film. Conversely, racial identity did not define a coherent account of culture, and ethnic differences are not sufficient to explain conflict.

In addition to ethnicity, religious convictions also influence the politics of Nusantara. *Raden Mas* shows that religion does not determine one's morality. One day, on her way back from a religious class, Raden Mas Ayu is stopped by Tengku Bagus and was seen by the cleric who reports the event to Tengku Halijah. In adding to this, Tengku Chik fell into a river while he is with Raden Mas Ayu. Although there is no injury, Halijah becomes very angry at Raden Mas Ayu and punishes her by assigning her to perform cleaning work in the palace. In the next scene at the palace, Tengku Halijah accidentally slips and falls on the floor, and Tengku Chik laughs at her, but Raden Mas Ayu is hit with plates when she tries to help her stepmother. When asked by Pangeran Agong, Halijah says that she was upset because of Raden Mas Ayu, but Tengku Chik argues that it was an

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[63] Very famous stars of the time play the Pangeran and Raden Mas Ayu in the film, namely matinee idol M. Amin, and Latifah Omar, who was Miss Universe of Singapore in 1953 (Lim, 2018, p. 45).

accident. Raden Mas Ayu is in trouble not only because of the attitudes of her stepmother but also because of the cleric's disparaging comments. The film demonstrates the "evil" or negative side of a religious personality that is different from the prevalent public perception of such figures. While there is a range of reasons for the revival of religious politics in Nusantara, religious radicalisation and discrimination against people based on their faith by some Nusantarans are counterproductive for peaceful coexistence.

In both regional patron-client relationship and nationalism, unwavering obedience and allegiance to the head of state are a dominant notion that not only conflicts with Islamic values but also affects regional democracy and the country's quality of governance. The subject of hegemonic *bumiputra* or *pribumi* socio-racial or socio-cultural identity finds resonance in the film when Halijah bursts out when her husband defended her stepdaughter, and she exclaims that both of them are '*bangsa hanyut*' (a lost race).[64] Suddenly, with the *keris* in the hand of Pangeran Agong, he slips and accidentally slashes Tengku Chik's palm. The Sultan and his vizier arrive and demand an explanation from Pangeran Agong. He becomes silent, so the Sultan and his vizier declare that Pangeran Agong is insane and sentences him to confinement in an unused well near the palace. Here the dry well is a symbol of the flow of his life that is coming to an end. Whereas *Raden Mas* is not an explicitly political film about Nusantara's ongoing situation, and it does not promote any doubt that the antagonism between the different levels of self and social categorisation impacts one's cultural identity and belongingness.

Based on ethnicity and culture, the scene outlined above uses identity to postulate how individuals define themselves and how others define them. By calling Pangeran Agong *'bangsa hanyut,'* Tengku Halijah, therefore, considers him as an outcast rather than a husband, even though the Pangeran is obedient to his father-in-law, the Sultan. Instead, the Pangeran does not speak to

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[64] *Hanyut* means drifted out to the sea.

protect the Sultan's feelings or perhaps recognise his inability to lead his wife and family, which shows that such customs are irrational and inappropriate. This scene informs us that prejudice and discrimination are alive in Nusantara, even within the Malay-speaking communities. Tengku Halijah also announces that Pangeran Agong is not from the same group of people as she is. It is not only the mix of visual metaphors that embodies and represents regional metaphysical and cultural concepts but also includes auditory stimulus through context-bound dialogue. *Hanyut* means 'adrift' which connotes uncertainty and aimlessness. In other words, there is no certain direction; a *bangsa hanyut* is a nation that is going nowhere and is not going to develop.

In a more festive but tragic setting, the film continues to demonstrate paradoxes in the following scenes. Before long, the Sultan, his vizier, and the palace clerics decide to unite Tengku Bagus and Raden Mas Ayu because they may be afraid of being accused of religious insensitivity. By this time, Pangeran Agong is exhausted and suffering from thirst in the empty well where he is imprisoned; he prays for water, and the sky turns cloudy and starts to rain heavily. At this stage, water no longer flows but is in the form of rain, a shift that indicates the story is about to change yet again because the natural flow of the life of Pangeran Agong has stopped. Later, Tengku Chik finds his father in the empty well while he was looking for his dodge spinning top. He is confused but is immediately taken away by the palace guards. Then, Dandiar arrives again in Temasek with his troops and goes straight to the palace when he realises that Raden Mas is about to be Tengku Bagus' wife. He notices that Pangeran Agong is not there to witness his daughter's marriage. When asked, Tengku Chik reveals that he found his father in the dry well at the back of the palace. Dandiar then brings his master back to the palace, where he pleads for justice. Raden Mas Ayu cries out for Tengku Halijah to ask for forgiveness from Pangeran Agong because he is dying, but she refuses. On her way out from the palace, Halijah is struck by a flash of lightning and dies, as do Pangeran Agong and Raden Mas Ayu. The lightning strike acts as a sign from god. Such animist

beliefs are inappropriate in Islam, but quite prevalent in this region, as Nusantarans see nature not as a distinct, impersonal entity or phenomenon, but as being filled with spiritual meaning.

When Dandiar and his troops run amok and insist that the Sultan respond, the Sultan hides inside the palace with his vizier and Tengku Chik. Tengku Bagus challenges Dandiar to stay, but instead, the angry loyal servant orders his troops to set fire to the palace. At that time young Tengku Chik runs out to Dandiar and pleads with him not to kill his grandfather. As a resolution, the Sultan comes out from the palace to confront Dandiar, and the Sultan apologises for what has occurred. With Tengku Chik in his arms, Dandiar agrees, but the Sultan needs to agree to his terms; a royal funeral for Pangeran Agong and Raden Mas Ayu and his wish to see Tengku Chik as the future Sultan of the territory. As noted earlier, Tengku Chik is neither Javanese nor Malay because he has a mixed heritage. Perhaps unintentionally, *Raden Mas*, inspired by the mythology of Nusantara, also illustrates the rejection of the ethno-nationalist particularly political parties' divisive identity politics that support cultural racism or the supremacy of the majority group over the minority.

Overall, the film like a chronotope represents a memory of the past from the beginning of national development within the region. Further, it narrates the flow of life in the form of *purbawara*, a genre that deals with life before colonialism but, unlike other *purbawara* films, *Raden Mas* not only glorifies the pre-colonial Malay world (Yusoff, 2013, p. 86) but also criticises racial nationalism. Milner (2002) observed that the development of politics in Malaya in the early twentieth century had begun to appropriate liberal Europe's doctrines to undermine the ancient Nusantara regime, even though they were the victims of colonialism (p. 89). Here, the film acts as a reminder to the people about the fluidity of Nusantara culture at the time when the idea of national identity was debated widely during the early days of independence. Importantly, within the next twenty years, all three countries will need to deal with some severe identity crises closely connected with race-based and ideological politics. Indeed, it is still occurring today, particularly

with regard to the disagreements around religious conviction and constitutional rights in modern Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

The complex interweaving's of history and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood[65] within this region have been explored creatively and carefully by the film's director at the time when the notion of a nation state was still relatively new to the people of the three countries. Water is used extensively as a visual metaphor to explain the inter-subjectivity of the Nusantara subjects. Nevertheless, the idea of one's *tanahair* in the film is revealed through the dialogue between Pangeran Agong and his loyal servant Dandiar; not just once, but twice. Dandiar attempts to convince Pangeran Agong to return to their *tanahair* in Kediri where they first met fifteen years ago, but he declines because, apart from having a new family in Kerimun, he is still unable to recognise what had occurred in the past. For the Pangeran, Kediri, Kerimun and Temasek are his *tanahair*.

Badjao: The Sea Gypsies (1957): *Tanahair* and Cinematic Cultural Contact Zone

Is it race or faith that divides us? What can unite us? The right to build a future... free... together. Whether Moslem, Christian... brown or white. - *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957)[66]

The 'Tri-Border' area around the Sulu-Celebes Seas between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines is deemed as being "between a fluid region and a hard state."[67] In a brief discussion about the region, Joseph Franco, in an online article entitled *The Sabah-Sulu crisis: Time to revisit the Sulu zone?* (2013) points out that cross-border trade between Tawi-Tawi in the southern Philippines and east Sabah is common to each with people having extended families on either side. Likewise, looking at the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, Febrica (2014), in her examination about the safety

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[65] Borrowed from Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (1994, p. 5). London and New York: Routledge.
[66] Taken from the closing credits for the film.
[67] Noor as cited in Franco (2013). - http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/The-Sabah-Sulu-crisis-Time-to-revisit-the-Sulu-zon-30202296.html

and security of the waterways in the area today, advocates that "securing the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas is complicated by the rampant illicit cross border activities and the disputed maritime boundaries in this area" (p. 77). Both Franco's and Febrica's studies reveal the complex societies living within the vast body of water here, but regrettably, they both ignore the socio-cultural history of the inhabitants.

In another account, Rabasa and Chalk (2012) in their investigation recognise that the "long-standing ethno-national, ideological, and religious conflicts have served to exacerbate the void in governance" (p. ix), but perhaps deliberately, they have discounted the socio-cultural aspects of the people in proposing a safeguarding system for the area. Alternatively, I propose to focus attention on the representation of the people who have their homes on the waters and lands around Sulu-Celebes Seas through the film about two communities from the area. While many studies have been written on Badjao in the Philippines National Cinema field (Toohey 2005, Benitez 2010, Vera 2019), this research focuses on transcultural interaction processes between individuals from different groups, the beach as *contact zone*, culminating in the transformation and amalgamation of previously distinct cultural elements into a new cultural synthesis.

Figure 3: The word 'primitive' may indicate the beginning, the early stages of the origin of the populations of the archipelago, reflecting the fact that love brings people closer together in the past and builds trust to create a relationship of love.

Badjao was produced by LVN Pictures of the Philippines and distributed by Cathay-Keris Studio for audiences around the archipelago. In 1962, Parallel Film Distributors Inc. of New York released the film for cinemas in the US.[68] Impressively, the film also travelled to the Adelaide Film Festival (1959) in Australia, the Vancouver Film Festival (1961) in Canada, the Edinburgh Film Festival (1962) in the UK, as well as Coronado Film Festival (1963) in the US. It also received several awards at the 1957 Asia Film Festival held in Tokyo including Best Direction, Best Story, Best Editing, and Best Cinematography.

Unlike *Raden Mas* which is based on a folktale, *Badjao: The Sea Gypsies* (1957) is a social realist representation of communality and religiosity in the southern Philippines. Briefly, the story is about the two lovers, Hassan, the son of a Bajau tribe leader and, Bala Amai, the niece of the

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[68] As in the Internet Movie Database; http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054655/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas
Curiously, Rovi Eleanor Mannikka in The New York Times review dates the film 1961 instead of 1962.
http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/152180/Badjao/overview

chief of the Tausug (or Suluk) clan. For them, it was love at first sight, but it took some time for them to be together as Hassan had to deal with intimidations from the Tausug especially by Jikiri who is the Tausug Chief's, right-hand man. As part of the agreement, he must leave his people as well as his Bajau tradition for Bala Amai. Although Hassan fulfilled his promises, Datu Tahil demands more blue pearls from him due to his greediness and abuse of leadership power as chief. In the end, Hassan, Bala Amai and their new-born return to the tribe of travelling sea dwellers. The film dramatises the romantic story by revealing the complex relationships between the Bajau and Tausug families and characters.

Badjao is crucial in discussing the notion of *tanahair* through two groups of Nusantarans that value nature (land/soil and water) as part of their daily lives and which foster a sense of belonging and connection for them. I chose *Badjao* because apart from its deliberation of *tanahair* as a regional idea that extends beyond language and ethnicity, the film implicitly critiques the nationalisation of areas, people and cultures. For Benitez (2010), however, Badjao's common desire for freedom, equality, freedoms and national unity in the post-WW2 era represents the same aspirations of the Filipinos, and the film sutures the audience into the film narration and a particular ideology (p. 23). The post-script asks viewers, as described above, is it race or faith that separates them, and what can unite them? After all social and cultural connections have existed for hundreds of years between the southern parts of the Philippines and the eastern parts of Borneo. Arguably the drawing of national boundaries gives way to the current armed conflict involving the Southern Philippines, the problem of undocumented or stateless people around that area and the 2013 invasion by the 'Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo' of Lahad Datu, Sabah. According to Howe (2013), at the root of the disputes in this part of the archipelago are mutually independent polities and identities, or territorial considerations (p. 96). The Sulu Sultanate, which also governed the north-eastern portion of now Sabah, was established in the 15th century, but the Carpenter Agreement of 1915 surrendered the political powers of the Sultanate.

Until today, the issues in *Badjao* remain relevant, and political approaches seem to have lost ground in all conflicting parties to find a definitive and acceptable solution.

In this film, the Bajau people likely value the ocean in a way similar to the first Greek philosopher, Thales of Miletus (c. 624 BCE –545 BCE) "[who] considered water to be the beginning, an originating and guiding principle or *archê*" (Klaver, 2012, p. 11). The Bajau are seafaring people, a nomadic tribe commonly called 'the sea gipsies'[69] who feel at home on the water. In contrast, the Tausug live on the land that resides along the coastline of the Sulu Sea, which covers predominantly the same area that the Bajau pass through (Kiefer, 1968, p. 225). The word Tausug implies "people of the current" and they are supposedly also good seamen who have clothing and jewellery skills and know-how (Anies, et al., 2012, p. 2). The Tausug perceive the Bajau as stubborn, hard-headed, and always having problems against one another. Nevertheless, because they are "fierce," the Bajaus fear the Tausug (Sinama.org, 2012). Indeed, the film in featuring a cross-ethnic romance is also a *contact zone* of sorts, like the seashores where the sea waters and the land react with each other. In that way, Hassan and Bala Amai are the two characters who convey hope for the future of their individual tribes.

On the other hand, Toohey (2005) in her analysis of *Badjao*, states that the film contributed to the re-formulation within the nationalist discourse on the 'ethnic' differences during the decades following the Pacific war (p. 282). From the time-space configuration of sea and land, she suggests that the seashore is a visual metaphor that hints at the state of in-betweenness (pp. 298-301). In this file, the seashore is a place that overlaps, creating the illusion of space "that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated"

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[69] In *Orang laut, bajak laut, raja laut: sejarah kawasan Laut Sulawesi abad XIX* (2011) Lapian suggests that the misrepresentations of the Bajau people stem from the term *Bajau Laut* [*Bajak Laut/Orang Laut* in Indonesian language] which was mistranslated from Indonesian to English language to mean 'piracy' [or pirate?]. He also argues that many other scholars (Leur, 1961; Tarling, 1963; Pringle, 1970; Warren, 1981) advocate similar problems with the definition and the representations of the people who wander around the Southeast Asian water ways (pp. 11-16).

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Moreover, a depiction of social and ethnic differences is not offered simply to the experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition but to highlight prevalent political conditions and the development of a social community conceived as a project in a spirit of revision and reconstruction (p. 3). For example, the seashore where Hassan builds his new home signifies the space of conjugal possibility which not only serves as a symbol of his new life with Bala Amai but also reminds him about his previous life (Toohey, 2005, p. 302). Toohey's assessment of the expression of identity and differences in this film is mostly from the perspective of national cinema in the Philippines. Unlike her work, this undertaking examines the film from a transnational lens and proposes that the seashore, also, resembles a *contact zone* that encompasses the Nusantara meaning of *tanahair*.

Furthermore, *Badjao* is not just a simple story about the Bajau and the Tausug via the love of two protagonists, but the socio-cultural issues between them are integral to the narrative of the film. The film is not only about the complexity of love-hate relationships, but also about how members of the two ethnic groups see themselves and see each other, particularly when the need to establish nation states in the Nusantara is inevitable.

Additionally, the film is not solely about a collision between two societies but also highlights the hybridisation of local culture resulting from multi-ethnic populations that inhabit the same social space. The strength of Nusantara underscores the idea of *tanahair* itself. Nusantara creates different perceptions of belonging through distinct relationships with different spaces and places within the archipelago. Indonesian performance artist Iwan Wijono points out in his video that Nusantara implies "the place we inhabit," including the space between islands, islands and continents, and "between material and spiritual" (inter lelieu, 2018).

Land and water are the two core elements that gave the place a name. The many islands in the expansive and vast oceans around the archipelago are interrelated or, that is to say; the land

itself without water would not offer significant meaning to life and vice versa. In *Badjao*, Hassan and Bala Amai who represent the two groups of people at the micro level to manage adversity in order to live together. However, in the end, instead of perpetually doing something that is prearranged for them, they opt to find a way of life that they want for their future; that is to go with the flow (where they choose to live at sea instead of land as proposed by the Tausug chief). The concept of 'spaces of belonging' is regarded differently by the two tribes in this film. Tausugs have stronger regard for jurisdiction and boundaries compared to the nomadic Bajau who do not hold a sense of ownership over nature. Tribal leaders, the protagonist Hassan, and the brutal antagonist Jikiri expresses these contradictory claims unambiguously at several points in the film.

The first gathering scene of the Bajau and the Tausug points to the need for peaceful inter-ethnic discourse. Here, the film uses cultural objects like the trident and the *keris* to draw the audience's attention to the differences between the two tribes. The Bajau people and their leader go to the house of Datu Tahil to discuss the perceived harassment, but the Tausug chief mistrusts them when they bring their three-pronged spears. Although, the concern regarding the weapons is allayed when the Bajau chief explains that their spear is just like the *keris* of the Tausug, which represents their life.[70] The Bajau chief later explains that they will "lay down their weapons in peace" before Datu Tahil but, if they are in danger they will be deployed differently, i.e. they will use them to kill. Afterwards, Datu Tahil invites the Bajau to join him in his house.

The changing power dynamics between the Bajau and Tausug are reflected in the camera angles utilised in this scene. In the beginning, Datu Tahil stands tall before the Bajau with a low angle shot that reflects his superiority. When they are in the house, Datu Tahil is seated in listening to the Bajau's grievances. After a brief mention about the attack on the beach by the Bajau chief, he then continues to explain that, although "his people are good, some might be overzealous." He

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[70] If Pangeran Agong in *Raden Mas* throw away his *keris* when he decides to detach himself with Kediri, Hassan in this film loses his spear when he chooses to live with Bala Amai on land.

demands that Hassan point out the wrongdoer. Up to this point, the two leaders are mainly positioned in a series of subjective shots, but after that, when they both argue for equality in front of the Quran, Datu Tahil stands up, and they are joined together in an objective *medium* shot. In that shot, Datu Tahil insists that he wants to know who the culprit is and he promises to judge the person accordingly. However, Hassan declares that he will not accuse anyone but hopes that Datu Tahil will permit them to live in peace within the boundaries. The scene becomes integral to the whole film because the process of accepting differences involves conflict resolution: foremost, the willingness to discuss and hear the other side and exercise justice and fair play to those who are different.

The subject matter distinguishes the scenes at the seashores with some that exemplify hostility between the two tribes and others that epitomise the seashore as a space where integration is conceivable through dialogue and negotiation. The seashore is stimulating since that is the place where the two elements of nature (land and water) could have an adverse or possibly amendable effect on each other. To appreciate Pratt's suggestion, in the contact zone "all players are engaged in the same game, and that game is the same for all players" (2002, p. 13). The contact zone is neutral because it brings together people from different backgrounds which can have both positive and negative impacts of harmony or conflict. Similarly, the seashore becomes the location where several dialogues and action take place. The seashore, the waves, the beach atmosphere become an actor in the film, not simply a backdrop because the waves are choppy when there is a struggle to create tension and tranquillity in a beautiful day for happy scenes between the couple (Bala Amai and Hassan).

The next scene at the seashore occurs when Bala Amai warns Hassan that some of her fellow people are wishing to harm him. However, the unsophisticated but stylish camera placement and editing techniques set this scene apart from the earlier one when Hassan encounters Jikiri and his men. In this scene, Bala Amai asserts that she is there because she admires the Bajau (Hassan) for

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his honesty and kindness from when they first met with Datu Tahil. They also talk about how the two tribes could live together in peace in the same space and about a topic on the dream for a happy family. Within the scene, they are framed either in an objective two shot or in a medium close up with an over-the-shoulder shot. Although the latter style of shot focuses on a particular character, the over the shoulder shot indicates a direct relationship between the two and provides the viewers with a focalising view of the two characters. This is in contrast to the third seashore scene when Datu Tahil arrives with his troop to "save" Bala Amai from Hassan and his people. Although Avellana occasionally frames the scene with several long shots wide enough to suggest the geography of the place with a generous depth of field, the two tribes are blocked in two separate areas. In fact, they are split into two separate objective group shots, implying their animosity towards each other.

The day after their wedding ceremony, Bala Amai and Hassan are alone on the seashore but, unlike other scenes at the seashore, this one is livelier and more peaceful in terms of settings and props leading us to assume that the narrative, at this point, is marking a unification of the two people from different cultural identities. Nevertheless, the rows of traditional *lepa* on the seashore could signify a different meaning. Hypothetically, the boats are reminiscent of Hassan who will not be able to sail again and will be stranded on land since he has sworn to live together with Bala Amai in her village. In this scene, the film mulls over the issue of belonging for the newlyweds. Hassan shows his affection for life at sea through his gaze towards the water, and Bala Amai responds with the assertion, "Your former home, Hassan, now you belong here with me."

Furthermore, she surprises her husband when she says that she does not wish to live with the Bajau whom she calls "homeless gipsies." [Slightly hurt,] Hassan reminds her that he is a Bajau and he is her husband as if to bring home to her that her prejudice affects him personally and emotionally. There are other scenes on the seashore that focus on Hassan's psychological conflict, including the night scene when he rests in the *lepa* while his wife sleeps in the house.

Eventually, though, they build their home on the seashore and occupy themselves with agricultural work rather than fishing and pearl diving. Moreover, the film uses a montage consisting of sequences of Hassan and Bala Amai working with the land and growing vegetables. Within the montage, we see Hassan watering the vegetables near his new home, which serves to create a synergetic combination between land and water that offers a rewarding outcome. The series of images of Hassan farming the land is consistent with Hassan's justification to his tribe people that he is "trying to improve his way of life." This suggests that Hassan is willing to follow the Tausug sedentary way by adapting to modern capitalism, accumulation and notions of development. However, he is less inclined to commodify his labour for someone's greed, refusing to dive for pearls for Datu Tahil, the greedy Tausug leader who wants to sell the pearls to a visiting Turkish trader. Instead, Hassan insists that there will be no more intimidations from the Tausug and because of that, Datu Tahil's troops set fire to their house.

I consider the seashore to be more than a mere place where the ocean and land meet; it actually serves as a camouflage to complex associations at a strategic situation between two Nusantarans. The beach scenes illustrate the social dynamics between the groups, between Hassan and Bala Amai, who marry each other, lowering their social status and identity, and reminding us of the basic humanity of the two Nusantarans. In the film, the seashore is the place where the film values the differences between the notion of water and land cultures. In Eisenstein's theory of film form, for example, landscape images like the seashore, in many ways, are used "to create a mood in a scene" (1977, p. 22). However, in this film, the seashore is not linked to the mood of the scene, but rather signifies cultural values between the Nusantara populace. Moreover, *Badjao* uses the seashores not as an empty landscape but as places where the two natural elements become part of life for the inhabitants. Eisenstein (1957) also advocates that "in landscape, the horizon represents the limit of depth" (p. 184). This is interesting because the 'seashore scenes' in this film, highlight topics that envision interconnectivity by focussing on differences rather than similarities. Although

there are scenes between Hassan and Bala Amai that viewers might presume to be filled with romantic dialogue, instead of talking about their love, they debate about their differences and their ways of life. Although the film is presumably focusing on the differences rather than similarities, the long and wide shots (with infinite depth of field employed in some scenes at the beach) can also be seen as a style that characterises indefinite cultural possibilities between the two ethnic groups.

Additionally, given the nature of diverse societies in Nusantara, it is likely that the notion of *tanahair* in the film is not merely understood from its meaning in the Malay language per se. As evidence of the relationship between Tausug and Bajau, this could be seen as a metaphor about the anxiety around the time of Independence and the Cold War (Benitez 2010), where difference and inequality among the different ethnic groups can lead to exploitation. Although the Tausugs are persuaded by the Turkish trader to sell the pearls to him, the Bajau is the one who 'mines' the seas of black pearls for them. At the same time, the Tausug way of life represents civilisation and capitalist modernity: agrarian, settled, territorial, with notions of land as property. However, for the Bajau, they still prefer the traditional way of life: nomadic, nonterritorial, gathering sea products which, among other, resemble how the people or the community determines the importance of the resources they have.

What matters in this film is not whether one group is better than the other, but in the way, the film highlights Nusantaran socio-cultural values, beliefs, and practices. As mentioned previously, if the baby in the opening sequence of the film is a son of the sea (Bajau), the baby that attracts attention at the final scene of the film is bi-racial. The second baby, Hassan and Bala Amai's child, is a representation of the future – a combination of the two groups and "the bridge" for peace between the Bajau and the Tausug.
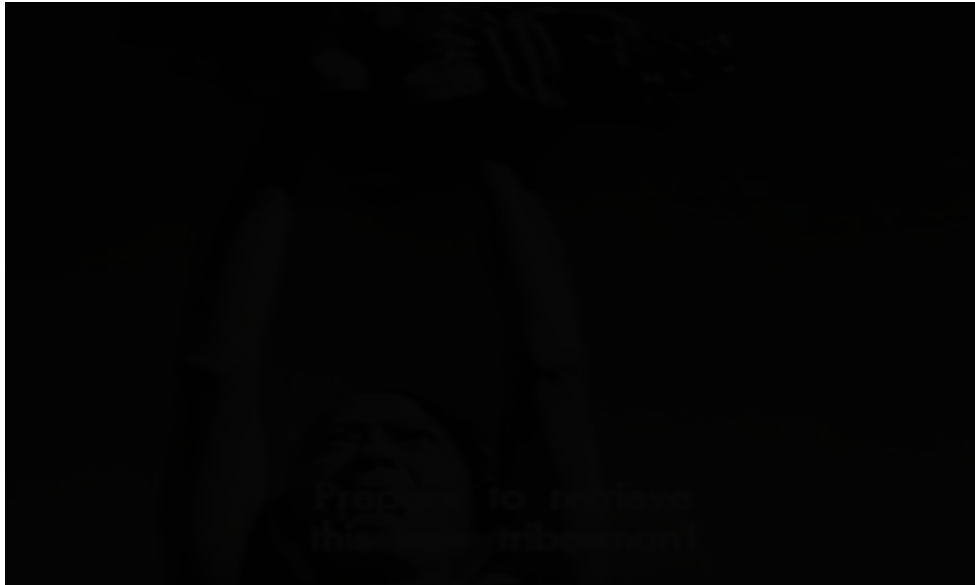
Figure 4: The tribal leader called for attention to his people and the audience, to save the child or, subtextually, to refer to the main tribal man in the film (Hassan) and also to their cultural traditions before they were lost.

To conclude, *Badjao* explores some of the difficulties and challenges involved in restoring harmony among the people who live around the Sulu-Celebes Sea and Nusantara population. The director devotes his film to a representation of a marginalised group of Nusantarans that live in the border area, and he posits the idea that the population in the area value lands and waters as their habitat and *tanahair* that they can call home. In this representation, the discourse of co-equal cohabitation in one space seems vital not only for peace between the two ethnic groups but for the long-term wellbeing of Nusantara as a peaceful region. However, both elements (land and water) need to be aligned and balanced in order for a harmonious society to prevail.

Conclusion

As cinematic chronotopes, the two films discussed here have the representation, styles, and narratives sufficient to support arguments about the social, political, as well as matters related to Nusantarans' senses of belonging to their *tanahair*; all leading to a discourse on identity as a critical component of the national and transnational cinemas in the area of Southeast Asian Cinema's studies. Context-wise, the two films frame their argument concerning ethno nationalism

around the region that rises in pursuit of power to administer the newly-created countries. The films represent intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial interconnections through the regional concept of *tanahair*, the reconstruction of ethnic identities, and social mobility between the diverse Nusantara populations.

Both *Raden Mas* and *Badjao* portray that the spirit of Nusantara lives without boundaries in the Southeast Asian archipelago. The two films tell us that Nusantarans has the potential to discriminate against each other based on rank, race, ethnicity and religion or based on their behaviour. Contrary to the region's perceived ethnocentrism whereby one ethnic group or culture is seen as superior to another (which has contributed to the creation of racially biased national cultural identities), the two films demonstrate that all ethnicities have equal rights. *Raden Mas* shows that Nusantara represents societies with high relational mobility, thus, enabling the exchange of ideas, practices, and cultural beliefs. With this kind of exchange, the cultures of the archipelagic region have been hybrid from the earliest period. By contrast, *Badjao* reveals that racial prejudice is not uncommon, but says it is vital that claims made about the legitimacy of a single group are explicitly evaluated, and that cultural differences are embraced within the diverse society.

Additionally, the notion of *tanahair* applies equally to all Nusantaran characters in the films for whom its meaning may differ from group to group. The shared *tanahair,* however, is where individuals from various ethnic groups meet and develop relationships while pursuing their objectives. In the case of *Badjao*, the objective was to achieve individual freedom to love freely and to be respected and accepted despite one's difference. In *Raden Mas*, the objective is to improve their opportunities through migration.

Approximately sixty years have passed since the release of *Raden Mas* and *Badjao*. Their outstanding cinematic sensibilities have been in response to the region's prevalent regional socio-

cultural and socio-political agendas. The two films serve as a testament to the impulsive developments of the region and deal with relatively unappreciated uncertainties within the Nusantara world such as the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (*Konfrontasi*) from 1962 until 1966, the 13th May 1969 incident and, the *Gerakan Acheh Merdeka* (Free Acheh Movement) from 1976 until 2005. The attempts to understand the value of *tanahair* as a concept that binds the population revealed Nusantara's socio-spatial system.

To steadily focus on specific representation interventions within these films allows for a comparison of spatial compositions and movements to social and political cultures within the region. Such representations regarding the importance of human mobility and hybrid cultural identities had the potential to considerably alter the experiential and historical relevance of the two films that have created textual representations of the recognised realities of the inhabitants within Nusantara. In this sense, an awareness of such film representations and productions should guide the conclusion about the elements of transnationalism of the cinemas in Southeast Asia as well as films as *contact zone* or perhaps, the existence of the *Sinema* of Nusantara.

Aside from the two films selected for close reading in this chapter, there are other films from this region that promote the concept of *tanahair* that deal with cultural identities as well as human/social mobility. For example, *Ca-bau-kan* [The Courtesan] (Nia Dinata, 2002) and *Tanah Air Beta* [My Homeland] (Ari Sihasale, 2010), *Tabula Rasa* (Adriyanto Dewo. 2014) of Indonesia that reflect on possibilities of integrating human mobility into a potential agreement on human interaction around the region in order to map out the shared characteristics of regional population.

Ca-bau-kan is about an adopted Indonesian *Peranakan* woman living in the Netherlands who returns to the country in search of her roots. Through a series of multi-layered plots, the film highlights the search for identity and the intermarriage between the *Peranakan* Chinese and the natives between the 1930s and 1950s. *Tanah Air Beta* represents the conflict between East Timor

and Indonesia (1993–1994) as well as the separation of families due to socio-political resistance and delimitation of national's boundaries.

Films like *Halaw: Ways of The Sea* (Sheron Dayoc, 2012), *Thy Womb* (Brillante Mendoza, 2012), *Bohe: Sons of The Wave* (Nadjoua Bansil, 2012) from the Philippines; *Di Ambang: Stateless in Sabah* (Matt Fillmore & Vila Somiah, 2014), *Fragile* (Bebbra Mailin, 2015) from Malaysia; and *Our Land is the Sea* (Kelli Swazey & Matthew Colaciello, 2018) a collaboration between Gadjah Mada University and University of Hawai'i are among the more recent representations that reflect social disorder around the tri-border area. In these films, people are marginalised given their sense of belonging to their *tanahair,* which threatens the national unity, while their mobility traditions question the porousness of state boundaries within the cultural space of Nusantara. These comparable representations also serve to corroborate that Avellana's representation of those peoples in *Badjao* not only adapts itself to the historical world but also relates to present-day issues across national boundaries.

In Chapter Four, I will deliberate more on 'border films' from around the region, which I see as complicating national cultural identities. I also discuss the concept of *merantau* as well as *sedar diri* in *Sri Mersing* [Beauty from Mersing] (Salleh Ghani, 1961) and *Tabula Rasa* (Adriyanto Dewo, 2014), both of which highlight regional values in national cinemas of the interrelated countries. The exploration is not only about defining the meaning of *merantau* as represented in films, but also about the thinking that is framed by a traditional human mobility concept like this in films and how it gives directions to acculturation processes that affect Nusantara subjects with cross ethnic identities within the region. Also, I will conduct further in-depth analysis and comparisons of the notion of *sedar diri* and *tak sedar diri* to explore the issues of alienation and assimilation among migrants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Merantau, *Sedar Diri* and Nusantara Ethnoscape

Introduction

> The archipelago is the area of migrations […], and we cannot deny the idea that we are in a
> migration society […]. – Garin Nugroho.[71]

In this chapter, I posit that human and social movements are inextricably tied to the current concepts of national space within the Nusantara region and, are crucial in examining the characters of national as well as Nusantara cinemas.[72] The unique regional form of human mobility called *merantau* (to go on a journey or to wander) provides a means to conceptualise Nusantara as a space of migration or using Arjun Appadurai's terminology, an 'ethnoscape'. Concepts of *"sedar/sadar diri"* (self-conscious) which more or less, means "self-realisation" are used to construct indicators which will become apparent during the examination of *Sri Mersing* [Beauty from Mersing] (Salleh Ghani, 1961) and *Tabula Rasa* (Adriyanto Dewo, 2014). The opposite of *sedar diri* would be *"tak sedar diri"* which suggests an unself-conscious or socially reckless temperament.

