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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Berita Filem, Malay fan magazines, and modernity in the early 1960s

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Abstract

This article investigates *Berita Filem*, one of the key Malay film magazines published in the 1960s, through the lens of minor fame: a form of temporary, localized celebrity status granted to aspiring actors, beauty pageant contestants, and other participants in the magazine's interactive features. It charts some of the ways in which *Berita Filem* constructed fandom as a participatory endeavour, and how that participation was tied to ideas of modernity and Muslim belonging. Fan magazines were instructive in circulating images of stars, as well as forging a sense of collective culture for moviegoers before the advent of social media. While the last decade has witnessed a proliferation of historiographies centred on fan magazines and their content, both visual and textual, such studies remain largely limited to the Global North. In aiming to close this gap, this article examines three of *Berita Filem*'s regular columns, which took distinctive formats. 'Our autograph column' (*Ruangan autograph kita*) modelled itself after school yearbook pages, 'Queen of Berita Filem' (*Ratu Berita Filem*) was a beauty pageant, and 'From heart to heart with Latifah Omar' (*Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar*) was an advice column written by a movie star. At the core of this investigation is the question of historical readership at a time when Malaysia was a newly independent and rapidly changing nation.

Keywords: Malaysia; fan magazines; film history; Malay; popular culture

Introduction

The photograph of S. Hussein Alattas appeared among 12 others, in a two-page spread in *Berita Filem*. It was December of 1962, and *Berita Filem* was one of the most popular film magazines in Malaysia: a country that had achieved independence from Britain only five years before. The images captured adolescent Malay men—the oldest 24, the youngest just 16 years old—in unbuttoned polo shirts and bomber jackets. 'Gallant! Dashing! Handsome and Stylish!', read the caption, the excitement palpable.[1] All the

[1] 'Bakal bintang filem', *Berita Filem*, December 1962, p. 38.

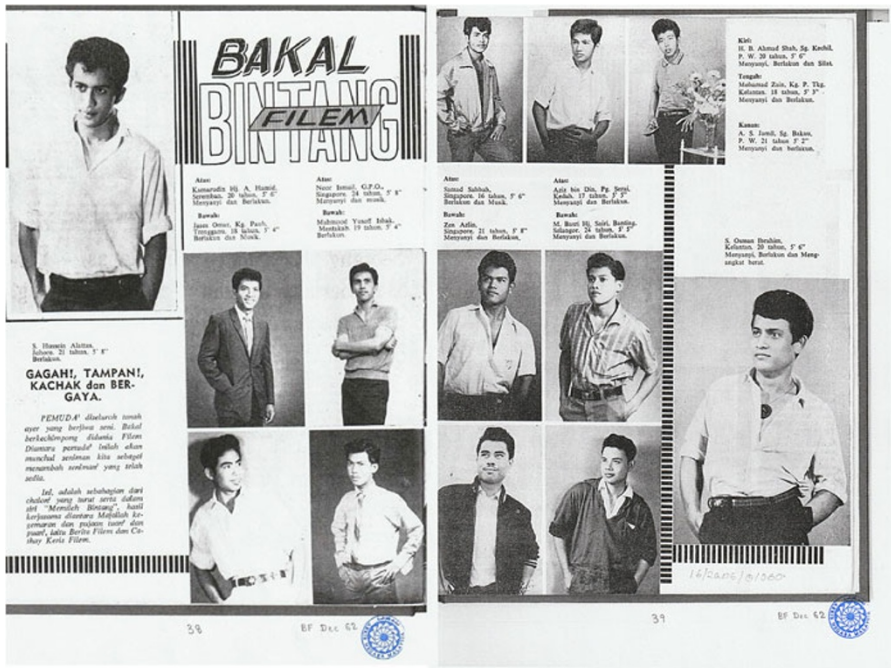

Figure 1. 'Future film star' column in the December 1962 issue of *Berita Filem*. Hussein's photograph is in the top left. Note that he is described as 21-years-old and 5'8" tall. *Source:* National Archives of Malaysia, Accession No. 2005/0015260.

subjects were carefully posed, their hands in their pockets—a gesture of confidence, portraying a certain *laissez-faire*. The attitude befitted aspirants to movie fame. The men were taking part in a competition organized by the magazine and Cathay-Keris, a film studio based in Singapore. The prize was a screen test (Figure 1).

