Article

https://doi.org/10.52696/QHWU8428
Reprints and permission:
The Malaysian English Language Teaching Association
✉ Ngee Derk Tiong ngeederkt@sunway.edu.my

Ethnic Representation in Malaysian Year Five English Language Textbooks from 1968-2016: from Erasure, to Proliferation, towards a "Malaysian" Narrative?

Claire Tan Yi Zhi
American Degree Transfer Program Department,
Methodist College Kuala Lumpur
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tiong Ngee Derk
Centre for English Language Studies
Sunway University
Bandar Sunway, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The question of ethnic representation has been a topic of concern for analysts and users of Malaysian textbooks. In this paper, we present a study analysing Malaysian Year Five English language textbooks published from 1968 to 2016, focussing specifically on ethnic representation and its changes over time in these texts. We conducted content analyses of the seven national textbooks published over the period, revealing mixed messages in ethnic representation: although on the surface there were celebrations of diverse ethnic and religious practices, these coexisted with problematic erasures and marginalisations of various groups. The problematic MCI (Malay, Chinese, Indian) formulation was favoured despite mapping poorly onto East Malaysia and rendering non-MCI groups invisible. Portrayals of Malays were particularly dominant, in some editions the only ethnic group with role model characters in the text. Chronologically, we identify three distinct phases that project different models of ethnic representation: ethnic erasure (1968, 1973, 1979), a proliferation of ethnic-ness (1997, 1999, 2012), and finally the apparent beginnings of a "Malaysian" narrative (2016), marking a shift towards greater inclusion despite the residue of the problematic patterns from earlier phases. The study offers an empirical contribution to debates on ethnic representation in Malaysian education, as encoded in locally-produced English-language textbooks. It also highlights that alongside the instrumental purpose of second/foreign language instruction, textbooks also project ideologies and narratives of nationhood.

KEYWORDS: Textbook Analysis, Ethnic Representation, Teaching Materials, Second Language Learning, English Language Teaching, Minorities, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the representation of ethnic groups in selected Malaysian educational texts, analysing how these have developed over a historical period. We analyse seven iterations of the Malaysian Year Five English language textbooks from 1968 to 2016, answering three research questions: which ethnic groups are represented in these texts, how are they represented, and how have these changed over time? Due to the close relationship between ethnicity and nationhood in the Malaysian political and cultural imaginary, we discuss our findings in terms of their implications for the narratives of nationhood they project.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Textbooks and culture-making

Official school textbooks, including English-language textbooks are learning materials with a culture-making function, in that they project "approved values and ideologies" (McCulloch, 2004) and "often represent an overt attempt to help create a new cultural reality" (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991) through a subtle process of "invisible normalisations" (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011). These rationales make textbooks relevant empirical material to explore issues such as the portrayal of gendered norms and values (Han et al., 2018; Mohamad Subakir et al., 2012) or ethnic representation and inclusivity (Cho & Park, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2019; Santhiram, 1997; 2021; Suppiah & Nair, 2016; You et al., 2019).

Ethnic representation in Malaysian textbooks: claims and gaps in research

The existing literature on ethnic representation in Malaysian textbooks, while limited, suggests a contested and varied landscape. Brown's (2007) comparative analysis of Malaysian Moral Education, Local Studies, and History materials reveal that the concept of citizenship promoted in those texts were "explicitly based on ethnic stratification" creating "ethnic citizens" (p. 319) in a society where unity is "constantly under threat" (p. 329) and patriotism is equated to loyalty to government. In this respect, the various textbooks reveal an ongoing tension between visions of a dominant ethnic Malay nationalism versus that of a multi-ethnic Malaysian nationalism. This dynamic manifests most acutely in history textbooks, which are said to depict a largely "Islamic and Malay-centric history" (Santhiram, 2021) at the exclusion of the other groups, Bumiputera or otherwise (Manickam, 2005; Ting, 2013). The nuances of representation, however, are not the same across subjects, variants (e.g. textbooks for national or national-type schools), and years of publication. Santhiram (1997) when comparing the History, Malay, English, and Moral textbooks of the time, found the latter two more successful in portraying a range of ethnicities and interactions compared to the former. Although the 1997 English-language textbook had shortcomings in its middle-class bias, nonetheless a more equitable depiction of ethnicities was found. Studies of more contemporary primary school English-language textbooks however found "inequitable ethnic representations" (p. 85) with the effect of marginalising minority groups, especially East Malaysians (Suppiah & Nair, 2016).

To our knowledge, the literature on ethnic representation in Malaysian textbooks largely focuses on subjects like History (Manickam, 2005; Santhiram 2021; Ting, 2013), Moral Education (Chang, 2013; Tan et al., 2018) or a combination of both (Brown, 2007), with less attention on other subjects (Santhiram, 1997 and Suppiah & Nair, 2016 are noteworthy exceptions). Moreover, historical analyses are infrequent, as most studies focus on contemporary textbooks at the time of the study, thereby being unable to trace changes over time (Brown, 2007; Santhiram, 1997). The exception to this is Santhiram's (2021) analysis of Malaysian history textbooks. Due to this gap in

the literature, we chose to conduct an historical analysis of English language textbooks, which to our knowledge is unprecedented in the literature.

Given the focus on ethnic representation in Malaysia, in our next sections we help the reader contextualise this paper, by providing information on the national background, as well as our conceptualisations of nationhood, ethnicity and race for the purpose of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National background

Malaysia is highly diverse in its ethnic, linguistic and religious make-up. Latest population estimates are that, of 30 million citizens, 69.8% are Bumiputera, 22.4% are Chinese, and 6.8% are Indian, with the remaining 1.0% labelled "others" (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). The term Bumiputera, literally "sons of earth/soil," describes a varied constellation of indigenous ethnic groups (Lee, 2019). More recent disaggregated Bumiputera data are not available, but in 2011 it was estimated that Malays, the largest group, comprised almost 55% of total population, with the remaining 12% "other Bumiputera", such as the Dayak, Iban, Kadazandusun, Senoi, Kristang (Portuguese Eurasian), Penan, Bajau and more (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). These figures underscore Malaysia's considerable ethnic diversity, from which the relatively young nation has had to forge a national identity (Milner & Ting, 2014; Samuel & Tee, 2013).

Conceptualising nationhood, ethnicity, race

Ontologically, the very ideas of nation-ness are socially constructed and historically contingent: as argued by Anderson (2006), such ideas whilst commanding "profound emotional legitimacy" are nonetheless "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (p. 4). Anderson (2006) defines the nation as "an imagined political community" (p. 5) in which a sense of comradeship is deeply experienced despite the impossibility of knowing every other person in the community. National identities can be "dynamic, fragile, 'vulnerable', and often incoherent" (De Cillia et al., 1999). Yet, we live in "an era of nationalism" (Anderson, 2006) in which people are required to understand at least a part of their social and political existence in terms of their citizenship—as such public educational systems often seek to intentionally foster such an identity.

Turning to the concept of ethnicity, we take it to refer to a form of social differentiation that has varied across history and place. Traditionally denoting a person's community of descent, ethnic categories are frequently treated as "singular, timeless and fixed" in everyday parlance (Chandra, 2012); however, many now acknowledge ethnic categories to be fluid, ambiguous, multiple, socially constructed—even voluntary—forms of social identification intertwined with language, culture, religion, history and nationality (Chandra, 2012; Hirschman, 1987). Despite the ossifying effect of administrative ethnic labels—in a country like Malaysia where ethnic classification exists at every level, and "every aspect of the citizen's life is based on ethnic divisions" (Nakamura, 2012)—ethnicity is still often ambiguous and contested, stretching and challenging rigid institutional categories (Hirschman, 1986; Nagaraj et al., 2015).

Some scholars argue that the concept of ethnicity as defined by the Malaysian state is inherited from the European idea of "race" as innate biological difference, a notion popularised in 19th century Europe, becoming normalised in pre-independence Malaysia through the machinery of colonial census-taking (Hirschman, 1987), subsequently leading to the internalization of colonial-era racial stereotypes among locals (Hirschman, 1986; Milner & Ting, 2014). Even in modern-day

Malaysia, this colonial legacy continues to be highly influential in many areas of life: the "race paradigm does not function merely at the ideational level but is constitutive of actions, practices and social processes, including policy-making and its implementation" (Ting, 2014). The Malaysian nation-building project remains entangled within the racial-ethnic paradigm.