With the formation of nation states in the Nusantara region, boundaries were established that limited the movement of people and created new allegiances (nationalism) that superseded regional (Nusantara) or even any other local and regional affiliations. Across the region, new forms

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[71] See Khoo (2016). *Practitioners' Panel - Southeast Asian Filmmakers Conceptualizing Time and Place* (9th Biennial Association for Southeast Asian Cinemas Conference). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8Wk7GSLfuc

[72] Butt (2013) claims that "[t]he undocumented migration stream between Indonesia and Malaysia […], is the second-largest in the world (after U.S./Mexico), with at least 400,000 known undocumented migrants in Malaysia, more than three times the number of legal migrants" (p. 7). As internal migrants travel around the region in search of better life opportunities, they also reenergise the destination by bringing in cultural knowledge and practices on top of labour and expertise. A recent finding from an observation by Flores Tanjung on the people of the district of Kampar, Perak in Malaysia who originated from Sumatra is an example of how a culture travels together with the people and is kept intact after a few generations (see Ariffin, 2016).

of ethno-nationalism and nativism relied on rhetoric that asserted which group of people had more rights in belonging to the country. The problem with such jingoistic rhetoric is that the history of regional social structure is wilfully neglected in maintaining the power structure of the country's political order. These ahistorical interpretations of belonging are ignorant of the role of the people who built the nation and the fact that human migration played a major role in this region (Hugo, 2005). For example, ethno-nationalists in Malaysia claim that certain groups or individuals do not belong to this country and are considered unacceptable as citizens merely because they celebrate a different cultural heritage and are not aligned with the "Malaysian Malay" tradition. Recently, Marina Mahathir, a social activist, challenged all the Malaysians who characterised themselves as 'Malays' and to list their family histories and to gauge how many can really go back more than three generations born in this land (Leow, 2016, p. 12). The statement also asks all ethno-nationalists to be *sedar diri* about who they really are. As such, it is a reminder to all Malaysian Malays that they share the immigrant experience of beginning anew in this modern country in the Nusantara.

In Indonesia and Singapore, racialisation and marginalisation of minority groups are also quite common. As of 2019, Papua has fallen into chaos, fanned by ethnic tensions and new calls for independence mostly because the Papuans feel that they are second-class citizens in Indonesia. Whereas in Singapore, a culture where racial stereotypes are promoted and indulged in by the state, xenophobia towards foreigners is growing. In recent years, Singaporean scholars have asserted intolerance towards immigrants and its ethnic minorities, saying that the city-state is prejudiced just as much as any other Nusantara nation.[73]

According to Lee (1966), she defines migration as the permanent or semi-permanent change of residence and suggests that the act of migration is affected by four factors, namely: the area of

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[73] Michael Barr of Flinders University as cited in Fenn (2014) argues that "Singapore is very racist even towards its own minorities."

origin, the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors (pp. 49-50). While Kolk (2016) explains that "individuals in different stages of their life course have different migration propensities, and move for different reasons" (p. 1). Contemplating the importance of place in migration, Cresswell (2010) considers the relationship between individuals, their social group, and territory (p. 18). What is essential here is the 'culture of migration' that can arise between individuals and groups accustomed to mobility. Carling and Schewel (2018) propose that within a specific macro-level emigration setting, aspirations to migrate begin to surface that encompasses the social, economic and political context in which specific migration social constructions occur (p. 946). Carling and Schewel also present three methods to facilitate research on understanding migration ambitions: (1) by comparing places that are central to push-pull models; (2) by comparing cultural initiatives, and (3) a matter of character or identity that is not about where you are, but who you are (pp. 953-4).

The word *merantau* "is […] adopted from the Minangkabau word *rantau*, which literally means coastal- or outer-area" (Persoon in Jong 2013, p. 68). Harvey (2007), regards *merantau* as an attractive form of mobility, due to its mutability and interaction with the individual. She suggests that *merantau* is omnidirectional mobility, as individuals could also permanently migrate or stay abroad for different lengths, and then return (p. 269). The concept of *merantau* which describes individuals moving within the region is part of a ritual and a 'rite of passage,' which more dynamically connects individuals and society. Indeed, this is particularly true for young Minang men who come from a matrilineal property system that cuts them off from housing, thus prompting them to "leave the community at an early age to accrue wealth, knowledge, and life experiences."[74] *Merantau* is a matter of who you are, a matter of identity (Carling and Schewel,

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[74] *Merantau*'s experience is a ceremonial and practical part, focusing on self-education and interaction with others that distinguish *Perantau* ("wanderers") from mere economic migrants and allowing Minang (male and female) to gain experience to contribute not only as employees and entrepreneurs but also as civic leaders. Interestingly, the first vice president of Indonesia, Mohammad Hatta, the first Supreme Head of State or Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaya, Tuanku Abdul Rahman, and Yusof Ishak, the first prime minister of Malaysia, and

2018). Therefore, I hypothesise that the representations of circular/internal human mobility suggest a fluidity regarding place, individuals and culture, without which there would be a "state of in-betweenness"[75] which would invariably lead to the notion that such migration produces an interconnecting bridge for cultural understanding. *Merantau* that involves the demand to return home and *sedar diri,* also deals with the problem of belonging. Thus, the films in question produce a cultural region or regional *ethnoscape,* which hints at the fluctuating patterns of cultural and national identities. Together these conceptions also suggest that ambiguity is an essential part of how *perantau* (individuals who *merantau*) deal with cultural differences.

Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is primarily to investigate stories about human mobility which is a distinguishing feature of Nusantara films. Here, human mobility is described in the context of migration and social identities from which different groups can recognise their desire to be a part of Nusantara. In discussing this topic, I rely on the exchange of points and counterpoints in related journals and other resources in defining the issues under discussion (see Lee 1966; Appadurai 1996; Bell & Ward 2000; Kakihara & Sørensen 2001; Cresswell 2006, 2010; Conradson & McKay 2007; Epstein & Gang 2010; Greenblatt 2010; Weichold 2010; Supratman 2013; Butt 2014; Hear, et al. 2018; Carling & Schewel 2018), and then turn to more than one of the additional references mentioned in the film analysis (Wang 1985; Lindsay 2012; Plomp 2012; Sakhaeifar & Ghoddusifar 2016) to ensure fair consideration to the subject matter. As a maritime region, this archipelagic area of Southeast Asia has seen many forms of human and social mobility since the prehistoric era (see Bellwood 1992, 1993, 2007; Gibson 1990), during the old kingdoms (see Evers 1988, 2003, 2014, 2016; Wade 2009; Andaya & Andaya 2014), throughout the Western colonial era (see Fee 1995; Kaur 2004), and from WWII until today (see Hugo 2004, 2005;

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the first president of Singapore, had ancestry of Minang (Rudd, 2015). My analysis in this chapter finds that Awang is not an excellent civic leader in this regard in Sri Mersing, and in Tabula Rasa, Mak and Hans succeed.
[75] Clifford and Bhabha in Lawson (2000, p. 174).

Thompson 2003; Asis 2004; Ananta & Arifin, 2004; Lindquist 2009; Amrith 2011; Kaur 2004, 2010; Chiou, 2014).

From my investigation, there are more than 60 films from Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore that exemplify the mobility of individuals to various places around the region from the 1950s to the present day, spreading impressions of the *in-betweenness* of the populations of Nusantara. These films include myths and legends like *Raden Mas,* which inform us how water provides regional populations with the ability to relocate them within the region. In focussing on the time-space matrix of the three national cinemas and different forms of mobility behaviour, this undertaking deals with films that represent migrant and migration regardless of whether they are native or non-native. Though what is important is that the films speak to the idea of *merantau* as well as *sedar diri*. Important questions emanating from this undertaking include the following: What values do the *perantau* hold? How does the film's resolution speak about Nusantara as a whole? Lastly, how does mobility rewrite the definition of Nusantara as a cultural sphere that influences the shape of Nusantaran communities today?

The stories in the two chosen films encompass individual preferences and societal motives that suggest the need to recognise the spatial/temporal links between all forms of human subjectivities particularly regarding cultural and national identity or, in other words, the feeling of belonging to a group. Here, I relate to Van der Heide's contention that the cinema is, in fact, "constructed from the interaction of cultural forces in that particular location" and with his position that the movement of ideas and peoples in the context of Malaysian films are actually interrelated (2002, p. 161). (This idea also underpins aspects of 'border crossings' in selected films discussed in this dissertation.) In defining the Indonesian cultural identity portrayed by *Sang Pencerah* (Hanung Bramantyo, 2010), Puspitasari et al. (2016) conclude that the authenticity of Nusantara society lies in its wisdom to confront the culture that comes into and out of its surroundings. Difference and external stimuli trigger an evolution of the personality of Nusantara (p. 65).

However, my intention rather is to expand on Van der Heide's work by including films from outside Malaysian political borders where the inhabitants move due to a wide variety of reasons with varying results. Likewise, these films possibly suggest different degrees of belonging and the criteria for belonging to society.

Furthermore, these regional *ethnoscapes* lure us to expand our concept of the nation state as well as the national cinema frameworks that reflect different forms of societal awareness. Hence, the purpose here is to identify and clarify whether or not the representation of human migration in the cinema of the three countries transcends nationality and time. The films analysed represent migrants who are from related neighbourhoods but can be included within the same *ethnoscapes* of the three countries. Appadurai, in writing about *ethnoscapes,* speaks of, "the migration of people across cultures and borders, presenting the world and its many communities as fluid and mobile instead of static" (Hogan, 2010). Thus, within this selection of film representations of migrants framed by the idea of *merantau*, it would seem that many regional filmmakers have somehow authenticated "ethnographic descriptions [that] have taken locality as ground not figure, recognising neither its fragility nor its ethos as a property of social life" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 182).

What follows is an analysis of the *perantau* in Nusantara cinema. The different types of *perantau* throughout the history of national cinema of Malaysia and Indonesia provide further insight into human migration and societal relationships through the lens of the political history of the region. As we shall later see, the dynamics of socio-political changes via films emphasise the representations of internal migrants among the Nusantara countries.

Mobility and Movement of Cultural Traits

Individual and social mobility is a further regional tradition that conjures up the state of *in-betweenness*. Research reveals that the history and the current status of the three countries are intimately intertwined with the mobility of the people (Evers 1988, Bellwood 2007, and Andaya & Andaya 2014). Similarly, consistent *cross-community*[76] migration across the islands, and cross-territorial dissemination of information via film over the years or, in Appadurai's term, *mediascapes*, affords significant and complex images with narratives plus *ethnoscapes,* which allows the audience to construct their imagined world (1996, p. 35), a cultural space more substantial than a single individual national body. Human mobility is a significant theme in Southeast Asian history and continues to be an essential feature of social and economic change for the region. However, the picture of the "fluid and highly mobile population" wandering into the region from outside is disregarded (Wang, 1985, pp. 44-5). Thirty-five years ago, when Wang Gungwu presented his assessment, he also argued that "if we look closely at migration patterns throughout history, we will recognise that the spirit of *merantau*, which has operated in elitist in-migration and out-migration patterns, has been a valuable ingredient in human progress and has also been an integral part of Southeast Asian history" (1985, p. 54). In a similar vein, Wang later writes:

> With very few exceptions, the scholars avoided portraying the local reality as integral parts of the unique border-less maritime world of the Malay Archipelago. In that world, people were mobile and migratory to a greater extent than we realised. It was a world of commerce, including trade over long distances. The trade was not only among the Malays themselves but one that, continuously and for centuries, attracted neighbouring maritime peoples from the west and the north, including those from mainland Asia (2001, p. 19).

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[76] According to Manning (2006), cross-community migration means "individuals and groups [who] move to join an existing community, learning its language and customs" (p. 28). For him, such migration is about sharing experience and labour between various communities.

Malaysia and Singapore are in a similar situation today when dealing with the issue surrounding illegal Indonesian workers. As before, these migrants rely on the pulling power of economic and political stability, and the social reception in both countries where they know they can integrate quite easily. What strikes me most about this issue when I encounter it is the idea that we really did not have any trouble accepting these migrants unless they created problems because, in many ways, they are very much like us. Moreover, it appears that the two nations are losing control over their border as each time these migrants are sent home, more will be arriving. These migrant workers' tragic tales take centre stage every so often, particularly when they suffer from exploitation, as shown in *Crossroads: One, Two, Jaga* (Nam Ron, 2018). However, these tragic incidents often reveal the other side of the dominant discourse, wherein transnational migration is seen primarily as part of the nations' economic instrument.

Hugo (2006) observes that previous studies on patterns of human mobility in pre-colonial Indonesia by Dutch historians Vollenhoven in 1918, and van Leur in 1958 establish that, before European contact, there were two essential types of mobility involved in the migration to cities which included: (1) colonisation by a large group of migrants from one region who settled in another region, and (2) the establishment of authority in different regions' (p. 57). Cross migration from various islands in the archipelago was highly significant during the era of old kingdoms as well as in the colonial period. Interestingly, similar activities continue to occur because according to the 2001 Malaysian census, more than half of the 1.38 million foreign-born individuals in Malaysia today originate from Indonesia (Hugo, 2007). These groups of inhabitants face a challenging path as they endeavour to assimilate into Malaysian society because provisions bound them under Malaysian law relating to naturalisation and permanent residency. However, despite that, many have managed to acquire Malaysian citizenship (Spaan, et al., 2002, p. 169).

Historically, the contacts between Singapore and scores of islands in the archipelago, and the Indian sub-continent, including the Chinese from East Asia, have a deep and complex history.[77] However, systematic migrations from China and India became more organised during the European colonial era (Saw, 2012, p. 55). Until 1965, Singapore had no restrictions on the movement of people, thus supporting Lisa Lim's suggestion that "the history and fortunes of Singapore have been closely intertwined with migrants and migration" (2010, p. 19). In addition nowadays to the large-scale migration, notably the People's Republic of China, into the city-state, regional immigration is still taking place.[78]

Also, because of national politics, the concept of social and cultural connections across the archipelago is separated from the main cultural narrative of the three countries. Nevertheless, this double-consciousness about one's regional identity is deeply entrenched within the region. Some anthropological studies deal with this double-consciousness of the regional and national population (Kahn 2006; Rahim 2001). For example, Kahn (2006) tells us that the mobility of people is vital in defining Malaysian "Malay identity." His description of the inhabitants just outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia discloses that many of these Malaysians were originally from locations which are now a part of Indonesia and named their villages after the place or location they originated from (p. xxi). In other words, the experience of having been dispersed is fundamental to the identity of Malaysian (and regional) populations. Conversely, Rahim (2001) argues that the manipulation of ethnic consciousness within these nations has helped to preserve ethnic insecurities and divisions, inhibited the development of other forms of consciousness, and disguised other fundamental social tensions (p. 19).

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[77] The *Here is Not Home* (2018) by Wang Gungwu is a good example of the complexity that he is trying to express through his own life experiences.

[78] For contemporary movements from China to Singapore, see Yeoh and Lin, *Chinese migration to Singapore: Discourses and discontents in a globalizing nation state* (2013). Asia and Pacific Migration Journal, 22.1 pp. 31-54.

***Merantau*: A Regional Human Mobility Principle**

> Population mobility has, for some time, been part of Southeast Asia's history and culture. In maritime Southeast Asia, present-day Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia were part of the greater *Dunia Melayu* [Nusantara], and many historical accounts speak of the extensive contacts through trade and migration. – Salazar (in Asis, 2004, p. 205)

The centuries-old pursuit of *merantau* which originated in West Sumatra, has moved Minangkabau and other Nusantara individuals and their communities from their birthplace to other parts of the region. *Merantau* is "to leave one's home or village temporarily, for a long time or forever – to work hard, to seek knowledge, skills or experience which will contribute to the security and happiness of oneself, relatives or the village" (Fee, 1995, p. 392). However, *Merantau* is not the only traditional concept regarding the movement of people around the region, because, aside from the Minangkabau, there are other identical traditional practices by other ethnic groups in the region. For example, the Banjarese have *Madam*, and the Bugis people have six different types known as *Sompe, Mallukke Dapurang, Mattuntu Paddisengeng, Amaradekang, Massappe Dalle* and *Mabbura Malli* (Supratman, 2013). Bugis migration was the most prominent of several such movements during the eighteenth century, but people's movement across the region has been evidenced by the change driven by a combination of growing trade and the increasing role of colonial trade and commerce (Bowring, 2019, p. 201). *Merantau* "[also] refers to those who go to another island for a relatively long period but eventually return to the origin community […] leaving one's cultural territory voluntarily […] with the aim of earning a living or seeking further knowledge or experience, normally with the intention of returning home" (Hugo, 1982, p. 64). In writing about the Minangkabau community of Sumatra, Jong (2013) suggests that this particular group of people has a "long history of migration to obtain worldly wisdom, experience and wealth" (p. 68). *Merantau* has informed a number of regional socio-cultural and socio-economic studies (see Lineton 1975; Hugo 1982, 1993, 2004; Fee 1995; Thompson 2003; Hussin 2008; Lindquist

2009; Schröter 2010; Bungo & Hussin 2011; Heider 2011; Jong 2013; Gunawan 2013; Hardwick 2014; Bowring 2019).

Lindquist (2009) investigates *merantau* amongst Nusantara populations in today's globalised world and the critical relationship between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. He shows that there was indeed an economic, social and cultural connection between modern-day Nusantarans in which *perantau* negotiated their cultural identities and social belonging with whatever place they reached. His documented account of the inhabitants of Batam Island is described by the concept of *merantau* as well as *liar* (wild/unruly) and *malu* (shame). The three concepts deal with the issue of belonging as *merantau* is about the relationship with the home, *liar* is about not belonging and being out of place, and *malu* is about not living up to the standard of "home," meaning the standards and desires that characterise the self. The feeling of rejection is apparent in both films in this chapter, but shame emerges when the character discovers that their actions do not reflect their position as exemplified, in particular by Damak and Hans. His book is best understood as an endeavour to take mobility and migration seriously without criticising existing forms of analysis, and more importantly, to consider alternative methods of analysis for spatially and temporally bound cultural spaces.

In contrast, the Minangkabau idea of *merantau* is quite widespread since there are millions of Minangkabau people who have left their homeland and in so doing have spread the cultural characteristics of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra to a much wider cultural space – not just over the Nusantara region, but globally. It is said that "some 2 million Minangkabau have migrated out (*merantau*) beyond the heartland of the province" (Heider, 2011, p. 15). This old tradition of migration has invariably led to the settlement of numerous diaspora in many parts of Southeast Asia (Hussin, 2008, p. 8). According to Bowring (2019), individuals from northern Sumatra settled in Madagascar, where they were known as Zafiraminia (p. 91). Similarly, there are other ethnic groups such as the Bawanese of Singapore who were originally from Bawean Island but then

migrated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hardwick, 2014, p. 7),[79] as did the Torajans of Sulawesi (Jong, 2013). However, it is worth mentioning that *merantau* is also pertinent to the movement of the Hokkien Chinese who migrated from Fujian to places around the region. They too share the Minangkabau idea of *merantau* as an important aspect of their culture. Most of the Chinese who migrated to Sumatra, Java, and the Malayan peninsula in the nineteenth century saw themselves as sojourners; they did not bring women and intended to return to China when they made a little money, although while some returned, many others remained (Bowring, 2019, p. 237).

Geographical aspects such as relatives living in the destination areas and transportation accessibility are the main forces that become the "pull factors" for the groups from Fujian (Gunawan, 2013, p. 5) to move to this part of the world. It should be noted that before the more recent phase of migration from China to Southeast Asia that occurred in the last two hundred years, according to Fix in Tarmiji et al. (2013), "the original Deutero-Malays migrated from southern China […] over 1,500 years ago and the inter-marriages between the Proto Malays and merchants of the ancient trade routes resulted in the diverse recent Deutero-Malay populations known presently as the Malays" (p. 84).

Although the relationship between *merantau* and Islam as the religion of the Minangkabau is key to discussing Islam in Southeast Asia (Hussin, 2008), Tanudjaja as cited in Chiou (2014), argues that "the Chinese have a close relation with Islam. […] the existence of Zheng He and the introduction of Islam in China happened a long time ago" (p. 296). The idea of *merantau* applies to all Nusantarans because migrating from one place to another in the past was a way of life for many people within the region. Within this geographical space, local and foreign cultures have

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[79] The Baweanese are also known as the "Boyanese" and the island where they come from is normally called as the "Island of Women" because many of their males are away either in Singapore or Malaysia undertaking their rite de passage. According to Ano as cited in Hugo, Singapore and the Peninsula "has become *tanah air kedua"* (second native country) to many Bawean men (Hugo, 2004, p. 32).

converged over many centuries creating an umbrella culture which we now understand as Nusantara. Nowadays, *merantau* does not apply to any particular ethnic group but instead describes a broad array of migratory patterns within the region (Lindquist, 2009, p. 30).

In the following film analysis, the Minangkabau concept of *merantau* is used as a social value that drives the narrative of many of the selected films as a form of the transnational or culturally regional analysis. The question of national identity lies at the heart of the cultural identities in the films, especially those that deliberately adopt the idea of *merantau* in its storyline.

Nusantara *Ethnoscape*

Appadurai's work offers a framework for understanding the correlation between film as cultural texts plus *perantau* experiences as represented in films about internal migrants. His five scapes which he calls *ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, mediascape* and *ideoscape* were developed through the concept that the imagination is central to contemporary social-cultural studies. Today, the world is facing a transnational crisis given the movement of people across national borders from Asia and Africa to various destinations in Europe, as well as from Central American nations to the US. However, it is understandable that separate factors have played a key role in such migration crises at different times and in different countries and therefore it would be too simplistic to identify one fundamental cause of the crisis. Commentators at conferences often talk about the rise of mobility in today's world as the "end of geography" (Cresswell, 2006, p. 3), but in Nusantara, it is different as it correlates with people's knowledge about their traditional concepts of mobility and is also influenced by the geomorphology of the archipelago.

In an attempt to understand the complex meanings and trajectories of human mobility in regional films, I am focusing on *ethnoscape* which, according to Appadurai (1996), is caused by the movement of people across national boundaries in the era of globalisation, suggesting that it,

"appear[s] to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (p. 33). Moreover, Appadurai perceives human migration as integral to the "disjunctive order of economies and cultural signs which are played out between, the landscapes of living persons, and *mediascapes*, image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality" (Dudrah, 2010, p. 35).

Nevertheless, if *ethnoscape* relates to the landscape of people, then in cinematic representation, it is embodied in internal migrants who constitute the shifting world of Nusantara in which the characters' travel and live. In this sense, the Nusantara *ethnoscape* draws attention to the movement of people in the context of their physical and cultural geographies. The films discussed in this chapter tap into collective imaginations and perhaps fantasies of wishing to move or being on the move throughout Nusantara.

Furthermore, what is necessary with the approach adopted here is that it enables this research to consider the production, dissemination and consumption aspects of the film but unlike Appadurai's *mediascape* which focuses on the electronic and print media in "global cultural flows," films in Nusantara were formed by combining representations of cross-cultural situations and identities within the region. Nonetheless, Appadurai does not spell out a specific time or place concerning the five ideas he discusses, thereby providing an opening for Dudrah (2010) to expand the theoretical framework of "haptic urban *ethnoscape*" which allows for engagement with a global cultural movement that occurs in the films, the media, and also amongst the audiences.

In a socio-geographical study of foreign workers and the flow of migrant workers in contemporary Singapore, Koh (2003) argues that Singapore's *ethnoscape*, which was previously considered to be an ambivalent space or a space embraced by cultural dynamics that are reciprocal, has today become a global diaspora space (pp. 245-48). Koh claims that the multiracial policy of Singapore is fundamentally represented by a convenient axiom of unity-in-diversity (comparable to the national motto of Indonesia) and the presence of foreign talent, which embodies a set of

identities that poses irreconcilable tension in keeping the border of difference while at the same time attaining unity within the country's boundaries, and nationalism (p. 248). I contend that the flow of people or foreign talent in Koh's accounts about contemporary Singapore is another case of how human mobility affects regional culture and the landscape of identity. However, this occurrence is not a new phenomenon. The only difference is that human mobility is more regulated than in the past because Singapore has legitimised the need for foreign employees, merely because local people alone are not enough to satisfy the economy's requirements (Population.Sg, 2017). Regarding the regional culture and identity landscape, I would argue that the present disjuncture and difference in the regional, and national identities stem back to colonialism as well as to the formation of national politics throughout this region when the construction of culture became a political project orchestrated from the Centre.

To elaborate further on the Nusantara *ethnoscape*, I present two cinematic examples. The first one is from the black and white era, and the second, from the 2000s. My focus towards the films is about *perantau* who are of Minangkabau as well as non-Minangkabau descent. I begin with the film *Sri Mersing* which narrates a story about complex relationships concerning human mobility, sociocultural spaces and belonging among Nusantarans from the Malay Peninsula. The second film is *Tabula Rasa* which tells a story about a Papuan *perantau* in the city of Jakarta. These treatments of the in-migrants in Nusantara films are from regional directors who like to invoke traditional cultural practices and reduce the social space against cross border migrants by reflecting their cultural identities.

Nusantara Perantau in *Sri Mersing* (1961)

> […] there is no patriotic art and no patriotic science. Both belong, like everything good, to the whole world and can be promoted only through general, free interaction among all who live at the same time. (Goethe cited in Greenblatt 2010, p.4)

This section aims to explore the representations of internal migrants by observing the mobility from regional cultural perspectives as represented in *Sri Mersing*. The film presents the life of the *perantau* through the social background, behaviour and values, and presents socio-cultural questions fixed around cultural identity as well as social belonging at a time when cultural imagination was becoming defined by political demarcations brought on by the formation of new postcolonial nation states and through the exercise of political sovereignty. *Sri Mersing*'s review by Muhammad (2010a) highlights how the film interrogates the monolithic Malay identity by depicting intra-ethnic differences within the Malay family system of various Malay states (p. 205). *Sri Mersing* is Salleh Ghani's first film as a director, and he also wrote a screenplay for the film. Before that, he worked as an actor, scriptwriter, and assistant director with several other Malay films.

Figure 5: The beach as a background, or perhaps a playground for the people.

Emerging in the early 1960s when societies throughout Nusantara were susceptible to ethnic political ideologies derived from the unsettling materialisation of national territories, *Sri Mersing*, a purbawara (a Malay period piece set in the mythical past) film nevertheless, retained the essential nature of being Nusantaran, a profoundly enduring aspect of how people perceive themselves, and the labels that others use to describe who they are that correspond to the distinct layers of cultural identities of Nusantara. *Sri Mersing* revolves around the love triangle between Damak, Awang and Sri and is set in a beach village named Mersing which today is part of the state of Johor, Malaysia. The story is centred on the life of Damak who lives with his mother and younger brother, Deli. The family originated from Pahang but moved away in search of a better life and ended up in Mersing. Sri or Sri Mersing who is highly regarded by the villagers is the daughter of Pak Malau and Mak Banang from Tioman Island, and though domiciled in Mersing, they still make frequent trips back to Tioman. The antagonist is Awang, the son of Penghulu Lancang Kuning, the chief of the village. Although Damak is honest, reliable and hardworking, he has a problem with Awang, who is envious of him just because Sri admires him more. Damak steadily maintains his innocence which makes him the main target of Awang and his men (as well as other villagers).

Nevertheless, when Damak and Sri are arrested at the end of the film after being charged with immorality, they are rescued by Deli with the help of Tok Musang.[80] Although Pak Malau admits that Awang's power and wealth fooled him. Damak, Deli, and his mother decide to return to Pahang, thus leaving Sri and Pak Malau in despair. Pak Malau was misled by the wealth and power of Awang and wanted his daughter to marry a rich man (Awang), but only later realised that Awang was a terrible man and apologised to Damak. Instead, he agreed to marry Damak with Sri, but Damak refused to consider his proposal. This sense of rejection is deeply rooted in Nusantara's Malay traditional interpretation and exploration of the idea of human dignity.

Moreover, the final scene also highlights the essence of Nusantarans "*in-betweenness*," 'here' and 'there' in many, if not all. Damak, in proverbs, emphasises his thoughts to Pak Malau when he said "*Hujan emas di negeri orang, hujan batu di negeri sendiri, lebih baik negeri sendiri*" which means 'our place is still better and more comfortable, no matter what the situation may be elsewhere.' While the saying connotes a destination in capturing the spirit and existence of the person, it also indicates the difficulty of choosing the best between two places.

Perantau consciousness is born at the junction of life during *merantau*, and therefore produces a sense of in-betweenness or liminality. With different roles in the narrative process, *Sri Mersing*'s characters exemplify the level of *perantau* consciousness that plays a significant role in many aspects of Nusantaran life, thought, and behaviour. Unlike Awang, Damak possesses attributes about being a wanderer who is *sedar diri*, the consciousness of *perantau* manifests itself in the self-awareness of being an outsider or a stranger to a new society. *Sedar diri* is a survival strategy based on the character of Damak, in holding back from responding head-on against Pak Malau when accused of being a rogue *perantau,* trying to trouble the people of Mersing after saving Sri from Awang's kidnapping plot. Such hideous provocation may cause a reasonable

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[80] Tok Musang and his people represent a group of *'orang asal'* (indigenous tribe) who only appear for two or three scenes at the end of the film.

person to lose control of himself. Thus, in order to survive, one must be conscious of one's surrounding environment and be able to analyse the situation and make a tactical decision to achieve the best possible result. Moreover, it can invariably lead to conformity and conservatism as a means for new migrants to live under conditions of oppression and not to speak up or fight back. Shortly after that, Penghulu chased Damak and his family from the village. Accordingly, this helps to explain the conservatism of some of Nusantara's inhabitants and their failure to develop a community that sees diversity and inclusion as two distinct elements and values.

In comparison, the protagonist Yuda (Iko Uwais) in *Merantau* (Gareth Evans, 2009) who acted in conformity [by conforming] with the Minangkabau tradition lost his life trying to preserve his dignity. As such, Damak and Awang are trapped in two different cultures as they often had a difficult time interacting with each other and working towards a deeper understanding of the differences between both, leading to a state of resentment. Moreover, they demonstrate that as a sojourner, as an outsider of that culture, one is in a vulnerable position. However, when you return from your journey to your hometown, and back in society, you are going to acquire some level of status previously not afforded to you, as an outsider. For instance, if you are the son of a community leader like Awang, you will need to conform or fall into that existing social position; or if you are not a wealthy merchant before you leave and return, your social status would be much higher upon your return. Also, to be in-between is to believe that in one place or another, you are never at home. Perhaps Pak Malau and Mak Banang, Sri's parents, set a better example in the film of how a mixture of control and chance can achieve in-betweenness.

Looking closely at the narrative, *Sri Mersing* shows two different kinds of *perantau* personalities of individuals who are in the process of transgressing into new stages of their life. Damak, the protagonist, the one who is *sedar diri* and Awang, the nemesis, a man who is intoxicated with both power and wealth. The film attempts to convey contradictions in cultural practices which reflect the interface between the traditional social system and aspects of

modernity. Power is the most critical component of modernity, represented by Awang, who with social status and rank, is trying to win over Sri's heart. However, Sri admires Damak more than anybody else. Damak is always very self-conscious of being a *perantau*, and he also knows that he is not in the same status as Sri and Awang, which makes social status appear to be a significant obstacle for the people themselves. Damak stands firm and holds onto the traditions that marriage only occurred among those of the same status, and men like him cannot live on an equal footing with the upper classes, such as Penghulu and Awang, who have vast political and economic power (Ali, 2008, pp. 81-2). The desire for power and its corrupting influence are dominant in Awang, and other people, especially Damak, are treated unfairly in many different situations. It is vital to break down this barrier of social status, and not hinder the spiritual growth and maturity of the *perantau*.

The film's opening sequence introduces the main characters regarding their mobility or, *perantau* status. The first image along with the title and opening credits shows a *sampan* (wooden boat) approaching a beach marking the arrival of Pak Malau and Sri. Next, the film continues to introduce the notion of being 'on-the-move' with several other shots which follow them walking through hidden pathways until they walk across a plantation where the father and daughter meet Damak and his pet monkey harvesting coconuts. In this scene, Pak Malau reveals to Damak that he just returned from Tioman Island to fetch Sri who was staying there. Here, the information indicates that Pak Malau and his family have a strong relation to the island that holds great importance for them. After a cross-fade between scenes, Pak Malau and Sri encounter Awang and his friends. Here, the narrative, once again, very clearly informs the audience that Pak Malau had a definite connection with the island.

Awang, the antagonist, who has just returned to Mersing from Terengganu, is revealed to have been roaming around for about fifteen years. The introduction's images all refer to the characters' mobility status with the opening sequence, suggesting that after his experiences abroad,

Awang is now ready to settle down and is seeking a companion. Here, Sri becomes the centre of his attention. Gradually, however, we see him as a character with an egoistic tendency whose adventures and experience abroad as a sojourner does not make him more sensitive or empathetic to the social situation of other sojourners around him. In contrast, Damak, the protagonist is different as he is there to earn a living and consequently, is always in the middle of working on something not only in the opening sequence but throughout the film. In particular, the film presents the viewers with the cultural values of the personalities, and those of the regional inhabitants who convey the attitudes of the majority of the people of Nusantara without directly or descriptively explaining them. Such representation refers not only to the characteristics of the actors but also to the nature of life in a society of migration as advocated by Nugroho, as quoted earlier.

In a chronotopical reading of *Sri Mersing,* we can also focus on the inhabitants of Mersing in terms of identity politics and belonging. The narrative of the *purba* film reflects Malaya in 1961, a crucial year for people across the region and its national development, because at this time, Lee Kuan Yew proposed Malaysia to be constituted, and Tunku Abdul Rahman agreed that the merger would be made up of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Brunei and Sarawak. What is also shown in the film is the attitudes of Malay film industry activists towards independence in Malay films between 1955 and 1965, as stated in Barnard (2009), in which he disagrees with the statement that Malay film activists rarely take an interest in the process of nation state political decolonisation because, for him, films made during that period focus more on promoting Malay attitudes towards modernity, individualism and ethnic pride.