Although he could not know it then, S. Hussein was soon to rise above the other participants. Eighteen months later, he was awarded a chance to meet three film stars, Rock Selamat, Roseyatimah, and Salinah (Figure 2). The article provided photographs of a hike organized as part of their meeting, describing S. Hussein Alattas as a graduate of an English college, an avid traveller and writer.[2] He was from Johor Bahru, a rapidly growing city neighbouring Singapore. Although the previous write-up claimed the contestant was 21, this time his age was given as just 18. 'I am ready to give everything I have, as I really want to become a film star and a successful author',[3] he admitted, before thanking the trio of movie stars for their kindness. The quest towards recognizability is presented here not as one driven by a shallow need for fame, but one connected to talent and education.

Publications about the movies enticed readers with an insider view of the industry. For *Berita Filem*, presenting stardom as something within reach was a commercially

[2]In this article, his name is spelled as Hussain Al-Attas.

[3]'Tamu khas', *Berita Filem*, June 1963, pp. 54–55.

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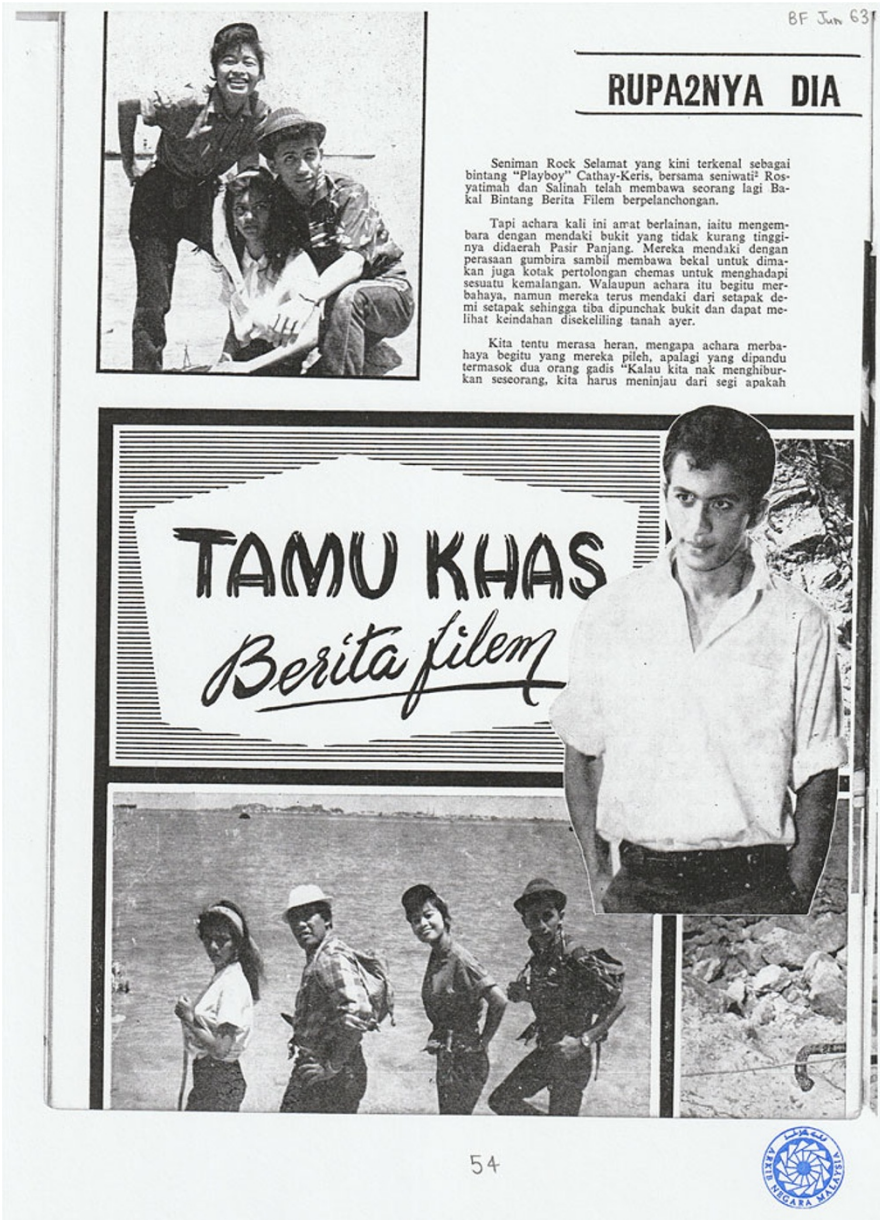