Situating the study: textbooks and nation-building

Against this socio-historical backdrop, education in Malaysia is viewed—and used—as a tool for nation-building (Brown, 2007), a goal against which educational policies (including learning materials like textbooks) are measured for their effectiveness. Unsurprisingly, the racial-ethnic entanglements referenced earlier are similarly reflected in educational policy and practice, including in the design of learning materials (Samuel & Tee, 2013; Santhiram, 1997; 2021). Samuel and Tee (2013) described the challenging task in Malaysian education of "striking a balance" between the "converging impulse to construct a sense of 'the national' and a diverging impulse that affirms the heterogeneity of the citizens within the state" (p. 150). In terms of policy aspirations, the 1956 Razak Report regarded a common content curriculum as "an essential element in the development of a united Malayan nation" (Government Press of Malaya, 1958). Education has been entrusted with inculcating "a greater sense of national belonging" (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1976), conceptualised to encompass social relations, culture and identity, and moral responsibilities towards people and country, held up as a "major vehicle in promoting integration among all" (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1986). As such, it is important to examine educational texts produced in line with these policies, examining how that "balance" is negotiated (Santhiram, 1997; 2021; Suppiah & Nair, 2016).

Research questions

In the light of the literature reviewed, this paper asks the following research questions:

(1) Which ethnic groups are represented in the sampled texts?
(2) How are the respective ethnic groups represented in the texts?
(3) In what ways does ethnic representations in the texts shift over time, if at all?

RESEARCH METHODS

To answer those questions, we conducted content analyses of ethnic representation in seven purposively-selected national English-language textbooks (Table 1). We chose content analysis due to the lack of existing coding frames/schemes that are fit-for-purpose for the Malaysian context, in addition to recognizing the importance of being flexible in our analysis while staying as close to the data as possible (Elo et al., 2014). The texts were published by the Institute of Language and Literature (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka [DBP]) on behalf of the Ministry of Education. They were viewed and scanned at the DBP archives in 2017 (except the 2016 textbook, which was in active use and purchased directly from the DBP bookshop).

Table 1. Selected Malaysian Year Five English language textbooks.

Year	Title of textbook	Authors (as appearing on cover page or front matter)	Notes
1968	*Dewan Programmed Structural English Book Five*	No authors named	First published in 1968
1973	*Dewan's New Primary Readers Book 5*	Sarojini Devi	1st print

1979	*New Primary English Course Book 5*	No authors named	2nd print of 2nd edition (1st edition in 1974)
1997	*Moving on with English KBSR Year 5*	Faridah J. Ibrahim Beatrice Thiyagarajah	Sixteenth print (1st print in 1986)
1999	*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah English Year 5*	Cordelia Mason Wan Khairul Fadhilah bt Wan Abd. Hamid Chitra Palaniandy	1st print
2012	*English Year 5 Sekolah Kebangsaan Textbook*	Ab. Majid bin Mohd. Said Mohd. Marzuki bin Maulud Saadah binti Khalid Abdul Hakim bin Zakariah	5th Printing (1st print in 2006)
2016	*Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools English Year 5 Sekolah Kebangsaan*	Lee Poh Lin Siti Shakilah Nirmala binti Abdullah	3rd Printing (first print in 2014)

We selected these texts based on specific rationales. Firstly, they were produced in collaboration with the Ministry, thereby being tailored to curriculum specifications. Secondly, as national primary school textbooks, the texts are/were widely used, given that primary school participation is high, relative to secondary education (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1965; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). Moreover, English is a compulsory subject, bolstering the textbooks' wider reach. As identified in the literature review, no existing published research has taken an historical approach to studying ethnic representation in English-language textbooks. Moreover, scholars have opined that the (English) language classroom has potential for generative dialogue about race and identity, if suitably facilitated by teachers (Mohamud, 2020). This provides further motivation for us to examine the core learning materials that are used in the English classrooms.

Our systematic content analysis involved iterative cycles of coding, categorisation and comparison. We describe our approach as both qualitative and quantitative: qualitative in that the data, whether textual or visual, were coded and interpreted for ethnic representation; and quantitative in that we also describe the data in numerical terms (e.g. of ethnically identifiable persons named in the texts; of the frequency with which these persons appear; of the number of 'role models' assigned to each ethnic group who appear in the texts). Borrowing from grounded theory, we generated themes from the data through an iterative process of constant comparison, adjusting the codes throughout, allowing "coding and analysis [to] take place together" (Cohen et al., 2011). In our final iteration, we generated two main categories of ethnic representation for analysis, with three sub-categories in each (Table 2).

Table 2. Analytic categories and sub-categories described.

Category	Sub-category	Description
1. Ethnic representation in distinct named	1.1 Total distinct named Malaysian characters	All distinct names in a text, *excluding* those clearly intended to be foreigners. The results are expressed as percentages of the total, broken down by ethnic codes.

Malaysian characters	1.2 Most frequently mentioned distinct named Malaysian characters	The frequency of the names in 1.1 was recorded. The results are expressed in terms of the ethnic composition of the Top Two and Top Eight most frequent.
	1.3 Malaysian role models	The total number of named special figures, *excluding* foreigners, as well as their ethnic composition. The frequency of their names appearing was also noted. These figures were further divided into sub-codes to reflect role model diversity.
2. Ethnic depictions, labels, and words	2.1 Visual depictions of ethnic-ness in pictures of people	The total number of people depicted in pictures was noted. Out of those, the depictions that bore visual markers of ethnicity were noted. Two results were recorded: i. Frequency of people depicted with visual markers of ethnicity, broken down by ethnic codes ii. Out of total people depicted in pictures, the percentage that are depicted with visual markers of ethnicity
	2.2 Ethnic/religious labels in text	Frequency of specific labels of ethnic and/or religious groups occuring in the text in written form (e.g. occurence of the exact words, "Malay", "Muslim", "Bajau", "Orang Asli" and so on)
	2.3 Ethnic/religious words in text	Frequency of specific words associated with a particular ethnic and/or religious group (including names of festivals, cultural practices, traditional dress, and places of worship).

To safeguard reliability and validity, the authors consulted each other during the coding process to compare interpretation, marking ambiguous instances in the data as such. It should be stressed, however, that in many cases our coding was not ambiguous—e.g. if we mark a particular ethnic depiction or label in the text as 'Bajau' or 'OA' (*orang asli*) it is because the text itself says so. The only small amount of ambiguity applied to coding visual depictions—for these, we consulted Malaysians of different ethnicities and corroborated with online sources (e.g. social media, blogs) to safeguard the accuracy of our interpretation. In addition, we sought a sense of the historical context of these textbooks through reference to secondary literature, in the form of the eleven Malaysia Plans (1965 to 2015). We selected these documents as companions for analysis because they represent official government narratives, which we could then bring into dialogue during the analytical process. Notwithstanding these, we concede that our analyses cannot be divorced from an element of personal interpretation, with all its attendant caveats and subjectivities. For more on how the categories and sub-categories were coded, see Appendix A.

A further caveat: students in national-type schools use different texts that are adapted for their needs, and the patterns of ethnic representation in those texts likewise vary (Suppiah & Nair, 2016). Chinese medium (19.15%) and Tamil medium (2.98%) national-type schools enrol a significant minority of students in the education system—by contrast, national schools enrol 77.07% of all primary students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). Therefore, we caution readers from generalising the study's findings. This paper only reports analysis of *national* primary school textbooks, and we suggest future research includes other types.