Nevertheless, Barnard's paper includes an interesting fact about the disappointment of Ho Ah Loke (co-founder of Cathay-Keris) when he decided to leave Singapore and establish Merdeka Studios in Kuala Lumpur, where he hoped to make films that underscored 'Malay culture and Malay language,' showing how Ho who is a Guyana-born Chinese embraced the Malay vision of the new nation state (pp. 82-3). The inner connectivity of temporal and spatial relations articulated

artistically in *Sri Mersing*, emerge as a time-space construction of social-cultural practices, consisting of inter-subjective understanding and cultural memory, may shed some light on these issues. Accordingly, this study will simulate how the subjectivities of the Malay characters are shaped by explaining the scenes of a film with a different Malay status.

> *Kajang Pak Malau kajang berlipat,*
>
> *kajang saya mengkuang layu*
>
> *Dagang Pak Malau dagang bertempat,*
>
> *dagang saya musafir[81] lalu*

Translation:

> Your thatch Pak Malau are shades of the fold,
>
> my thatch Pak Malau are those withered pandanus leaves
>
> Your voyage Pak Malau are those who has its place,
>
> my voyage Pak Malau is that of the passing traveller

- Sri Mersing (1961)

The Malay *pantun* (poem) is expressed by Damak when he rejects the offer made by Pak Malau to him in the final sequence of the film to marry Sri and stay in Mersing.[82] In so doing, Damak shows that he has no future in Mersing as a *dagang* or *perantau*. The *pantun* embodies uncertainty and ambiguity within the framework of internal/circular migration for the *perantau* subject in Nusantara. Damak and Pak Malau in *Sri Mersing* are not local, but one is deemed to be less fortunate than the other because Damak's position in Sri Mersing is more tenuous and impermanent, whereas Pak Malau is more emplaced and settled in Mersing. The first two lines of

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[81] The roots of the word *musafir* can be traced to the Arabic, Hindi and Urdu which means traveller.
[82] This *pantun* is also available in Indonesian literature (Agus Priyanto, 2014, pp. 83-4).

the *pantun* serve as hints (*pembayang*), and the last two lines reveal the meaning (*maksud*). The comparison is between stability and impermanence, as signified by the different materials used to build a roof. The one for Pak Malau is nicely woven, but for Damak, the *mengkuang* (pandanus straw) leaf is withered and droopy. Moreover, the term '*dagang*' in the *pantun* is quite critical since it translates literally as 'trade' (Thomas, 1986; Mohamed & Harahap, 2016). However, *'berdagang diri'* means 'a person who migrates or travels away from his birthplace' thus supporting the fact that both characters are *perantau*. In another definition, the term *dagang,* from the *pantun,* in this film conveys the meaning of a "traveller-migrant worker" (Yusoff, 2015, p. 4).

The scene with the *pantun* is seen as enhancing Damak's bitterness and dissension because it refers to a common problem among the different communities and social class issues around Nusantara at that time and perhaps, even until today.[83] The cinematic arrangement in this scene connects the affection and emotion of the main characters to the communities where Damak and Pak Malau live. At first, the scene concentrates on Pak Malau and Damak with an equal number of personalised, subjective shots for each of them. However, as soon as Damak begins to express the *pantun,* the camera tracks back from a medium close up shot to a wide long shot in order to include the other villagers in the scene. Indeed, that particular effect is an attempt to integrate the meaning and emotion from Damak's *pantun* with audiences in the 1960s who were essentially in the middle of socio-political and socio-cultural upheaval while trying to establish new countries. If we compare *Sri Mersing* with *Harimau Tjampa* [The Tiger from Tjampa] (D. Djajakusuma, 1953) and *Tiga Buronan* [Three Fugitives] (Nya Abbas Akup, 1957) of Indonesia, it is clear that the use of local literary forms such as *pantun* and *peribahasa* (maxims/proverbs) is not only to entertain but also to persuade the audience and to adopt a critical approach towards understanding the deeper issues of cultural identity.

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[83] My deduction is based on judgements made by two studies. First, an analysis by Brackman as reviewed in Praeger (1966, pp. 410-11) and a study by Yazid (2014).

Although Awang and Pak Malau's family, in some way, represent the notion of *merantau*, the phrase *'dagang merempat menumpang di tempat orang'* (rogue *perantau* squatting in the village) is only directed at Damak and to some extent, his family. This unpleasant phrase is uttered by Awang to convey discrimination and disgrace and is repeated numerous times throughout the film. Although the allegation is a lie, Awang on many occasions uses his position to influence other people as well as his father by proclaiming that Damak is planning to abduct Sri and that Damak has cast a spell over her and Sri's friend, Siantan. As a result, Damak and his family are consequently banished to a distant place, all of which began with Awang feeling that Damak was showing off in front of Sri and treating one of his men offensively. He refers to Damak as *'dagang tak sedar diri'* (*perantau* who do not know his place). A comment made not long after Awang confesses to Pak Malau and others that he had just returned from *merantau* in Terengganu, and presuming that Awang is a better person for living away as *perantau*. Unfortunately, however, he misuses his position and the authority of his father to condone discrimination against another *perantau* such as Damak. Also, in the opening sequence, the two meet head-on, whereby Damak and his brother Deli manage to subdue Awang and his men. However, despite this, Awang demands that Damak's mother, Mak Tanjung, remind Damak not to be rude to the son of Penghulu (village head). Even Mak Tanjung herself insists that Damak and Deli respect Awang's reputation and to realise that they are *'orang dagang.'*

After some time, the mother demands that both Damak and Deli behave themselves as *'orang dagang'* and to stop acting like a "rooster" (champion) and is adamant that they carry out her wishes. The sequence not only sets out all the film's main characters, but it also sets out the fact that people are still not free from the conservatism of old-established rules of society, of which everyone had the ruler [authority] over him, and to whom he owed loyalty and service in return for land and security. However, there was a peculiar mixture of conservatism and a keen sense of the 'demands of the day' in the character of Damak and Deli. Consequently, Damak is in a dilemma

because he needs to deal with the villagers' bias and prejudice while being unable to retaliate. His frustration manifests his ambivalence about being a *perantau* who in trying to adapt and fit into a new place has to constantly negotiate power dynamics and tolerate injustice towards him.

Considering the narrative of *Sri Mersing* within the larger context of the regional socio-political situation, the process of establishing new countries, which aim to unite the people, is also the main factor that divides them. For instance, "Indonesia in the 1950s and early 1960s is a vivid picture of cultural mobility regarding the process of cultural formation (the dialectic at work) and is transparent […] we see in the 1950s Indonesia's awareness of culture as an emergent process, of, magpie-like, taking and shaping from place and time" (Lindsay, 2012, p. 22). However, from another angle, the conditions in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore are dissimilar given the political systems are different. Due to the political ideology, "the issue of 'nationhood,' which by then meant promoting the rights and privileges of the Malays apart from the non-Malays rather than the issue of '*kerakyatan'* ('peoplehood') from a class perspective, was free of ethno-nationalism and was promoted by the Malay (and non-Malay) Leftist nationalists" (Budiawan, 2012, p. 152). Such opposition was in Nusantara cultures, to begin with, but it became acute when considering the many centuries of colonialism and its suppression.

Despite the engaging layers of the narrative, the depiction of cultural practices requires further elaboration. The pre-wedding part represents the traditional *gotong royong* (cooperation/mutual assistance) mode of social organisation and communal work.[84] Here, neighbours come together to celebrate and support each other, prepare bridal dais, cook food for the ceremony, and donate food to help make a difference. The culture of *gotong royong* is known

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[84] The term *gotong royong* comes from the Java language, but it only appeared in written form in essays on customary law as well as in essays on agricultural social aspects, particularly in East Java (Koentjaraningrat in Erwany, et al., 2016, p. 74).

and widely practised around the region and is an indicator of transnational tradition shown in *Sri Mersing*.

In documenting her experiences living in Singapore between 1955 and 1965, Chia (2013) writes that *gotong royong* is when "neighbours kept a look-out for each other, and the children played with one another without any thought of discriminating against others for being of a different race" (p. 11). It is also worth mentioning that in Indonesia, this tradition is incorporated into the national culture (Kiong & Fee, 2003, p. 51). Recently, President Joko Widodo encouraged the country's administration to regenerate the idea of *gotong royong* and present it as the key for the rural development of the country.[85] In another example, Hanan (1988), used this traditional concept to justify his view on Indonesian communalism as represented in film. Nevertheless, despite seeing the *gotong royong* expressions in *Sri Mersing* as merely a regional shared tradition, this particular sequence from *Sri Mersing* actually "'liberates the viewers' sense of [the] spatiotemporal continuum, [thus] dividing their gaze and minds through 'the middle,' between places, or between here and there" (Yusoff, 2015, p. 7). The pre-wedding scene is arranged with full movement with the people crisscrossing quickly in frames without pausing; they are merely there to fulfil their social obligation, and after that, they move on. It seems certain that Hanan's and Yusoff's judgment on the regional concept of *gotong royong* also underlines the importance of interrelated cultural values and attitudes towards social interaction as a bridge between the Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean cinemas. It is my opinion that the *gotong royong* spirit in Nusantara is an assertion of collective cultural difference that is non-Western. This communal work which shapes local attitudes of sincerity affects the regional social system and serves to

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[85] See Amindoni (2016), *Gotong royong key to rural economic development: Jokowi*. Retrieved from http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/04/12/gotong-royong-key-to-rural-economic-development-jokowi.html

remind regional inhabitants about the basis of the regional structure which was neglected in the process of building and rebuilding new countries.

Notwithstanding, in the context of establishing new countries, and aside from continuous exchange of performances between the inhabitants of Nusantara during that era, *Sri Mersing* gives the audiences important insights into how individuals perceive relationships across social contexts. The narrative of this film can be seen from the perspective of the old intricate cultural links among the population in Nusantara which they, "saw themselves confronted with a new community of which they were a part, […] they had to redefine themselves vis-à-vis this new nation and its leaders" (Plomp, 2012, p. 373). Although Plomp emphasises that the confusion only applies to the Sumatrans since they are different from the Javanese of Java Island, it becomes applicable to the population in the Malay Peninsula, and perhaps the Malays in Singapore.

Sri Mersing, from the lyrics of a song sung by Sri, provides relatively distinct cultural areas and spatial demarcation of Nusantara as a cultural region based on maritime trade patterns. The area referred to spans the area from the Straits of Melaka to the Straits of Makassar at Maluku Sea. During the 1950s, the inhabitants of Sumatra, and Singapore in particular, were in dire need to redefine their political membership status while the Malay nationalist agenda was at odds with the way it was being undertaken.

The final scene of *Sri Mersing* shows Damak and his family determined to return to Pahang because they feel like outsiders where they currently live. In the opening scene, Pak Malau's *sampan* arrives at the beach, and Damak is about to sail out from the same place. Unlike Pak Malau and Sri who possibly think of Mersing as their alternative home, Mersing is merely a transition point for Damak, Deli, and Mak Tanjung. Along this vein, both scenes encapsulate the film's criticism of the exclusionary and non-accepting attitudes towards strangers and *perantau* which are still relevant today. Despite his disappointment, Damak with his *sedar diri* attitude, decides to

move on. Also, in the film, ethnicity is not the central focus in defining foreign-local relations and the sense of belonging to a place because the people being represented here are classified by class and status rather than by any particular racial group. Though what is important, is the portrayal of the Nusantara inhabitants who are on-the-move or in the process of moving from one point of their lives to another. Human movement in this film not only exemplifies moving from one place to another, or perhaps, from one position to the next level, but serves to exemplify the contested and multidimensional process of belonging in Nusantara. Mobility in *Sri Mersing* offers various value options for the *perantau* characters depending on who they are.

In conclusion, *Sri Mersing* not only exemplifies the ambiguity that surrounds the status of internal migrants or *perantau* but also deals with the sensitive issues of social belonging and such aspects as ostracism, social rejection, and the consequences of impulsive and aggressive behaviour. All these ambiguities, reflected in Nusantara's mobility culture, are integral to the texture of the lives of its inhabitants, although, in this thesis, they are related to the current events of Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean cinemas. *Sri Mersing* exemplifies that, as a migration society, individuals will encounter situations that may have an impact on their sense of belonging as well as on their social identity, but they also have the opportunity to prepare themselves along with improved awareness in bettering themselves in life.

Tabula Rasa (2014): Going Forward Through Food

The focus of films about internal migrants changed following the 1970s when political relations between Indonesia and Malaysia underwent a redefinition following the 1963-1966 armed confrontation. The resumption of diplomatic ties between Indonesia-Malaysia following the transfer of power from Sukarno and Suharto in 1967 and from Tunku Abdul Rahman to Tun Abdul Razak in 1970 marked a significant shift in inter-country relations. According to Yusoff (2019),

between 1975 and 1979, many newly established film companies, influenced by Malaysian government policy, were actively involved in the distribution of Indonesian films to the Malaysian film industry and continued throughout the early 1980s. The period from 1970 to 1975 is known as "the golden years of Indo-Malay blood brotherhood" (Yong, 2003), a time when the Malay kinship agreement between Indonesia-Malaysia became policy and the representations of migrants' origin-destination in films also shifted accordingly.

There are a number of titles that highlight individual mobility or migrants in Indonesia and Malaysia. To begin with, *Gelora* [Gale] (1970) by P. Ramlee presents a mother and her teenage daughter, who are originally from Sumatra but live in Kuala Lumpur. The mother takes a fancy to her daughter's lover, and later the daughter falls in love and lives with another man who turns out to be her long-absent father. In addition to *Gelora*, there are at least seven other titles about people who migrated across Indonesia-Malaysian territories including *Semalam Di Malaysia* [A Night in Malaysia] (Nico Pelamonia, 1975), *Panglima Badol* [Commander Badol] (Hussein Abu Hassan, 1978), *Budak Nafsu* [Slave to Lust] (Sjumandjaja, 1983), *Mawar Merah* [Red Rose] (Rosnani Jamil, 1987), *Irisan-irisan Hati* [Shreds of the Heart] (Djun Saptohadi & Ismail Sasakul, 1988),[86] *Ramadhan dan Ramona* [Ramadhan and Ramona] (Chaerul Umam, 1992), *Imigran* [Immigrant] (Nahar Akhbar Khan, 1993) and *Kaki Bakar* [The Arsonist] (U-Wei Haji Saari, 1995).

The connection between Nusantara inhabitants around the region was not a shallow one. In the late 1990s and into the new millennia, Southeast Asia witnessed not only political reformation in Indonesia but also the cultural resistances against national imposed identities which are represented in the films about individual mobility or *perantau*. However, the investigation that I have conducted reveals that Indonesia released more films regarding migrants and migration than

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[86] According to Yusnor Ef, a Singaporean musician who wrote the film's dialogue with Misbach Biran of Indonesia, the film was chosen as the best joint venture film in Malaysia and Indonesia in 1988, but there was no mention of the film festival (Cinémathèque Quarterly, 2012, p. 59).

did Malaysia and Singapore in this era.[87] It is safe to say that many regional filmmakers have, to a degree, promoted the idea of wanting to move rather than being complacent about represented socio-cultural and socio-political situations in their work. What is more important is the *perantau* in these films which not only enrich their lives but also those people around them.

In general, tabula rasa is the state of the human mind before the senses' respond to the outside world, and the objects having made an impression on the ideas generated. In reality, space would not be empty or void because there is nothing in it, with energy and particles floating in and out of existence (Folger, 2008). I prefer to think that cinematic empty spaces are places having both narrative and theoretical possibilities where the complexities of simultaneously thinking about cinema in an aesthetic, historical and geographical context can be clearly expressed (Brunsdon, 2010, p. 91). I have selected the Indonesian film, *Tabula Rasa* (2014), to highlight the relationship between *perantau* and the concept of *sedar diri*. This section discusses the intersections of ethnicity, food and cultural space in Indonesian cinema and their efforts to create a tangible representation of the country's diverse population and community. Aside from deliberating on the representation of a Papuan *perantau* in *Tabula Rasa*, the film in question is also important in deliberating about the Minangkabau's migratory tradition. *Tabula Rasa* represents migratory subjectivities within the Nusantara society. Although the film deals with the life of Minangkabau individuals and a Papuan, it presents similar socio-cultural questions fixed around cultural identities and a sense of belonging.

Tabula Rasa tells the story of Hans, a young male migrant from Papua, who undertakes *merantau* to Jakarta to realise his dreams of becoming a professional footballer. When a club from Jakarta scouts him, he decides to accept their offer but has to withdraw when he is badly injured during training. The club refuses to pay for crucial medical treatment, and as a result, he is unable

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[87] See - Appendices.

to play again due to his broken ankle. He then spends his time wandering around the city looking for jobs. The feeling of being lonely and isolated from society takes a toll on his mental health. Following a failed suicide attempt, he is found unconscious by two Minangkabau characters, Mak and Natsir who had migrated to Jakarta after the 2009 tsunami and now run a small restaurant providing *Nasi Padang* (Padang is a city where Minang people come from) along with Parmanto who is responsible for the operations of the kitchen. Parmanto does not want Hans to work and stay with them because an extra person would mean cutting into each person's share of the restaurant's earnings.

Moreover, Hans continues to hold onto his personal and social values along with the concept of *sedar diri,* which help him to survive in unfamiliar places. For instance, he never displays signs of aggression when he is discriminated by Parmanto. In this context, *sedar diri* is also concerned with the knowledge associated with the difference between other feelings and the personal desire, exemplifying that "*in-betweenness*" is essential to the survival.

Although *Tabula Rasa* has been analysed from several different perspectives,[88] my interest is in Hans's experiences when he migrates to Jakarta and the complex interplay between social representations and the character's assimilation at an individual level. A tabula rasa can be defined as a fresh mind without preconceived ideas, reflecting the state of mind which the film is intent on imposing on people from the diverse cultural spaces of Nusantara.

At the end of the film, Parmanto finally sees the error of his ways and expresses regret for his behaviour. He admits to Hans, "[t]he world is getting stranger, a Papuan cook in a Padang restaurant." His statement says something about the adaptability of Nusantara inhabitants. For

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[88] In a review from the web by Riordan (2015), he believe the film offers several different themes approximating; (1) the archetypal story of the 'little guy' taking on the big corporation, (2) a condemnation of the erosion of local culture by chain-consumerism, (3) a thought-provoking exploration of the links between taste, flavours and food on the one hand and life, (4) relationships and memory on the other, and an ode to the perhaps unparalleled melting pot of ethnicities, cultures and traditions alive in modern Indonesia. Obviously, the fourth topic in Riordan's deduction is related to my research area.

example, Parmanto initially identifies entirely with his ethnic group, and he seems to embody the Minangkabau values as reflected in the film.[89] However, his experience teaches him that some things go far beyond ethnicity. This development reflects the fusion of various ethnic groups into one distinct society. Adriyanto Dewo's (the film's director) representations centre on the unfinished process of acculturation[90] in Indonesian films and, in other similar projects in the modern Nusantara countries. Because Hans is an internal migrant from Papua, the film's "narrative and character emerge as the temporalisation of human action, significant in its diacritical marking of both cultural and narrative space."[91] Hans progresses to the point when he is accepted unconditionally into the group that struggles with issues of cultural resistance. Uncovering similarities and differences between these two ethnic groups are the first stages in deciding the extent to which the heterogeneity of the population of this region is important.

Although Hans wanted to be a footballer, he ended up becoming a cook at a Minangkabau restaurant in Jakarta. The opening scene in Papua sets the main narrative of the film with two rows of children, assembled like a class, waiting for something, and each child holding a plate. The shot of the children is intercut with an open house door through which Hans, smiling, walks out holding two big bowls. At this moment, the audience recognises Hans as the main character when he is positioned in a frame (the door) inside another frame (film composition). In addition, holding two bowls of food in his hands, he is represented as the provider of nutrition for the future generation. This could very well imply that the future of Indonesia's young is reliant on the labour and love of its diverse ethnic groups: whether Minangkabau (the chefs) or Papuan (Hans, the server/chef). Also, at the end of this scene, all eat together, indicating that food has always been more than just food. Here it unites and serves as a key to the narrative structure.

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[89] Although Parmanto is a little territorial and may have very different viewpoints on whether they should or should not take Hans on board. The film exposes the importance of negotiation in resolving differences as well as how they should respect senior women in their group (Sanday, 2005).
[90] Read Pané (1953).
[91] I borrowed this formulate from Sobchack (1998, p. 151).

The process of changing from one plot to another is accomplished through the use of food as a critical cinematic storytelling motif. In Jakarta, the homeless and jobless Hans becomes so weak due to hunger that Mak could not resist inviting him to the restaurant. From that point forward, the narrative lingers over the preparation, the taste, as well as the way to serve and to eat certain types of food. Somewhere in the process Hans feels nostalgic about his home and cooks up his favourite sago congee or *Papeda* and shares it with Mak. In the scene, Hans teaches Mak the proper way to eat the staple food of the Papuan people.

Migrants bring their food with them as an integral part of their identity wherever they settle since "food serves both to solidify group membership and set groups apart" (Mintz and Du Bois in Naidu & Nzuza, 2013, p. 195). For example, Minang people and their restaurants/shops "have spread from their small corner of Indonesia until they are ubiquitous from the capital city of Jakarta to foreign capitals around the world" (Rudd, 2015). The most important food in the film is fish head curry[92] - it saves the restaurant and binds people from different backgrounds in Nusantara. It was also the dish that Mak served Hans when she found him at a low point in his life and brought him back to her shop. The non-Minangkabau and non-Papuan cuisine help to attract and inspire customers to return.

Furthermore, deciding on the new menu, as shown in the film, is a complicated process that requires Hans to engage in proper negotiation with Mak. Here, he explores the meanings attached to the food and his personal sense of nostalgia which connects him to Mak's own past as fish head curry was her late son's favourite meal. This sequence indicates the relationship between food, social relations, and cultural identities. The decision to have fish head curry in a Minangkabau eatery involves a complex series of negotiations; it was not easy, but with the diners continuing to return and visit, it was, therefore, well worth the effort. Therefore, the restaurant becomes a space

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[92] The origin of fish head curry is still contested. However, I believe it is safe to say the dish is unique to this region.

of in-betweenness in which hybridity is embraced and not viewed as a mere distinction, but perhaps as a norm.

In Jakarta, the first shot of Hans that we see is in a medium shot, standing in the middle of a busy street with fast-moving city traffic in the foreground and background of the frame. He looks like he has just woken up to find himself in a strange place. His mobility within the space becomes limited because he becomes powerless when the football club refuses to finance the treatment for his ankle. As a result, this emphasis on the powerless internal migrant is compensated by the humanitarianism and Nusantaran solidarity reflected through compassion and understanding of others, especially when Hans is given food and shelter by Mak.

In the beginning, Mak and Parmanto, the chief cook, give the impression that they are trying to influence Hans's behaviour and exploit his freedom, but this changes when Hans asks for payment after finishing his duty. He insists that "even coolies work for money, not just meals."[93] Hans is not willing to be exploited as a *perantau*. Here, *sedar diri* is about knowing one's rights and holding on to one's dignity rather than keeping quiet when being bullied or harassed. From his friendship with Mak, Hans's feelings of alienation and lack of power over his physical, as well as social conditions, gradually changes as the film progresses, (it is worth mentioning that these sequences are interspersed with images from Han's memories of Papua).

In the film, Hans' physical problems, poor financial status and education, as well as the peripheral status of West Papua offset his supposed equal membership status as an Indonesian citizen. As a consequence, a man with black curly hair is seen to be an alien from a less advanced civilisation compared to Java, thus, making him different from other Indonesians.[94] The

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[93] My translation.

[94] In *Ibunda* [Mother] (Teguh Karya, 1986), the youngest daughter of the Javanese family struggling to keep her family together when she brings home her Papuan boyfriend. In a dinner table conversation, her uncle in front of her mother argues that "One must consider whom one associates," and that "In this modern age we must protect our name, protect our descendants." Her mother disagrees, saying, "It is the 20th century, men fly to the moon, but you are stuck in the past" and, for her, "What is important now is the character and education of a person."

community and the periphery that *Tabula Rasa* establishes are related to the spatial framework of the film. The film begins in Papua, which gives the city of Jakarta an invisible leading role in discussing sociocultural differences between the populations of West Papua and "Indonesia."

Figure 6: A poster featuring *Tabula Rasa*'s main characters.

Tabula Rasa represents not only the struggles and hardships of Papuans working in Jakarta, but Hans' situation is suggestive of complex cultural spaces and identity relationships. Hans, however, is not like Parmanto, who is also a *perantau*, but is hardly a self-educated man, and has difficulties interacting with people (Rudd, 2015). The film shows that each person can be proud of their own heritage and culture and that no one culture is more superior to another. Also, the film shows that *perantau* must always be *sedar diri* about his position as well as where he belongs as exemplified by Hans.

Papua was not part of Indonesia when it was initially founded in 1946 and then becoming a province in 1969 through military intervention. According to a report prepared by the Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy (ELSHAM) and the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Papuans continue to demand special autonomy from Jakarta. Although their request was granted in 2001 under Special Autonomy Law No. 21/2001, the implementation has

yet to be finalised.[95] Papuans are seen by other Indonesians as a backward group, having a perceived lack of cultural sophistication as a unitary, primitive group without culture, relics of the Stone Age, naked savages except for the penis sheath, or as cannibals. Both migrants and indigenous people perceive differences in skin colour, hair type and even staple diet as illustrating fundamental differences between these groups (Upton, 2009, p. 456). Parmanto sees Hans as a nuisance, as many Indonesians have subconsciously always perceived Papuans to be.

In the first half of the film, Parmanto had an emotional problem working with Hans, which led him to disagree with Mak and move across the street to a new restaurant. Like several other Indonesian films that represent the people of Papua,[96] *Tabula Rasa* also addresses crucial Indonesian social and political issues. For example, the ongoing struggle for Papuan independence and self-determination continues in that country to this very day. Similarly, in responding to a claim made by the Indonesian Defence Minister in December 2015 regarding the long-running separatist movement in Papua,[97] Benny Wenda (2015), the current leader of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), and founder of the Free West Papua Campaign, advocated that "[a]s a West Papuan, a Melanesian and a Pacific Islander [he is] outraged that such malicious threats and outright lies continue to be blurted out by Indonesian government ministers about the lives of my people […]." Wenda openly displays his feeling of not belonging, of not being Indonesian. The film provides a less pessimistic view of Indonesia's future and its relationship with the people of Papua, and as such, opportunities for dialogue should not be dismissed. Hans attempts to convince Mak to cook and sell the fish head curry at one point in the film, but later

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[95] As studied in *The past that has not passed: Human rights violations in Papua before and after Reformasi* (International Center for Transtional Justice, 2012).

[96] Some of the related titles for films about the Papuans from Indonesia are *Denias, Senandung Di Atas Awan* [Denias: Singing on the Cloud] (John de Rantau, 2006), *Melody Kota Rusa* [The Melody of Deer City] (Irham Acho Bahtiar, 2010), *Lost in Papua* ((Irham Acho Bahtiar, 2011), *Di Timur Matahari* [To the East of the Morning Sun] (Ari Sihasale, 2012) and, *Cinta Dari Wamena* [With Love from Wamena] (Lasja Fauzia, 2013)

[97] See – *'Indonesia warns other countries to respect its sovereignty over Papua'*. The minister notifies that 'Papua is [part] of the united Republic of Indonesia. The united Republic of Indonesia extends from Sabang [in Sumatra] to Papua. There is no other solution, that's it, that's the way it is' (Australian Associated Press, 2015).

refuses to do so. Mak seems to be very angry at the proposal and shuns him. Hans begins to feel a low sense of belonging to the place at that point because he considers himself not good enough for a Minang restaurant. The subsequent negotiation period only served to demonstrate the need and desire for accommodation. The film reveals that relationships with fellow humans typically involve more give-and-take than relationships with leaders, thereby providing an opportunity to establish the sort of positive national culture, such as cooperation and negotiation.

Tabula Rasa also highlights the differences between the groups of people that challenge Indonesia as a hegemony through simple conversations, such as between Hans and Natsir during a chess game. These conversations about diversity are the first step in attaining solutions because, over time, they should open up to each other. Also, the scene mediates the place of origin and the mobility performance of subjects with the politics of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Indonesia. In one scene, Natsir explains the rules of chess and movement of the pieces, saying that all games have rules, but in reality, it is different. When Hans questions why the Knights move in a certain way in the game as it is unlike what "real" knights do, Natsir tells him, "[t]hat is in real life, this is chess!" His reply suggests that such 'mobility regimes' are not applicable to real-life situations. In this context, chess movements help the audience understand the Nusantara migrant and mobility practice that also allows Nusantaran viewers to relate to their social position and become aware of their multiple and transnational cultural identity status.

The scene continues with conversations about the cultural differences between the Papuans and the Sumatrans. For instance, as Christians, Hans explains, that for Papuans, pigs are prized possessions and usually used for dowry.[98] The scene establishes a jovial mood between the Muslim Minang characters for whom pork is prohibited and Hans as he continues to tell a story about Papuans and pigs in a comical manner. These dialogues between two people from the two

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[98] In this film, the three Minangkabau characters are Muslims. Therefore, they are prohibited from eating pork. However, The Papuans are mostly Christians and this is highlighted in the opening sequences of the film.

provinces of Nusantara focus on specific questions concerning cultural understanding and accepting cultural differences. The scene conveys the fluidity and mobility of migrations as well as social and religious matters that transcend national and ethnic boundaries. More importantly, it is Jakarta, the nation's capital that attracts migrants from the East (West Papua) and the West (Sumatra) to make a living which enables them to meet each other.

In that sense, with its urban setting *Tabula Rasa* is different from many other contemporary films that represent the Papuans in a marginal rural context. Since this representation of socio-cultural diversity grows in tandem with the rising dependence of migrant workers in various sectors of the Indonesian economy, it can be argued that the new millennium is the period when the provincial interests appear in the national sphere. Moreover, the country's political projects aim to construct belonging within particular communities, although, in recent years, there are other films like *Tabula Rasa* that challenge the status quo and legitimacy of national policies.[99]

In the film, the Minangkabau restaurants in Jakarta and the food traditions are as much a part of the Minangkabau peoples as is the land of their birth. In fact, the restaurant serves to connect homesick Minang migrants to their hometown and community. So much so, that there are several paintings of traditional *Gadang* houses hung on the wall of the restaurant and in the living area serving as a constant reminder of their place of origin and in Hans' case, of his home in Papua. After Hans found a job at the Minang restaurant, the camera pans from the living area of Hans's "new home" which includes the painting of a Minangkabau village. When the camera stops, Hans enters into the frame and makes a phone call to Papua. In truth, that is the one phone call he did not want to make at that time, and consequently hangs up before it starts to ring; possibly because as he said earlier to Natsir and Mak, he was ashamed to return without having achieved his goals. However, the final sequence of the film has Hans seemingly prepared to make the phone call. The

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[99] Relevant discussion can be found in Scott (1972), Hirschman (1986), and Kahn (1998).

scene starts with a full shot of the same painting and moving on to Hans holding the telephone. Due to all the experiences, he had undergone; learning how to cook Minang food, cooking and running the restaurant when Mak was not well, and they had a large order to fulfil, which made him seek the help of Parmanto who had gone to work for a rival restaurant, he now has the confidence to reconnect with his adopted mother in Papua. I read this as the blurring of boundaries of the actual, and the imagined as a critique of the current national centric attitudes that exist.

This discussion of *Tabula Rasa* underlines many of the issues that are important in numerous other films about human and social mobility as well as internal migration across Nusantara countries. Thus, it suffices to say that one's identity or sense of national belonging in the region is still a contested issue. As in many other films dealing with *perantau* like Hans, the migrant is not prepared to return home without having achieved some degree of success: "I do not want to go home like this, I am ashamed" Hans tells Mak in the restaurant earlier. Similarly, in the recent Malaysian film *Pulang* [Return] (Khabir Bahtia, 2018), for instance, a fisherman who had worked as a sailor on a British cargo ship, sailing the world in pursuit of fortune ended up in Liverpool lonely, poor and sick. Since he had promised his wife that he would make more money by becoming a sailor in order to take care of her and their son better, he could not face going home penniless and disappointed. Hence for 61 years she never saw him again.

Returning to *Tabula Rasa*, Hans, Mak, Natsir, and Parmanto represent the ideal models for social conscientiousness in contemporary Indonesia but, even so, here the characters define themselves by the place where they are born and raised, thus indicating that sense of belonging to the place where they discover a determining role in all situations and spaces where the presence of people in the place continues to exist (Sakhaeifar & Ghoddusifar, 2016, p. 60). In my view, the lack of familiarity and patience in preparing ethnic foods, which is central to the film's narrative, also portrays something about achieving personal, social, national, and regional integration goals.

Central to *Tabula Rasa* is the critical engagement of the diversity and complexities of human mobility, and the two different types of Indonesians by focussing on the perspective of regional cultural identities formation in contemporary Southeast Asia. Overall, *Tabula Rasa* suggests a fluid form of the positions of the subjects or that a 'state of in-between-ness' among Nusantarans in the new millennia is prevalent. In the film, both Hans and Parmanto depict that the notion of *sedar diri* is elemental in overcoming the challenge of reconciling cultural distinctions in the practice of socialisation between different individuals, groups and cultures in the Nusantara. The story is open-ended, considering that the films final shot is that Hans walks away from the camera in a long shot without disclosing whether or not he is going back to Papua, it is probably just like what Nusantarans needed to find, an alternative to re-emerge peace and harmony among dissimilar individuals or groups.

Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed human mobility within the region, highlighting the different levels or extent of belonging and the requirements, in order to be a part of a community or social group from different periods of national histories. In many ways Nusantara has changed profoundly since the formation of countries, and, along with it, the film's representations of the region. Also, through film representations, internal migration and regional human mobility have created a Nusantara *ethnoscape* with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural inhabitants.

The selected films exhibit the strong attachment behaviour of the people towards their birthplace and the community in which they were raised and its relation with the regional concept of *sedar diri*. However, in the event that their journey does not eventuate, the people, *merantau* are likely to continue living in their adopted world or move on to another location perpetuating the notion that multi-ethnic identities and communities become the mainstay of national identities.