Figure 2. The article describing Hussein Alattas's hike with three film actors: Roseyatimah, Salinah, and Rock Selamat. 'Tamu khas' [Special guest], *Berita Filem*, June 1963, p. 54. *Source:* National Archives of Malaysia, Accession No. 2008/0006510.

viable tactic, and the 'Future film star' contest demonstrates this. As with many other youngsters dreaming of screen fame, S. Hussain's story disappeared from the magazine's pages as quickly as it had appeared, to be replaced by another, and then yet

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another contender for fame and fortune.[4] While those searching for stardom rarely succeeded in establishing acting careers, occasional success stories did occur. The stories of readers propelled to stardom added validity to the notion that others could achieve the same feat without connections to the industry. The real winner of *Berita Filem*'s competition turned out to be Shaikh Osman Ibrahim, whose photograph was published alongside that of S. Hussein (Figure 1, photograph on the far right). The caption described Ibrahim as a 20-year-old from Kelantan, interested in 'singing, acting and lifting weights'.[5] Over a year-and-a-half later he had a screen test, which impressed film director Jamil Sulong so much he gave him a supporting role in *Bidasari* (1965).[6] At this point, Shaikh Osman was promoted on the pages of the press under the name Ed Osmera, a cosmopolitan pseudonym enhancing his star appeal.[7]

One of the chief aims of film magazines was to open a space for imagination, and in doing so to 'render the reader-viewer-fan into a better version of themselves',[8] a person who could, one day, appear in front of the camera too. *Berita Filem*'s star search was inscribed with ideas of personhood, self-actualization, and personal achievement. Still, the contest was also important for the ethno-religious group it represented, projecting an image of what it thought modern Malay youth should be. It enabled them to envision themselves as celebrities, even if the experience was not to last.

The temporary, localized celebrity commodified by fan periodicals is what I refer to as 'minor fame'. This form of celebrity relates to those who enter the public realm as aspiring film actors, never making it beyond the aspirational level. Pageant winners, as well as extras and bit players, share the designation. The term 'minor' is useful because, as Fiona Gregory elucidates, it conjures 'a career abbreviated and/or of an individual who did not reach his or her potential'.[9] Although not related to as such, minor fame has been elaborated on by numerous scholars interested in the historical dynamics of fan magazines. They contend that, in the United States, star-searches—key generators of minor fame—intersected with individualism and Protestant values of self-betterment.[10] How then, were these endeavours constructed in Malaysia? What did minor fame mean to Malay Muslims, with a vastly different set of cultural values?

[4]Malays do not have surnames, which is the reason why I refer to most individuals discussed here using first names. While 'Alattas' seems to be a name of Arabic origin, I follow the same pattern for consistency.

[5]'Bakal bintang filem', *Berita Filem*, December 1962, p. 39.

[6]'Ed did dipileh [sic] di dalam *Bidasari*', *Berita Filem*, September 1964, pp. 3–33. Please note that some article titles in Malay use archaic spelling, or misspellings. I retain original spellings, but signal this in the titles.

[7]One fan enquired which country Ed Osmera was from, attesting to this. Another reader asked why Malay actors, such as Osmera and Tony Kassim, feel the need to select foreign-sounding pseudonyms. See 'Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar', *Berita Filem*, April 1964, pp. 42–43.

[8]Tamar Jeffers McDonald, Lies Lanckman and Sarah Polley, 'Introduction', in *Stars, Fan Magazines and Audiences: Desire by Design*, (eds) Tamar Jeffers McDonald, Lies Lanckman and Sarah Polley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), p. 2.

[9]Fiona Gregory, *Actresses and Mental Illness: Histrionic Heroines* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 38.

[10]Marsha Gordon (formerly Orgeron), 'Making "It" in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4, Summer 2003, pp. 76–97; Marsha Gordon, 'You Are Invited to Participate: Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 61, no. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 3–23; Diana W. Anselmo (formerly Anselmo-Sequeira), 'Screen-struck: The Invention of the Movie Girl Fan', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 55, no. 1, Fall 2015, pp. 1–28.