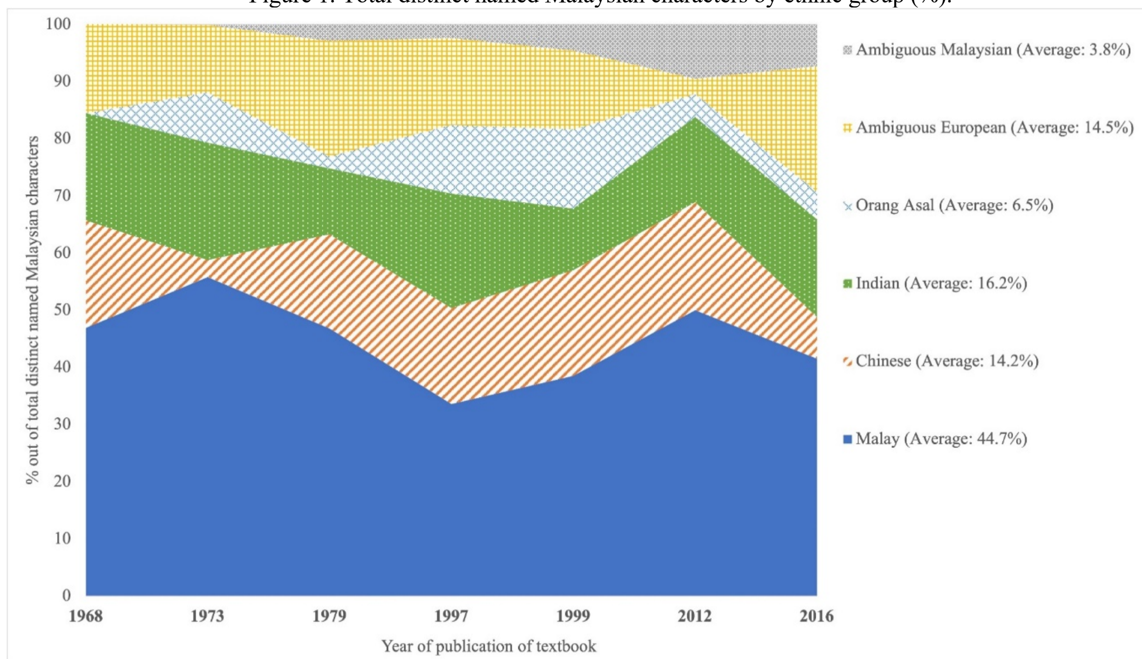
FINDINGS

We present the study's findings in two parts: first, an overview of ethnic representation in the textbooks as revealed by the content analyses; and then our subsequent discussion of three distinct phases found in these texts, each arguably projecting different models of multi-ethnic national unity. A caveat to our identification of three phases is that the third is relatively tentative, comprising only the 2016 textbook. By contrast, the first two phases possess three texts each, forming a more convincing pattern.

Overview of content analysis

First of all, by all measures across all seven texts, Malay representation is consistently strong. There are more distinct named Malay characters than other ethnic groups (Figure 1), also often the most significant (frequently mentioned) characters (Figure 2). There are also more Malay role models—while as a whole, role models are few in the first four textbooks, all are Malays, and in the final three textbooks where role models more frequently appear, a majority of these are also Malay (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Total distinct named Malaysian characters by ethnic group (%).

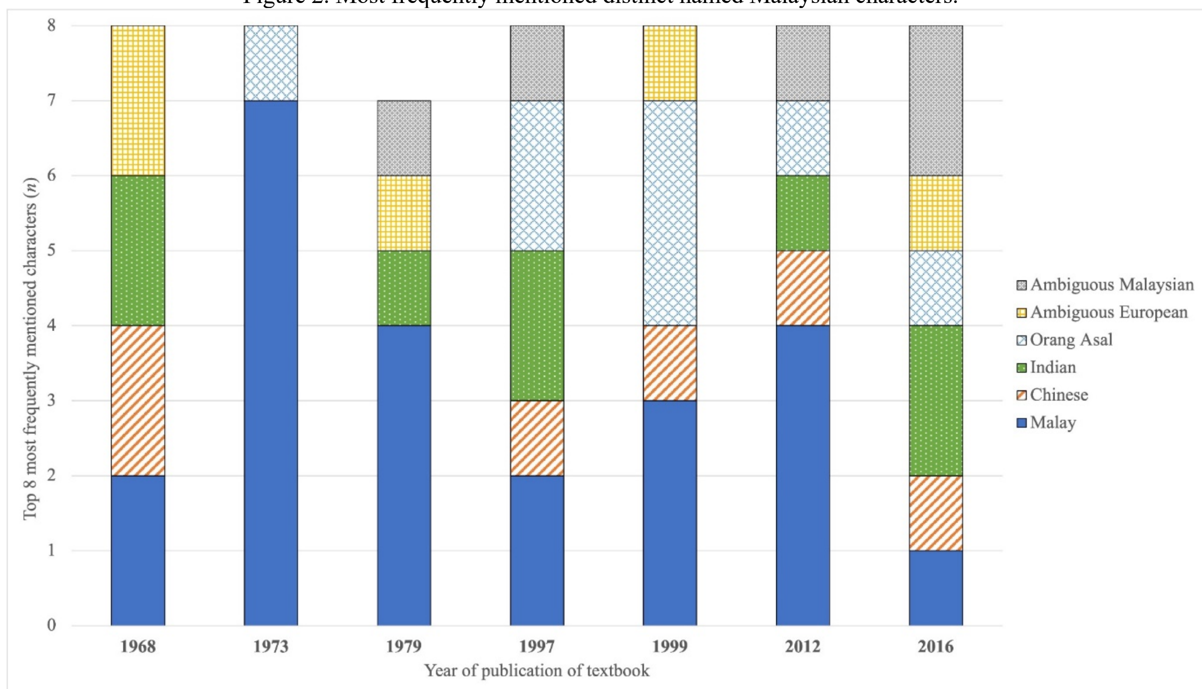


Note that "Ambiguous European" (AE) is a category created for the purposes of coding, denoting characters with English names who could be Malaysians of various ethnicities (e.g. Chinese, Portuguese Eurasians) or even non-Malaysians, but are not specified. We use "Orang Asal" (OA) as an umbrella term for the non-Malay indigenous peoples of Malaysia. Due to the diversity of groups, the categories used in our coding are divided according to region: OA-Sabah (e.g. Kadazandusun, Bajau), OA-Sarawak (e.g. Iban, Bidayuh, Penan), and OA-West Malaysia (e.g. Senoi, Jakun). For more details, see Appendix A.

Following the theme of strong Malay representation, the 1999 text depicts 12 Malay role models; with four given considerable depth of treatment, along with one Orang Asal (OA): the Malay role models include an athlete, an intellectual, a politician, a member of a royal family, and a legendary

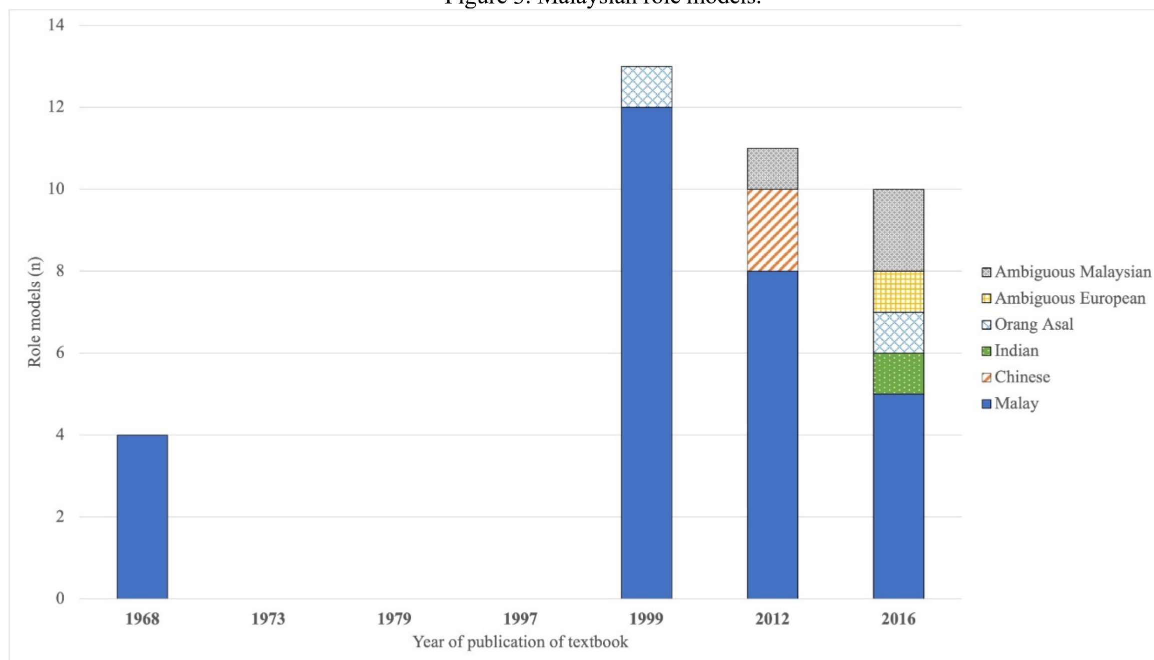
warrior, providing a diverse range of contemporary and historical figures. The 2012 textbook has eight Malay role models, two Chinese, and one Ambiguous Malaysian (AM). These numbers appear to communicate a small increase in inclusiveness, but as stated earlier only the four Malay figures and the one AM figure are portrayed with some depth, while the two Chinese figures appear as passing mention in a passage primarily about the Malay figures.