Such strong attachment to both places shows an example of in-betweenness, connection and disconnection between the here and there, which contributes to cultural identity and the sense of belonging. These are examples of how films from Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore depict the multi-directional mobility of people and other aspects and merging of the cultures of Nusantara in this Southeast Asian archipelago. Both films, *Sri Mersing* and *Tabula Rasa*, while narratively quite different, are thematically similar. Each seems to be consistent with Nusantara's notions of mobility, *merantau* and corresponds to the overlap between traditional cultural identities and the inevitable strengths of national identities that have emerged.

The films examined here reveal that the movement of people around the region from one place to another can be more about uniting different ethnic minorities within a nation rather than dividing forces within a country. These regional narratives of migration practices, individual and communal belonging, as well as cultural identities, were all utilised in the process of national societal development and nation-building in modern-day Nusantara. As found in the attached Appendix 1; from the 1950s to the early 1960s, the films, to a certain extent emphasised the inter-island movement of the *perantau* from Sumatra to the Peninsula.

However, echoing national policies from around the region between the mid-1960s and early 1970s, *perantau* only migrates within its national borders. Regionalism has been central in Indonesia and Malaysia's national politics since the 1970s (Appendix 2) when leaders in both nations recognised that the country's nationalism story was not just a right-wing nostalgic narrative. Since then, cross-border migration has once again become common in films from the two countries. Even though the new millennium was only several decades past, so much else has changed. The individuals or perhaps the citizens of the three countries can claim their origins from beyond their national borders, as shown in the films from the early 2000s to the present day (Appendix 3). Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore's national cinemas and cultural identities are becoming more complicated in light of their association with globalisation, digital and

communication technologies. Focusing on the point of single-origin, the superiority of one race or group slowly, but surely, becomes meaningless should Nusantara's current generations refuse to recognise the twisted logic of ethnonationalism and racial supremacy as a way forward.

This chapter advocates a re-examination of representations of films about migrants and *perantau* that touch on fluid and mobile identities between spaces at a time when such themes have become popular in recent films of the region. Moreover, regional filmmakers continue to focus on heterogeneous identities and the continuity of ethnic difference within the countries' national identities and related policies. The following chapter extends the discussion of in-betweenness in cinematic imageries through the representation of borderlands and the people who live in the peripheral areas of Nusantara countries.

CHAPTER FIVE

Borderlands and National Borderlines in the Cinema of Malaysia and Indonesia

Introduction

> The pain and joy of the borderlands - perhaps no greater or lesser than the emotions stirred by living anywhere, where contradictions abound, cultures clash and meld, and life is lived on the edge - coming from a wound that will not heal and yet is forever healing. These lands have always been here; the river of people has flowed for centuries. It is only the designation "border" that is relatively new, and along with the term comes the life one lives in this "in-between world" that makes us the "other," the marginalised. – (Cantú, 1993, p. 29)

This chapter examines film representations of life in the border areas and the cross-border movements of people within Nusantara, thereby describing new cultural ideas, identities and forms of historical memory that contrast with those of the nations. Films set in the borderlands of Nusantara countries focus on how people negotiate territory, boundaries, and nationality. The films express stories about a third cultural identity - the state of being in-between or across national cultural identities. In representing "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25), borderlands show a tension among the hyphenated Malaysian-Indonesian and Malaysian-Thai national identities.

Before the formation of nation states, the economic dynamism of regional film industries was not characterised and restricted by rigid national boundaries but instead, focused on networked cooperation between entrepreneurs across the region (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2010: Ruppin & Tofighian, 2016). Moreover, borderland films from Malaysia and Indonesia not only demonstrate the ability to reflect two national cultures in which bi-national audiences can recognise, but can

also reveal significant liminality and thus clarifying transnational interactions. Representations of Nusantara individuals dwelling in the in-betweenness and through their liminal lives, and how they manage to move across borders is aesthetically exemplifying and significant. Borderland films reveal not only one cultural identity synchronically but often multiple identities simultaneously.

This chapter explores critically the degree of ambiguity and perplexity among the inhabitants of Nusantara's borderlands in films from Malaysia and Indonesia. I argue that the representations of borderlands and borders in these films not only indicate that national boundaries do not correspond appropriately to realities on the ground but also project the impressions of "*in-betweenness*" of the inhabitants and problematises the fixity of the national cultural discourses. As Bhabha (1994) argues, "in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (pp. 1-2). Borderland films portray something in common: they represent the continuity of traditional culture, which can become fractured, and both national and local cultures can be questioned once they are taken for granted.

In a 2009-published anthropological and historical review of the Southeast Asian highlands, written by James C. Scott, the term "Zomia" is used to describe the "largest remaining non-state space in the world," consisting of self-governing hill peoples who, Scott maintains, must not be seen as remnants of socio-economically more developed societies, but rather as empowered upland peoples, who preferred not to be part of the lowland environment controlled by the state (p. 13). According to Scott, ''Zomia" is both as "a historical sanctuary for state-evading peoples," and as "a pattern of settlement, agriculture, and social structure that is state-repelling" (p. 127, 178). The characters in all four films in this chapter display contrast to Scott's definition of people living far from state centres; they recognise that nation-states exist, but do not allow borders to stop them. Furthermore, these films demonstrate that people from both sides of the border are seen as one group and rely on one another. Scott's non-state space studies are enlightening, but the people of

the borderlands as represented in these films recognise that they were part of a larger imagined community.

Conversations about issues of national identity in the three cinemas usually lead to a more in-depth dialogue about the cultural identities of the people and the involvement of other groups. Such encounters tend to result from the *in-between* nature of being a resident of this region which has a bearing on the issues of cultural identities, belonging, and mobility, thereby undermining the country's national homogeneity and identity. That is not to say that I look at the nation from an unrealistic perspective, but being a Nusantaran means living between two worlds and it is not in our 'traditional' world or the 'modern' world but an intermediate or in-between space. For example, Indonesia's film *Ratu Pantai Selatan* [Queen of the South Sea] (Ackyl Anwary, 1980) exemplifies at best the psyche of Nusantara. The film explores a mythological figure of Java (Nyi Roro Kidul), the spirit Queen of the South Sea (Indian Ocean), and in the film, one of the princesses of the Queen wants to live on earth by incarnating as a goldfish.

This chapter discusses the representations of being or living in-between in Dain Said's *Bunohan: Return to Murder* (2012) and *Interchange* (2016). Dain offers a shared cultural identity of living between past and present in both films through *mestiza* figures,[100] showing them as prominent characters of the Nusantara region. If in *Ratu Pantai Selatan,* the princess can transform herself into a goldfish, Mek Yah in *Bunohan* is a crocodile-human figure, and Belian in *Interchange* is a human-bird character, both based on regional folk tales. Intentionally structured and actual fictional and artificial borders evaporate through these representations as people accept cross-cultural experiences. It is, therefore, possible to distinguish the transnational identities of these national cinemas through the cinematographic discussions of the chosen films, as well as through the analysis of the aesthetics and cultural properties of Nusantara.

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[100] *Mestiza* means "a mixed race," as prescribed by Anzaldúa.

In distinguishing between cultural hybrid identities and politically related transnational identities, Cuninghame (2008) mentions that hybrid identities are characteristic of borderlands, which can also be border-crossing and border-reinforcing, and are not necessarily emancipatory (p. 16). Significant to this thesis, Cuninghame also reminds us that 'hybrid identities' tend to refer more to individual identity and 'transnational identities' than to collective identity (p. 23). In all four films I examine the stories are more about transnational identities of borderland inhabitants than about hybridity issues (Dain's *Bunohan*, however, is exceptional because Mek Yah is a hybrid character, half-human/half-animal). They speak both languages either side of the border, and people in *Tanah Surga… Katanya* [The Land of Paradise… or So They Say] (Herwin Novianto, 2012) prefer Malaysian *Ringgit* to Indonesian *Rupiah* despite living in Indonesian territory. That being said, hybrid identities exist in a much more diffused way and not so visible or in an aggregated way throughout the borderlands (p. 40).

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the people who live in the borderlands. By focussing on those who are in the borderlands, it reverses the centre-dominance of national politics. Through an analysis of films about Nusantara borderlands, this thesis will illustrate the idea that the "cinematic border can be defined as a representational practice, the popular form of expression of a geopolitical discourse" (Dell'agnese, 2007, p. 26). Hence, to observe films that speak of Borderlands and the way of life within the country's political boundaries can enable us to comprehend the lives of people as Southeast Asian countries continue to modernise. As such, this informs us as to whether or not, national identity will have an impact on the livelihood of the borderland inhabitants.

Furthermore, these film representations may enlighten us about the complexities that the countries face when their political borders are drawn without consideration for those who happen to live in these areas. These peripheral areas which historian Wang Gungwu labels as "nations without states" (2005) or, in Eilenberg's words "frontier constellations" (2014) are critical in

expressing overlapping national identities and cultural spaces in multifarious social conditions. All of these enable me to look at Nusantara's cultural formation in the contemporary borderlands within the context where cultural, political and economic borders affect and revolve around the construction of national identity.

In discussing the Indonesian-Malaysian border, Eilenberg uses the concept of borders as representing the physical, political lines that separate two countries and suggests that the Borderlands are the regions that are characterised by "close proximity to a national borderline as well as the direct and significant effect, economic, social and political impact this border has on life in the region" (p. 160). Drawing upon Eilenberg's definition of borders and borderlands, this chapter includes film representations of Malaysia-Indonesia as well as Malaysia-Thailand border areas. I will reveal how borderland films capture the sense of in-betweenness among Nusantarans in order to depict transnational film representations that national cinema cannot provide. Essentially, this chapter reflects the overall character of the three national cinemas and supports *Sinema Nusantara*'s idea of diverse cultural identities, such as people living on both sides of the border, who are discussing their cultural identities and self-awareness that goes beyond the abstract realm of national belonging.

Borderlands, Border Studies and Border Films

> A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of the unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. – Anzaldúa (2012, p. 25).

Upon examining the representations of borderlands, it seems plausible that Anzaldúa's '*mestiza*' consciousness applies here. Her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2012), details her field experiences and the invisible "borders" that exist between the people of

borderlands in the Mexico-United States border. She posits that mestiza consciousness is about breaking down the subject-object duality through the images in which the duality is transcended (p. 102). In reviewing Anzaldúa's work, Licona (2005) suggests that mestiza consciousness refuses fixed opposing structures and their implication on matters of self-representation (p. 104). Moreover, Anzaldúa perceives the world from the viewpoint of oppressed persons of colour, whereas, this thesis attempts to look at living 'in-between' by examining narrative reflections of regional identity production. The mestiza or, what we call hybrid consciousness, is a useful source that can help in understanding the factors that alter signifying and signification through "geo-migrations and other forms of postmodern sociocultural contact" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 11).

In this thesis, I use Anzaldúa's concept of borderland spaces to understand the intersection of national border enforcement and habitual patterns of border communities. However, if Anzaldúa's exploration of the cultural identity of the US-Mexican borderlands suggests "a third country" (a border culture) that exists through *mestiza* consciousness, then the film representations of Nusantara's border areas hint at how the fluidity model can be found in culture from Southeast Asia's peripheral spaces. In fact, in its archetypal nature along with aspects of the cultural and geographical regions, the Nusantara Archipelago is a vast group of Borderlands. Nusantara is a contact zone (Pratt, 2002) where not only products but also people and cultures come together, merge and flow.

Although Anzaldúa focuses on the psychological, sexual and spiritual borderlands, she argues that "the borderlands are present wherever two or more cultures border each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch each other, and where the space between two individuals narrows with intimacy" (p. 19). Within this region, the lands and waters that we now know as borders have not been as they should be. What Jaleswari exemplifies in the film *Batas* [Border] (Rudy Soedjarwo, 2011) fits in with this unconventional cultural perspective when she returns to the border in the final minute of the film

and is determined to deliver and raise her baby there, and as she said, "I want my baby to learn about the world there."

With regards to regional border studies, anthropologist Ishikawa (2010) argues that the government control of western Borneo borderlands (Kalimantan-Sarawak), "in practice and image, is gradually taming the borderland" (p. 230). However, the related Southeast Asian governments have not been overly concerned about the livelihood of their borderland populations. Even today, for example, there are numerous border areas around Malaysia and Indonesia, where residents often cross to make a living. I mentioned earlier about the illegal Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and Singapore, and several scholars have touched upon the socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics regarding this issue, mainly stating that sustainable livelihood opportunities on the other side drive them to cross illegally (Fee 1995; Lindquist 2009; Clark & Pietsch 2014). Moreover, in addition to the illegal movement of people and goods, what is more concerning is the escalation of armed conflicts centred on territory, resources, and power such as what is occurring in places between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia near the Sulu-Celebes seas.

In contrast to the US-Mexico border, Nusantara proposes a different kind of borderland, one that has mostly watery borders and port cities, where diverse people co-exist and have the advantage of maritime mobility. For example, not only does the region see diverse ethnic groups (Bajau, Murut, Javanese, Sulu, etc.), but its port cities also attract ethnic groups of Chinese and Indian (*Jawi* and *Chetti*) settlers from the southern provinces of mainland China and India who came to the archipelago as traders, sailors or perhaps soldiers. Here, they are able to take wives and partners from local communities, and their culture and language are influenced mainly by locals. Their offspring are called *Jawi Peranakan, Chetti Peranakan* or Chinese *Peranakan*. Moreover, the Peranakans display instances of double-consciousness in their identity. Here I borrow W.E.B. du Bois's (1903) concept of *double consciousness* to explain how the subjectivities of hybrid cultures, *peranakan* and mestiza, feel caught in between the "two-ness" of cultural

identities. They are always conscious of their dual culture and identity as individuals who are familiar with cultural and ethnic mixing or hybridisation processes. Pittman (2016) in an online article defines the concept as a "sensation," that falls short of "true" self-consciousness, but, nevertheless, is a self-consciousness that is also part of a more complex "dualism" feeling and a stable and enduring form of consciousness.

Nusantara consciousness in the form of this unsureness of being caught in two-ness is visible in the various artistic and creative communities and their creative and cultural works. Films like *Si Tjonat* (Nelson Wong, 1929) and *Cau Bau Kan* [The Courtesan] (Nia Dinata, 2002) from Indonesia, both starred *Peranakan* Chinese and touched upon their positions in the Dutch East Indies. The film *Red Haired Tumbler in Malaya* (Eddie Pak, 1994) is the only *Peranakan* Chinese film from Malaysia, but there are a series of *Jawi Peranakan* films namely *Anak Mami The Movie* [Children of *Peranakan* Descendants The Movie] (Abdul Razak Mohaideen, 2002), *Mami Jarum* [Shit-Stirrer] (Abdul Razak Mohaideen, 2002), *Mami Jarum Junior* [Shit-Stirrer Junior] (Abdul Razak Mohaideen, 2003), *Nana Tanjung* [The Man of The Family] (Abdul Razak Mohaideen, 2006) and *Nana Tanjung 2* [The Man of The Family 2] (Abdul Razak Mohaideen, 2007), which narrate the life of Penang's *Jawi Peranakan* in Malaysia. Such consciousness is not only used by filmmakers but is also used by politicians, poets, cultural artists and activists to connect the land and water around this archipelago as well as the people who live among them. This understanding means that people are aware that they have transnational interactions and relationships with others and reflecting different levels of significant cultural affiliations. Here, the independent *Peranakan* Chinese filmmaker Sherman Ong is a notable figure. In Chapter Five, his film *Flooding in the Time of Drought* (2009) is discussed.

Film representations regarding Nusantara Borderlands, on the other hand, suggest that regional culture is not only a hybrid culture, but also maintains a hybrid cultural self of Nusantara inhabitants. However, most film representations of regional borderlands, especially films from

Indonesia, are inclined towards supporting the centre's policy narratives which consider these peripheral spaces as economically unproductive - i.e. *Tanah Surga... Katanya* [The Land of Paradise... or So They Say] (Herwin Novianto, 2012), *Tanah Air Beta* [My Homeland] (Ari Sihasale, 2010), *Atambua 39° Celcius* (Riri Riza, 2012). These descriptions of Borderlands "often have more to do with the anxieties (and fantasies) of the "Centre" than with the social and cultural realities of the periphery" (Walker in Eilenberg 2014, p. 6). Malaysia and Indonesia's periphery refers to the geographic location relative to the rest of the country, but is underdeveloped and appears disconnected from the country's economic and population centres. There are also border regions that have become special economic zones (SEZs) such as the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS GT) consisting of Singapore, Johor, and Riau (Indonesia) and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), but these are more concerned with capital accumulation within their respective borders.

Concerning the IMS GT, the territorialisation of Singapore's control over its two neighbouring countries has been affected by fluctuating bilateral relations, in which tensions have arisen as a result of Singapore's aggressive efforts to secure land (sand) and labour. Although, designating a region for growth would not be sufficient to allow any development to take place (Sparke, et al., 2004). Also in this region, support for cultural hybridity is seldom more than a gesture or some short-lived rhetoric of socio-political power because regional politics within the three countries are clearly associated with race and/or religion preferences.

Nowadays, border studies are more important than ever before and can help in the understanding of border conflicts and nation-building efforts in contemporary Nusantara countries. Indeed, conflicts continue to exist, as evidenced by China's recent claims and demands in the South China Sea which is the more recent indicator that political boundaries could be the largest threats to current and the future political systems. In addition to the China initiated dispute, the region still has some unfinished border and borderland issues. For example, this includes the

contentious area between Malaysia-Thailand, the maritime boundaries of Malaysia-Indonesia-the Philippines, as well as the seas of Malaysia-Indonesia-Singapore, and the dispute between West Papua Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. These ongoing conflicts have been instrumental in shaping the identity of the people living in those areas.

Border and boundaries at the end of the previous century were not only about national territoriality but more about political boundary-producing practices and questions of national identity (Newman & Paasi, 1998, pp. 187-8). The issues of borders have gained prominence given the advancement in ethnic studies, feminist studies, post-colonialism, and postmodernism. In a study on the English-language scholarship of Asian queer studies, Sinnott (2010) concluded that themes of borders and boundaries have been useful in Asian queer scholarship since the mid-1990s (pp. 28-9). Also, the concerns about border studies have extended to Southeast Asian film studies indicating that filmmakers and scholars realise the significance of cultural diversity in their work. Borderlands studies, on the other hand, ask what happens if different cultures collide with each other or challenge the lands between them. In other words, 'Borderlands' is both a place and a historiographic methodology (DuVal, 2017).

In this chapter, I would like to highlight the Malaysian and Indonesian films that deal with living in borderlands, that have emerged in recent years, crucial to the issue of cultural identities which are part of the transnational features of both cinemas. Apart from the production criteria that guide the filming process, such as funding and production staff and the thematic subject matter, it is also capable of justifying transnational connections among these cinemas. According to Noor (2017), we should examine how borderland cultures question the notion of a solid-state boundary since it is important to look at how nations can exist across the state and look at the important role that transnational populations play in the process of nation-building (p. 255).

Nowadays, studies concentrating on the borderlands of Southeast Asia are also gaining in popularity. In 2011, the Society for South-East Asian Studies (SEAS) in Vienna dedicated a specific section on the topic in the Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies (ASEAS). In the editorial notes, Horstmann (2011) concluded that border studies could help "to deconstruct the geographical demarcations and national ideology of the nation state and to question a perspective that implicitly accepts and reconfirms the nation by limiting itself to the study of social transformations" within Southeast Asian nations (p. 203).

Horstmann notes that ethnic minorities in the borderlands also aspire and wish to establish their own political and moral orders (p. 212). As Malaysia and Indonesia argue that the state recognises differences in their national communities, both countries have not been able to consider the importance of peripheral societies in their national development. The populations that reside near the borderlands within these countries may be irritated by the fact that they have been left behind for many years. However, instead of defending diverse cultural traditions, the state drives these people to change their cultural expectations and styles. Horstmann also notes that Eilenberg's work on the Malaysian-Indonesian borderland in Borneo suggests that the people in the areas have their own laws (p. 206). Even today, customary laws are fundamental to the identity of borderland communities and others in the heart of Nusantara. *Batas* and *Bunohan: Return to Murder* are examples that incorporate customary laws in their narrative. SEAS' concerns about border issues are supported by the communities they serve and in the context of globalisation, participating entities, local or otherwise, have many economic and political vested interests in Southeast Asian border areas.[101]

During the 2nd Southeast Asian Cinema Conference, McKay (2006) argues that a critical analysis of Southeast Asian film needs to address Southeast Asia's "spatial, inter-spatial as well

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[101] See *Transnational dynamics in Southeast Asia* (Fau, 2014).

as cultural and inter-cultural dilemma" and needs "to recognise that cultural production does not happen in a vacuum."[102] The themes of this conference were '*Cinema at the Borderlands*' and were not really about borderland representation or border people, but rather about neighbouring countries' cultural and linguistic commonality. Obviously, McKay's comments were in response to the lack of world knowledge on the subject. In that sense, there is a lack of determination and transparency on the matter. That is, films that show the role of cultural identity in the lives of others in border areas where people are negotiating territory, borders and nationality that may contradict with the more popular narrative of nationalism.

Currently, there are more films about borderlands covering the period since the beginning of Southeast Asian's Nusantara countries. These films focus on the border people's lifestyle plus political practices in liminal spaces, its transnational nature, fluidity and flexibility. Additionally, these films illuminate cultural, political, and identity issues both past and present, real and fictitious. Moreover, the argument as to whether or not Nusantara films capture and retain dominant cultural identities, or perhaps a sign of misidentification with other cultures and locations, can become apparent in this spatially based, discursive film study. It may also mean that we need to reconsider the notion that identities are easily formed and can only be established as attachments to specific places or nations.

Representing Borderlands in Malaysian and Indonesian Cinemas

So, what is it like to live near the border between Nusantara countries? Here I offer an overview of the representations and discourses on borderlands in the mainstream cinema of the three countries in an effort to comprehend how filmmakers produce forms of cinematic culture in addition to cultural resistance in these cinemas. Among the three countries that are discussed here,

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[102] Retrieved from http://criticine.com/feature_article.php?id=25

Singapore has two films dealing with the ramifications of borders, whereas Indonesia and Malaysia have produced several pieces about that topic. Singapore's two films are *They Call Her Cleopatra Wong* (Bobby A. Suarez [as George Richardson], 1978), which tells the story of an Interpol agent (Cleopatra) investigating counterfeit currency smuggling activities across the border of South East Asia, and a short film *The Alien Invasion* (Rich Kok Tai Ho, 2004) brings the ridiculous fight to the comic side of Singapore as aliens invade the city-state. There is, for example, the film *Leftenan Adnan* [Lieutenant Adnan] (Aziz M. Osman, 2000), which tells the story of the brave protagonist who ends up leading the Malay Regiment of the British Colonial Forces and defending Singapore against the invading Japanese troops. For his actions during the war, Lieutenant Adnan is considered a national hero of Malaysia and Singapore after sacrificing himself to protect Singapore. The film is co-produced by Grand Brilliance Sdn Bhd, Paradigm Film Sdn Bhd, and the Malaysian Army. Indeed, there are also films about men protecting the sea border from illegal activities or piracy, such as *Raja Laut* [King of the Ocean] (Z. Lokman, 1982) from Malaysia and Indonesia, *Pelangi di Nusa Laut* [The Rainbow in Nusa Laut] (Asrul Sani, 1992) and *Badai di Ujung Negeri* [Troubles at the country's border] (Agung Sentausa, 2011), all of which appeared to represent authoritarian temptations on both sides.

One of the earliest border films is *Daerah Perbatasan* [Borderland] (S. A. Karim, 1964) but data about this film is difficult to locate. Nevertheless, in 1965, Indonesia released *Segenggam Tanah Perbatasan* [A Handful of Border Soil] by Djamal Harputra which has a narrative set in Indonesia's borderland in Borneo. These two films were made during the time of the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (1963-66). Based on the available synopsis, the main character in *Segenggam Tanah Perbatasan* is challenged by a woman to go to the frontier (Kalimantan border) if he wants to fight, so he then joins the army with the intent of protecting the borderland from the

enemy.[103] After a while, the woman who is also a singer enlists with the entertainment troop of the Indonesian army where she tries to look for the lead character because she is still in love with him, but he is found dead clutching the soil of his homeland. The film can be regarded as a propaganda tool in support of Sukarno's vision of Indonesia Raya (Great Indonesia) which challenged the formation of Malaysia in 1963.

Only recently has the subject of borderlands become salient again in Indonesian cinema which can be linked to the government policies of decentralisation and regional autonomy implemented in the wake of *Reformasi* in 1998, giving greater political and economic power to regional governments.[104] *Denias Senandung Di Atas Awan* [Denias, Singing on the Cloud] (John de Rantau, 2006), *Melody Kota Rusa* [The Melody of Deer City] (Irham Acho Bahtiar, 2010), *Di Timur Matahari* [To The East of The Morning Sun] (Ari Sihasale, 2012) and *Tanah Mama* [Mama's Land] (Asrida Elisabeth, 2015) all represent Indonesian protagonists in Papua. In addition, *Tanah Air Beta* [My Homeland] (Ari Sihasale, 2010) tells a story of how the division between West Timor and East Timor divides children from their family members. *Atambua 39° Celsius* (Riri Riza, 2012) discusses how a family becomes estranged after the Timorese independence referendum in 1999 in which the film focuses on Joao and his father who left Liquica, East Timor to go to Atambua in Indonesia because of the political conflict. However, Joao's mother and the other two siblings have to stay in East Timor, thus causing an immediate split in the family. The latest film representing the people of Atambua is *Aisyah: Biarkan Kami Bersaudara* [Aisyah, Let Us be a Family] (Herwin Novianto, 2016) is about a young Muslim female teacher from West Java who dedicates herself to teaching at a Roman Catholic school in Atambua. All of these films show cultural identities that have nearly been forgotten over the years

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[103] From *filmindonesia* database - http://catalogue.filmindonesia.or.id/movie/title/lf-s024-65-710346_segenggam-tanah-perbatasan

[104] In the same year, Indonesia's House of Representatives approved two new decrees marked as Law No. 22/1999 and Law No. 25/1999. These new laws have shifted political and economic power of which previously administered from the centre in Jakarta to subnational, at the local level.

by the advent of nationalisation within the society but continue to be a significant part of the culture of Nusantara and Indonesia.

Notwithstanding, another area dealt with in Indonesian cinema is the border between Indonesia and Malaysia in Borneo. *Tanah Surga… Katanya*, *Batas*, and a feature-length documentary *Cerita Dari Tapal Batas* [A Story from the Border] (Wisnu Adi, 2012) are all set in the Kalimantan-Sarawak border areas. *Tanah Surga… Katanya* and *Batas* raise questions about the concept of national identities and nationalism in addition to the role of public administration and government in giving appropriate attention to the residents at the national frontiers of Nusantara countries. The invitation here is to revisit the discourse of liminality that occurs in the border area of Sarawak-Kalimantan, which is strangely absent from the interpretation of national cinemas of the two countries since it accounts for the difference besides the similarity in the image of the borderland. Community and cultural similarities in traditional borderland populations suggest that they are highly dependent on each other, but not entirely dependent on the exact meaning of the establishment of national sovereignty.

Malaysian cinema, on the other hand, offers only a glimpse of the Malaysia-Thailand border area through *Jasmin 2* (Kamarul Ariffin, 1986), but regrettably, this film is no longer available for viewing.[105] In brief, *Jasmine 2* is a sequel to *Jasmin* (Kamarul Ariffin, 1984) about a woman who returns to Malaysia from England in search of her ex-husband. She meets with an Indonesian lawyer in the film, who also wants to look for the same person. They could not locate Jasmin's ex-husband, but they manage to come across his new wife, a woman from the indigenous community (*Orang Asal/Asli*), although they did not recognise her. On the journey, Jasmin and the Indonesian man travel to as far north as the borderlands of Malaysia and Thailand.

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[105] As confirmed by film scholar and film columnist Norman Yusoff in a conversation about representation of borderland in Malaysian cinema.

In 1997, the film *Jogho* [Champion] by U-Wei Haji Saari drew critical attention from academics and the international film community (Khoo 2002; Ibrahim 2009). The film is about Southern Thailand's Patani Malay culture in which the territory of Patani has historical affinities with the Kingdoms of Singgora (1605 – 1680), Ligor (The beginning is unknown, - circa 700 CE), Lingga and Kelantan. Before British colonialism, Patani was a semi-autonomous Malay Sultanate paying respect to the Siamese Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms. The border was established by the British and the Chakkri dynasty of Siam when both parties signed the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909. However, the demarcation process between Kelantan and Patani remains unfinished. *Jogho* represents a community of people who have their homes in the so-called *liminal space* between Malaysia and Thailand.

Jogho is the second film in the region that represents the people and culture of the border between Malaysia and Thailand. The first film is a Thai film *Butterfly and Flowers* (Euthana Mukdasanit, 1985) that focuses on a bright teenage Muslim boy forced to drop out of school by becoming a small-time smuggler to support his family. Whereas *Jogho* shows a *kampung* near Patani, Thailand as a place of strict social relation especially from the perspective of identity and gender (Khoo, 2002) besides a trans-border space where there are no political boundaries (Ibrahim, 2009). In short, the story is about Mamat and his family who were originally from Kelantan, Malaysia but move to Patani when Mamat fails for the second time to win a seat in the Malaysian general election. However, Mamat discloses his cross border cultural identity in his exclamation, "The Patani Malay will live on!"[106] when the Thai police arrest him for allegedly killing his rival at the bullring. The *"Melayu Patani"*, is a group of Malays who live in a cultural space separated from each other by national politics and ideologies.

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[106] My translation, emphasis added.

From the film, political boundaries between the two countries are essentially invisible. Moreover, the subject's movement between places (Patani to Kelantan) might increase the viewers' understanding of the community and its social structure. The inhabitants of this borderland live in a protean environment where borderless cultural practices occur and where territorial sovereignty is supposedly indivisible. In the minds of many Malaysians, the separation line between the two countries is somewhat fully controlled, and one cannot cross the border area without a valid document. Nevertheless, the Patani people are a minority in both countries, and the Patani region in mainstream media is always in conflict, although, *Jogho* reveals otherwise.

Besides other aspects of the film, it portrays vague and amorphous cross-border cultural identities, which can only be appreciated when viewed with time to spare. Unlike the normalisation of the idea of the national community, the film has been able to incorporate the socio-cultural conditions of such a society based on mobility and the need for change, at least as far as their livelihoods are concerned. The borderland in *Jogho* is an ambiguous space in which people dream of transitioning. Additionally, the film depicts the liminal space of the people of Nusantara in the modern construction of national borders.

As Bhabha contends, "liminal" space is a "hybrid" site that witnesses the national subject parts in the ethnographic viewpoint of culture's existence and offers a hypothetical position for minorities. The status of the Patani people, the plot, and the characters in *Jogho* correspond closely to Bhabha's theory as said below:

> Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its signifying difference is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one. The national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture's contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse (1994, p. 150).

The Patani Malays stand at the threshold between the old [traditional] way of being and the modern (economic) appearances of people across borders which makes them distinctly different. Indeed, the contrast between the two sets of colours (pale vs vivid) is what makes them different from each other. The characteristic of old philosophy as advocated by Mamat differs from modern philosophy as exemplified by his son Jusoh, who lives in Kelantan, in that, modern and contemporary philosophy tends to focus on common, albeit narrower areas with a greater analytical awareness that accompanies their approaches. The scene is further elaborated in the analysis section of this thesis.

On the other hand, Fuller (2015), sees the "border" differently from how others see it in that a border is not specifically defined as something tangible such as a fence, a river or a wall, but rather by locational shifts and appears only as a cut in the editing in order to indicate that the border has been crossed. Such cinematic approaches to spatial and cultural narrative mapping are used intelligently in both *Jogho* and *Bunohan*. For instance, *Jogho's* main character, Mamat, travels from Patani in Thailand to Kelantan in Malaysia without any border restrictions. Through a straight cut in the editing process, the location of the film changes between the two places. In *Bunohan,* the sequence in which Adil and Muski escape from a near-lost Muay Thai duel is an indispensable part of the story. The only scene that shows them crossing the border is when they cross the marsh. The film sutured a few brief introductions between that scene and the previous one on the Thai side of the border that helped to introduce other key characters along with the philosophy behind the story of *Bunohan*. In particular order, it begins with Ilham killing Cina Burong, the broker before switching to the next scene in which Bakar in a car is looking at the land he wanted to sell. The context of the killing scene at that point is somewhat disturbing, as viewers can sense the sensation of time dilation. Adil and Muski left early, and the car was moving as fast as possible, but with a slower and more relaxed pace, in which Ilham is already on the other side of the border. The following scenes show Bakar arriving at Pok Eng's house and greeting a mysterious boy

before being juxtaposed with his father in the same shot, but in two separate rooms. Here is how cinematic space-time combines three dimensions of space and three dimensions of time into one. After that, the viewers are returned to Adil and Muski, passing through the swamp, symbolising a transition space.

After *Jogho*, Malaysia had to wait until 2012 for the next borderland film by Dain Said. *Bunohan* was not a box-office film, but it travelled to many festivals and garnered several awards.[107] According to Aziz (2014), "*Bunohan* manages to rejuvenate" Malaysian film industry again (p. 86). (I will discuss these two films in more detail in the later section of this chapter.)