Fan magazines were instructive in circulating star images and, as such, have been a site of extensive study. This is especially true of the American press, which worked to endorse Hollywood interests. *Photoplay, Motion Picture*, and the like consolidated and commodified the star personae of the most popular actors.[11] The growth of the film press is inseparable from the expansion of the leisure industry under consumer capitalism and modern advertising.[12] At the same time, movie magazines are more than primary sources in the study of historical stardom and film reception. They are objects worthy of investigation in their own right. Marsha Gordon wrote about their engagement strategies, including the promotion of 'the concept of interactivity, repeatedly asking their readers to move out of the somewhat passive role of spectatorship [...]'.[13] The magazines presented themselves as spaces of interaction, where fans could correspond with editors, but also debate film-related issues with each other. In her work on Turkey, Özge Özyılmaz notes that movie magazines deployed star-searches as one of the ways to fuel the desires of film enthusiasts. They offered their readers a transformation from 'mere consumers' to dynamic agents in the interconnected realm 'of cinema and stardom'.[14]

The last decade has witnessed a proliferation of historiographies that focus on fan magazines and their content, both narrative and aesthetic. This scholarship is dominated by works on the United States and the Global North, while accounts encompassing Asia are relatively rare. Belinda Qian He and Jessica Siu-yin Yeung made great strides in uncovering the role of Sinophone movie magazines as cultural intermediaries.[15] The historical movie magazines published in India, such as *Filmindia*, have also garnered increasing attention.[16] Although the field is a burgeoning one, very little is known about similar publications in Southeast Asia, let alone about those in Malaysia. This omission is even more glaring if we consider the fact that publishing and journalism in Malaya, and later independent Malaysia, is a fairly robust field. Articles by Jonathan Driskell and Timothy P. Barnard on *Majallah Filem* during early independence

[11]See, for instance, Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013); Michael Williams, *Film Stardom, Myth and Classicism: The Rise of Hollywood's Gods* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Agata Frymus, *Damsels and Divas: European Stardom in Silent Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

[12]Sumiko Higashi, 'Adapting Middlebrow Taste to Sell Stars, Romance, and Consumption: Early *Photoplay*', *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2017, p. 127.

[13]Gordon, 'You Are Invited to Participate', pp. 3–23.

[14]Özge Özyılmaz, 'Readers Engagement and Imaginary Stardom: Exploring Turkish Movie Magazines and Oriental Star Selma in the 1930s', *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, vol. 64, no. 3, Spring 2025, p. 74.

[15]Jessica Siu-yin Yeung, 'Hong Kong Literature and the Taiwanese Encounter: Literary Magazines, Popular Literature and Shih Shu-Ching's Hong Kong Stories', *Cultural History*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2023, pp. 224–250; Belinda Qian He, 'Cine-news, Paper Cinema, and Film Periodicals as Intermedial Encounters', in *Global Movie Magazine Networks*, (eds) Eric Hoyt and Kelley Conway (Berkeley: California University Press, 2024), pp. 107–128.

[16]C. Yamini Krishna and Emilia Teles Da Silva, 'Construction of Indian Femininity and Masculinity in *Filmindia* Magazine 1946–1948', *South Asian Popular Culture*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2015, pp. 183–198; Olympia Bhatt, 'Writing about Sound: The Early Talkie Film Periodicals of India', in *International Perspectives on Publishing Platforms*, (ed.) Meghan Forbes (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 45–81; Francesca Orsini, 'The Post-colonial Magazine Archive', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2022, pp. 250–267; Darshana Sreedhar Mini, '*Filmindia* and its Publics: Magazine Culture, the Expert, and the Industry', in *Global Movie Magazine Networks*, (eds) Hoyt and Conway, pp. 37–56.

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and *Film Melayu* before the Second World War, respectively, are a notable exception.[17] The fans' interaction with film is rendered invisible. Framed by modern periodical studies on one side, and histories of Malay cultural production on the other, this article aims to close this gap.

Fan publications are miscellaneous objects, combining movie news, celebrity gossip, short stories, and glossy images of stars with fan sketches and beauty contests. Interactive, reader-generated contributions have been a staple in the movie magazine diet across the globe. Letters of enquiry and vivacious exchanges between disagreeing fans are hardly unusual for a publication of this nature. What is astounding about Malay magazines, and *Berita Filem* especially, is the ubiquity of such content. In some issues, it is the editorials and film news that supplement reader content and their letters, not the other way round. Another notable characteristic of *Berita Filem* (and *Majallah Filem*, for that matter) is the gendered composition of their readers. International scholarship tells us that fan practice was a highly feminized endeavour.[18] In contrast to that, Malay fan publications were consumed mainly by adolescent men.