Figure 2. Most frequently mentioned distinct named Malaysian characters.



In contrast to strong Malay representation, minority group representation is at best inconsistent, and in some respects problematic. Chinese, Indians and Ambiguous Europeans are at least present in all texts, albeit with fluctuating frequencies. Orang Asal (OA) are not represented in 1968, only appearing from 1973 onwards, and at generally lower levels than Chinese, Indians, and Ambiguous Europeans. Sub-categories such as Indian Sikhs, Portuguese Eurasians, and specific OA groups are only occasionally represented. Almost completely absent are the Orang Asli of West Malaysia, a group under the broader OA category. The Orang asli, itself an umbrella term for the indigenous peoples of West Malaysia, only make an appearance in the 2016 textbook, which mentions the term twice and includes a legend that has roots in an Orang Asli tribe; however, the explanation is sparse, and the legend's roots not explicitly acknowledged. There does not seem to be a single Orang Asli character across all seven textbooks. It is possible that some of the ambiguous names in the texts could be Orang Asli, but this link is never explicitly made, in contrast to characters whose ethnic identities are made explicit. Other seemingly underrepresented Malaysian communities are the Peranakan and the Sikhs who are represented in characters and dress but whose practices are not mentioned.

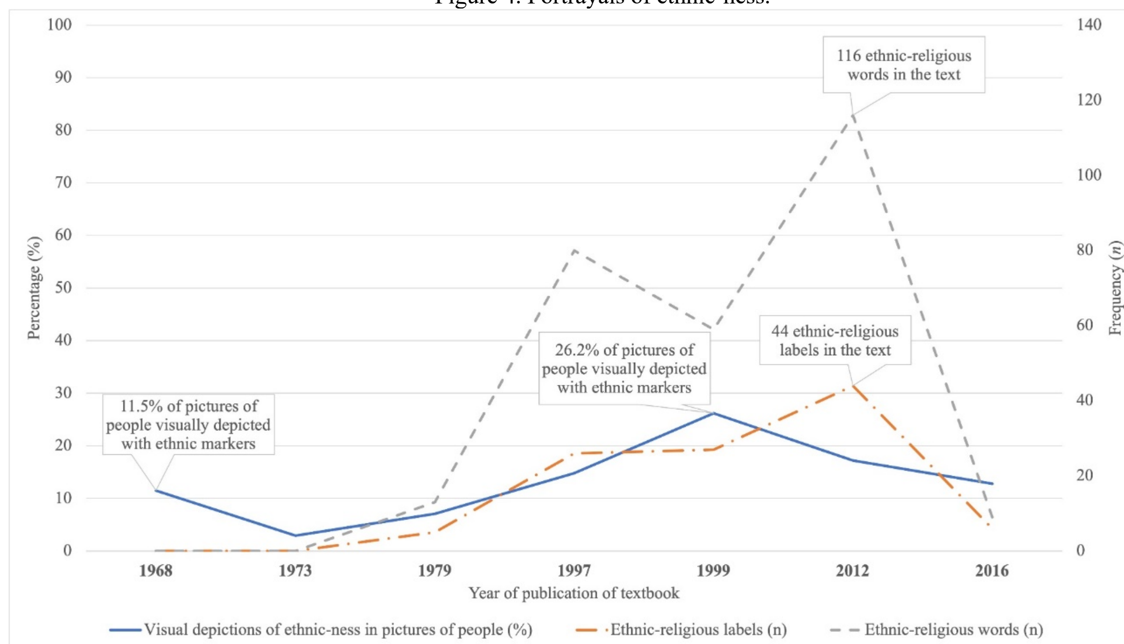
Figure 3. Malaysian role models.



Overall, ethnic representation appears to follow a hierarchy loosely correlated with population demographics, but often at the exclusion of minority groups. There are, however, signs of partial movements towards greater inclusion. In 2016, five of ten role models are non-Malay, depicting a more inclusive range of role models. Non-Malay role models consist of one OA legendary figure and two community heroes, an Indian and a Eurasian (AE). Amidst these, the ethnic ambiguity of two very prominent characters, "Captain Malaysia" and Master Kiddo"—two fictional superheroes—is an interesting development which we will discuss.

Aside from these, we also captured changing patterns in the portrayal of "ethnic-ness" i.e., of overtly ethnic depictions, labels and terminology (Figure 4). Ethnic-ness is conspicuously subdued in 1968 and 1973, dramatically increasing from 1979 through to 2012, with a particularly high period in 1997, 1999, and 2012, followed by a sharp decrease in 2016. These trends match patterns of more inclusive ethnic representation, such as more non-Malays portrayed as significant characters in 1999, 2012, and 2016, and further diversification of role models in 2016. Two of the Top Eight characters are conspicuously Ambiguous Malaysian in 2016, pointing towards a less ethno-centric Malaysian identity, although we note that ethnic depictions and ethnic-religious words are heavily dominated by Malay and Malay-Muslim portrayals, practices, and terminology still. The analysis of ethnic-religious labels provides more fine-grained insight, showing that the use of specifically ethnic labels like "Malay", "Chinese", and "Indian" grew slowly from 1999, peaked in 2012 and almost disappeared in 2016.

Figure 4. Portrayals of ethnic-ness.



Having provided an overview of the content analysis, we expand and discuss our findings in the next section, organising the texts into three distinct "phases" of ethnic representation.

Phase One: Ethnic erasure (1968, 1973, 1979)

We describe this phase as 'ethnic erasure', where narratives of race and visible ethnic-ness are mostly absent, especially in the first two textbooks, which display a lack of concern with depictions, labels, and explanations of ethnic differences.

The 1968 textbook features a cast of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Ambiguous European names, with an even spread across Top Eight characters. This textbook is the only to have two AE characters in the Top Eight, indicating the prominence of Eurasians at the time. While the cultures of Malays, Chinese, and Indians are given passing mention, little elaboration is provided, and the words "Malay" and "Chinese" are used to describe languages, not ethnic groups. The textbook's depiction of characters seems "colour-blind", as the illustrated characters are nearly indistinguishable, depicted in similar styles with varying skin tones, often clothed in Western dress or school uniforms. The exception is the depiction of Indian women, who are portrayed stereotypically with long braids, dark skin, a saree and/or a red dot on the forehead (bindi). Characters in this text wear traditional dress in a range of casual contemporary contexts not explicitly linked to festivals, with interethnic interaction occurring seamlessly across a wide range of social and school contexts. In Figure 5, for example, the host's clothing indicates his Malay identity but apart from that the celebration is ethnically neutral: the guests wear a variety of clothes, and the text simply reads, "The party is a great success" (p.41). The educational narrative may be "national in character" (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1965), i.e., locally grounded, but is not built around narratives of ethnicity.

We also note the omission of East Malaysian OA here. In the First Malaysia Plan, it was said to be "some time yet" before the education system in East Malaysia could "be co-ordinated" (p. 164) with West Malaysia's, which explains the lack of East Malaysian OA representation,

although the omission of West Malaysian OA has no similar extenuating circumstance.