Central to this chapter is the regional political effects of the borderland on issues that impinge upon cross-border movement, and border fortification, in which the fault lines of belonging are determined by political rather than cultural affiliation. Although border protection is critical to the national politics, economy and sovereignty, controlling cross-border movement of borderland people in Nusantara can be very challenging. Nowadays, many of these areas are seen as fragile due to extremism and terrorism. In fact, the representations of the borderland population in such films give us a perspective on a sense of loss and the lack of national belonging because of marginalisation, deprivation, and economic disparity. The Southeast Asian countries are eager to improve the border economies but, at the same time, they regard the borderland as zones of political instability and subversion which, consequently provides justification for the government to police the border.[108]

Furthermore, they were inhabitants in these areas who had acquired their socio-cultural systems long before there were any political borders among the regions of Nusantara. According

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[107] Apart from Malaysian Film Festival (2013), *Bunohan* has also participates in Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (2012), Golden Horse Film Festival (2011), Five Flavours Film Festival (2012), Asia-Pacific Film Festival (2012), Asia Pacific Screen Awards (2012) and ASEAN International Film Festival and Awards (2013).
[108] This deduction is based on Horstmann's essay *States, Peoples, and Borders in Southeast Asia* (2006). Retrieved from https://kyotoreview.org/issue-7/states-peoples-and-borders-in-southeast-asia/

to Horstmann (2002), the cultural boundaries between groups in Southeast Asia extend beyond the geo-body of the country and beyond the territorial borders of the nation (p. 8). Border strengthening is an extremely critical matter among present-day Nusantara countries (as well as around the world). However, Anderson et al. (2012) posit that border "controls are not neutral but productive: they produce and reinforce relations of dependency and power" (p. 78). During more recent years, greater attention has been levelled at border security because of terrorism and the "illegal" movements of people, besides contraband goods which affect the country's economy. In addition to the borderland films that are dealt with in this thesis, there are other films from Malaysia that represent such activities. Recent human trafficking films highlight the porousness of borders: *Songlap* [To make something disappear] (Effendee Mazlan & Fariza Azlina Isahak, 2011) has a human trafficking scene at the border between Malaysia and Thailand; and *The Tiger Factory* (Woo Ming Jin, 2010), shows that human smugglers around the region are also dispatching illegal immigrants inside shipping containers.

Films about these countries' borderlands arise in the interstices between regional identity and nation state legitimacy and cultivate identification ties between individuals across national borders or what Vertovec and Cohen have termed "trans-local understandings" (1999, p. xvii). The next section explores the way borderland inhabitants view the issue of mobility rights and cultural belonging through film representations. It also looks into the space and place in which the Nusantara borderlands people belong as a way of articulating Nusantara socio-cultural identities and how the represented spaces shape meaning within that context. Altogether four films are analysed: two are set in the borderlands of Sarawak and Kalimantan, and two are set at the Thai-Malaysian border.

Along the Sarawak-Kalimantan Borderlands

At the 2014 East Asia Summit in Myanmar, the Indonesian president Joko Widodo listed five pillars of Indonesia's foreign affairs policy among which border disputes with neighbouring countries was at the top of the list (Connelly, 2015, pp. 7-8). In the following year, Malaysia and Thailand, under the pretext, that they were fighting human trafficking and illegal smugglers agreed to build a wall to run along their common border. A similar wall is also to be constructed along the Sarawak-Kalimantan boundary. In another case, negotiations about border delineation between Indonesia and East Timor which began in 2001 took almost ten years to conclude. Although it was subsequently finished, Gutteling (2009) reported that "the Indonesian leadership argues that local customary settlement (*adat*) has shifted the border and that a new boundary should take this into consideration" as the main reason for the delay.[109] These narratives tell us that controlling and limiting human movement across national borders in the Nusantara region is problematic, which underlines the need to explore borderland narratives from the cinema of the countries. In anticipation of understanding the situation, this segment examines, from a cinematic perspective, the impact of national borders on the people of Kalimantan's hinterland.

This section focuses on the livelihood of communities at the Sarawak-Kalimantan as represented in two Indonesian films, *Batas* and *Tanah Surga… Katanya*. Both films are directed by Jakarta-based filmmakers who look outwards towards the border regions of Indonesia as the site for their filmic imagination. These two films appear to convey different ideas about the Sarawak-Kalimantan borderland in Borneo, which was circumstantially considered a land of vigilantes and gangsters (Wadley & Eilenberg, 2006).

The borderland between Malaysia's state of Sarawak and Indonesia's provinces of Kalimantan are no less problematic compared to other border areas within the region. It became

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[109] See Gutteling in *A problematic division* (2009). Retrieved from https://www.insideindonesia.org/a-problematic-division

the site of armed conflict and dispute during *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) in the 1960s when Soekarno opposed the establishment of Malaysia, seeing it as a neo-colonial puppet state. As a result, this 966-kilometre borderline remained heavily militarised up until the early 1990s as a result of the confrontation and the communist insurgency that ensued during that period (Eilenberg, 2014, p. 8). Although border tensions have now subsided, these two Nusantara countries are still in dispute and continue to contest the boundary (p. 11).

Second, the idea of erecting a wall for security reasons distracts us from focusing on people and the quality of their lives in this area, since they are more important than constructing a wall in reducing the number of goods coming in and out during a certain season in these affected areas.[110] The Borneo Iban or Dayak communities still need to continue their normal activities and probably cannot avoid the wall, but they can adapt to other areas, such as citizenship. However, some carry identity cards from both Indonesia and Malaysia, and some even carry two passports (Eilenberg & Wadley, 2009, pp. 59-60). As such, policymakers must consider that there is an enormous difference between living in the borderland and living elsewhere.

The question I ask here is, "How do the locals in these films deal with and adapt to the political divisions of Nusantara countries in recent times?" These two films speak unequally about the two communities in the same borderland region (Sarawak-West Kalimantan) with each representing a culturally and socially specific response to the current political and social reality. The film *Batas* highlights a Dayak community, but *Tanah Surga ... Katanya* presents Indonesian nationalism issues in a community comprised mostly of Javanese descendants who migrated to the area.

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[110] The latest report from the Indonesia-based Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) reveals that only half of Borneo is now covered by forests compared with 76 per cent in 1973. See Latif (2016), *'Plantations seen behind more than half Malaysian Borneo deforestation'* – Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-environment-idUSKBN1490RH

To begin with, I want to highlight the final sequence of *Tanah Surga* in which a high-ranking official comes to a village and Salman, the young boy who is also the main cast, is chosen to recite his poem in front of their guests during the welcoming ceremony. The poem reveals his emotional self while, at the same time, he is aware of the present situation of being abandoned at the borderland, thus affecting the place and the community to which he belongs. Salman is expressing his honest opinion, but the senior official seems irritated with Salman's sincere yet cynical verses:

> *Bukan lautan hanya kolam susu ... katanya, tapi kata kakekku, hanya orang-orang kaya yang bisa minum susu* (Not an ocean but a milk pool… so it is said, but my grandpa said, only the rich can afford to drink milk)

> *Kail dan jala cukup menghidupimu… katanya, tapi kata kakekku, ikan-ikan kita dicuri oleh banyak negara* (Hook, and nets are enough for your livelihood… so it is said, but my grandpa said, we have lost all our fish to other countries)

> *Tiada badai tiada topan kau temui... katanya, tapi kenapa ayahku tertiup angin ke Malaysia* (No typhoon and no storm you will encounter… so it is said, but why does the wind to Malaysia blow my father)

> *Ikan dan udang menghampiri dirimu... katanya, tapi kata kakekku, awas ada udang di balik batu* (Fish and prawn will come near you… so it is said, but my grandpa said, careful there is a prawn under the rock)

> *Orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga, tongkat kayu dan batu jadi tanaman ... katanya, tapi kata Dokter Intel, belum semua rakyatnya sejahtera, banyak pejabat yg menjual kayu dan batu untuk membangun surganya sendiri.* (People said our land is the land of paradise, wooden sticks and stone become plants… so it is said, but 'Doctor Intel' said, not all citizens prosper, many agencies sell the timber and rocks to build their own paradise.)

This poem contains contradictions, as seen in the ocean (*lautan*) spheres in the middle of almost each line. The verses are set in direct opposition to each other, and the other two characters,

granddad (Hashim) and Doctor Intel (Anwar) figure prominently in the poem. The irony of this piece is that these two characters are very patriotic. Apart from Astuti who teaches the kids about Indonesian nationalism at school, Hashim and Anwar are clearly upholding Indonesia's national identity throughout the film.[111] I view this as a critique of the idea of being an Indonesian, which raises questions of self along with national belonging. Addition to that, *Tanah Surga* concludes with two interwoven scenes. In one scene Salman, Astuti and Anwar are in a wooden boat howling at the death of Hashim, and in the second piece, Haris (Salman's father) is celebrating with his friends at the other side of the border because of the Malaysian football team's win over Indonesia.[112] The juxtaposition of these images not only shows the separation of consciousness between the two countries but Hashim's death also signals the end of the younger people's relations with Indonesia as Haris' (jobs, etc.) future lies in Malaysia.

Although *Tanah Surga* won many awards during the 2012 *Festival Film Indonesia* (FFI),[113] the representation of borderland subjects in this film was diminished by the absence of strong Dayak presence. The film, however, has a different way of presenting how this community communicates among themselves while conveying ideas about nationalism in the rhetoric infused with Indonesian identity and power issues.[114]

Tanah Surga offers something different from the other three films on this topic. Salman's family is not native to where they live, especially his grandfather Hashim who was sent there to support the political agenda of Sukarno. Although Hashim and Haris' wives were not visible in the film (only their graves), I presume they were both native to the place because volunteers sent

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[111] In the film, Astuti also sells titbits to kids after school. In a scene, she explains to Anwar that the currency used in that village is the Malaysian Ringgit and not Indonesian Rupiah.

[112] The nearest hospital is really far from the village and small boats were the only means of transport available.

[113] Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Original Story, Best Artistic Direction and Best Music.

[114] Maygiarta in her doctoral dissertation entitled *Representasi masyarakat perbatasan Indonesia-Malaysia dalam film (Analisis semiotik pada film 'Tanah Surga, Katanya...')* (2014) argues that the film questions aspects of one's identity or sense of belonging to Indonesia because of the people's dependency on Malaysia. Retrieved from http://eprints.umm.ac.id/26880/2/jiptummpp-gdl-yogamaygia-36758-1-pendahul-n.pdf

to the border to fight for the country were mostly male. The women in the place, as represented in the film, are native except Astuti who is a school teacher from Jakarta. Haris, Salman's father, remarried a Malaysian woman to ensure that he was able to live in the country freely. Possibly Haris and Salman are both offspring of the initial cross between a migrant from Java and a native woman from deep in the heart of Kalimantan.

Tanah Surga centres on Salman, who lives with his grandfather Hashim and his sister Salina. His father Haris has *merantau* to a small town across the border in Sarawak, but one day, he returns to the village wanting Hashim and his two children to follow him to Sarawak. The children are excited, but Hashim refuses to follow, and because of that, Salman decides to stay to look after him. Haris is not a native because Hashim, his grandfather, was an ex-soldier who was most likely sent there to support Sukarno's policy of Operation *Dwikora* which was initiated by Malaysia's failure to live up to the 1963 Manila Accord.

Moreover, Hashim and his family symbolise more of the "ideal Indonesian family" rather than they do of a typical Dayak family because Hashim is like those "retired military personnel from Java and Sumatra who had served in the area [who] and persuaded to settle in the borderlands" as mentioned by Adrian Vickers in his study on the history of modern Indonesia. Vickers indicates that the ideal Indonesian family model which was initiated as part of the New Order health care programme in the 1970s was depicted as comprising a father, mother, son and daughter with a civil service uniform for the father and school uniforms for the children (2013, p. 194). In *Tanah Surga*, the ex-serviceman Hashim is the head of the family and is more dominant as a fatherly figure if compared with his son Haris. Salman and Salina are also portrayed often dressed in Indonesian school uniforms, a marker of national homogeneity and oneness.

Notwithstanding, schools are part of the Indonesian Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2004) meant to standardise and unite Indonesians across the archipelago through a

standardised curriculum emphasising Bahasa Indonesia and instilling national values. Representations of schools and education are significant in post-*reformasi* Indonesian cinema. Beside *Batas* and *Tanah Surga*, there are also films such as *Laskar Pelangi* [Rainbow Warriors] (2008) and *Skola Rimba* [The Jungle School] (2013) by Riri Riza, *Serdadu Kumbang* [The Beetle Soldiers] (2011) and *Di Timur Matahari* [To The East of the Morning Sun] both by Ari Sihasale which all centre on the struggle to learn within Indonesian primary schools. In *Tanah Surga*, there is a village with a small wooden school consisting of two classrooms where they live, and Astuti is the only teacher. She is an attractive young woman who accidentally volunteered to teach there. In addition, there is Anwar or "Doctor Intel" the newly arrived physician, but, unlike Astuti, he volunteered his services to serve the people of the village. Instead of being an ideological tool for the state government, *Tanah Surga*'s school is doing quite the opposite. For example, the institution has taught Salman to write a poem that criticises the state showing that enslaving people's minds by manipulating their imaginations is not as easy as it appears because individuals in all consciences are free to make their own decisions as subjects (pp. 694-6).

Nevertheless, the film's conflict begins when Haris tries to persuade his father and his children to join him with his new wife in the small border town on the other side of the border. Although Hashim is in poor health that prevents him from migrating. *Tanah Surga* deals only minimally about living in the borderlands. Aside from a tense conversation between Hashim and his son Haris about moving to Sarawak, audiences need to follow Salman closely to gain a sense of life in the borderlands. The young Salman has to choose between joining his father and sister, or else, stay on with his sick grandfather.

Figure 7: Although national borders have constitutive effects, they are also fundamentally fragile and easily crossed.

In the film, Salman is rather confused with the location and the permeability of the boundary because, when he is about to cross the border for the first time, he stops at the boundary marker momentarily to look at the two national flags. The camera's point of view is from a high-angle, but Salman is in a medium close-up shot, thus drawing everyone's attention to Salman's facial expression. Nevertheless, instead of connecting Salman with the national flag of Indonesia, the shot places him in between the two flags, suggesting his ambivalence regarding his allegiances towards the two countries. His ambiguity is tied to the fact that he must work across the border in order to save some money to take Hashim to the nearest Indonesian hospital. Although the next few scenes reveal that Salman is a proud Indonesian, he relies economically on life across the border. Salman has to work at delivering Dayak crafts from Kalimantan to the town in Sarawak and bringing back goods to the native community. From each country's legal perspective, Salman is just like many other smugglers who operate between the Sarawak-Kalimantan borderlands.[115] Living on this borderland of Borneo, nevertheless, means he does not conform to one single national identity. This portrayal, of course, is the product of Salman's experiences in communities

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[115] Apart from several border posts along the border areas, there are more than 50 small back roads which locals have used for centuries (Eilenberg, 2014, p. 6).

having a double consciousness or duality feeling that has become part of their identity. The borderlands have taught him to tolerate differences and ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 2012, pp. 216-7).

Tanah Surga and *Batas* both portray the inhabitants of the Sarawak-Kalimantan borderlands as being somewhat naïve about national politics. The Dayaks in *Batas* are not used to being governed by man-made policies, but rather, by the laws of nature (*adat*).[116] While this may sound equitable and fair, both films subtly mock the incorrect views regarding borderland populations through several scenes that criticise such a view. In *Batas*, Panglima is always cynical about Indonesia's national policy, especially during the first half of the film. His thoughts for Jaleswari are examples of a borderland individual, a leader who is well aware of national politics, particularly on issues of perceived reputation and identity. *Tanah Surga*, in contrast, uses the tension between Haris and Hashim to highlight the level of awareness of national politics among borderland populations.

For the majority of people, it is illegal to cross an international border without legal documents such as a valid passport or visa, but, for others, it is not. To the borderland people, their ways of surviving were well embedded before the existence of the border, and they feel that the land, like the place, is theirs, and where they belong. A noteworthy illustration from *Batas* is when Arif takes Jaleswari to the boundary marker between Indonesia and Malaysia and explains their location and warns Jaleswari about crossing the demarcation line without permission; however, the camera is filming them from the other side of the border! The shot is taken from a third perspective, from the Malaysian side of the border, thereby, legitimising border crossing activities in such spaces.

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[116] In Borneo, there are over 500 Dayak tribes with different views about their own natural and cultural laws or *adat*, with each using different terminology and being influenced by their experiences and history. In the Indonesian part of Borneo, Masiun (2000) provides four examples of the governance of Dayak's adat, namely *Mayau Dayak adat*, *Jawan Dayak adat*, *Iban Dayak adat* and *Kanayatn Dayak adat*. All four have their systems, but in some aspects, they have similarities concerning the authorities (pp. 2-4).

Figure 8: Arif and Jaleswari at the international boundarymarker. Who crosses the border, the two actors or the camera?

This scene appears quite ironic because the expectation is that a scene which explains the meaning of national border, the line of sovereignty, would by itself justify the importance of not to cross the boundary line.

In the film *Batas,* it explores the life of Dayak people who live around the Sarawak-Kalimantan borderland with a narrative that follows Jaleswari who is working for a company based in Jakarta. After her husband died when she was in the early stage of pregnancy, her employer asked her to follow through with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) duties in Kalimantan after many candidates had failed to finish the company's project. Initially, the people of Pos Apong, Dusun Entikong misunderstand her status, and they assume she is instead, a teacher. Although she has to admit that she is not what they expected, she is in a dilemma; between her assigned corporate duties and helping the local population, especially getting the children to shine academically. Along the way, she learns about the Dayak people, primarily from Panglima, the village chief, from Adeus who is supposedly a teacher, from a young boy who is also an orphan named Borneo, from Nawara, the lady who gives her a place to stay. Later, Jaleswari presents her case and also arranges a photo exhibition about life at Pos Apong in Jakarta. In the last scene, she

returns to deliver her baby at the Borderlands. In *Batas*, Jaleswari, Arif, Otig, Ubuh and Jalung[117] are not native to the area whereas all the others are mostly local Dayak people.

The first half of the film reveals what it means to live in a borderland community. Here, Jaleswari is confused when she realises that there is neither barbed wire nor walls to separate Indonesia and Malaysia to which Arif explains that the people who live along both sides of the dividing line are actually from the same group. That is interesting because Arif is an Indonesian intelligence official, and becomes critical when he admits that the people were separated by political ideologies and not by culture or tribal differences.

On the other hand, for Panglima, the Dayak leader, living in the borderland of Sarawak-Kalimantan means knowing that life in the borderland and Jakarta are distinctly different, which is something the chief reminds Jaleswari several times throughout the film. During their first meeting, Jaleswari asks about a painting that the Panglima is making and she is told that the image is difficult for people from Jakarta to comprehend, but after she has lived there for a while, she would be able to understand it. The difference is highlighted again when Jaleswari sees Panglima reciting his mantra in preparation to cut a tree. The Dayak chief explains to the woman from Jakarta that "there are a lot of wise people, but only a few want to understand,"[118] and suggests that if she wants to help them, she needs to learn how they think. Afterwards, Jaleswari changes her teaching approach by taking her students outside the classroom to learn, which attracts the attention of more children to join the class. These scenes illustrate the closeness of the borderland people to the laws of nature and environment which exist independently of the rule of a given political order. Both scenes show that the Chief is well aware of the issue of national aspirations and is more intelligent and aware than the politicians may assume.

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[117] Ubuh and Jalung in this are both human traffickers who exploit vulnerable people, especially women.
[118] My translation, emphasis added.

In the finale, Jaleswari brings together all her experiences and understanding in a photo exhibition in Jakarta where she becomes an unofficial agent who shares her report with her superiors and the public. Her expressions during the opening ceremony of the exhibition are vital to the conclusion of the film's narrative as well as the progress of Nusantara's population. The last few lines indicate the desired future, reflecting on the present reality of the borderland of Nusantara.

> *Disinilah ikatan kekeluargaan dan kesahabatan, yang terpisah dan dipisahkan kerna terbaginya dua kuasa atas dua negara yang semula satu menjadi berbeda.* (It is a bond of family and friendship, divided over the two countries by the division of the two powers, initially one, but then the other)

> *Yang akhir menampakkan jarak kemajuan, ketertinggalan di depan mata.* (That finally reveals the gap of development, their underdevelopment is in plain sight)

> *Saya disini, di atas mimbar ini, ingin mengajak anda semua yang ada disini untuk membaca tanda-tanda yang tergambar dari urap wajah mereka.* (I am here, on this pulpit, and I would like to invite all of you here to read the signs from their faces)

> *Kebekuan, kelembutan, keteguhan, dan sejuta kalimat dari balik sorot mata mereka yang masih menatap masa depan.* (Coldness, tenderness, determination, and a million sentences from the eyes of those who still look to the future)

> *Masa depan yang mungkin masih menjadi gambaran besar kita bersama.* (A future that could still be a big picture of us together)

She then returns to Pos Apong with a plan to deliver her first baby there. When asked by Arif about her unborn baby, she says, "I want him to have his first life experience over there." Here, her dialogue reflects her speech and how the borderland affects her view of herself in addition to a Nusantaran. She wants to raise her baby in the borderland, perhaps because she believes that borderlands do not create contradictions but rather acknowledges that two opposites

can be found in the same situation (Balibar, 2009, p. 210). The words she uses demonstrate that the character believes that Borderlands are not merely a peripheral space with rigid barriers but rather the social spaces to start a life.

Moreover, border protection in these two films from Indonesian cinema is not directly present throughout the entire series of cinematic images. *Batas*, however, places a special emphasis on human trafficking and both films deal with border security being more than just about showing empathy to the Borderlands community; they discuss security from the point of view of 'intelligence' personnel and not by any other law enforcement and border security standards.[119] *Batas* begins with a forest scene with a shaky tracking camera where a young woman is running scared of something. Interspersed with opening credits, two men are chasing her in the distance where she then trips and falls, but Arif and his friends hold her safe, before taking her to the village, and Nawara's house under the agreement of Panglima. The lady is helping her regain strength and heal from the trauma. Otig and his henchmen facilitate the trafficking of migrants in the area by using a small grocery store to conceal their illegal operation. They are not native to the borderland, and at one point they try to challenge the Panglima but fail in doing so. In the later part of the film, Arif and his colleague arrest them. The escapee (the young woman) is traumatised, and Jaleswari meets her at Nawara's house for the first time, but she acts erratically towards her. The first attempt by Jaleswari to help her is unsuccessful, later manages in becoming her companion. The young woman is one of the first to welcome Jaleswari as she returns to the village in the final scene.

The issue of Indonesian illegal migrants in Malaysia is a never-ending issue. So far, there is no foreseeable end-to-end solution to the root cause of the problem of stopping Indonesians from migrating illegally to Malaysia. People's smuggling activities at the border, on the one hand, tell

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[119] According to Rudito (2007), the deployment of security and army personnel's dealing with establishment of joint border posts as well as border surveillance equipment is critical in securing Indonesia's border areas (p. 10).

us that the border is fragile and law enforcement is not working. While, on the other hand, as Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1992) suggests, human trafficking is also an economic and migratory phenomenon that is an integral part of modernity. While Eilenberg (2014) notes that the state-led activities in the borderland "also reveals the flipside of the imagined 'sovereign state' when, […], the national military publicly condemns Malaysian intrusions into Indonesian territory and simultaneously serves as security for Malaysian extractive companies along the border" (p. 20). *Batas* and *Tanah Surga* suggest that controlling the border is not only about building walls or presenting armed law enforcement but is also about emphasising borderland communities. After all, "a borderland exists first of all in the consciousness of the inhabitants" (Barwiński, 2001, p. 1). It is also safe to say that borderland populations are aware of this fact and that the state should recognise that these people have their own minds in securing the national borders of the country.

Importantly, the political community of Indonesia must pay attention to what is said by Panglima and Hashim in the two films. In the scene where Jaleswari and Adeus meet with the Panglima, she is advised to try to understand how the locals think. From that point on, Jaleswari became more alert to the situations and interactions with other people, including Arif who gives insight into the way of life of the Dayak people and the vibrancy of the land. In *Tanah Surga*, Hashim explains to his son Haris that "he devoted himself to fight for Indonesia not because of the government, but for the land, and the people."[120] This statement, spoken early in the film reminds his son and, perhaps, the audiences that Hashim's patriotism is not really about supporting policymakers in Jakarta but more about the literal *tanahair* and the people. Both affirmations by Panglima and Hashim relate to their sense of belonging to the place and space, and not to the nation state.

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[120] Hashim's original dialogue was *"Aku mengabdikan diriku bukan untuk pemerintah, tapi untuk negeri ini, bangsaku sendiri"*. The interpretation of this dialogue which first suggests itself is that the word *negeri* can be interpreted as the land or space where a group of people live and share identical cultural system.

From my reading of both films, to live in the borderlands of Sarawak-Kalimantan means that the natural and cultural laws are more significant than the laws of the state. Although the villages still lack basic facilities like treated water, electricity and health clinics. Also, there are problems with the economy, for example, the people on the Indonesian side of the border work very hard, but prefer Malaysian ringgit to Indonesian rupiah. While the inhabitants at the borderlands have high hopes for their country, they also tend to value their past while believing in the future and are open towards outsiders to assist them in moving forward. For them, culture is the seed of life and therefore, it needs to be preserved.

Nevertheless, the people in both films show that cultural barriers are much more fluid than we think. It seems that there is nothing to prevent the borderlands population from practising their way of life - not even the political borders. *Batas* shows that customary law or *adat* still rule the Dayak people, and *Tanah Surga* indicates that the process of galvanising borderland communities has been ineffective despite national integration policies such as Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, and Malay hegemony to date.

As such, *Batas* and *Tanah Surga* are two modest Nusantara cinematic contributions that represent issues at the borderlands areas and question the notion of national identity. Conversely, the population of the Sarawak-Kalimantan borderland also present forces for transnational integration of Nusantara modern countries. The locals on both sides of the border who exist in the same cultural space feel "a sense of belonging to either one of the two sides, or even to a form of a hybrid space in which they adopt parts of each culture and/or speak both languages" (Newman, 2011, p. 37). Both films reveal that the people challenge Western dualism's clear distinctions as a substitute for "in-between" spaces (Bhabha, 1994) besides challenging the notion of ethnically and culturally inclusive state nationalism (Anzaldúa, 2012).

An Illusion of a 'Borderless World': The Patani and Kelantan Border

Representing in films, the borderland between Malaysia and Thailand enables us to explore the imaginary worlds beyond national time and space. This area is an area where dual nationality is common to people, but is rife with instability, and is closely linked to inequality and underdevelopment. The self-identification of people in this area is also problematic and is difficult to be grounded firmly in the national categories in which the two nation states are situated. Moreover, the people in this area are obsessed with identifying their own unique identity because they are culturally neither Malaysian nor Thai (Johnson, 2012, p. xii). This section aims to determine whether the demarcations of political borderlines around Nusantara were fully or partially in force after more than sixty years of nation-building. Today, in the digital age, the term "borderless world" has changed the way Nusantarans view their role in building a better place to live, and a better way of viewing themselves in a much better light. People living near the Nusantara country borders do not find it so difficult to cross these borders as such practices have been happening long before the creation of a national state. Similarly, they do not attach importance to the political borders because they were living in a place of their own, in "[…] 'nation[s] without states', an established multi-cultural, multi-lingual, even multi-nationality conditions" (Gungwu, 2005, p. 253). In Wang Gungwu's assessment, the Borderlands is a locality, a nation on its own so to speak, but, he also contends that studies on the historical and cultural roots of ethnic nations approximating the Thais of Thailand and the Malays of Malaysia within the current state of Southeast Asian national space and time has been somewhat patchy and uneven (2005, p. 259).

Akin to Wang's observation, I would like to draw attention to Bhabha's proposal on the cultural construction of nationness for whom "[t]he story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs the time of modernity" (1994, p. 142). The two films from Malaysia, *Jogho* and *Bunohan,* highlight the lives of the people around present-day Malaysia-

Thailand borderlands. These films are two illustrative examples from the three Nusantara national cinemas that have suitable cinematic attributes in dealing with the ambivalence and the intersections of time and place representing the experience of the Nusantara subjects in the Borderlands. I quote Bhabha at length here because his insightful opinions drive this discussion on the narrative of a nation and people who live in the Borderlands, as portrayed in Nusantara films.

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past or present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7).

In both *Jogho* (1997) and *Bunohan* (2012), the characters belong to the land, and as if to show that the existing political demarcation lines are insignificant, they regularly cross the dividing line. As stated previously, Khoo (2002) and Ibrahim (2009) note that the film *Jogho* offers alternative meanings together with a specific identity for the Patani Malay community within the borderland of Malaysia and Thailand. Human mobility across the borders between Malaysia and Thailand that involve Mamat, the quintessential liminal character, crisscrossing different geopolitical spaces but in similar social structure and physical environments, confirms the inefficiency of rigid national cultural boundaries and the dissolution of diverse identities in the archipelago. Such acts of cross border mobility metaphorically pin down the cultural space of the community. Even though both films emphasise people who specifically reside in the area, it is also common for people of other ethnicities from both countries to do business or, perhaps, for leisure, to cross over and diminish the importance of national cultural differences.

Before the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty (otherwise known as 1909 Bangkok Treaty), there was little understanding of a national border between Patani and Kelantan. Currently, Patani, at the southernmost province of Thailand, is the only region in the country where the population is predominantly Muslim and continuously associated with separatist issues. It is quite common to hear that Patani and Kelantan's people are as close as one family because most of them have relatives across the border. In *Jogho*, Mamat and his family are from Kelantan, so they are technically Malaysian. The scenes when Mamat and his daughter Faizah cross the border to visit Jusoh at the boarding school but stopover at Zainab's house located in Kelantan illustrates how Borderland inhabitants have clear roots or family relations that may straddle or span the border. Additionally, Mamat's youngest son Jusoh is studying in a government-sponsored religious boarding school in Kelantan and, therefore, must be a Malaysian citizen. However, the film suggests that Mamat's family also passes as citizens of Thailand when Melah (eldest daughter) is admitted to a local Thai hospital. They also show respect to Thai authorities when Mamat twice surrenders himself to the Thai police.[121]

Jogho depicts economic inequality and the unequal social environment between Thailand and Malaysia through the use of camera shots of villages, sets, props and costumes. For example, when Mamat and Faizah travel to Zainab's house and Jusoh's school in Kelantan, the film uses a series of images with higher contrast and a better range of colours, thus, making their images and cultures look much more vivid, especially when the characters' travel to Malaysia. In comparison, it appears that Kelantan is much more prosperous given the better infrastructure, busier roads and homes with electricity. However, when looking at the mise-en-scène of Minah (Mamat's wife) and Zainab (Minah's sister), it is apparent that wardrobe choices, costume accessories and props

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[121] Dual citizenship is not a problem in Thailand but it is not allowed by the Malaysian government, "[d]ouble citizenship seems to be one of the patterns in the political ecology of the borderland in which border people are reworking the government rules according their own interests" (Hortsmann, 2009, p. 174). However, for a 63-year-old person living in the Borderlands "dual citizenship involving [the] people [of] Southern Thailand and Kelantan existed due to [various] social and economic interests" (Bernama, 2016).

convey their character's personality as well as a better economic status. For example, Zainab is wearing a stack of gold bracelets, a brightly coloured dress, and lives in a house with a television set, all of which can be seen as signs of wealth for her family. Nevertheless, the economic difference does not attest to their family relationships as in the scene when Zainab asks her children to welcome Mamat and Faiza out of respect for her older brother.

Upon closer examination, the attitudes of Borderland personalities towards the dividing line in both films portraying border crossings may also be a suggestion or an alternative to current socio-political events. In a scene from *Jogho*, Mamat warns Jali, Sani, and Salim that the three young Patani Malays will have to face difficulties if they cross the border into Kelantan without a valid Malaysian national identity card (IC). Nevertheless, the three antagonists, Isa, Semail and Dollah quickly flee to the other side of the border after killing Mamat's brother in the bull ring to evade capture by the authorities. Despite this, the national demarcation lines in *Jogho* only exist through dialogues and are not visible or shown to be an obstacle to their border-crossing activities. It seems that the border separating the two countries exists, but for the inhabitants, it does not present much of an obstacle.

In *Bunohan*, it is impossible to tell the difference between the two geopolitical spaces that divide Kelantan (Malaysia) and Patani (Thailand). The Borderland is shown as a cultural space that is split into identical halves. Apart from the registration plates of vehicles, the construction site project sign, and location signage (which appears only briefly), there is no other way to tell the differences between the Kelantan and Patani or to determine the nationalities of the people. Characters like Ilham, Adil, Deng, Muski and Jolok are seen to fit in with both communities across the borders and move seamlessly between the two political territories.

Bunohan is a good example of the interweaving of territorial, social and cultural demarcations and border crossings in the Nusantara cinema(s). In *Bunohan*, the central spectacle

of the film is the fighting sport of Muay Thai, which is also the national sport and martial art of Thailand in which contests are regularly held events in Buddhist temples. At the beginning of each fight, Muay Thai fighters perform a ritual dance called *Wai Kru Ram Muay* or *Wai Kru* to pay tribute to their teachers and their families, and to bless themselves in the ring with a victory. It also demonstrates that martial art is sacred to the Thai culture and should not be taken lightly.

Bunohan also highlights the performance of *Wayang Kulit*, the shadow theatre, which exemplifies how people of Nusantara cohabit with the mythical dimension of spirits and legends. These performances, despite their 'un-Islamic' nature, are also popular in Kelantan and Thailand, due to a mixture of Hindu influences and animist beliefs in the broader region. By incorporating Muay Thai, *Wayang Kulit* as well as other traditional practices and rituals, *Bunohan* demonstrates the problem of national classification in terms of social and cultural norms. Irawanto (2014) suggests that the film director Dain Said "deliberately uses the border [...] as an interstitial space in which various elements/influences merge (Islamic and pre-Islamic practices) and where the border is porous." He then concludes that "Bunohan as a real territory in Kelantan has been completely transformed into '*Bunohan'* as a new cinematic landscape and became a microcosm of contemporary Malaysian politics characterised by intrigue, deceits and murders" (pp. 204-5). Irawanto's deduction is sound but lacks concern for the social relationship among Borderlands inhabitants. His analysis of Borderlands as a liminal space provided him with evidence for the representational analysis of associations between Malaysian and Indonesian films and the underlying cinematic transnationalism of film. In his discussion, however, he makes no attempt to discuss the strong family relationship among the characters in films that occupy a liminal space somewhere in the country. To borrow an idea from Bhabha, this "liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves" (1994, p. 148) because, in *Bunohan*, due to the transnational interrelationship of its

characters and cultures, the film upholds regional loyalty (Nusantara) rather than the nationality of the individual state.