This article charts some of the key ways in which *Berita Filem*, active between late 1960 and 1971, saw fandom as a highly creative, personal endeavour.[19] To that end, it centres on the initial years of the magazine's existence, a period of vast economic and political transformation. By 1957—the year Malaya became a sovereign state—it was the most urbanized country in Southeast Asia, and second most urbanized in Asia.[20] Exchanging opinions on new film releases and stars, both national and foreign, *Berita Filem* encouraged moviegoers to see themselves as part of a globalized world, while also maintaining Islamic ideals. Beyond letters of opinion and an 'answer man' column, the periodical featured a wide selection of fan art—from drawings to pantun (traditional Malay verse)—and a pen pal section, where readers shared their addresses and photographs. To borrow Diana W. Anselmo's phrase, what formed across these columns was 'a community of self-motivated movie aficionados [sic]'.[21]

What forces intertwined on the pages of this film magazine, and what do they reveal about Malay discourse of the era? To tackle this, the article takes a closer look

[17]Jonathan Driskell, '*Majallah Filem* and Stardom in the Golden Age of Malay Cinema', in *Star Attractions: Twentieth-Century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom*, (eds) Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), pp. 111–122; Timothy P. Barnard, 'Film Melayu: Nationalism, Modernity and Film in Pre-world War Two Malay Magazines', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2010, pp. 47–70. On fan publications in Thailand, see Palita Chunsaengchan, 'Poeticizing Cinematic Experiences: Traditional Thai Poetry in Early Film Magazine of Phappayon Siam', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2023, pp. 230–251.

[18]As a result, few works situated the desires and longings of male cinephiles. See Anna Torres-Cacoullos and Elizaveta Senatorova, 'A Digital Archaeology of Early Hispanic Film Culture: Film Magazines and the Male Fan Reader', vol. 9, no. 4, 18 July 2024, available at https://culturalanalytics.org/article/118152-a-digital-archaeology-of-early-hispanic-film-culture-film-magazines-and-the-male-fan-reader, [accessed 11 September 2025].

[19]I am grateful to Hamedi Mohd. Adnan for providing me with some additional context for the magazine. See also Hamedi Mohd. Adnan, *Majalah Melayu Selepas Perang: Editorial, Sirkulasi dan Iklan* [Malay Magazines After the War: Editorial, Circulation and Advertising] (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2013).

[20]Tim Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 214.

[21]Anselmo, 'Screen-struck', p. 25.

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at three of *Berita Filem*'s regular columns: 'Our autograph column' (*Ruangan autograph kita*), 'Queen of Berita Filem' (*Ratu Berita Filem*), and 'From heart to heart with Latifah Omar' (*Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar*). Although different in their respective formats, all three relied heavily on readers' input. First, the article contextualizes the structure of the Malaysian public sphere, followed by an overview of *Berita Filem's* demographic reach. Next, it locates ideas on modern lifestyles articulated by the Malay public. At the core of this investigation is the notion of minor fame. Fan culture, underlined by ways of belonging in a rapidly changing nation, is of equal importance.

Modernity and the nation

Before delving into a discussion of fan publications and their narrative strategies, this article will first contextualize the culture that formed them. Then, as now, Malaysia was a highly multicultural nation. At the outset of the twentieth century, large numbers of non-Malays 'had been living in Malaya for generations'.[22] The country's ethnic makeup has long historical roots, and is connected to imperial commercial interests. Existing scholarship views the Malayan and Malaysian public sphere in different ways. Influential works produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s describe its societal structure as plural, with various cultures developing alongside each other.[23] In opposition to pluralism, cosmopolitanism is categorized by openness and merger, a civilization where diverse influences interact to form something new. Rachel Leow theorized the Malayan public realm as divided and containing many 'plurilingual collective audiences'.[24]

More recently, Malaysian and Singaporean scholars have sought to complicate the plural versus cosmopolitan model, pointing out uniquely hybrid elements of the local cultural landscape.[25] In any case, what scholars agree on is that Eurocentric ideas about the public sphere are not useful here. Importantly, Malaysian communities produced their own institutions and print cultures, often voicing different concerns in different languages. The Malay-language press was a site of opinion exchange among Malays

[22]Chua Ai Lin, 'Nation, Race, and Language: Discussing Transnational Identities in Colonial Singapore, *circa* 1930', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2012, p. 2. Note that when I refer to authors with Chinese names, I follow the given/family name order used in the original piece cited.