Figure 5. A "party" (1968, p.41).

Similarly, the 1973 textbook depicts characters that appear ethnically indistinguishable and homogenous. Only four characters are depicted in traditional dress, and zero ethnic-religious labels and words are used. However, the character names reveal an unbalanced ethnic representation favouring Malays. Seven of the Top Eight characters are Malay, in contrast to only one Chinese name appearing in the text. A positive development is the introduction of OA representation, with one Sabahan OA as a Top Eight character, indicating some integration with East Malaysia. The dominance of Malay names is not immediately evident due to the homogenous visual depiction of characters (relatively low in 'ethnic-ness' as we have defined it). For example, it is visually impossible to tell in Figure 6 that one family is Malay, and the other Indian. There is a visual "colour-blindness" in representation.

Figure 6. "Encik Kamarudin and Mr. Nathan took their families for a picnic" (1973, p.45, 48).

The beginnings of a new trend can be seen in 1979. This textbook has a similar aesthetic to the previous, portraying most characters in a homogenous and generally non-ethnic way; however, ethnic depictions increased, and religious labels were used for the first time to describe groups of people, e.g. "Muslims", "Christians". The inclusion of minorities was expanded further to include the specific sub-groups of Indian Sikhs and Portuguese Eurasians, each represented in a

Top Eight character. The association of Malay-ness with Islam is visually depicted in an illustration of two men and a woman in Malay dress, accompanied by the text, “We haven’t gone to the mosque for Friday prayers. Where must we be…at home or at the mosque?” (p.62). The most frequent ethnic depictions and words represent Malays and Malay-Muslims, in 25 of 35 ethnic depictions, and 11 of 13 ethnic-religious words. The close link between religion and ethnicity in Malaysian society suggests that the introduction of labels to denote religious groups is a precursor to the later more explicitly ethnic narratives. Yet the illustration of “Mrs Tan” (a Chinese name) in Malay dress (p.12, 32, 33) also hints at the idea of “Malay culture forming [the] core” of the “Malaysian national identity” (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1976).

Overall, however, ethnic-ness and the portrayal of ethnic difference are relatively subdued. “Malaysian-ness” is invoked in the 1973 textbook through various passages homogenizing the Malaysian experience. A passage contrasting what “Malaysians” and “English people” eat (p.55) draws the distinction along national lines. Malaysian cuisine is described as “rice, fried vegetables with fish, meat or eggs” (p.54), which could apply across different ethnicities. The emphasis on national identity teaches that “we” are “Malaysians” and “they” are “Englishmen” (p.56). Similarly, a passage in the 1979 textbook tells us that some people “are Malaysians. Some are not Malaysian” as they come “from countries far away from Malaysia” (p.92), despite the fact that many Malaysians are descendants of immigrants with close links to “countries far away”. A passage on passports says that it “shows that he is a citizen of Malaysia” (p.109). Citizenship and a shared political and national identity are embraced, but the fragmented past and diverse cultures of Malaysians are glossed over, echoing policymakers’ desire for “the establishment of a true Malaysian identity based on national pride and a sense of belonging” (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 1976).

Phase Two: An explosion of ethnic-ness (1997, 1999, 2012)

In this phase we observed an “explosion” of ethnic-ness i.e., a dramatic rise in ethnic depictions, ethnic-religious labels, and ethnic-religious terminology. The three textbooks in this phase display more overt concern with ethnic-ness and explicit focus on elucidating ethnic difference and facilitating intercultural discussion.

This pattern is evident through the content analysis. In the 1997 textbook, 14.8% of all illustrated characters were depicted with explicitly ethnic markers (such as the Sikh turban or Bajau sinuangga, for instance), as compared to 7.1% in 1979. This measure rises to 26.2% in the 1999 textbook, and drops to 17.2% in 2012, though still a high figure. Ethnic-religious labels (i.e. specific labels like ‘Malay’ or ‘Hindu’), numbering only seven in 1979, reached 26, 27 and 44 in the three subsequent textbooks. Ethnic-religious words (i.e. festivals, cultural practices, places of worship) saw a similar increase, rising from 13 in 1979 to 80, 59 and 116 in the respective textbooks subsequent to it. Notably, unlike in the previous phase, all three textbooks of this phase have dedicated sections explaining the festivals of various religious and ethnic groups.

These festivals were most frequently Malay and Malay-Muslim, but also the celebrations of other groups, such as Wesak Day (Buddhist), Hari Gawai (Sarawakian OA), Deepavali (Hindu), and more. Moreover, the 1997 textbook is the first to depict and explain the cultural practices of various OA groups in Sabah and Sarawak, beginning a trend which continues to 2012 and 2016. These texts project a concern with educating readers about ethnicity and culture, encouraging them to take part in the practices of others; for example, to “find out the names of festivals

celebrated in Malaysia" and "tell your class what you have found" (1997, p. 210). The textbooks endorse cultural appreciation and understanding, promoting unity through ethnic difference.

This sentiment is captured by the multicultural cast cliché, prominent from 1997 to 2016. The portrayal of a group of children, each representing an ethnic group and some becoming recurring characters, first appears on the front page of the 1986/1997 textbook (Figure 7). The text identifies the children as Malay (two), Chinese, Indian, Sikh, Sabahan OA, and Sarawakian OA, with one not ethnically identifiable.

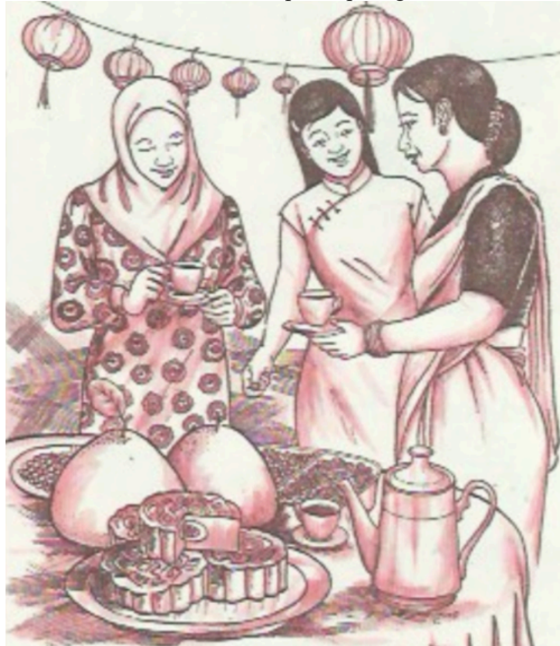
Figure 7. The multicultural cast on the front page (1986).

We note that the ethnic makeup of the multicultural cast shifts across future textbooks, rendering certain minorities invisible or visible; in 1999, a Portuguese Eurasian character featured, but not an Indian Sikh, and in 2012, there is an Indian Sikh, but no Portuguese Eurasian, nor Sabahan OA. There are always Malay, Chinese, and Indian characters in the main cast, but the representation of other minorities is more precarious. In addition, minority members of the cast do not always turn out to be a significant character, as measured by the Top Eight most frequently mentioned characters; in 1999, the Indian character did not, while in 2012, the Chinese and Indian Sikh characters did not either. The multicultural cast can be seen as an inclusive act to represent broader Malaysian society, but may in some cases be described as tokenistic.

Race-based narratives are introduced in this phase, particularly the language of "Malay, Chinese, and Indian" and the "major races" narrative. Previously, the only labels used to denote ethnic or religious groups had been "Muslim" and "Christian" (1979) — not "Malay", "Indian", etc. By 1997, the ethnic labels of "Chinese", "Bajau", "Kadazandusun", "Dayak", as well as religious labels "Muslim", "Buddhist", and "Hindu" were used. In 1999, the terms "Malay", "Chinese" and "Indian" to denote ethnic groups were mentioned six times. Consider also the illustration in the same text, overtly portraying three women as Malay, Chinese, and Indian taking part in the Chinese mooncake festival (Figure 8). In 2012, such ethnic labels quadruple, creating an explicit

narrative that is dominated by the idea of the three "major races" (2012, p.67). The text specifically informs readers that Malaysia has "many ethnic groups" out of which the "major races are the Malay, Chinese, and Indian" (p.67).