However, the film is not about Malaysian citizens per se as it is more about the culture of the Borderlands, of the binational subjects. With an ambivalent attitude towards the in-between space of the Kelantan-Patani borderlands, *Bunohan* offers "an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (p. 219). On the other hand, in the film, the people of the interstitial future die with the sale of the hereditary land for a seaside resort. Conversely, they may still survive considering the use of metaphors concerning the spirit boy who mysteriously appears in the village. This depiction of the young boy represents the complex cultural issues of society that reaches its peak at the end of the film when two older adults talk about spirits, myths and possessions again after the boy with his bloodied chest, quickly leaves Pok Eng's dead body.

Bunohan negotiates borders in a number of ways. The Malaysia-Thai border that Adil and Muski cross at the beginning of the film is merely a swamp full of *pandanus* plants which oppose the existence of national borders. Another very significant setting in this film involves a portion of land at a beach, a space that in the past was where Ilham and his mother Mek Yah lived after she separated from Pok Eng. The house is no longer there, what is left is just the cement steps, and old graves where Mek Yah is buried. The film introduces the setting with Ilham sitting at the steps mulling over how things stand in his mother's land. Someone has opened the old graves where his mother and others had been buried, and we can see a set of tombstones foregrounding the shot.

Figure 9: The old graves, the beach and the family home are all in one composition.

The shot starts with a wider long-shot which also includes the cemetery. Ilham then moves to the steps, the camera follows, and it ends as such. It seems that he is mulling over the negativity of what has occurred, reflecting on past memories. He may also be anxious about the future. A beach is a borderland space where different factors, including relationships, attitudes and climate, influence the sense of identity and the sense of belonging. Thus the beach and shoreline scene shows that there is a place for the past both in the present and in our future. The location of the remnant house on the beach being eroded by the waves also suggests liminality of the mother's identity in the village (as a healer both feared and revered) and the transience of life itself. Therefore, both scenes use cinematic approaches to express social ties along with the local population's cultural degradation.

Bakar wants the land title from his father (Pok Eng) and two stepbrothers (Ilham and Adil), in order to develop it into a modern-style resort but Ilham, Adil and Pok Eng do not agree with the proposal nor decision to do so. The setting is a shoreline with an estuary nearby, which,

metaphorically is a border - the place where the land meets the water as well as where the salt water mixes with freshwater.[122] Dain Said, the director, reiterates this in his own words;

> I like to think that they (the people of Nusantara) live in a vertical time because the stories are repeated […]. I did a lot of work […] on the nature of narrative in the land, how we live with the land, how we shape the land, the land, in turn, shape us […]. In many ways, for me, that is the place where I grew up in […] why I go back to that kind of place is because, I think we all share this in Southeast Asia, where we live in so many contradictions, side by side. This is Southeast Asia that I love. In particular, in the Nusantara region, the contrast is so amazing […] (in Khoo, 2016).

Borders in *Bunohan* are not only spatial, but more importantly, they are temporal. For Dain, a cultural history of the land is vital. The beach in *Bunohan* represents 'in-between' space which intrudes into present-day socio-cultural situations and becomes something unavoidable in the life of borderland inhabitants.

Furthermore, the beach is suggestive of Nusantara's homeland (*tanahair*) as described in Chapter Two and works as a "contact zone" (Pratt, 2002). Beaches and changes in the shoreline can be a useful metaphor for cultural evolution and cultural change over time and can be seen as a source of natural beauty which can also be a place to nourish our souls and is synonymous with erosion. Like the erosion of beaches, which includes land (sands, trees, shrubs, etc.) and sea (corals, fish, invertebrates, cetaceans, et.) materials, Nusantara's cultural change has been accompanied by many other modernising attributes such as transportation services, access to education, information, and political life. Socio-cultural change is both inevitable and essential to modern nation states' survival. The beach is the site of Bakar's treachery (patricide and fratricide) and the same site (where the mother's house lies) where the sea (a very feminine symbol) is the repository

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[122] Andaya (2018) suggests that the association of brackish water areas as sites of potential power is significant for people in this region because beings or places that "cross" defined spheres of existence are believed to be spiritually potent (p, 23).

of past, present and future times. The beach, as the contact zone where the *tanah* (land) and the *air* (water) meet, becomes the setting for the allegory of the Malay culture. The beach becomes Dain's canvas (just like the opening of the *wayang* screen that becomes a film screen).

Dain's allegorical message is hidden in the story of three brothers and what each of them signifies by their names and what happens to them and that the Malays have lost their connection to their *adat* and land (Adil is unable to find his way of life because he does not realise that his mother is a representative of the deep Malay spirituality - his death means the lost potential of Malay's culture and *adat* and spiritual connection. His death also means that there is no justice/fairness in the world, as he was poisoned in the ring after all). Ilham (meaning intuition and inspiration) always attempts to reconnect with the past by going back to the mother's house on the beach, but at the end of the day, he too embraces his destiny (as a mercenary, you either kill or be killed) and he is killed. In the modern materialistic world of craving, greed and with no blood-loyalty, only the destructive brother, Bakar, survives. The Kelantanese are supposed to be very clannish, a very tight-knit community of people, but Dain's film shows that older, more collective values cannot withstand capitalist values, particularly when individuals like Adil are not given the resources (the father told the truth) to prepare for the attack/slaughter. There are no women to underpin the acts of these men (both mothers are dead, and there are no other female characters), they are driven by greed, simple impulses and violence.

The beach is also a site of dispute (the old graves) and the place where Ilham surrenders himself to Deng (sent by his paymaster to kill him) to face the death penalty in exchange for Adil's life. Both scenes are indicative of Malaysia's (as well as Nusantara's) national cultural and political incoherence and offer critical representations, depending on the viewer's interpretations and appreciations. As such, modern nation states should move forward, but some people never seem to want to let go of memories and heritage. For many locals, Nusantara or the Malay world has remained intact for decades due to their *adat*. The main problem with this line of argument, along

with its emphasis on *adat,* is that the region and its communities are forever changing and developing new opportunities in all directions like all modern societies. The presence of the Western concept of nationalism and capitalism, the notion of people's growth, and the promotion of national rather than shared regional cultural values have all diminished the importance of *adat* as the primary organisational rule of this archipelagic population.

The final dialogue between Deng and Ilham is key to unravelling the question of Adil's identity and family dynamics. Ilham asks Deng a question, *"Takdir mu ke sini pasal aku ke, atau takdir mu yang bawa aku ke sini."* (Perhaps you were fated to be here because of me, or is it your fate that brought me here). The answer he received, *"Itulah hidup kita ni… dok sangkut dengar cerita orang yang lepas sudah"* (This is the way we are… our lives caught in the web of other people's stories of the past). Deng seems to be suggesting that in-betweenness is the condition of their humanness. As his name suggests, Deng is supposedly a Siamese, where he hinted at his ethnicity when he informed Ilham about Bunga Lalang (Adil) getting into mischief.

Ilham, Adil, and Bakar are siblings; however, due to what happened between their parents (the people) in the past, the sons have to accept the consequences. In other words, they have to pay for the past actions of their father and mother. In an earlier scene, Adil asks his father, Pok Eng, about his own identity, but the man does not say anything when Adil asks whose son he is. Adil then goes to Jing's place to search for Ilham, but he meets Jing and Pok Wah instead. Adil asks Pok Wah about his true identity, but the old man refuses to talk about it and maintains that Adil's father is the one who has to speak about it. Jing, however, has a different opinion about it and argues with Pok Wah that if he does not speak up, Adil will never learn about his true identity. As Mek Yah gave birth to Adil, according to Jing, Pok Eng asked Jing's mother to support him because other people were not supposed to know. Jing's family is Chinese, so they should know how to keep it secret, as expressed in the film dialogue. Pok Wah then reveals that Adil was born out of wedlock and was born after Mek Yah and Pok Eng had divorced. The disclosure here comes

a little too late, and it implies that if he had not kept Adil's mother's identity a secret, Adil would not have lost his way; he would have had an anchor and probably would have inherited his mother's spiritual legacy. The *Bunohan* narrative gives us a hint of a complicated family relationship in the Kelantan-Patani borderlands and gives the impression that they were living in a nation of its own - neither Malaysia nor Thailand.

Likewise, families separated by an international border in *Jogho* carries similar importance as it does in *Bunohan*. However, *Jogho* is perhaps more vocal on "cultural boundaries and the meanings lurking underneath being […] a Malay Muslim" (Raju, 2011, p. 57). According to the director:

"So I am trying to find what Malay is. To me, questions are more important than answers. I cannot give the answers" (in Raju, 2011, p. 57).

Apparently, the director himself is questioning his own identity. His other films, like *Kaki Bakar* (1995) and *Hanyut* (2016), also present culturally and ethnically ambiguous characters having identity issues. Following Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia, a Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, usually speaks the Malay language, and conforms to Malay's customs. A radical Malay nationalist leader, Burhanuddin Al-Helmy (1911-1969), defines Malay in a broader sense, including the Javanese, Madagascan, Taiwanese and other Malayo-Polynesian languages (Omar, 2015, p. 51). Al-Helmy also maintains that if one "diverts his loyalty and fulfils the requisites and requirements of Malay nationalism he/she then becomes a nationalised Malay in accordance with its political meaning" (as in Mohamad & Aljunied, 2011, p. ix). The Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, also sees the Filipino races as one of Malay races and seeks to unite Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia as part of Malay's common heritage (p. x). In essence, there are Malays beyond Malaysia and even the archipelago. In fact, Malay culture or identity is the result of a hybridisation that has taken place for many centuries (Nagata, 2011, p. 15). It is,

therefore, safe to say that Malay cultural boundaries are substantially unclear, and their related functions vary significantly.

Conclusively, *Jogho* and *Bunohan* show that people living near the Kelantan-Patani borders do not really recognise the political borderlines between Malaysia and Thailand. Hence, crossing the border is not seen as an issue, and such practices occur naturally. Cinematically, *Bunohan* gives more attention to inhabitant's historical boundaries and connections. Nevertheless, both films inform us that the investigations, as well as the formation of cultural and national identity, are ongoing.

These films of the Kelantan-Patani Borderlands endorse Hortsmann's analysis that the people from this area "perceive the other side of the border very much as part of their social world," and for them, "there [is] effectively no border" (2009, p. 157). Moreover, Hortsmann's examination also suggests that "blood ties seem to be an essential element of citizenship ideology on the Thai-Malaysian border" (p. 174). I would also like to add that the issue of kinship is not exclusive to the Thai-Malaysian border because *Jogho* and *Bunohan* share similar narrative trajectories with many other representations of borderlands from the Nusantara region.

Previously, *Batas* and *Tanah Surga* affirm that the people of Sarawak-Kalimantan Borderlands through space and time have an intricate kinship connection. These films exemplify that the places are 'Nations without States.' Consistent with that idea are several other films of Nusantara Borderlands from different but similar social and political areas like *Tanah Air Beta* [My Homeland] (Ari Sihasale, 2010), *Di Timur Matahari* [To The East of the Morning Sun] (Ari Sihasale, 2012), *Tanah Mama* [Mama's Land] (Asrida Elisabeth, 2015), and Aisyah*: Biarkan Kami Bersaudara* [Aisyah, Let Us be a Family] (Herwin Novianto, 2016).

Conclusion

The existence of political borderlines set up in response to the establishment of new countries within the Nusantara region from the 1950s onwards is seriously dealt with by regional filmmakers as to the advancement of Nusantara national societies. From the films that I have examined in this chapter, it can be seen that representations of Borderlands from Nusantara cinemas illustrate that national boundary lines have barely had any effect on the people's everyday lives.

Film representations of borderland inhabitants in Nusantara cinemas contribute to the discussion of national and regional identities by showing the peripheral cultural parts of the countries in cinematic form. What is more important is that these films have established a different perspective concerning border reliability and integrity, and emphasise the complex liminality of lived experience that occurred during the ongoing process of nation-building in Nusantara. It also speaks about falling in-between two nation states and presents critical transnational elements within the complex body of Southeast Asian Cinema.

In my analysis of *Jogho* [Champion] (U-Wei Haji Saari, 1997), *Batas* [Border] (Rudy Soedjarwo, 2011), *Bunohan: Return to Murder* (Dain Said, 2012) and *Tanah Surga… Katanya* [Land of Paradise… So They Said] (Herwin Novianto, 2012), it can be seen that the films occupy a liminal feeling between truth and fiction. However, the borderlands in these representations are almost free of border protection infrastructure with practically no borderlines when the actors cross into another national territory. All four leading characters, Mamat in *Jogho*, Aidil in *Bunohan*, Jaleswari in *Batas*, and Salman in *Tanah Surga*, embody Nusantaran people in a transitional space: between traditional and modern as well as, the intermediary between the two national cultures.

Of the four films dealt with in this chapter, *Bunohan's* cinematic properties deserve more critical attention and appreciation. Aside from incorporating a variety of cinematic styles, there are other details about the connection between cinematic time and space with regional socio-cultural

history as well as cultural materials in *Bunohan* that require more analysis than undertaken in this research. For instance, *wayang kulit* or shadow puppetry, used as the main props in this film, is familiar to the people throughout Nusantara cognisant with its stories of brotherhood, courtly intrigue and good versus evil (Mahabharata, Ramayana). The film intentionally uses the ghostly young boy and Mek Yah, who appear intermittently to elicit a particular emotional response from the audience. The presence and behaviour of both characters disrupt the normal relationship between the chronological order (*Fabula*) and the narrative in film semantics. Likewise, the unusual subplot demands serious attention and allows the viewer to decipher the narrative more thoroughly. The scenes with these characters evoke the memory of a past that does not recognise a boundary between the present and the past; rather it is a continuum that links the culture of today's people with the culture of their ancestors.

As a final point, these relatively recent films are not only about living in an indeterminate space between two political ideologies but is more about how day-to-day life in Nusantara Borderlands that informs the criticality of in-betweenness and problematises a nationally defined and demarcated cultural identity.

CHAPTER SIX

Representing Nusantara in the Digital Age

Introduction

This chapter examines three films, *Flooding in the Time of Drought* Part 1 (*Drought*) and Part 2 (*Flood*) (Sherman Ong, 2009) and, *Interchange* (Dain Said, 2016) which represent work from a new group of filmmakers who explore the problematic cultural context of Nusantara countries in order to create awareness of regional cultural dimensions in their narratives. These filmmakers challenge the system by revealing the paradoxes of societal diversity within national boundaries which include class, religion, ancestry, family, and regional attitudes. While working with foreign actors to explore themes of social identity, cross-border mobility of individuals, and belonging, they show mobility resulting from either choice or from matters of survival. In representing ethnic marginality and cultural intimacy within a transnational Nusantara community and advocating for change in mainstream social and political attitudes, these films all defy the narrow image of a homogeneous national populace.

In this chapter, I argue that the three selected films bring into play cross-border mobility of individuals and regional cultural connections in addition to the continued need for redefinitions of national and cultural identities. Moreover, they carry the possibility of understanding the multiple aspects of cultural mobility and the opportunity of critiquing an ethno-nationalist idea of 'national culture.' These representations provide a sense of gaining a different understanding of Nusantara than as discerned through the films' transnational lenses. Inter-generational and relative levels of mobility, as addressed in Chapter Three, may have always been a feature of regional social relations, along with a reduction in the differences between people's lives in the three countries. Moreover, in a region where so many individuals and communities are linked to mobility, the

ability to travel between places tends to represent collective cultural characteristics that are not easily altered, even when political boundaries have been drawn in separating them. Although improving connectivity at this time and age shows that boundaries can also create awareness of cultural fluidity rather than stability. In other words, social borders are a complicated reality.

In contrast to the previous chapter, which looked at the political borders and the borderlands, the boundaries here are social and mental constructions, established by individuals as well as by social entities that influence the spheres. The three films in this chapter reveal that boundaries can exist as long as people continue to formulate them and aim to create separations between individuals and communities. If the film *Badjao* in Chapter Two depicts the sea nomads of this archipelago (the Badjao people) whose culture-history does not conform to current political boundaries due to their migratory traditions, this chapter explores how cultural borders are represented in films from modern settings where a variety of social properties and historical contexts affect the creation of imaginary cultural perimeters.

Moreover, the intertwining transnational narratives, productions and exhibitions of these three films challenge our way of thinking and the strategies of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore to strengthen the protection of the country's national cultural heritage and national identity and to impose their will on their neighbours. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* comprises two parts, each running for about 92 minutes. The film follows eight immigrant couples living in small apartments in contemporary Singapore and plays scenes from their own lives, rather than mixing them. The director also links all the stories to the issue of freshwater scarcity in Singapore and more importantly, to how characters interact, negotiate, and, suffer from the problem of "foreign talent" subjects living on the margins of the Singaporean imagination of the national body (Yang, 2014) as well as Singaporean cultural hegemony that often occur in contemporary Singapore. The film deals with various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds living in the city-state and focuses on Mainland Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, Filipino, Thai, Italian, Singaporean and Pan-Asian

characters. The background to their stories revolves around water shortages that affect the city-state and cause much uncertainty about Singapore's economy and life for everyone. People are still short of water, even when it rains. Some people want to move away from the state, but there is no other place for them to go. Some residents want the nationality of Singapore, so they will do almost anything to obtain citizenship. The film was intended for festivals only and not for widespread commercial release. To that end, both parts have travelled to various international festivals including the Hong Kong International Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Cinema Digital Seoul Film Festival, World Film Festival Bangkok, Cinemanila International Film Festival, and Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius.[123] The film was initially commissioned by the Singapore Biennale and directed by Sherman Ong, a Chinese *Peranakan* from Malaysia who is an active visual artist specialising in photography and filmmaking with interests that embrace the human condition and relationships. Ong is Malaysian by citizenship, but the film was produced in Singapore. In the film, the relevance of nationality affiliations does not really matter. Consistent with his own words, "I guess having one foot in Malacca and the other in Singapore is natural for me, as I have families on both sides of the causeway. […], I would say that Singapore is my city and Malaysia is my country" (Wiegand, 2014). Nationality is not an issue, and he neither saw himself as Singaporean nor Malaysian.

The third film, *Interchange* portrays the social situation of the regional inhabitants through the interaction and interchange of opposing ideas about the past, present, this world, and others. The film reflects the change from caring for one's self to one's culture and identity. The story portrays the struggle of the dual identity of Adam and how personal, social and cultural conditions influence him. Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore are all beautiful countries with a rich history and cultural traditions that can also be represented as a (singular) body like Adam, an individual with complex cultural backgrounds. Like *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, there are also many

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[123] The details of the production are accessible at https://13littlepictures.com/flooding-in-the-time-of-drought/.

transnational elements in *Interchange*. The film is about Adam, a police forensic photographer trying to solve serial killing cases. And is set in the near future in a nameless city in "Nusantara." Also, whereas *Flooding in the Time of Drought* relies on a multinational cast, *Interchange* is limited to only Malaysian and Indonesian actors. At the centre of the film is Adam, a male character who struggles to find his identity within the immediate social environment. Adam is a forensic photographer who lives alone and works with Detective Azman, a man in the Metro Police Force. Although places like Borneo and Surabaya have been mentioned or at least made part of the film's screenplay, it is not clear whether the actual location of its story is in any of the contemporary Southeast Asian nation states. The metropolis can be located anywhere within the three countries in question with respect to this research. Malay is the film's dominant language, but it is difficult to determine if the dialect is Malaysian, Indonesian, Singaporean or maybe east Malaysian/Borneo-an. This third space in the film narrative replaces cultural identity as a necessary code and is rather portrayed as a "homogenising, unifying force" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). However, what is more important, is that the film employs an interplay of new possibilities to blur the boundaries between choice and identity, national narratives, and regional lives, in addition to the real and imaginary. *Interchange* shows that even those who may share the *tanahair* and the language from time to time will be caught up in a cultural misunderstanding.

By way of this analysis, I will demonstrate how these films privilege Nusantara society which occupies a cultural space wherein past, present, and future coexist simultaneously. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Bunohan* shows that the struggles between past and present identities are intense. Considering what is in *Interchange*, the director seems to have continuity in composing, representing and contesting contemporary ideas of cultural identities within this region.

Flooding in the Time of Drought (*Drought / Flood*)

> Traditional societies and indigenous communities have a way of coexisting and working with nature where their social and economic activities are inevitably bound to the environment and geographical peculiarities of the land. Rather than attempting to control nature or going against nature, they work with the dictates of nature. - Sherman Ong[124]

The above statement helps explain the director's cultural sensibilities, and why, in his films, he rejects the national identity narrative of the state in favour of a poetic form that emphasises inter-subjectivity and coexistence in this archipelago. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* has two ways of appreciating nature in local livelihoods and social representations, but to observe that we must open ourselves to its emotional stimuli. Drought is typically synonyms with an unceasing period of dry weather, whereas, flood, on the other hand, means an overflow of water that submerges the land. However, in *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, water is crucial to human survival and reminds us that we are all, first and foremost, more human than Italian, Malay, Chinese, etc. that occur within Singapore's inhabitant daily lives.

In both segments of *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, characters such as Sanjay, Giovanni, the Indonesian born students, and the two Korean girls use the city as a transit point because they have different objectives depending on how they define themselves. However, for others like the Malaysian-Japanese and Indonesian homosexual characters, and the Singaporean-Chinese family, it is the best place to call home as they seem to feel that the city-state is where they belong. *Drought* also weaves together the stories of several families, specifically; two families portrayed by Sanjay and Gayatri with their flatmate Inder, as well as Marco and Faridah with their kids Giulio, Elia and Sofia. *Drought*'s narratives, which mainly centre on the above characters, linger around social and cultural conflict that initiate mistreatment and demise in dealing with legacy, personality, and

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[124] Cited from Weigand (2014), *An Interview with photographer Sherman Ong: Narrating through Image*. Retrieved from https://theculturetrip.com/asia/singapore/articles/an-interview-with-photographer-sherman-ong-narrating-through-image/.

inquiries of family and ties. The film could give the impression that living in Singapore in the early 21st century is difficult, but what is more important is that the film exposes its viewers to a series of intimate, yet social accounts, which are interwoven with stories from the past. While there are few local characters, most individuals in *Drought* are mainly migrants such as expatriates and students from abroad. Such non-citizens leave their country to seek a better life, work, study and live for themselves in the city-state, and to ensure a better future. The film shows that expatriates are grappling with their sense of identity or self-sense and are having trouble fitting in. For example, Giovanni's character, an Italian expatriate, is struggling with issues of identity that lead to depression and suicide. Nevertheless, it is possible for others, like Sanjay, to adopt the characteristics that locals want in migrants, but it can take time and can be extremely difficult. This is something with which Nusantarans, like other modern-day Southeast Asian societies, should be able to identify with.

Drought begins with a frame of a young woman from a low angle doing laundry in a confined space, hanging and collecting clothes. Later in the film, we know that she is a Filipino who was sent to Singapore by her parents after a kidnapping incident. This long static shot is not just an ordinary scene; in fact, it amounts to one of the film's most potent representations of the people who are the essence of a country and in Singapore's case, migrant labour. To me, it can also be a way to convey emphasis on the presence of the camera, or perhaps, the audience as another character who observes how contemporary Nusantara people live. The woman stops when she feels uncomfortable and notices a little of her menstrual blood on the stool which she uses to stand on to collect the clothes from the clothesline. Although blood universally represents life, Kristeva (1982) suggests that "[m]enstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalisation, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (p. 71). As a "settler country" (Huat, 2003, p. 59), it is always a challenge to address Singapore's national

identity because 47 per cent of all residents in the country in 2017 were foreign-born (Nowrasteh, 2018, p. 2).

Flood as the second part of *Flooding in the Time of Drought* has four main plots consisting of a Singaporean-Chinese couple who lives with their family but are in a difficult economic situation; two mixed-blood friends who share a flat as their home (the male is half Chinese from a Malaysian mother, the female is Korean, but both have Japanese ancestry); a young female from China who is negotiating a job offer and wanting to become a lawful permanent resident; and, a story about a young Thai male who is confused and suffers sudden memory loss. All four stories explore identity-related themes besides young adults' behaviour in overcoming inner- and inter-cultural conflicts. Like *Drought*, *Flood* opens with an eye-level shot that is wide enough to see two figures laying idly on the floor in a bathroom. On the left side of the frame, the foreground is filled by the washbasin with water flowing from its tap. Likewise, we can see the water from the tap and the shower head near the couple inside the bathroom also flowing steadily. The overall atmosphere in the bathroom looks depressing when the low contrast image is dimly lit and filled with pale colour tones. In addition to the sound of running water, another sound is added in this scene which could come from something in the bathroom but which also resembles donkeys braying constantly. Although donkeys are non-existent in Southeast Asian history (Clarence-Smith, 2015, p. 32), perhaps *Flood* uses the sounds of donkeys to signify "our day to day, careworn and monotonous lives" (Bough, 2010, p. 58).

The two figures are Gayatri and Sanjay from *Drought*. This scene has continuity with another scene in their bedroom from the previous segment. The connection between these scenes is not about the strict temporal continuity, but rather, the formal and thematic connections. In the previous segment or scene, their cynical, amusing jokes about rain and marrying donkeys in South India address the paradox between cultures, time and space in their complicated socio-cultural structure. In the modern intercultural, inter-social and transnational space of Singapore, dialogue between the

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two is based on personal and social boundaries. In the bathroom scene, the fluidity of spatial progression associated with cultural memory is accentuated, where they lie helplessly on the floor with water flowing from the taps and the shower.

Flood is focused on measures of belonging among regional inhabitants, in addition to a more complex identity ambivalence at the personal level, together with the cinematographic preferences associated with it. This undertaking pays more attention to the plots involving two types of characters symbolising the simplicity of today's view of one's identity as an individual or the problem of defining ethnicity objectively and talks about groups of people in non-dominant contexts as making a consistent distinction between them which has a major impact on how we think about cultural identity. This is evidenced by the nameless Chinese-Japanese male and Korean-Japanese female characters who are flatmates. Also, by the young Singaporean Chinese husband and wife who live in another HBD flat with the husband's parents and younger sister. In the earlier plot, we learn from the two subjects who are of mixed ethnicity; and in the latter, we see how someone's identity changes from one context to another when the husband's gambling-addicted father wanted to sell his young daughter in order to save himself.

The interest of the director and how this representation is seen as underlining the idea that a new generation of regional filmmakers might have alternative ways to identify the cultural dimensions that are regionally applicable through the film. Secondly, it appears that the narrative and aesthetic dimensions of *Drought* and *Flood* reveal the rarely discussed side of mobility and complexities of belonging that are integral to the social setting. In this regard, a person's identity is established as a subjective experience of flow. The next four subsections will concentrate on these two themes.

I.   The Interplay between Caste, Identity and Nationality

The life of Sanjay and Gayatri in *Drought* is like many other young families in contemporary Nusantara, apart from efforts in managing the household economy, they are faced with challenges in terms of building better relationships with others their social circle. Sanjay and Gayatri, however, inherited a hidden social issue - the caste system as they are each from different castes, but Gayatri is keeping this as a secret between them. Gayatri is an upper-caste Singaporean Indian woman whose parents are professionals with stable incomes. Sanjay, however is an Indian national, an out of work actor and from the lowest caste, a shoemaking family in India. Caste separation is highlighted through the upper caste fears of pollution in the first scene that introduces us to the couple in their bedroom. In the foreground lies a bowl of water, which Sanjay uses to clean his body. Their conversation begins with issues related to personal space perceptions and the wife complaining about the lack of privacy in their small flat due to the presence of the tenant/sublet (Inder). Although, before this act, the opening scene at the flat demonstrates that Gayatri desires her space in her own house, but she has to relinquish the living area to Inder, the tenant, when he is back from work and stay in her bedroom and not to encroach on Inder's privacy. A thick wall in the middle of the shot clearly shows a sort of division between the two. At the heart of the conversation in the bedroom is the contradiction of Gayatri's desires for personal space which involves their financial status along with being tolerant of others in their lives particularly when it comes to her parent's feelings about social stratification. They are renting a small flat because they cannot afford a larger abode. Although they are both composed in a considerably deep-focus shot, the *HDB*[125] flat room feels confined. The long take makes the audience feel the atmosphere and the intricacy and intimacy of three persons sharing a small two-bedroom flat.

Athough they are all ethnic Indians, there are sufficient differences that demonstrate diversity and complexity within the category of 'Indian' in the Singaporean Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others

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[125] Public housing in Singapore is governed and managed by the Housing and Development Board (*HDB*).

(CMIO) framework. That said, upholding the caste system is clearly a generational belief that the young couple rejects. Rather, they are portrayed as loving towards each other, and their behaviour demonstrates that parental objection, cultural, as well as national differences would not separate them.

The bedroom is where the director sets his private conversations, not just between Sanjay and Gayatri but for all the couples in *Flooding in the Time of Drought*. The other setting for the two is the kitchen where matters about improving lives and livelihoods are articulated, which is where Sanjay persuades Gayatri to follow him to return to Delhi, India when he receives a job offer from a friend.[126] She refuses to follow as she has no confidence in being able to speak Hindi fluently. Sanjay asserts that he too does not fit into any roles to live in Singapore because he is not Malay, Chinese or Singaporean Indian. This scene tells us about the multiple problems that arise from transnational mobility and the experience of not belonging due to non-acceptance of one's ethnic, cultural or national differences. The film problematizes the homogenisation of 'race' categories like 'Indian'. Interestingly, while Indian expatriates have been blamed for not integrating or mixing with locals (Yahya & Kaur 2010, pp. 205-206), the film chooses to focus on an Indian national who subverts the stereotype.

Such characters seem to be trapped in two national communities and are in the "betweenness" situation of two national cultures along with loneliness, confusion and identity problems. The scene taking place in the liminal space depicts two individuals who discuss how to move forward from an uncertain situation. The scene shows that the in-betweenness of those who migrate is not merely about going back and forth from one aspect to another, but rather it is about flowing in a perpendicular direction, sweeping away the dichotomous conceptual frameworks that still pervade dominant world views (Deleuze and Guattari in Basu, 2017, p. 4).

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[126] Kitchens in this film are not just a place to prepare food, but a liminal space that has the function of transforming the "living thing" (nature) into "food" (culture) (Ishikura in Jacob, 2018).

In cinematic representations, the shot composition requires that it not be just a container for the screenplay, and it seems that the film's cinematic organisations also suggest a location or space is highly significant for the survival of people. The screenplay focuses on the proportions of places and subjects/objects, in addition to the interdependent relationship between individuals; it seems that the mind, body, and spirit of the "sea-oriented peoples" of Nusantara reflect how nature acts and behaves within the archipelago. In addition, the way Ong chooses his camera angle and composes his framing arguably defines the optimism of the characters. In the two scenes as mentioned here, the backgrounds are typically well-lit in contrast with the middle ground where he places his actors which is just above the visible spectrum. This might be an indication that this generation implicitly believes that there is hope out there to guide them toward the future. Also, that cultural tradition, (i.e. the caste system), persists even in hyper-modern Singapore, albeit, hidden inside people's houses.

In a different kitchen scene, Sanjay says that earnings or the desire to have a sustainable income, to have a better livelihood, is why individuals tend to migrate. Moreover, these conversations tell us about Singaporeans who are against migrant workers who are there because of economic opportunity. Yet, many talented migrants like Sanjay are discriminated against or treated unfairly given their status and national origin. In recent years, evidence suggests that a lot more needs to be done to address racial equality and discrimination.[127]

In another scene, Inder informs Sanjay about an opportunity for a temporary job as a watchman at his office and is willing to help him schedule an appointment with the manager. It ends with Gayatri approaching them and asking Sanjay the watchman's caste. If we read the mise-en-scene carefully, the scene not only reveals that the film wants its audiences to be able to

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[127] In the words of Madhusoodhanan and John in *Problems Faced by Indians in Singapore* (2018), "Indians in Singapore, are without a doubt treated as second class citizens. In a country that bans any sort of racist discrimination, we might still come cross several advertisements in Singapore that mentions 'No Indians' or 'No PRC' (p. 165).

empathise with Sanjay by plotting the position of actors in a triangularly shaped position (see below) but also tells us that Sanjay and Gayatri's optimism may turn negative. The beam of light in the background of the shot eventually disappears when Gayatri takes her position in between Sanjay and Inder. The placement of the characters in the shot can tell us something, as the negative result of good intentions is possible because, at the end of it, we can see something terrible going on between Gayatri and Sanjay. While working as a watchman, he dies during a robbery.

Figure 10: From left to right: Sanjay, Gayatri and Inder.

The subsequent scene is set in the kitchen with Sanjay about to go to work and Gayatri preparing food for him. She then reveals that she has made up her mind to follow Sanjay to Delhi when his contract as a security guard in Singapore ends. This act is by far the most joyful moment between the two characters. However, the visual arrangement or its mise-en-scene is thick with a sub-text, and this strong contrast is shown by way of the juxtaposition of opposing qualities. The warm colours of the sunsets outside the window are apparent through the framing, but there is something odd about the shot. The rest of the frame, the interior, and the characters are a little flat, with nothing but practical light as the foreground. It is important to note that the scene maintains its plain colour scheme that gives a sad and melancholy mood (see below). The scene bears a

resemblance to the sunset of life and can, indeed signify 'death' (Chaitin, 1988, p. 53). In the end, we know, of course, it was the last night of Sanjay's life.

Figure 11: Sanjay and Gayatri's last night together.

The last act at the apartment is also the final scene for *Drought* with Inder entering the frame and making steps towards Gayatri in the kitchen. They both sit at the kitchen table and talk about the incident in the office that took Sanjay's life. It looks so calm, and with silhouette lighting set in a wide framing, it is almost impossible to be sure of the characters' emotional situation without seeing their facial expressions. In mysterious circumstances, we can hear a male voice that sounds like Sanjay calling for Gayatri from a distance causing her to get to her feet to see who is calling. At this moment, the handheld camera follows her out of the house. The camera then pans in the opposite direction (left), and we can see someone resembling Sanjay on the rooftop parking space next door. Without the need to cut the shot, the camera stays with that very long shot for a while with a Chinese folk song adding to the film's climax. We then see Gayatri re-enter the shot and they sit on a mat as if they are having a picnic. The scene is surreal due to two factors; first, she hears the voice of her husband and the figure on the rooftop appears to be just like him; second, the distance between the flat and the rooftop is quite significant considering the duration of the shot and the way she runs towards him. In some way, the scene cues the audience to recognise that

mystical experiences can be self-generated. The second thought that comes to mind is that, rather than supernatural, the scene is a self-generated imagination or wishful thinking on Gayatri's part.