[23]See Tim Harper, 'Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1997, pp. 261–292; David Y. H. Wu, Humphrey McQueen and Yamamoto Yasushi (eds), *Emerging Pluralism in Asia and the Pacific* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1997); Abdul Rahman Embong, 'The Culture and Practice of Pluralism in Postcolonial Malaysia', in *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*, (ed.) Robert W. Hefner (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 59–85.

[24]Rachel Leow, 'Weeping Qingdao Tears Abroad: Locating Chinese Publics in Colonial Malaya, circa 1919', *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interaction*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2020, p. 316.

[25]Su Lin Lewis, 'Cosmopolitanism and the Modern Girl: A Cross-cultural Discourse in 1930s Penang', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, 2008, pp. 1385–1419; Gaik Cheng Khoo, 'Introduction: Theorizing Different Forms of Belonging in a Cosmopolitan Malaysia', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 18, no. 8, 2014, pp. 791–806; Jean Duruz and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Eating Together: Food, Space, and Identity in Malaysia and Singapore* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Adil Johan, *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independence Era* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2018).

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and their position towards modernity and Muslim thought, while the Sinophone press created a sense of 'community, belonging and concern'[26] for Malaysians of Chinese ancestry. The Tamil-language press served the population of Indian descent.

The country gained independence from Britain in 1957. The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed a tide of political and economic transformations that swept across the nation. The majority of Malays lived in close-knit communities, generally constrained to 'rural subsistence farming in *kampungs*'.[27] The period coincided, in part, with the Golden Age of Malay cinema, a time when the national film industry rose to unprecedented heights. Its output is best described as an ethnic cinema.[28] Driskell elaborates that the two Singaporean studios that dominated the market—Malay Film Productions, headed by the Shaw Brothers, and Cathay-Keris—created stories 'about Malay characters in the Malay language for a predominantly Malay audience'.[29] The Malay fan magazine, the industry's ancillary institution, must be seen as representative of the interests of that ethno-linguistic group alone. Legally, all Malays were (and still are) Muslim, making their religious and ethnic belonging inseparable, at least conceptually. While *Berita Filem, Mastika*, and *Majallah Filem* concentrated predominantly on Malay actresses and actors, they frequently included news on Hindi and Tamil films, as well as on American blockbusters. However, their editorials, correspondence columns, and beauty competitions were aimed exclusively at Malay citizens.

What makes Malay periodicals particularly illuminating, in the context of historical film engagement, is their practice of providing readers' full addresses, often accompanied by a photo. This gives us a good picture of who their readers were, pointing towards identity factors that go beyond ethnicity and gender, such as age, rural or urban background, and class. It is commonly accepted that fan magazines were marketed towards women, a fact evident in their design, rhetorical address, and wealth of advertising.[30] References to individual cinemagoers, made directly in the letter sections, also attest to this. Yet, as I outlined earlier, most fan magazine scholarship centres on the United States and Western Europe, with some exciting new developments in Latin America.[31] While insightful, there is only so much these studies can tell us, because audiences are situated locally. In other words, their findings cannot be

[26]Leow, 'Weeping Qingdao Tears Abroad', p. 319.

[27]Rosalind Galt, *Alluring Monsters: The Pontianak and Cinemas of Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 63.

[28]See, for example, Edna Lim, *Celluloid Singapore: Cinema, Performance, and the National* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 21–40.

[29]Driskell, '*Majallah Filem* and Stardom', p. 111. My own research on movie-going memories supports this notion: Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indian correspondents generally did not engage with Malay film, seeing it as a Malay domain. Still, P. Ramlee vehicles had a strong appeal to all groups. Agata Frymus, 'Cinemagoing in Kuala Lumpur: Memories, Movies, and the Multiethnic City, 1970–1979', *Film History*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2022, pp. 55–81.