Figure 8. Malay, Chinese and Indian women participating in the mooncake festival (1999).



Despite the rise in portrayals of other ethnic groups and increasing inclusiveness in representation, we argue that the "Malay, Chinese, Indian" (MCI) narrative in effect marginalizes other ethnic groups, in addition to overlooking the diversity within these "major races". Ethnicity and religion are conflated in the projection of the MCI narrative, portraying Malays as Muslims, Chinese as Buddhists, and Indians as Hindus, despite considerable numbers of the latter two groups being adherents of other faiths (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). Moreover, the absence of representation of OA religion in any of the texts may suggest a discomfort with portraying difference within the bumiputera category, echoing Nakamura's (2012) view that OA "have not been racialized" (p. 140) in public discourses because of their co-status with Malays as bumiputera. The slippage of implicitly equating "Malay" with "bumiputera" in effect marginalizes the OA, rendering them invisible within the national narrative. The conflation of ethnicity and religion strengthens the projection of "hierarchical ethnic relationships" (Nakamura, 2012), in which some groups are foregrounded in ethnic-religious boxes while others are marginalized.

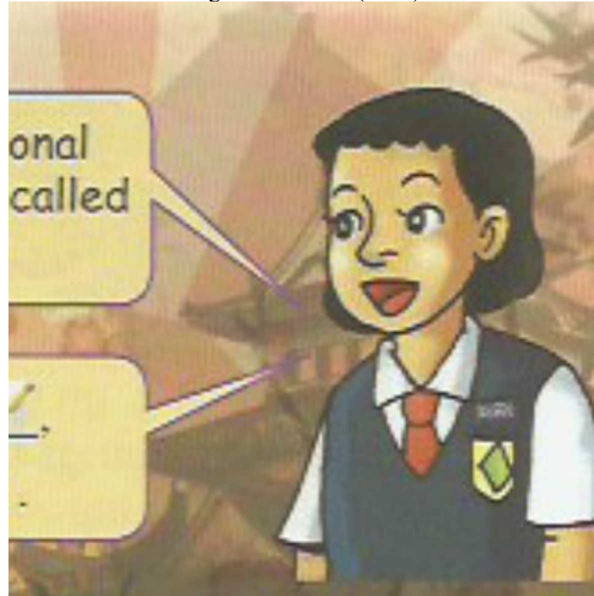
Phase Three: The beginnings of a "Malaysian" narrative? (2016)

We believe the 2016 textbook signifies the tentative beginning of a new phase, shifting away from a more ethnically defined national identity to a narrative of shared "Malaysian" identity, with less overt ethnic-ness. There is a degree of ethnicized continuity as trends from Phase Two remain visible, but these are mixed with signs of a new narrative.

This shift is initially not evident from analysing total named Malaysian characters. In 2016, Malays are the most represented group (41.5%); Chinese (7.3%) and OA (4.8%) remain underrepresented, and Indian (17.1%) and AE (22%) have strong representation; however, we

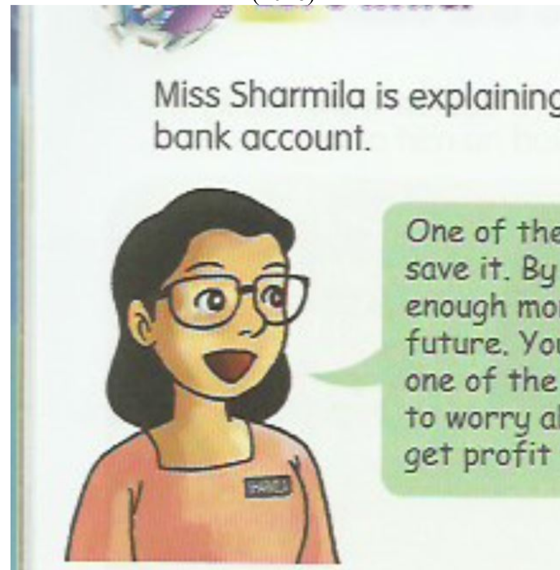
noted that the percentage of Ambiguous Malaysian (AM) characters is higher (7.2%) than its average of 3.8% across all textbooks. Moreover, closer inspection reveals a spread of Top Eight characters across all ethnic groups, suggesting more even representation: the Top Two characters are Indian and AM; the latter named "Jasleen" might be construed as Sikh, but our consensus was that this was not definitive, and as such we marked this instance as AM (Figure 9). Out of the multicultural cast of six introduced at the start of the book, we noted that four are ethnically ambiguous in appearance, especially the Indian "Miss Sharmila" and AM "Jasleen", as the Top Two characters, indicating a shift away from overt visual markers of ethnicity (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Jasleen (2016).



This pattern is mirrored by the overall decrease of ethnic depictions, from 17.2% to 12.8% of all illustrated characters. The influence of Phase Two and relative dominance of Malay depictions of ethnic-ness is still evident, as 85 of 91 ethnic depictions are Malay, out of which 75 are depictions of Malay women wearing the tudung (head covering). However, other ethnic depictions are generally low, with only one Chinese, two Indian, two OA, and one AM. This textbook does not have a section about festivals, or long passages dedicated to explaining cultural or ethnic-religious practices, a clear departure from the previous phase. Only six ethnic-religious labels occur in the text as compared to 44 previously, and only eight ethnic-religious words compared to 116 previously. Phase Two's concern with educating readers and teaching them to celebrate ethnic and cultural differences had diminished, except passing reference to Orang Asli "culture" (p.39) and East Malaysia being "rich in fascinating cultures" (p.72), both without using the word "race" or "ethnicity". The inclusion of the West Malaysian Orang Asli is notable, given their prior exclusion.

Figure 10. Cikgu Sharmila, who while having an ethnically identifiable name seems ethnically ambiguous in appearance (2016).



We propose that Malaysian-ness in this phase appears to be constructed in three ways: transcending ethnicity, subsuming ethnicity, and involving all ethnicities. The first is conveyed by the ambiguity of a fictional "local superhero" (p.23). "Captain Malaysia" (Figure 11) is anonymous, as "no one knows who he is or where he lives" (p.24); questions are asked about his "real name", what he does "for a living", and whether he has "a family" (p.22), pointing towards a definition of identity not tied to ethnicity. His neutral appearance and anonymity make it impossible to identify him ethnically. What is important is "his mission to protect all the children in Malaysia" and his "kind and unselfish" (p.24) characteristics. This superhero, who happens to transcend ethnic categories, is celebrated as a figure of Malaysian patriotism, the ultimate role model. His moral values of strength, courage, and kindness are projected as aspirational. Similarly, his sidekick "Master Kiddo" is also ethnically unidentifiable and described as "responsible" and "brave" (p.27). We believe the extended treatment of "Captain Malaysia" here represents a different ideal of Malaysian-ness.

The 2016 textbook projects narratives of Malaysian culture that subsume ethnic identification, where society involves contributions from many ethnic groups. Instead of a dedicated chapter for explaining festivals, there is one on "Malaysian Legends" (p.31), encompassing three legends which we traced back to Malay, Jakun (West Malaysian OA) and Iban (Sarawakian OA) origins; however, the text does not frame the first two as ethnic; all are presented as rooted in local culture and myth, inviting readers to embrace a shared "Malaysian" mythology. Moreover, the contribution of many groups is recognised through role models, featuring "Real-Life Heroes" (p.143) of various ethnicities. Although Malay role models still number highest (five) there is diversification to include Indian, AE, OA, and two AM role models. The community heroes celebrated are a Malay firefighter, a doctor and humanitarian activist, a Eurasian nurse, and an Indian social worker, celebrating the contribution of people of different ethnicities. This is a positive trend, though incomplete as some groups are still omitted.

Figure 11. Captain Malaysia (2016, p. 21).