II.   Trusting and Transiting Singapore

In a speech given at the Singapore Parliament on May 18, 2018, the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office Indranee Rajah proposed that the hallmark of Singaporean national identity and values is centred around trust. She then went on to say that the people know they can trust the Singapore government.[128] What is in *Flooding in the Time of Drought* is dissimilar with Rajah's statement, as it is simply propaganda. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* shows that the cultural in-betweenness of the population of Nusantara with its regional inhabitants and the admiration of other world cultures, especially those of the West, inevitably leads to the fluidity of their cultural identities and belonging. National values connect with all the complexities of a global culture when talking about the new 'mobility culture,' and Nusantara inhabitants evolve fast enough to adapt to the progress of digital technology.

In contrast, *Drought*, through its narrative and aesthetic dimensions, reveals that mobility and belonging yield complicated and ambiguous consequences. To prove this fact, this analysis follows the sequence of events between Singaporean Malay Faridah and Giovanni, her Italian husband. They do not seem happy or even worse, to trust the government of Singapore. Thus what the Minister has said is starkly in contrast to what is depicted in the film. As a family, they have three children and share their home with Faridah's parents. In representing this interracial family, the film emphasises that conflicts cannot be attributed to ethnocultural differences as the underlying problem because what is more important is the people's well-being. They struggle to make a living,

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[128] The speech, entitled *Becoming Singaporean* is retrievable from https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/content/dam/minlaw/corp/News/Special%20Edition%20Note%20on%20Being%20Singaporean.pdf.

and live in constant fear about the future, especially for their children, and live in a culture that values the "nation before community and society above self"[129] often at the expense of people's well-being.

The plot surrounding this Italian-Malay family begins with Faridah bathing her two children in the bathroom and wiping them with a wet towel. The next scene at their apartment is between Faridah and Giovanni for which the director places his camera in the bathroom, observing the husband washing his face with just a glass of water. In the background, we can see Faridah in the bedroom through the full open bathroom door. It is surprising to see that, although they are husband and wife, the first impression we get through their first shot together is they are actually apart because the door creates a division between spaces even though they are in a private area. Altogether, it suggests and hints at their upcoming separation in the film's ending. Their dialogue explains their relationship and the shared reasons for the conflict between them. It begins with water scarcity, the price of water, and the family's economic well-being. In due course during the film, it shifts towards cultural difference when Giovanni urges Faridah to persuade her parents not to use too much water and to use toilet paper instead to clean themselves after relieving themselves.

This couple, like the previous pair, essentially have different views as to which pathway in life they should follow and choose or where it is best to raise their children. Faridah wants to move to Italy because in that country the government pays mothers to stay at home. Giovanni, in contrast, wishes to stay in Singapore because he finds it difficult to secure a job in Italy. It frustrates Faridah that she lives in a place where it rains nearly every day and is surrounded by the sea, yet there is a freshwater shortage. Giovanni, on the other hand, places more emphasis on honour because as *perantau*, he believes that he must have sufficient assets in order to return to Italy. Such a scene

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[129] The first value of Singapore's five shared values.

underlines the fact that individual subjectivity is an essential component of human culture and is a social and dynamic part of social cooperation.

The next short scene between Giovanni and his eldest son shows a hint of depression in Giovani's expression when he tells Giulio to shoulder responsibilities of caring for his mum and siblings when he is not around. The next act is much more intense. In a poorly lit children's bedroom, Giovanni sits at the foot of the bed and then moves to the computer desk while the camera maintains its angle and framing. The result is the back view of Giovanni. This kind of shot may suggest that the film dissimulates the character's weakness and hides his emotions (Barrance, n.d.). The scene continues with the same shot as Giovanni is seen writing what will be his final words to his son Giulio. In the end, Giovanni's farewell letter may be read as a possible suicide note.

Furthermore, the climactic scene for this family offers a profound appreciation of the unspoken. In the scene, Faridah and her children are seated inside a vehicle and framed in a confined group shot taken from the front of the automobile. At first glance, the shot can give the impression that they are on their journey somewhere, but after listening to the narration of Giovanni's letter to his parents, we begin to realise that the film is sharing something intensely personal about *perantau* stories from a director who is a descendant of Chinese *Peranakan* migrants. This voice is used not only to convey the content of Giovanni's written message but also to enlighten us about *perantau*, their thoughts and, how they feel about living in Nusantara. The voice tells that his new home is, "a lovely island where there is no fog, no cold, no winter, an island where the sun is always shining. The beach is white, and the sea is shining. It is so beautiful."

Additionally, the film creatively reminds the audience about human subjectivity through the voice of Giovanni introducing his family to his parents and saying that he needs to tell them that they all have different backgrounds. The letter starts with "Dear sweethearts, I'm really, really going to miss you a lot. You and your mother have been the most beautiful thing for me all these

years. Regrettably, I have to go. This is the best thing for our future." And ends with a moving statement that he would like to show them his new home, "with its diverse people, different but united by their need for water that is inaccessible." The final statement is full of questions concerning human mobility, subjectivity and the sense of belonging to the place where the characters live. *Drought*'s hidden story is about people who struggle to understand and accept cultural differences and histories because modern nationalism is all about racial or ethnic loyalty rather than entirety and diversity.

It is also clear that *Drought* focuses on the contemporary generation of social experiences, along with cultural mobility. It is a curious, if not strange irony that *Drought* portrayed multinational characters who represent both the time and circumstances of individual experiences with different languages in ways that illustrate the ever-changing transnational cultural flows in Nusantara, as well as the in-migration and out-migration drivers and disparities that contribute to the region's cultural dynamism. Given population growth and the resultant density, there is a relationship to national integrity, prosperity and security, and cultural and social mobility, which continues to make a Nusantara modern city like Singapore, still very much alive. The Indian and Italian subjects in *Drought* are just two examples intended to show how others should understand mobility situations and its cultural flows nowadays.

III.   Mixed-Heritage Individuals' Experiences of Self Identity

The introductory scene for the unnamed Chinese-Japanese male (Fukuzaki) and Korean-Japanese female (Jung) flatmate forms the opening sequence.[130] From the asymmetrical wide shot of their living area, the two characters are silhouetted with intensely lit windows as a backdrop. In the middle, there is an almost empty aquarium with two small identical fish. The starting dialogue

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[130] Neither name is mentioned in the film. Fukuzaki and Jung come from the end credits of the film.

is from the male character while he is standing near the window, commenting on the rain falling outside. The paradox here is that rain should provide fresh water, but later, we hear them conversing in Japanese about the lack of water. The film's screenplay for the scene is exceptional; the young man stops at the fish tank and notices that one of the fish is lifeless and proceeds to remove it with the intention of burying it. The two fish are in a plain fish tank devoid of any plants or decorations, suggesting that they have an abundance of water but not enough to move beyond the limitation of the water level.

During conditions of drought in Singapore, water shortages will affect millions of people, and it is not only a matter of economic crisis but also one of anxiety that can lead to extreme pressure on the people in expressing their anxieties regarding the future. It is interesting to note that in 1994, in several offshore farms in Singapore, in which 160 tons of fish died due to a lack of oxygen in the water, dry weather was partially blamed for the death of the fish stocks (Reuters, 2014). It may also mirror the reality of the two personalities in this film (Fukuzaki and Jung), for, if the aquarium is a habitat representing their space for life, it can be a direct synonym about the reality of Singapore as a nation or perhaps, Nusantara as a cultural region. Moreover, the emptiness reflects the understanding that the nationalisation of ethnicity, the modernisation of society and the values of a culture are not mutually exclusive issues.

Metaphorically, the living area is a semi-private space where they remain for most of the film. Within that space, the director's direction and blocking suggest the permeability and susceptibility of social boundaries and how it inspires one another's daily lives. Unlike *Drought*, which uses the entrance and wall lines, the borders in *Flood* appear hazy or blurry, and the director avoids using visible lines to separate Fukuzaki and Jung. These transnational characters do not appear to have rigid boundaries such as cultural, political, or those relating to belonging and social identity as they are within the same context, but each has their own opinion and individual agenda.

The next few scenes of this plot utilise a number of cinematic expressions in order to articulate the issue of belonging amongst the new generations at the individual level, reflecting both the cultural and historical contexts.

First, the scene of Jung introduces her Korean girlfriend, who is visiting Singapore, to Fukuzaki. As with previous scenes, the action is shot from an eye-level perspective with the three actors seated symmetrically. While they are unequal, though, in comparison to the parallel line, they tend to be equal, and the dialogue opens negotiations on moral predicaments to the complex interface of human subjectivity. The film modifies another common space with just a few chairs positioned near the walls with a dining table in the middle of the frame. The crucial subject in this scene is that everyone has their struggles regardless of whether or not one is aware of it. The female flatmate (Jung) introduces her friends to each other, in Japanese (with her male flatmate) and Korean (with her Korean girlfriend) in which she is seated between the two. In addition to a round dining table in the middle of the frame, there are a number of empty chairs, somewhat suggesting that they each have their position in the represented space.

In this simple three-person scene, we hear them talking about the history behind one's culture. We then understand that the Korean girl who is visiting them was Jung's brother's ex-girlfriend when they were in South Korea. Over time, Jung tells the girl when asked about her relationship with Fukuzaki, "What can I do with him?" Earlier, she mentioned that Fukuzaki does not like women; nevertheless, their relationship may include the possibility to live in Japan, which she wants since his family holds Japanese nationality. She further discloses that her family may not agree given their wartime experiences. In the following scene, we learn that the demeanour of Jung's grandfather was the result of her great grandmother being raped by Japanese soldiers during the Japanese occupation of Korea.

In a separate plot, Fukuzaki asks Jung to marry him, but he gains a result that was quite different from what he expected. From Jung's revelations, it appears that Korea's Japanese-hatred is also influencing the present generation's vengeance and resentment. It begins with his flatmate rejecting his proposal in a scene set with mist spraying on their faces. In a confined medium size two-shot which provides a more intimate perspective of their relationship while providing some broader details of their surroundings, Jung explains about her position, including her perception about Fukuzaki when they first met. In consideration of the opportunity to live in Japan, she seems to believe that marrying him would be out of the question, and can make her way to Japan by other means. On the whole, their personal identities, as well as their relationship, are as confusing as their racial and national identities.

At this point, the film reveals a new character, a young Chinese-Indonesian businesswoman. From the dialogue, we learn that she is alone in Singapore but ready to have a family. However, she claims that nobody wants to have her as a wife. An Indonesian male asks her to marry Fukuzaki, but the answer to the proposal is not verbalised but rather all contained within the scene. In the same living space, they sit very close together face-to-face, where she smiles and looks down. This is so unlike the way the film introduced the flatmate in earlier scenes because here, the two characters sit side by side with no significant boundaries between them, thus bringing about a sense of understanding and affection.

Next, the film reveals Fukuzaki's clandestine gay affair beginning with a frontal mid-two-shot (in the previous scene, we cannot ascertain his identity), in which his partner (the Indonesian male) is negotiating the arranged marriage while eating instant Korean ramen with the sunset in the background shown from the living room. Using Bahasa Indonesia slang, he expresses his frustration to Fukuzaki. The partner believes he is entitled to have a say about the marriage and demands to talk to the woman. Fukuzaki listens to what his partner has to say, thus, proving that complex social practices ordinarily include relationships with and against others around us.

The last two scenes in the house see Jung share her dream with Fukuzaki, with the final scene involving her girlfriend expressing her aggravation. The disturbing dreams that rattle her begin with her in place of the last Queen of Korea having dinner with her family but ends tragically with a Japanese soldier raping her and the culprit, as she sees in her dream, is none other than her flatmate. The scene ends with a line from Fukuzaki, "Did we really have sex?"

From one perspective, the dream may be a reflection of their relationship in that she holds out hope for him to live in Japan, but is not realised. On the other hand, the scene, in association with the dream, seems to dispute the idea that the continuation of one's personality is unaffected by either historical or political factors such as colonial memory. Her dream refers to the past, to when the last Korean empress was Queen Min who brought progressive reform to Korea but in the end was brutally murdered in 1895 by Japanese soldiers in full compliance of the Japanese government (Simbirtseva, 1996).

Accordingly, the dream is like a prophetic vision about their future, and Fukuzaki actually may share the same mixed feelings because we know that he is the son of Malaysian-Chinese and Japanese parents, and he has told us that his Japanese family does not have a good family relationship with his Malaysian relatives. Similar to the Korean-Japanese woman family's background, the poor relations may also have connections with the wartime experience of the Malayan-Chinese being a victim of the Japanese soldiers' brutality, As Braun (1994) says, historical narrative "represents a world possessing completeness and fullness, a formal coherence past "reality" never had" (p. 181). Moreover, she is shot with her back to the camera; thus, her facial expression is hidden from view and her resentment and sense of powerlessness is obscured.

The entire plot tells a story about how the new generation deals with sexual, gender, cultural, and national identity in relation to socio-cultural and historico-political contexts and brings surfaces some repressed historical tensions about the region under Japanese occupation (since the whole

area was affected). The two subjects' personal history shows the audience that they inherit flawed habits, mistakes, and aspirations. The selected plot also informs us that the flow of culture through the movement of people to and from this region, the past in their present-day relationships, and identity is becoming an issue because nationalism finds it challenging to link subjectivity to political and cultural changes. With the loss of cultural diversity and the rise of religious extremism in contemporary Nusantara, the understanding of social mobility for people's lives, the changing concepts of space and culture blurred by the skewed perceptions of distorted oligarchs, the sense of national identities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore is losing its external references.

However, on the other hand, their story offers transnational visions in a cinematic fictional form. If they were to attach their identities to a false evaluation, they would risk their reputations. Their desire to become themselves, as defined by their experiences and their imaginations, gives hope for the future. Though, what is more important is that the flow is normal for this maritime cultural space, but nevertheless, is dependent on the co-existence of migrants and inhabitants.

IV.   Fluid and Open-Ended Identity

The plot of the Singaporean Chinese family is about how identity changes from one context to another depending on how certain social and cultural limits are set, along with the many challenges of the modern Nusantaran family nowadays. The sequence reflects the second and third generations of Singaporeans that may have evolved from the wave of immigration more than a century ago. People are differentiated by the relation to descent from one parent and through one or both of their ancestors based on the assumptions made regarding cultural heritage. However, new cultural concepts and traditions may also need to be accepted by those living under new situations and circumstances. The story shows that the experiences of change, the formula of

descent and the newly adopted cultural characteristics are essential for reassessing one's identity since they are all subject to cultural interpretation.

The plot begins with an almost silent long-shot revealing the young husband and wife sitting at a dining table eating and chatting in a HDB flat. We can also see an older lady walking back and forth in the kitchen, in the background, while the sound of raindrops fills the shot establishing that they are somewhere in the tropics. The male character is wearing shorts without a shirt, thus emphasising his bare body. The shot has a tremendous depth of field, but their position is quite far from the camera. Eventually, the camera moves to the left to include a young girl at another table looking at a laptop. Ultimately, the shot exposes all four characters from two generations who live under one roof showing the past, present, and future all existing together in one space/time.

The film uses the same style of composition for the second scene at the house. However, there is no sound of raindrops, and the camera slants to the right with the wife sitting silently at the table. The husband is talking with his mother at the dining table at the rear and, through their conversation, we learn that the father is hiding from a "loan shark," and they want his sister to work for them, but she will only work at night. The male character offers himself instead of his sister even though his mother reiterates that it will be useless because they only want women and not men. He insists on resolving their problems head-on and, in doing so, intentionally alters his identity, driven by the interplay of positive and negative emotional factors.

The subsequent scene, unlike all other scenes in the film, consists of several shots. It starts with a shot with the two relaxing and smoking on a couch serenaded by the soothing sound of raindrops. Then, the film introduces a slow song to assist in creating outrageously loud music for the viewers as well as the two characters. The next few shots are much more confined (close-ups and medium close-ups), with a combination of intercuts between the husband shaving, applying make-up on his face, and, the wife helping to transform him into a woman. It ends with another

full two shot showing the husband walking in high heels. Assuming that the husband is absolutely sincere in wanting to help the family and to save his younger sister from the loan shark,[131] this melodramatic scene instantly connects us with the issue of cultural identity transformation and connects us to the current stage of national identity crisis to encourage ongoing change. The husband is a person who, due to the lengths he would go, is a hero to the family - to act in drag - to save the life of his sister.

Next, some scenes may challenge our assessment of reality about how Nusantara or, national identity is created by factors related directly to us, at personal and societal levels. In the next scene, looking like a drag queen, the husband is walking into the frame in his new identity while pulling a big suitcase and proceeds to walk towards the camera. He does not stop, and the camera follows him until he pauses at a sitting area. The husband is out to resolve the family's financial problems and the luggage that he pulls may symbolise responsibilities, and the emotional baggage he carries with him.

In the following scene, the husband is lying and smoking in someone's bed alone but off-screen we can hear someone taking a shower in the bathroom. After that, the camera moves to the pair's own bedroom with the husband lying and smoking in his bed half naked alone except he is now only seen from behind. The sound of someone taking a shower is replaced with the sound of raindrops. It is not just another tropical rainfall, especially when it becomes leitmotif to the narrative which the raindrops correspond to the shower sounds as well as the sound of water running because altogether, these sounds of water of different types have a like signification. Douglas Kahn, in his book *Noise, water, meat: History of voice, sound, and aurality in the arts* (1999) writes:

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[131] It is an assumption based on what is presented in screenplays from the previous scene.

"The music of less domesticated dripping could be found in the untamed wilds of the home wherever there was a leaky tap, its unpredictable pitches and rhythms effectively equivalent of the book of nature read aloud. […] Dripping is a flow, marked by incipience and restraint". - (p. 252)

Perhaps, the sound of water in *Flooding in the Time of Drought* represents life in addition to signifying the characters' acceptance of what has happened to them.

There are two short scenes between the husband and wife before their story ends in an intimate closing scene suggesting that the body can change quite significantly over time but is dependent on the individual being able to deal with the evolutionary nature of the human species as well as social conditions. Accordingly, their story illustrates the theme because the husband changed and gave his body to replace his sister, just as the wife sacrificed her self-centeredness for the benefit of the family. While this may be seen as a plot that places viewers on the scene of ongoing stories of courage and sacrifice, the husband is undergoing a gender transition, a transformation that does not fit the established ideas of being male or female in order to protect the future of his sister. First, the couple is framed with close-up shots resting and smoking on their couch with the camera tilting from one character to another emphasising their facial and internal emotional state telling us that they are hiding difficult feelings and emotions that need to be dealt with. Then, through a long-shot, we see the two standing at the ground floor near the stairway with the husband in a dress along with his luggage while the wife is standing at the opposite end. He then takes out his drinking water from the luggage before he pulls out several stalks of white flowers and a red rose. He inserts the white flowers into the water bottle before passing the bottle to his wife while keeping the red rose for himself. This gesture, after a decision on a familial disorder or possibly, social consciences, symbolises the husband's belief that she is innocent but gets caught up in the situation and hopes that she will continue to love him for what he is about to do.

The final scene for them is another long take set in relation to the bonds between the husband and wife, where the issues of identity and authenticity actualise. They are in bed, but the husband is still wearing his dress, and the wife gazes at the husband for quite some time before giving him a passionate kiss and helping him to undress - unbuttoning his bra as well as removing his long blonde wig. Then, a classic Chinese song fades in the scene to support the connection between the two while they continue embracing and kissing passionately. The use of music in film, according to Beeman (1981), "serves as a conduit for the distinct aesthetic sensibilities of the society for which the film is produced" (p. 77). Although the shot is taken from behind the male character, their body language tells us that they still love each other despite the identity differences.

Since the formation of nation-states in Nusantara, the Chinese have been confronted with scepticism about their devotion, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, promoted in national politics by jingoism. The plot above represents, in cinematic terms, the value of Chinese individuals and shows that one of their characteristics is dependability. The non-stereotypical transnational narrative of ethnic groups and the cultural advantages of cinematographic representation offered by contemporary filmmakers, such as Sherman Ong, have given considerable importance to the Nusantara countries and cinemas' cultural and national identities. *Drought* and *Flood* not only portray individual subjectivity and criticise implicit stereotypes that one's identity is an inborn and unalterable quality, but also epitomises the water-based cultural values that involve fluid identity in social groups and individual status.[132] Both segments attempt to show the dimensions of national culture and, in doing so, it displays the shady realities in contemporary life. The film tells the story from several locations, revealing the complex nature of the individual's positionality played by

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[132] Individual subjectivity, according to González Rey as cited in Kafrouni (2013), "is a differentiated expression that is combined with unique subjective senses developed in the history of the individual" (p. 125).

various characters from diverse backgrounds that are at the intersection of their lives in relation to Singapore's national identity.

The effects of human mobility and cross-cultural movement on national cultural identity in Singapore (and Nusantara) remain active even today. More than ever, human mobility and cultural diversity in the country have become necessary to support its development as a city-state. Curiously, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are having similar problems with emigration when six in every one-hundred citizens live abroad.[133] The argument presented from a Singaporean social scientist, Leong Chan-Hoong, in a media commentary says that it is unlikely for Singaporeans who move overseas to lose their sense of Singaporean-ness because, "being away made them appreciate what they had left behind" and, "Singaporeans have always been able to navigate multiple identities, shaped by our ethnicity, background and beliefs."[134] While it may be true, Singaporeans have strong strains of nationalism, and it is almost impossible for the country to guard those citizens from bringing back new cultures when they return. Singapore has become an important transit point for trade, as well as for individuals and, therefore, the country would not be able to hold on to a stationary status of national cultural identity.

Interchange (2016): In Search of Identity and Belonging

After *Bunohan* (2012), Dain Said produced *Interchange* (2016), which, according to the director, addresses another essential regional socio-cultural issue: "[*Interchange* is] a film about characters and their struggle to find themselves, via their journey, although this time the characters are trapped not just by place, but by time. […] All the characters are trapped in one way or another." My reading focuses on what exactly the film is about, "a South-East Asian story that we can all

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[133] See Chan-Hoong (2017), *Commentary: More Singaporeans going abroad, but are no less Singaporean for it.* Retrieved from: https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/commentary-more-singaporeans-going-abroad-but-are-no-less-9134122
[134] Chan-Hoong (2017).

recognise" (Koay, 2015). Mysticism, the supernatural and magic are the Nusantara elements that pervade Dain's work. In *Interchange*, these aspects are incorporated differently according to the style and narrative acuity of the director's stamp. The film integrates and transforms Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore's shared cultures into extraordinary experiences, the archipelago's mystical tradition, into a culturally relevant cinematic form. Not only does the film break and challenge Malaysia's cinematic boundaries, but it also talks about regional norms, the relationship between man, nature and animals, post-colonialism and its impact on indigenous communities, and the (sometimes lost) values of archiving (Ragavan, 2016). As a mainstream film, *Interchange* helps to inform audiences about Nusantara's past, present and future. *Interchange* offers a sense of cultural and non-national belonging and suggests that the director views time-space within a regional complexity as being disturbed by a variety of modern forces. The film is in Malay, but the characters are Malay, Chinese, Indonesian and Borneo, peoples.

The film presented in gloomy greys, blacks, and whites, evokes the mystical aspects of crime, murder, delusion, and deception that are the main features of the film's noir, a form of hybridity in itself. The audience can see that *Interchange* is a regional story masked as a story of composite characters set somewhere in Southeast Asia. In the film, the shadowy, tough environment of the city fits the noir style and frequently highlights the mysteriousness of the place. Fascinating and provocative images of dead bodies are infused into the various implications of the rich nature of Nusantara, especially in the form of an unusual hybrid park in the centre of the city, in direct contrast to the urban mood (Huiyuan & Wang, 2016). We tend to simplify film noir qualities by pointing out that nightmarish, weird, erotic, death, dread, ambivalent and cruel are the main components that may disorient the audience when they cannot find familiar reference points (Borde & Chaumeton, 1996, pp. 20-4). But, what is more important, especially for *Interchange*, is that "the moral ambivalence, the criminality, the complex contradictions in motives and events, all conspire to make the viewer co-experience the anguish and insecurity" (p. 25).

In general, the film tells a story about the oppositions between a forensic police photographer or Adam who is in a state of depression and his colleague, detective Man; both of whom are trying to solve a series of gruesome ritualistic murders where the unidentified victims are all found hanging, dissected with their veins extracted from their body and their body completely drained of blood. Mysteriously, broken photographic glass plate negatives are found near each of the dead bodies which become essential props for *Interchange*. Moreover, they become the catalyst for Adam to embark on a mystical journey between the "Time-world and the Timeless-world" in search of his true identity. As stated by Stefan (2016), "[t]he Time-world and the Timeless-world are mutually intertwined, mystic tells us; namely, in every point of the Time-world, there is a Time-less world. This means that the Timeless-world is everywhere where the Time-world exists. The timeless-world is here and now; you do not need to travel far away to reach it" (p. 255).

According to Iva the heroine, who is Adam's neighbour as well as a clairvoyant for the *Tingang* (the hornbills) people of Borneo, and who also shares the same line of ancestry, Adam is trapped. Along the way, he realises that the murders are connected to his family's cultural roots in Borneo. *Tingang* or hornbills are sacred creatures for the Ngaju Dayak of Borneo and are, "thought to be able to move between the earth and the sky, between the different stages of existence. If we note the presence of […] winged creatures that can fly between different realms, then we see the importance of metamorphosis and the concept of resurrection" (Allen, 2016, p. 83). Allen's interpretations that stress the transgressive nature of the hornbills that may cross-cut spaces and time seems to me, to have a strong connection with the film's narrative. The film speaks about the significance of hybridity upon a person's or, community's identity and culture. Other notable characters are Sani the antique dealer, Heng the photo studio owner, and the mysterious Belian, a character who is from another world who not only has the characteristics of a bird because he is trapped in a disfigured human body but can mutate into the hornbill when necessary. In the final sequence of the film, he comes back to life after being declared dead when all individuals from the

tribe are murdered, and the photographic plates are broken; at that point, he has the capacity to return to his actual appearance and be free.
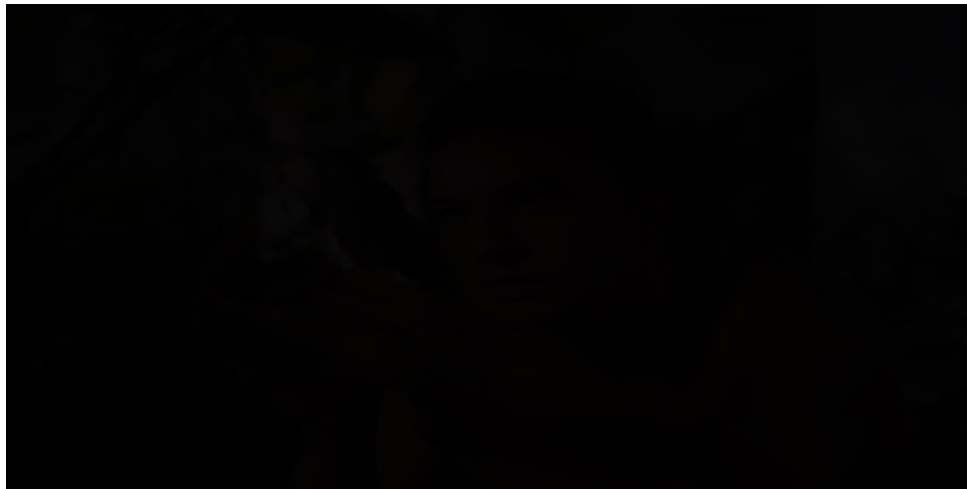

Figure 12: Belian, the Birdman (Nicholas Saputra).

It is my given opinion that the film's cinematic use of time and space reflects and critiques the rigid ideas of national cultural identities of Nusantara countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. *Interchange* is an Indonesian-Malaysian co-production, and the film hinges on a chain of occasions activated by an episode depicted between 1913 to 1917 when Norwegian adventurer Carl Lumholtz explored innermost Borneo. Despite this, director Dain said, "It's not set in Borneo. It is set in a city "somewhere." I prefer not to be specific about where that city is […]" (Jakartanistic, 2017). True, at least cinematically, but not all critics can accept and realise the sensitivities within the details throughout this film. For instance, Maggie Lee of *Variety* suggests that Dain is exploring, "the legacy of Malaysia's colonial past on the country's ultra-modern present" (2016). That assessment is partly accurate. For me, the director's unwillingness to be specific about the setting is a strategy that attempts to be set in a generic modern Nusantara city. Lumholtz captured several photos during his journey, and one of them is a shot of native women washing/bathing in a river. The photo of women bending over the river with the caption, "Women washing from the evil effects of being photographed" from Lumholtz's book – the one in which inspired Dain to make the film (Chan, 2016). For Belian the Birdman, he spent so many years

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looking for Sani, Iva, Adam and other people in the negatives because he believed that their souls should be released from the bodies. What drives the plot is Adam and Man's need to find the killer, but the glass photo negatives found near each dead body drive Adam to become more ambitious in knowing his "real" self. Their investigations shed light on the past secrets of the extinct Tingang tribe, Adam's ancestors, which were captured in the photographs. The tribe believes that the soul of the person is locked in every photo.

Nusantara folklore inspires the film, but such stories are widespread to all pre-modern cultures as well (Rosenthal 1983; Ragavan 2016). The cinematographic aesthetics he intentionally composes makes several interpretations possible. Moreover, the positionality, as well as the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations, of a non-existent destination, is quite precise in *Interchange*. Here, the director solidifies this in at least two scenes, both are in the police meeting room where he uses newspapers as a background image that says, 'Philippines Tribune,' 'KL Times,' 'The Jakarta Post,' 'Daily Jakarta,' 'Singapore' and 'Bangkok.' The second of the two shots show that the antique dealer, Sani, had a large criminal record and was once retained in prison in Surabaya. The news articles are all about the same instances of murder. Therefore, these scenes suggest that the characters have connections with those specific places in Southeast Asia and illustrate how people's cultural qualities serve as an identity vector that constitutes Nusantara's imagination.

In the opening of the film, the camera pans from black to an over-the-shoulder shot of a smartphone screen capturing a stage performance. After a cutaway shot of a lady, we see the singer in a medium-sized shot singing the songs that have become the main sound for the scene. The singer is a transvestite in a green coloured dress-up, complete with a headscarf. On the one hand, the film celebrates the opening up of spaces for Trans people and, on the other, the scene speaks about the transformation of individual, social, and cultural identities nowadays.

The transvestite character is the only female character who wears an Islamic dress which is a subtle way to draw attention to how Islam changes regional cultural identities, especially during the last century when political entities used religion to make their group attractive and to achieve control of the government. In line with what the director said in an interview, "[…] in Malaysia and Indonesia, there is a diverse range of people, but that diversity is being lost with Islam becoming more dominant" (Jakartanistic, 2017). However, he insists that the portrayal of Islamic characteristics for the transgender character is unintentional. I very much doubt that because, in the same conversation, he recalls that making movies in Malaysia is not as easy as people may think. By saying unintentional, he may be just attempting to ward off unwarranted attention from regional Islamic hardliners which may influence the attitudes on film censorship.

The song, correspondingly, emphasises the lyrics, "my soul is separated from my body" in which he may be referring to the notion of, 'the souls of the Tinggang are trapped in the bodies of the 21st Century' or perhaps, 'places that do not have a true national identity.' Sound is one of the central semiotic dimensions through which the filmmaker speaks to his viewers. This, however, connects with the ideals of modernity symbolised by different kinds of digital screens in the opening scene as well as the soul-stealing photographic plates which were used to move the narrative forward.

After the performance, the transgender artist and her colleague find the first body near their changing rooms after which a short interview scene informs us that the victim had a passionate interest in antiquities. The screenplay is neither idolatry nor heretical but did attempt to raise an important issue about the politics of the body. A person's identity can be determined by looking at their bodies, strength and sex, and through culture and society, many things are ascribed and written and projected by the body. There is a tendency for the body to become increasingly important to the average person's sense of self-identity in a state of high modernity, but the body in death illustrates the passage of time, the inevitability of physical transformation, and thus serves as a

potent reminder that the self is subject to change (Hallam, et al., 1999, pp. 3-4). Moreover, bodies are places where people chart the social construction of the individual, and body politics imply that the body itself is socially defined and shaped by practices of containment and power (Brown & Gershon, 2017, p. 1). It is always a challenge for the police, like Man and his colleague Detective Jason, to try to identify mysterious dead bodies. Nevertheless, the identity must be confirmed even after death in order to settle the case and administer the remains' last rites. Likewise, the search for cultural identity is a process of discovering and challenging one's own culture to know more about it and understand the implications of that culture's membership (Phinney, 1993, p. 75).

When Adam, who photographs corpses first appears he is struggling with identity issues and seems nervous, uncomfortable and not accustomed to the (modern) setting. He is alone on a balcony of a modern apartment where the pale white colour scheme plus the minimalist settings extenuate his loneliness. We see him spying on his neighbours with his camera lens, printing their photo, and sticking it on his wall. There are hundreds of pale grey photos on the wall, but Adam's facial expression is hidden while he is looking at the wall with an over-the-shoulder shot. The film is also about photography and the image which gives the impression that the past and the present in *Interchange,* overlap and intermingle like the souls of Borneo people who are trapped in the old photos.

A photograph, like a film and digital video, may well operate as a symbol in which the whole world has been caught up within the ongoing process of modernity (Parsa, 2004, p. 844). Many traditional cultures in this world believe that a photo can steal human souls, whereas the spirit is caught in the photograph, trapped in time, while the un-ageing body continues to move around.