[30]See, for instance, Gaylyn Studlar, 'The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s', in *Silent Film*, (ed.) Richard Abel (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 263–297; Sumiko Higashi, *Stars, Fans, and Consumption in the 1950s: Reading Photoplay* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[31]Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); Rielle Navitski, *Transatlantic Cinephilia: Film Culture between Latin America and France, 1945–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023); María Paz Peirano and Claudia Bossay, 'The Missing Piece: Imaginary Audiences in the *Ecran* Fan Magazine of the 1940s', in *Stars, Fan Magazines and Audiences,* (eds) McDonald, Lanckman and Polley, pp. 238–255.

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applied to any setting *a priori*. Malay film periodicals seem at odds with the assumption that historically film fandom has been a female domain. On the contrary, they attracted primarily adolescent men.

For instance, in their regular columns both *Berita Filem* and *Majallah Filem* printed the names and addresses of cinephiles wanting to correspond with other film enthusiasts. The list was usually accompanied by photographs and short descriptions of personal interests. More often than not, such lists were exclusively male. In its first incarnation, 'Our autograph column' asserted it would give youngsters an outlet to publish short aphorisms and words of wisdom important to them.[32] The column's design was reminiscent of a school yearbook, heightened by the fact it included the name of the schools attended by the fans. From that, one can extrapolate the readers belonged to a cultural elite, as only 16 per cent of Malaysians reached upper secondary education. Nearly half of the country's population left school between the ages of 12 and 14.[33] As a group, Malays were particularly underprivileged, in no small part due to the legacies of British colonial rule.

Throughout its life, women and girls rarely made more than five contributions to 'Our autograph column', compared to nearly 30 movie-struck men and boys. Over the course of 11 issues, published between December 1960 and July 1963, over 84 per cent of submissions were written by male fans.[34] However, it is worth noting that literacy rates for women were generally low in the 1960s. One study estimated that out of 100,000 Malay magazine readers in the late 1950s, no more than 15 per cent were women.[35] Estimates indicate that less than 40 per cent of Malaysian women could read and write in the 1960s.[36]

In terms of their locations across Malaysia, nearly 21 per cent of the readers published in this section were from the state of Johor, 15 per cent were from Perak, 10 per cent from Singapore, 8 per cent from Pahang, and another 8 per cent from Kedah. Other localities, such as Kelantan and the Bornean states of Sarawak and Brunei, were also represented.[37] Clearly, most readers were based outside of the large metropolitan centres, like Singapore, Penang, or Kuala Lumpur, cities usually associated with public entertainment. This highlights the cultural impact of cinema across the region,

[32]'Ruangan autograph kita', *Berita Filem*, December 1960, p. 22.

[33]Ministry of Education Malaysia, *Education Statistics of Malaysia, 1938 to 1967* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1967), p. 6.

[34]The analysis includes issues available at Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur. These issues are: December 1960, April 1961, May 1961, August 1961, September 1961, October 1961, December 1961, October 1962, December 1962, May 1963, June 1963, and July 1963.

[35]Abdul Aziz Hussain, 'Penerbitan buku2 dan majalah2 Melayu di Singapura di antara bulan September 1945 dengan bulan September 1958', Department of Malay Studies, University Malaya, Singapore, 1959, pp. 64–65, cited in Hamedi Mohd. Adnan and Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad, 'Post-Second World War Malay Magazine, 1945–1957: Analysis on the Circulation and Distribution', *Historical Research Letter*, vol. 11, 2014, p. 11.

[36]*The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957–2000* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003), p. 44.

[37]The fans located in other states were represented as follows: Selangor 6.5 per cent; Kelantan 6 per cent, Sarawak 4.6 per cent, Kuala Lumpur 4.6 per cent, Negeri Sembilan 3.7 per cent, Terengganu 2.3 per cent, Brunei 2.3 per cent, and Penang 1.8 per cent.

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including the hinterland and eastern part of the country. Movie-struck Malays were to be found everywhere, from the cities of the Malay Peninsula to the island of Borneo.