We argue that 2016 signals a move away from explicit ethnic identification and categorisations while striving for inclusion of communities under a shared Malaysian identity. It is distinct from Phase One, as it appears influenced by the proliferation of ethnic-ness in Phase Two and projects an underlying awareness of the prevailing dominant narratives, displaying remnants such as the multicultural cast cliché, the dominance of Malay cultural elements and role models, and one image featuring tokenistic representation through visible ethnic markers. At the same time, there is a movement towards a more ambiguous, fluid national identity. The textbook acknowledges culture, but does not impose ethnic narratives; instead, it points to the idea of being "Malaysian" in a narrative that transcends ethnic identification.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the disjunctions between ethnic representation in textbooks and the demographics of Malaysian society, and brings into view the constructed nature and fluidity of national narratives in relation to ethnic representation. Looking back, one discovers that the narratives of today are not self-evident, nor have they always been dominant; yet they have become an indelible part of social reality. The relationship between ethnic representation and narratives of nationhood is complex, as approaches that favour "colour-blind" homogeneity or explicit ethnic differentiation can both mask problematic representation in different ways by erasing, marginalizing or essentializing ethnic identities. The themes of the study also raise questions about how we relate to difference as citizens; in the Malaysian context, "difference" includes not only the relation between bumiputera and non- bumiputera, but also with the many foreign workers and refugees in the country, which have pertinence in many other contexts. Educational texts play an important role in making them either visible or invisible to young people.

By examining historical trends, our analysis reveals a general progression from first a period of relative indifference to ethnicity, then to placing a great deal of prominence on ethnicity and ethnic differences, and finally a seemingly new narrative where ethnicity is relatively subsumed under national identity. Amidst these, we argue that there have been mixed messages in ethnic representation and narratives of nationhood—perhaps to be expected over such a long historical period. Although on the surface we found features that are commendable, such as the drive to facilitate intercultural communication in Phase Two, and to improve ethnic representation in the

2016 textbook, these appear alongside problematic erasures and marginalisations of various groups, especially West and East Malaysian OA.

Therefore, with respect to the role of education for nation-building (Brown, 2007), and of finding the "balance" between presenting a convergent national identity and divergent heterogeneity (Samuel & Tee, 2013)—we see within the textbooks analysed here that while the older editions were arguably problematic, the 2016 edition appeared to be more inclusive of ethnic difference and simultaneously pointing towards a "Malaysian" narrative that transcends or subsumes ethnic identification.

Notwithstanding our findings, an important limitation of this study is that it does not include the imported, post-2016 English-language textbooks used in Malaysia under the new curriculum aligned to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). We are not aware of any published studies analysing these latest textbooks through similar methods as ours; however, a recent interview-based study of English teachers claims that these textbooks were not localised for Malaysian use (Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehhudin, 2018). If true, this would have implications not only in terms of surrendering some aspects of the culture-building function of textbooks but as a departure from the accepted practice of localising textbooks to accommodate learners' schemata and background knowledge (Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehhudin, 2018). We speculate also that such a move would drive the perception that the English language is simply a foreign language, not part of the Malaysian cultural fabric and heritage. Such implications must, in our view, be considered by policymakers and textbook writers.

To better inform policy and practice, we recommend that future research takes a similar ground-up approach to analysing the latest textbooks, treating the texts themselves as data. Moreover, future research can go further than we have done, by eliciting teachers' and students' views of their textbooks through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. This will enrich the literature with both the "rich descriptions" of the texts themselves as well as the "lived experiences" of those texts by their users (Su, 2022).

We recognize that the writing of national textbooks is a challenging task, especially for diverse and heterogenous countries. The goal of our analysis—by taking a backward-looking historical approach—is to offer a forward-looking contribution, informing the design of future local textbooks, sensitizing textbook authors to the relevant aspects and dimensions of ethnic representation in these texts. In our view, these considerations must be made: after all, textbooks not only facilitate the learning of academic subjects but contribute to their readers' collective sense of identity and nationhood (McCulloch, 2004).

REFERENCES

Anderson, B. R. O. (2006). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

Apple, M. W., & Christian-Smith, L. K. (1991). The Politics of the Textbook. In M. W. Apple & L. K. Christian-Smith (Eds.), *The Politics of the Textbook* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.

Brown, G. K. (2007). Making ethnic citizens: The politics and practice of education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *27*(3), 318–330. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.12.002

Chandra, K. (Ed.). (2012). *Constructivist theories of ethnic politics*. Oxford University Press.

Chang, L. H. (2013). Revisiting the Values in Moral Education for Malaysian schools. *Journal of Research, Policy & Practice of Teachers & Teacher Education*, *3*(2), 49–59.

Cho, Y., & Park, Y. (2016). "Textbook as a contradictory melting-pot": an analysis of multicultural content in Korean textbooks. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 36*(1), 111–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2014.924388

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720967

De Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (1999). The discursive construction of national identities. *Discourse and Society, 10*(2), 149–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926599010002002

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2011*). Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010* (Updated: 05/08/2011). https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/ctheme&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2021). *Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2021.* https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/pdfPrev&id=ZjJOSnpJR21sQWVUcUp6ODRudm5JZz09

Economic Planning Unit Malaysia. (1965). *The First Malaysia Plan, 1966-1970*. http://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RMK1.pdf

Economic Planning Unit Malaysia. (1976). *The Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1980.* http://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RMK3.pdf

Economic Planning Unit Malaysia. (1986). *The Fifth Malaysia Plan, 1986-1990.* http://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RM5.pdf

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open, 4*(1), 215824401452263. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633

Fahlgren, S., & Sawyer, L. (2011). The power of positioning: On the normalisation of gender, race/ethnicity, nation and class positions in a Swedish social work textbook. *Gender and Education, 23*(5), 535–548. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.511605

Government Press of Malaya. (1956). *Report of the Education Committee, 1956.* https://www.fcmsm.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Razak-Report-1956.pdf

Han, H., Park, S. C., Kim, J., Jeong, C., Kunii, Y., & Kim, S. (2018). A quantitative analysis of moral exemplars presented in moral education textbooks in Korea and Japan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 38*(1), 62–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2018.1423950

Hirschman, C. (1987). The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 46*(3), 555–582.

Hirschman, C. (1986). The making of race in Colonial Malaya: Political economy and racial ideology. *Sociological Forum, 1*(2), 330–361. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237343

Kim, H., & Kim, S. K. (2019). Global convergence or national identity making?: The history textbook controversy in South Korea, 2004-2018. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 39*(2), 252–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2019.1621801

Manickam, S. K. (2005). Textbooks and Nation Construction in Malaysia. *18th Conference of International Association of Historians of Asia* (IAHA), 78–89. http://www.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/capas/publication/newsletter/N28/28_01_04.pdf

McCulloch, G. (2004). *Documentary research in education, history and the social sciences*. RoutledgeFalmer.

Milner, A., & Ting, H. (2014). Race and its Competing Paradigms: A Historical Review. In A.

Milner, A. R. Embong, & S. Y. Tham (Eds.), *Transforming Malaysia: Dominant and Competing Paradigms* (pp. 18–58). ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2019). Quick Facts 2019: Malaysia Educational Statistics. In *Ministry of Education, Malaysia*. Educational Data Sector. https://www.moe.gov.my/en/penerbitan/1587-quick-facts-2018-malaysia-educational-statistics-1/file

Mohamad Subakir, M. Y., Bahiyah, A. H., Zarina, O., Kesumawati, A. B., Fuzirah, H., & Azmah, M. (2012). A Visual Analysis of a Malaysian English School Textbook: Gender Matters. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 69*, 1871–1880. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.140

Mohamud, L. (2020). Talking about 'Race' in the English Classroom. *Changing English, 27*(4), 383–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2020.1814693

Nagaraj, S., Tey, N.-P., Ng, C.-W., Lee, K.-H., & Pala, J. (2015). Counting Ethnicity in Malaysia: The Complexity of Measuring Diversity. In P. Simon, V. Piché, & A. A. Gagnon (Eds.), *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics* (pp. 143–173). Springer Science+Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20095-8

Nakamura, R. (2012). Malaysia, a racialized nation: Study of the concept of race in Malaysia. *International Proceedings of Economics Development & Research, 42,* 134–142.