In this film, one of the most remarkable scenes is where Adam is on his way to Heng's photo studio for the first time; the film shifts locations from the modern environment to the old building area. He comes across a group of *Tingang* people in their tribal costumes crossing the city's back

alley just before he meets Iva for the first time. At that moment, rain starts to fall, but the sun is still shining, which, for many Nusantara natives, is a bad sign. Dain's mise-en-scene conveys an eerie mood. The scene also indicates that the present will always contain components of the past as indicated by the *Tingang* tribe, which has long gone - meaning that what is seen by Adam is his vision of the past.

Figure 13: Tingang people march through the city's back alley.

It has also been said earlier that the *Tingang* people of Borneo can hover between different spheres (Allen, 2016, p. 83). As such, it would be simplistic to say that the Borneo people identify with their political spaces (Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei, North, Central, and East Kalimantan) where they live because they are known primarily as their tribes and villages. Thus it is also fair to contend that the general cultural atmosphere like what we have seen through this representation as well as from *Batas* in Chapter Four would have significant implications for us to limit our deliberations to national frameworks.

In the next scene, Adam's soul travels to the past when Iva "captures" his body with an old large format camera in Heng's studio. Iva in opening the camera shutter is marked with sharp white flash transition effects, and Adam suddenly finds himself in the photographed scene with the women washing by the river as captured by Lumholtz. Before this interchange of time and space

occurs, the way the film frames the viewing area of the old camera allows the audience to see a frame within a frame, thus enhancing the cinematic depth and context of the shot. In it, we can see Iva's reflection looking at the viewfinder and at the inverted image of Adam at the same time. After the flash, we see Adam lying in the river in a medium close-up before he picks himself up to observe the women washing. Then, from a long-shot perspective, we can see him sitting in the river and Iva in her sarong tied around her midriff approaching him from behind. She then carefully takes a little hornbill out from Adam's mouth and sets it free. In the scene, Adam's viewpoint becomes surreal with wavy images as if seen from a reflected image on the water's surface or over a layer of water flowing. In the shot, Iva tells Adam that he is not sick and he must trust his eyes to convince him that the event from the past that he sees is real.

Interestingly, the scene shows metaphorically that the past is real and that it coexists with the present and the future. We tend to focus our attention on cultural identities within the template of nationalism. This representation relates to present situations as well as to a time when national lines could not delimit culture. The inverted image of Adam, the way he is frozen in time and moves from one dimension to the next, as well as the way his soul wants to be free from the body, reveals the importance of the "soul" of the Nusantaran "body" and blurs the line between the past and the present.

Interchange ends with both protagonists dying. It is a tragic ending, but in the chorus, the scene exemplifies that cultural identities (belief, mythology, aesthetics, attitude) of modern Nusantara countries are at least double if not multiple. It is not uncommon in films to kill the protagonist, but it only occurs if it means something. According to Rieger and Hofer (2017), through establishing and seeking meaning, human beings can cope with the universal fear of death, and this can be done by adherence to cultural worldviews, improving self-esteem, or participating in or sustaining close relationships (p. 711). From one perspective, the scene shows that Adam finally understands his existence and relationship with the cultural arena of Nusantara, but

assertively, the viewers of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore may have a sense of self-reflectivity and cultural humility in such a way that they can relate and appreciate the ideal as they may feel that they are part of the story. In the finale, Iva pressures Adam to release her soul from her own body just as she did for the other victims. Reluctant as he, is to perform the execution ritual, he has no choice but to do so. At the moment he pushes the old dagger to break the photographic glass plate negative that is placed over Iva's body, detective Jason shoots and kills him with his handgun. The blade of the knife enters Iva's chest, and the bullet goes straight through Adam's body.

Conclusive as this scene maybe, the ending makes a compelling case that modernisation should reconcile the various strands of Nusantara cultural identities as well as our transnational sense of identity, and it should not destroy the possibility of rapprochement among the transcultural communities that best exemplifies each particular character in the film except for the two polices officers, Man and Jason. The film shows Nusantara's conviction that spirits inhabit natural objects, myth is an essential aspect of the human experience, and the multifaceted aesthetic life of man brings past, present, and future together. The narrative also underpins the fact that modernity, reflected in technology, colonial knowledge, urban cities, detection methods, crime investigations and forensic sciences, cannot solve the mystery of the magical or mystical elements of the Tinggang tribe and their beliefs and traditional practices/customs. In fact, modernity is inseparable from nationalism because nationalism is the product of the union of state and culture celebrated on the altar of modernity (Acuff & Gellner in Conversi, 2012, p. 14).

Considering the film as a text, it explicitly criticises the nature of the historical construction of national identities, the idea of national cultures in this region of Southeast Asia, and the complicity of national cinema at this time and age. Two films that maybe most important, and were aimed at breaking the monotony of mosaic elements in Malaysia's national cinema are Chiu Keng Guan's *The Journey* (2014), a Chinese-language comedy-drama, which made a breakthrough in Malaysia's box office collection of over RM16 million and in the following year, *Jagat* (2015),

which focuses on the Indian of Malaysia, which changed the criteria for the top category at the Malaysian Film Festival. The list of films based on this subject is extensive and includes *Paper Moon* (Mandarin), *The Wedding Diary 2* (Mandarin), *Once Upon A Time* (Cantonese), *Kaliyugha* [Age of Kali] (Tamil), *Olli* [The Skinny] (Tamil), *Olipathivu* [Cinematography] (Tamil), *Kara King* [Champion Singer] (Mandarin), *Ge Mei Lia* [Brother and Sister] (Mandarin), *Dhusrajanam* [Rebirth] (Tamil), *Marai Mugam* [Invisible] (Tamil) and *Firefly* (Mandarin) are all from 2013, the same thing happens in the following year with *Vitti Pasanga* [Useless Folks] (Tamil), *The Transcend* (Mandarin), *Siddharta* (Mandarin), *Ah Beng The Movie* (Kantonis), *Huat Ah! Huat Ah! Huat!* (Mandarin), *Bullets Over Petaling Street* (Mandarin), *Pasar Malam* [Night Market] (Mandarin), *The Beggar Hero* (Mandarin), *Vennira Iravuggal* [White Night] (Tamil), *In The Dark* (Mandarin), *Goal* (Tamil), *Vivaagharathu* [Divorce] (Tamil), *Curse of Spirits* (Mandarin), and *Yu Lan Shen Gong* [Hungry Ghost Ritual] (Kantonis).

The cinematic style of *Interchange* offers many hints and examples about what we can expect from the new generation of filmmakers from Nusantara. These filmmakers are not shy in their narratives to link locations across national borders. Like *Batas* and *Tanah Surga* from Indonesia connecting Sarawak and Kalimantan, *A Land Imagined* (2018) by Yeo Siew Hua, a Singapore-France-Netherlands co-production, centres around a land reclamation site and questions the origin of large amounts of sand traditionally imported from neighbouring countries by Singapore. Likewise, the use of newspapers from all major cities around the region in Man's office, the mix of dialects and languages, as well as the inclusion of Borneo in the urban metropolis reinforce the idea that contemporary regional filmmakers have a broader vision of the Nusantara community, and their identifications transcend the boundaries of nationalism. It is quite evident that *Interchange* is constructing transnational identities in its narrative. The cinematic work of the new feature filmmakers like what has been represented in *Interchange* marks the turn of the cultural tide with cinematic representations of national society that is no longer maintained via rigid, monotonous

uniformity in cultural identity. Like many other contemporary films from the modern Nusantara countries that highlight people of Borneo and Papuan islands from Indonesia as well as, the Mindanao's populations in the Philippines, *Interchange* is another example of an anomaly in regional, national cinemas. In the three modern countries of Nusantara, cultural identities have never been constrained by political specificity in their respective "true" national cultural contexts as perceived and celebrated by right-wing nationalists.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two contemporary filmmakers who represent diverse nationalities and complicate ethnic categories in Singapore and problematise or pluralise the urban identities in a fictionalised Kuala Lumpur known as "Metropolis" to show the resurfacing of traditional and rural identities that have been repressed and colonised. By way of their work, both directors, in one way or another, question the desirability of a homogeneous national culture by showing social, emotional and physical diversity. Moreover, it is safe to say that the rise of a knowledgeable new generation of filmmakers is challenging the national identities of regional cinemas in addition to espousing cinematic transnationalism and transculturalism. New generations differ from previous generations, which have mostly grown out of a social re-engineering and affirmative action program known as the Malaysian New Economic Policy (NEP). Here they have had the opportunity to succeed in academics, since the share of Malaysians with higher academic qualifications and literacy has steadily increased since the 1980s.

Flooding in the Time of Drought offers what underpins Nusantara modern society, and its narrative sheds light on the formal technique of presenting Singapore's population along with the country's residents' cultural characteristics. The film informs us that cultural flows are transforming the politics of national identity in the country and, a new mobile cultural community

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of Singapore is emerging. As well, the film's representations of millennials through its foregrounding of young families and adults, it discloses the intersection of mobility, place, and identity. While this chapter only looks at films from Malaysian and Singapore, both films question the logic of national cinema and national political attitudes by portraying marginality and cultural interaction in the existing transnational Nusantara society, such as ASEAN.

Interchange, similarly, suggests a progressive path with a regional narrative that elevates cultural remoteness as well as ethnic diversity, and then uses the conflict it creates to propose a hybrid Nusantara film by incorporating shared beliefs and values established long before the region being nationalised while spurning national stereotypes of bordered identity in Southeast Asian cinemas. This reading can be seen through the film's formation of a modern Nusantara society and, in addition, it is clear in his portrayal of unspecific locality, and in the interchange of cinematic time and space that these works stress, that the people in the film, as well as its viewers, should appreciate the existence of diverse cultures in a country.

Both films question the notion of national identity and culture in two imaginary third spaces when most actors create composite characters in Nusantara through their human affinities and merge physical and remote spaces into networked worlds that can be simultaneously or asynchronously occupied by many external users. In their critique of rigid national cultural identities and national belonging, both directors employ transnational characters and translocational positionality but maintain regional cultural values and elements. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* uses water as a critical element to emphasise international cultural values and domestic fluidities in a small sample of Singaporean households in the city-state. Whereas *Interchange* intertwines Nusantara's traditional mysticism, myth, with the modern nation, thus, ensuring opposition to a single cultural identity among its characters. In the film, Iva tells Adam "It is time, I want to go home." She does not feel like she belongs in the city. Nevertheless, Sani from the antique shop, prefers to live in the 21st-century urban city. She does not want to be killed

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and asks for protection from Man and Jason. In this regard, both directors appeal to the fractured nature of an imagined national community as well as the minority ethnic (national) identity.

On the other hand, Ong's *Flooding in the Time of Drought* highlights local cultural space in Singapore, representing Nusantara from a detached perspective, that shows the spatial affairs among the important characters, elements, and setting in a scene. Opposingly, Dain's *Interchange* obscures the identity of its location, thereby establishing the world of the Nusantara. Accordingly, both directors, owing to their representations of heterogeneous characters accompanied by cross-cultural and cross-border identities, focus on the growing cultural tide and attitudes of their time.

CONCLUSION

South-East Asian cinemas have to date largely been discussed based on countries of origin. This has formed a history of national cinemas which has interpreted form, value, and aesthetics through parameters of 'national' culture. As a result, transnational studies that look at the cinematic relations from two or more countries have to date been in the minority. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that socio-cultural portrayal in many films from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore challenges the frameworks of 'National Cinema' especially in its more ethno-nationalist iterations. Many films, including but not limited to those discussed in this thesis, circumvent the parameters of national cinema by depicting a transnational Nusantara culture. Nusantara culture is evident in cultural identifiers such as *'Tanahair'* that expresses a sense of belonging; '*merantau'* or relocation as their common experience; life at the borderlands which show the permeability of national borders; as well as, framing the three national spaces as a regional cultural space.

Accordingly, this study takes advantage of Higbee and Lim's 'critical transnationalism' to discuss diverse regional cultural identities in films from the perspective of Nusantara as a cultural space, the movement of an individual or group from place to place, the projection of the sense of '*in-betweenness'* in the Borderlands and the dilemmas of the digital era for nationalism. These films show that the cultures of the Nusantara transcend national borders. However, over the past six decades since at least the end of World War Two, nationalism and nation-building have segregated Nusantara inhabitants and diminished cultural fluidity. Nevertheless, films from the three Nusantara countries have succeeded in advocating regional values by blurring national profiles, which are imposed by the government's censorship laws.

This transnational cinematic study confirms the existence of cinematic and cultural relations between nationals of the three countries as well as contributing to the development of transnational cinematic assessment within Southeast Asian Cinema scholarship. Moreover, this research has

indicated that the national political lines which framed the notion of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean national cinemas are not fixed and impenetrable. Throughout this thesis, I have shown how a number of films illustrate socio-political realities and critique the country's nationalism because underlying every ethno-nationalist's cultural aphorism is a local ethos which refutes the ethnonational identity formation. Moreover, certain groups that have crafted the national mono-cultural identities do not follow the realities on the ground but, rather validate the ethno-nationalistic structure as well as the political powers. That said, it is incomprehensible for the three countries to leave behind a variety of cultures as represented in the films selected in this thesis. The films demonstrate consistent negotiations in the three national cinemas of social identities and cultural narratives, continually shifting through a multiplicity of different reasons and purposes, that build and shape the three national bodies. In this research, I traced the construction of the three national cultural identities, historically, from several political stages. My exploration disclosed how the national cultural identities of the three countries are biased, and, are shaped by a particular group which exerts maximum political power.

In my readings, the narratives and aesthetics of the selected films centre on self and social subjective identity, mobility behaviour of regional populations, people's sense of belonging and their interactions with one another. Hybrid identities are not considered a new issue for the Nusantarans (as in *Badjao* and *Raden Mas*) as these communities, are habitually on-the-move from one place to another (as in all films in this thesis) and with that, the precise meaning of 'belonging' to them are not static and beyond the nationalism of a single country. The diverse and fluid cultural identities in such representations continue to exemplify the permeability of national/cultural identity for the three national cinemas. Concerning contemporary films, the hard political borderline is always porous, through which mobility is still possible.

Tanahair is a concept originating in Nusantara that crosses not only political lines, ethnicities, and languages, but also time and space. *Tanahair* is seen as a place to call home, and

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from cinematic perspectives, audiences from the three countries can relate to the film's narrative. The people's connection to the land and water across Nusantara where coexistence is a way of life flourishes within the three countries. In *Badjao* and *Raden Mas,* for example, the two elements are not only essential to differentiate the groups of people but also, to connect them physically and metaphorically.

The Nusantara shared an ethnically diverse identity making the people capable of identifying themselves with multiple cultural identities. It is also a heterogeneous and pluralistic region where the members live within a larger, more complex society. The mobility tradition of *merantau* has not only moved individuals between places but also, transferred the culture between locations, and as such, a transnational *ethnoscape* is created. This has subsequently led to more cultural diffusion when the spread of attributes starting with one culture is then passed to the next and overlaps compared to when the cultures are similar to each other. Also, crisscrossing migration within the region, and from other regions globally, has nurtured the state of in-betweenness amongst the Nusantara population.

Consequently, migration will continue to be a significant feature of many Southeast Asian countries, as most citizens of the three countries can accept an individual or even a group if they look and behave the same. However, the concept of *sedar/sadar diri* is essential in the process of assimilation as it can help to construct connecting bridges for inter-ethnic cultural understanding. *Sri Mersing* and *Tabula Rasa* discuss two types of Nusantara's *perantau* who are wandering around the archipelago, the one who *sedar diri* and the opposite, who is an egoist and holds unself-conscious traits. The concept, however, creates a cross-cultural, inter-place, inter-ethnic or else, a cross-national structure of belonging. For the most part, the concept goes far beyond nationalities and ethnicities, giving substantial evidence to the nature-based beliefs throughout the Nusantara region, intertwined with current issues such as stateless people, illegal migration, border conflicts,

and territorial disputes; recent developments in the non-fiction film arena provide clear evidence of this.

Between the three cinemas, Borderlands narratives have factually been viewed as marginal in the development of the country's national identities. It was only more recently when digital technology allowed the creation of more mobilised filmmaking tools and changed the way society communicates, that regional audiences began to see representations about people living in the once harmonised lands. Frontier livelihoods in films, as discussed in Chapter Four, were not as hazardous as we were typically informed about it. Today, the directors' representation of life presents more compelling accounts of trans-border behaviours in this region, thus, reaffirming certain activities of migration, the interconnectedness between the population, and the decentralisation of cultural identities. The security of national borders, for instance, is not really about limiting or restricting the population's movements, but more about embracing the people's attachments to what feels to be their *tanahair*, reality, and life.

However, borders continue to become a critical subject in the contemporary films of the three national cinemas. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* and *Interchange*, exemplify the 'borderless world,' that predates modern conceptions. *Flooding in the Time of Drought* reflects upon the livelihoods in contemporary Singapore that is reconstructed in the depth of a collective Nusantara's value. While the film portrays issues related to personality traits that, to gender, class, as well as nationality. Deep within the narratives of the film, the filmmaker included presumably a hidden suggestion that not many audiences will perceive. The film's subtext suggests that developing a proper sense of one's true 'self' is equally critical along with improving the country's true identity. The spaces represented in *Flooding in the Time of Drought* were transitional and the narrative focuses on the everyday lives of persons living in the city-state. The film also frames locations within this region as modern spaces, compartmentalised, and having a lack of attributes to identify the characters belonging to a distinct national identity. *Interchange*, eloquently,

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diminished the political and social borders by forming a cultural relation to the unspecified setting and in doing so, the film takes the audience to unknown political territories where everything is impermanent and intersects. *Interchange* opens the country by bringing back Nusantara's history by creating a city that is already Nusantara, while *Flooding in the Time of Drought* introduces the nation-city to new migrants from around the globe and other places within Nusantara.

Although the application and use of textual analysis is a reasonably straightforward approach in studying representation on film, this study does not provide a complete picture of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean cinemas. I have not, for example, thoroughly examined all films from the three national cinemas, which may account for some of the underestimations in the discussions. Similarly, observations and interviews with audiences as they watch the films, an approach that is occasionally employed during the exploration process, could result in somewhat different interpretations of reception and relation.

The absence of cinematic transnationalism in Southeast Asian cinema scholarships is thus one of many subjects of discussion that need further attention, among aesthetics of film representation, which forces us to view not only from a national framework perspective but also from transnational social formations as well as cultural practices. This thesis is dedicated to what resides in-between the national cinema of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to justify how the films of these countries are cinematically, representationally and culturally, interrelated by its steadfast resistance to ethno-nationalism. Notably, the films in this thesis also epitomise the fissure in the foundation of the country's nationalism and national cultural identities. On that note, the promising development of filmmaking, as well as the appreciation for cinematographic qualities of film from the three countries, presents high expectations for greater social, cultural, and indeed national success.

FILMOGRAPHY

A Land Imagined (2018, Siew Hua Yeo), Singapore/France/Netherlands: Akanga Film
Productions; Films de Force Majeure; MM2 Entertainment; Volya Films.

Apprentice (2016, Boo Junfeng), Singapore/Germany/France/Hong Kong/Qatar: Akanga Film
Productions; Augenschein Filmproduktion; Cinémadefacto; Peanut Pictures; Sam Spiegel
International Lab; Zhao Wei Films.

Army Daze (1996, Ong Keng Sen), Singapore: Cathay Asia Films.

A Yellow Bird (2016, K Rajagopal), Singapore/France: Akanga Film Productions.

Badjao: The Sea Gypsies (1957, Lamberto V. Avellana), Philippines: LVN Pictures.

Batas (2011, Rudy Soedjarwo) Indonesia: Keana Production.

Bayangan Diwaktu Fajar (1963, Usmar Ismail), Singapore/Indonesia: Cathay-Keris Film;
Perfini.

Banting (2014, Raihan Halim), Singapore: Papahan Films.

Bayi Tabung (1988, Nurhadie Irawan), Indonesia: REX Indonesia.

Berbagi Suami (2006, Nia Dinata), Indonesia: Kalyana Shira Films; WallWorks.

Black Gold (1962, Yi Sui), Singapore: Cathay-Keris Film Productions.

Bohe: Sons of The Wave (2012, Nadjoua Bansil), Philippines.

Budak Nafsu (1983, Sjuman Djaya), Indonesia: Soraya Intercine Film PT.

Bugis Street (1995, Yonfan), Singapore: Jaytex Productions.

Bukan Cinta Malaikat (2017, Aziz M. Osman & Herdanius Larobu), Malaysia/Indonesia: Ace
Motion Pictures; Ganesa Perkasa Films.

Bunohan: Return to Murder (2012, Dain Said), Malaysia: Easternlight Films; Convergence
    Entertainment; Apparat.

Butterfly and Flowers (1985, Euthana Mukdasanit), Thailand: Five Star Production Co. Ltd.

Ca-bau-kan (2002, Nia Di Nata), Indonesia: Kalyana Shira Film.

Cerita dari Tapal Batas (2012, Wisnu Adi), Indonesia: Keana Production & Communication

Chalanggai (2007, Deepak Kumaran Menon), Malaysia/Netherlands: OneHundredEye.

Chennai 2 Singapore (2017, Abbas Akbar), Singapore/India: Comicbook Films India; Media
    Development Authority (MDA).

Darah dan Doa (1950, Usmar Ismail), Indonesia: Perfini.

Daun di Atas Bantal (1998, Garin Nugroho), Indonesia: Christine Hakim Film.

Denias, Senandung di Atas Awan (2006, John de Rantau), Indonesia: Alenia Pictures.

Dia Bukan Bayiku (1988, Hasmanan), Indonesia: Kanta Film.

Di Ambang Stateless in Sabah (2014, Matt Fillmore & Vila Somiah), Malaysia/USA.

Di Timur Matahari (2012, Ari Sihasale), Indonesia: Alenia Pictures.

Dr. Rushdi (1970, P. Ramlee), Malaysia: Merdeka Film Productions.

Dukun (2018, Dain Said), Malaysia: Astro Shaw.

Flooding in the Time of Drought (2009, Sherman Ong), Singapore: Paddy Pictures; 13 Little
    Pictures.

Fragile (2015, Bebbra Mailin), Malaysia.

Gelora (1970, P. Ramlee), Malaysia: Merdeka Film Productions.

Gie (2005, Riri Riza), Indonesia: Miles Films; Sinemart Pictures.

Halaw: Ways of The Sea (2010, Sheron Dayoc), Philippines: Cinemalaya Foundation; Los
    Peliculas Linterna Studio.

Harimau Tjampa (1953, D. Djajakusuma), Indonesia: Perfini.

Homerun (2003, Jack Neo), Singapore: Mediacorp Raintree Pictures.

Ibunda (1986, Teguh Karya), Indonesia: Satrya Perkasa Esthetika Film; Suptan Film.

Ilo Ilo (2013, Anthony Chen), Singapore: Singapore Film Commission; Ngee Ann Polytechnic;
    Fisheye Pictures.

Interchange (2016, Dain Said), Malaysia: Apparat; Sonneratia Capital; Seeing Eye Films.

Irisan-irisan Hati (1988, Djun Saptohadi, Ismail Sasakul), Indonesia/Malaysia: PT Kanta Indah
    Film; Cipta Tuah Sdn Bhd.

Jagat (2015, Shanjey Kumar Perumal), Malaysia: Skyzen Studios.

Jermal (2008, Rayya Makarim & Orlow Seunke), Indonesia: ECCO Films Indonesia.

Jiran Sekampung (1965, Hussain Haniff), Singapore/Malaysia: Cathau-Keris Films.

Jogho (1997, U-Wei Haji Saari), Malaysia: Gambar Tanah Licin; NHK.

Kaki Bakar (1995, U-Wei Haji Saari), Malaysia: Satu Gitu.

Kuldesak (1998, Mira Lesmana, Riri Riza, Rizal Mantovani, Nan Achnas), Indonesia: Day for
    Night Films.

Lewat Djam Malam (1954, Usmar Ismail), Indonesia: Perfini.

Lion City (1960, Yi Sui), Singapore: Cathay-Keris Film Productions.

Lips to Lips (2000, Amir Muhammad), Malaysia: Artsee.net; Kino-i Sdn Bhd.

Love in Perth (2010, Findo Purwono), Indonesia: MD Pictures.

Mami Jarum (2002, A. Razak Mohaideen), Malaysia: Metrowealth Movies Production Sdn Bhd.

Mami Jarum Junior (2003, A. Razak Mohaideen), Malaysia: Metrowealth Movies Production

    Sdn Bhd.

Medium Rare (1991, Arthur Smith), Singapore/Australia: Derrol Steppeney Pty. Ltd.

Mee Pok Man (1995, Eric Khoo), Singapore: 27 Productions.

Melody Kota Rusa (2010, Irham Acho Bahtiar), Indonesia: Merauke Enterprice Production.

Merantau (2009, Gareth Evans), Indonesia: Pt. Merantau Films.

Merry Riana: Mimpi Sejuta Dollar (2014, Hestu Saputra), Indonesia/Singapore: MD Pictures.

My Stupid Boss (2016, Upi Avianto), Indonesia: Falcon Pictures.

Nana Tanjung (2006, Abdul Razak Mohaideen), Malaysia: Grand Brilliance; Lineclear Motion

    Pictures; NAJ Productions

Nana Tanjung 2 (2007, Abdul Razak Mohaideen), Malaysia: Lineclear Motion Pictures;

    Primeworks Studios

Ola Bola (2016, Keng Guan Chiu), Malaysia: Golden Screen Cinemas; Astro Shaw; Woohoo

    Pictures.

One Find Day (2017, Asep Kusdinar), Indonesia: Minded Factory; Screenplay Films.

Opera Jawa (2006, Garin Nugroho), Indonesia/Austria: New Crowned Hope; SET Film

    Workshop; Visions Sud Est.

Our Land is the Sea (2018, Kelli Swazey & Matthew Colaciello), Indonesia: University of

    Hawai'i Manoa, CRCS UGM, Global Workshop.

Pasir Berbisik (2001, Nan Triveni Achnas), Indonesia/Japan: Christine Hakim Film; NHK; Saito Productions.

Pulang (2018, Khabir Bahtia), Malaysia: Primeworks Studios.

Raden Mas (1959, L. Krishnan), Singapore: Cathay-Keris Film.

Ramadhan dan Ramona (1992, Chaerul Umam), Indonesia: P.T. Citra Wiwitan Film.

Red Haired Tumbler di Malaya (1994, Eddie Pak), Malaysia: Produksi Seni Duapuluh.

Rudy Habibie (2016, Hanung Bramantyo), Indonesia: MD Entertainment; MD Pictures.

Sang Pemimpi (2009, Riri Riza), Indonesia: Miles Films; Mizan Production.

Sampai Ujung Dunia (Monty Tiwa, 2012), Indonesia: Nasi Putih Pictures.

Sayang disayang (2014, Sanif Olek), Singapore: Reeljuice.

Secangkir Kopi Pahit (1985, Teguh Karya), Indonesia: PT. Interstudio.

Semalam di Malaysia (1975, Nico Pelamonia), Indonesia/Singapore: Tuti Mutia Film; Shaw Brothers.

Sepet (2004, Yasmin Ahmad), Malaysia: MHz Film.

Serdadu Kumbang (2011, Ari Sihasale), Indonesia: Alenia Pictures.

Shirkers (2018, Sandi Tan), Singapore / U.S.A / U.K: Cinereach; Doc Society; Shirkers.

Siti (2014, Eddie Cahyono), Indonesia: Fourcolours Films.

Songlap (2011, Effendee Mazlan & Fariza Azlina Isahak), Malaysia: Grand Brilliance; Primeworks Studios; Red Films.

Spinning Gasing (2000, Teck Tan), Malaysia: Niche Film Sdn Bhd; Spinning Gasing Films Sdn Bhd.

Sri Mersing (1961, Salleh Ghani), Singapore: Cathay-Keris Film.

Surat Dari Praha (2016, Angga Dwimas Sasongko), Indonesia: Visinema Pictures.

Tabula Rasa (2014, Adriyanto Dewo), Indonesia: LifeLike Pictures.

Tanah Mama (2015, Asrida Elisabeth), Indonesia: Kalyana Shira Films.

Tamu Agung (1955, Usmar Ismail), Indonesia: Perfini.

Tanah Air Beta (2010, Ari Sihasale), Indonesia: Alenia Pictures.

Tanah Surga... Katanya (2012, Herwin Novianto), Indonesia: Brajamusti Films; Citra Sinema.

Tanahair Beta (2010, Ari Sihasale), Indonesia: Alenia Pictures.

That One Not Enough (1999, Jack Neo), Singapore: Cathay Asia Films Pte Ltd.

The Journey (2014, Keng Guan Chiu), Malaysia: Astro Shaw; Woohoo Pictures.

The Raid (2011, Gareth Evans), Indonesia/France/USA: Pt. Merantau Films; Celluloid Dreams; XYZ Films.

The Raid 2 (2014, Gareth Evans), Indonesia/USA: Pt. Merantau Films; XYZ Films.

The Tiger Factory (2010, Ming Jin Woo), Malaysia/Japan: Ando Laboratory; Greenlight Pictures; Waseda University Ando Laboratory.

Thy Womb (2012, Brillante Mendoza), Philippines: Centerstage Productions; Film Development Council of the Philippines.

Tiga Buronan (1957, Nya Abbas Akup), Indonesia: Perfini.

Tjoet Nja' Dhien (1988, Eros Djarot), Indonesia: PT Kanta Indah Film; Radio Flamboyant.

Yasmine (2014, Siti Kamaluddin), Brunei: Origin Films.

APPENDIX 1 (Inter-island mobility of *perantau*, 1950s-1960s)

Title	Year	Origin
Udang Di Sebalik Batu [Prawn Under the Rock]	1966	Singapore
Tajul Ashikin	1963	Singapore
Bayangan Di Waktu Fajar [Shadows at Crack of Dawn]	1963	Sing/Indo
Bing Slamet Merantau [Bing Slamet Goes Wandering]	1962	Indonesia
Seri Mersing	1961	Singapore
Musang Berjanggut [Bearde Fox]	1959	Singapore
Pendekar Bujang Lapok [The Three Bachelor Warriors]	1959	Singapore
Raden Mas	1959	Singapore
Panggilan Pulau [Call of the Island]	1954	Singapore
Harimau Tjampa [Tiger from Tjampa]	1953	Indonesia
Tas Tangan Wanita [Woman Handbag]	1953	Singapore
Terbelenggu [Shackled]	1951	Indonesia

APPENDIX 2 (*Merantau* within national borders, 1970s-1990s)

Title	Year	Origin
Kaki Bakar [The Arsonist]	1995	Malaysia
Imigran [Immigrant]	1993	Malaysia
Cikgu Romantik [The Romantic Teacher]	1993	Malaysia
Balada [Ballad]	1993	Malaysia
Ramadhan dan Ramona [Ramadhan and Ramona]	1992	Indonesia
Daerah Jagoan [District of Champion]	1991	Indonesia
Mat Som	1990	Malaysia
Mutiara di Khatulistiwa (Di Hatiku Ada Kamu) [Pearls in Equator (In My Heart There is A Place for You)]	1990	Indonesia
Ujang	1989	Malaysia
Kembar Siam [Siamese Twin]	1989	Malaysia
Nuansa Birunya Rinjani [The Blue Nuance of Rinjani]	1989	Indonesia
Irisan-irisan Hati [Shreds of the Heart]	1988	Indo/Mal
Tempo 88	1987	Malaysia
Mawar Merah [Red Rose]	1987	Malaysia
Balik Kampung [Homecoming]	1986	Malaysia
Kembara Seniman Jalanan [Street Artist Adventures]	1986	Malaysia
Bujang Selamat	1985	Malaysia
Secangkir Kopi Pahit [A Cup of Bitter Coffee]	1985	Indonesia
Tujuh Biang Keladi [Seven Ladies]	1984	Malaysia
Budak Nafsu [Slave to Lust]	1983	Indonesia
Ganesha	1983	Indonesia

Title	Year	Origin
Sorta (Tumbuh Bunga di Sela Batu) [A Flower Grows in Between Rocks]	1982	Indonesia
Sesejuk Air Mata Ibu [A Mother's Sorrow]	1981	Malaysia
Kejamnya Ibu Tiri Tak Sekejam Ibu Kota [The City Capital is More Cruel than a Stepmother]	1981	Indonesia
Da Di Du	1981	Malaysia
Sumber Ilhamku [My Inspiration]	1979	Malaysia
Kisah Seorang Biduan [A Singer's Story]	1979	Malaysia
Ceritaku Ceritamu [Chasing The Rainbow]	1979	Malaysia
Panglima Badol [Badol The Warrior]	1978	Malaysia
Ratu Disco [Disco Queen]	1978	Indonesia
Semalam Di Malaysia [One Night in Malaysia]	1975	Indonesia
Gelora [The Gale]	1970	Malaysia

APPENDIX 3 (*Merantau* beyond national borders, 2000s onwards)

Title	Year	Origin
Bulan di Atas Kuburan [The Moon on the Graveyard]	2015	Indonesia
Tabula Rasa	2014	Indonesia
Mursala	2013	Indonesia
Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck [The Sinking of Van Der Wijck]	2013	Indonesia
Petualangan Si Adi [The Adventure of Adi]	2013	Indonesia
Ilo Ilo [Mom and Dad Are Not Home]	2013	Singapore
Sayang Disayang [My Beloved Dearest]	2013	Singapore
Tanah Surga... Katanya [The Land of Paradise… or So They Say]	2012	Indonesia
Di Timur Matahari [To The East of The Morning Sun]	2012	Indonesia
Si Anak Kampoeng [The Kampoeng Boy]	2011	Indonesia
Bidadari Jakarta [Angel of Jakarta]	2010	Indonesia
Merantau [Sojourn]	2009	Indonesia
Flooding in the Time of Drought [Banjir Kemarau]	2009	Singapore
Merem Melek	2008	Indonesia
Budak Kelantan [Boys from Kelantan]	2008	Malaysia
Kejar Jakarta [Chase Jakarta]	2005	Indonesia
Ca-bau-kan [The Courtesan]	2002	Indonesia

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