Nurul Farehah, M. U., & Mohd Salehhuddin, A. A. (2018). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysia: Teachers' awareness and the Challenges. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *24*(3), 168–183. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2018-2403-13

Samuel, M., & Tee, M. Y. (2013). Malaysia: Ethnocracy and Education. In L. P. Symaco (Ed.), *Education in South-East Asia* (pp. 137–156). Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472544469.ch-007

Santhiram, R. R. (1997). Curriculum Materials for National Integration in Malaysia: Match or Mismatch? *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 17*(2), 7–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188799708547758

Santhiram, R. R. (2021). *From Decolonisation to Ethno-Nationalism: A study of Malaysia's school history syllabuses and textbooks*. Strategic Information and Research Development (SIRD).

Suppiah, P. C., & Nair, R. (2016). Ethnic Identity in English Language Textbooks: Considerations for a Multicultural Society. *Social and Management Research Journal, 13*(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.24191/smrj.v13i1.5149

Su, S.-F. (2022). Exploring students' attitudes toward university e-textbooks: Experiences, expectations, and preferences. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 54*(3), 331–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211020096

Tan, B. P., Mahadir Naidu, N. B., & Jamil@Osman, Z. (2018). Moral values and good citizens in a multi-ethnic society: A content analysis of moral education textbooks in Malaysia. *Journal of Social Studies Research, 42*(2), 119–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.05.004

Ting, H. (2013). The battle over the memory of the nation: whose national history? In M. Baildon, K. S. Loh, I. M. Lim, G. İnanç, & J. Jaffar (Eds.), *Controversial History Education in Asian Contexts*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203753491

Ting, H. (2014). Race Paradigm and Nation-Building in Malaysia. In A. Milner, A. R. Embong, & S. Y. Tham (Eds.), *Transforming Malaysia: Dominant and Competing Paradigms* (pp. 82–110). ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

You, J. A., Lee, H. S., & Craig, C. J. (2019). Remaking textbook policy: analysis of national

curriculum alignment in Korean school textbooks. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 39*(1), 14–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2019.15725

APPENDIX A. Analytic categories, sub-categories and data indicators.

Category 1. Ethnic representation in distinct named Malaysian characters.

<table>
<tr><th>Sub-category</th><th>Description</th><th>Codes</th><th>Examples</th></tr>
<tr><td>1.1 Total distinct named Malaysian characters</td><td>All distinct names in a text, excluding those clearly intended to be foreigners. For example, ‘Kamal’ and ‘Seng Huat’ were regarded as 2 distinct named characters. The results are expressed as percentages of the total, broken down by ethnic codes.</td><td rowspan="2">1. M (Malay)
2. C (Chinese)
3. I (Indian)
a. I-Sikh (Indian Sikh)
4. OA (Orang Asal)
a. OA-Sb (Sabah)
b. OA-Sw (Sarawak)
c. OA-WM (West Malaysia)
5. AE (Ambiguous European)
a. AE-PE (Portuguese Eurasian)
6. AM (Ambiguous Malaysian)</td><td rowspan="2">Kamal
Seng Huat
Arumugam
Mrs Jaswant Singh
Ongkili
Daren Agat
N/A
Peter
Alicia Nonis
Dan</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.2 Most frequently mentioned distinct named Malaysian characters</td><td>The frequency of the names in 1.1 was recorded. The results are expressed in terms of the ethnic composition of the Top 2 and Top 8 most frequent. For example, in the ‘68 text, ‘Kamal and ‘Seng Huat’ were the Top 2 most frequently mentioned (86 & 91 times respectively).</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.3 Malaysian role models</td><td>The total number of named special figures, excluding foreigners, was noted, as well as their ethnic composition. The frequency of their names appearing was also noted.

These figures were further divided into sub-codes, coded as non-mutually exclusive: Astronaut, Athlete, Community hero, Fictional, Historical, Intellectual, Legend, Politician, Royal, Warrior.</td><td colspan="2">Ethnic codes as above.

Examples of ethnic and sub-codes:
Za'ba (Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad) — Malay, Intellectual
Simalungun — Orang Asal, Legend, Warrior
Sybil Kathigasu/Daly — Ambiguous European, Community hero</td></tr>
</table>

Notes:

i. *Ethnic codes were coded as mutually exclusive. 1, 2, 3, 3a, 4, and 5a denote existing ethnic classifications; categories 4a, 4b, 4c, 5 and 6 were created for coding purposes only. Supporting textual context was used to inform the coding process.*

ii. *Orang Asal (4) is an umbrella term for the indigenous peoples of Malaysia. OA codes are divided by regions because of the plurality of OA groups, whose ethnic classifications are fluid and unclear.*

iii. *Ambiguous European (5) denotes characters with English names (e.g. “David”), who could be C, I, OA, AE-PE, other Eurasians, English people living in Malaysia, or simply foreigners.*

iv. *Ambiguous Malaysian (6) denotes characters with Malaysian names that could belong to several different ethnic groups, or who are of mixed ethnicity (e.g. Nicol David)*

.

Category 2. Ethnic depictions, labels, and words

<table>
<tr><th>Sub-category</th><th>Description</th><th>Codes</th><th>Examples</th></tr>
<tr><td>2.1 Visual depictions of ethnic-ness in pictures of people</td><td>The total number of people depicted in pictures was noted. Out of those, the depictions that bore visual markers of ethnicity were noted. Two results were recorded:
i. Frequency of people depicted with visual markers of ethnicity, broken down by ethnic codes
ii. Out of total people depicted in pictures, the percentage that are depicted with visual markers of ethnicity
Ethnic codes were coded as mutually exclusive; 1, 2, 3, 3a, 4, 4a, 4b, and 4c denote specific ethnic groups, while category 5 is created for coding purposes only. This category of 'Ambiguous' denotes characters depicted with unclear traditional dress that cannot be clearly identified.</td><td>1. M (Malay)
2. C (Chinese)
3. I (Indian)
a. I-Sikh (Indian Sikh)
4. OA (Orang Asal)
a. OA-SbB (Sabah, Bajau)
b. OA-SbK (Sabah, Kadazandusun)
c. OA-SwD (Sarawak, Dayak)
5. Ambiguous</td><td>tudung, baju Melayu
cheongsam
bindi, sari
turban

kain dastar

sinuangga

sirat</td></tr>
<tr><td>2.2 Ethnic/religious labels in text</td><td>Frequency of specific labels of ethnic and/or religious groups occuring in the text in written form (e.g. occurence of the exact words, "Malay", "Muslim", "Bajau", "Orang Asli" and so on)</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">1. M (Malay)
a. M-Malay
b. M-Muslim
2. C (Chinese)
a. C-Chinese
b. C-Buddhist
3. I (Indian)
a. I-Indian b. I-Hindu
4. OA (Orang Asal)
a. OA-SbB (Sabah, Bajau)
b. OA-SbK (Sabah, Kadazandusun)
c. OA-SwD (Sarawak, Dayak)
d. OA-SwI (Sarawak, Iban)
e. OA-SwOU (Sarawak, Orang Ulu)
f. OA-SwB (Sarawak, Bidayuh)
g. OA-SwM (Sarawak, Melanau)
h. OA-WMOA (West Malaysia, Orang Asli)
5. Christian
6. Malaysian</td></tr>
<tr><td>2.3 Ethnic/religious words in text</td><td>Frequency of specific words associated with a particular ethnic and/or religious group (including names of festivals, cultural practices, traditional dress, and places of worship)

— E.g. Mooncake Festival, Ponggal, Hari Raya, wau bulan, mosque, Christmas</td></tr>
</table>

Notes:

i. *Ethnic/religious codes, coded as mutually exclusive. Religious codes are included due to the conflation of ethnicity and religion.*

ii. *4c-4g may not be distinct ethnic groups (existing classification is unclear and fluid), but are listed out separately because the labels were used in the text.*

iii. *4h refers to the Orang Asli, a blanket term for indigenous groups in West Malaysia.*

iv. *Malaysian (6) is a category created for coding purposes only used in 2.3, to denote festivals or practices promoted as shared or "Malaysian" in character rather than ethnically defined.*