Interestingly, the aphorisms included in 'Our autograph column' tended to oscillate around large issues—citizenship, bravery, proper conduct—rather than being directly relevant to screen culture. Indeed, specific references to film were virtually non-existent. The quotes articulated ideas about the nation and the roads to be taken for a brighter future. 'Establish a strong economy, so life is not impoverished. Life will be happy if the economy is developed', wrote Wan Taha Assarwaki, a student of the Aljunied Islamic School in Singapore.[38] A strong message of heroism and sacrifice for the greater good was touched upon by numerous contributors. 'As long as there is life in the body, we shall devote ourselves to any field, for the sake of the nation, country, and religion, even if we must sacrifice our lives to these pure ideals. Once devoted, always devoted', read the aphorism submitted by Mohamad bin Sulong from Kelantan. *Bangsa*, which I translate here as 'nation', has a broader set of meanings. Depending on context, it can describe people from a specific territory, community, or even ethnicity. The same page included a somewhat more poetic submission. A young reader from Perak wrote: 'A tiger dies leaving behind their stripes. An elephant dies leaving behind their bones. A human dies leaving behind their name'.[39] Comments such as these reflected modern identities that embraced progress while also building on desirable elements of the past. While not interested in film fame per se, these young men sought public visibility in a space of like-minded individuals.

Perhaps the discourse of patriotic nation-building is to be expected from a publication that emerged only several years after Malaysia's independence from Britain. In other post-colonial settings, such as India, film periodicals actively shaped readers' perception of femininities, masculinities, and their roles in the new nation.[40] Moments of political transition give additional impetus to patriotic thinking. Furthermore, the Malay print media has long held an opinion-making status, putting cultural examination at the centre of their discourse. Mark Emmanuel remarks that, because of their intellectual, opinion-making character, combined with limited interest in news, they should be called 'viewspapers' instead of newspapers.[41] In that sense, *Berita Filem* continued the tradition of Malay publishing: it aimed to shape Malay discourse as much as it aimed to keep readers informed about the newest cinematic offerings.

Moreover, the mid-1960s saw a rise in the Malaysian Islamic movement, prompting debate on traditionally Malay principles, gender, and colonial heritage. Claudia Derichs contends that the 'perceptions of the post-colonial political world order were dominated by the image of a bipolar structure—East versus West, or communism/socialism versus capitalism'.[42] This perception—of seeing cultural forces as opposing ones—is

[38]'Ruangan autograph kita', *Berita Filem*, December 1960, p. 22.

[39]'Ruangan autograph kita', *Berita Filem*, April 1961, p. 25.

[40]Krishna and Teles Da Silva, 'Construction of Indian Femininity and Masculinity in *Filmindia*', pp. 183–198.

[41]Mark Emmanuel, 'Viewspapers: The Malay Press of the 1930s', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2010, pp. 1–20.

[42]Claudia Derichs, 'The Global Sixties in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, (eds) Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young and Joanna Waley-Cohen (London: Routledge 2018), p. 424.

not uncommon in the historiography of the region. However, it works to simplify a set of nuanced ideas. First, the picture painted by contemporary movie culture is not built around dichotomies. Rather, it is much more complex. In his analysis of Malay film of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Barnard makes a persuasive argument about modern outlook and tradition as overlapping rather than contradictory. Contemporary cinema was 'promoting a modern outlook, engendering a community open to change', where tradition was important, but was not to be followed blindly.[43]

Secondly, modernity is a vernacular phenomenon with multiple sources, and should not be conflated with the legacy of the Global North. It relates to new fashions and lifestyles that are not 'merely derivative of a European/Western modernity'.[44] In Southeast Asia, modernity is hybrid, entrenched in local customs and technologies that frequently differentiate it from the West. This is what Connie Lim Keh Nie and Made Mantle Hood refer to when they advocate for the need to resist the singularity of modernity, and in their usage of the term 'alternative modernity'. It comprises 'the ambivalent understandings of progress, social development and changes, novelty, technology and human agency'.[45]

The pages of *Berita Filem* reveal that cinemagoers did not conceptualize Islamic values and modernity as incompatible. Instead, they saw themselves as connected to global currents of change while *also* being rooted in Malay Muslim culture. Although this is exemplified through the magazine's writing, its visual content also provides interesting clues on this process. Fashions adapted by young Malays demonstrate a variety of Asian and European inspirations. For example, a short feature on extras employed by the Merdeka studio in Singapore includes a photograph of three women. Mahiyon is captured in a polo shirt and slim fitting trousers, Hamidah wears *baju kurung*, a distinctively Malay costume consisting of a loose-fitting, long dress and trousers in the same pattern, and Rosmah sports a knee-length, short-sleeved dress, with the accompanying text explaining that she favours Western fashions over local ones (Figure 3). These differences show that minor fame is not a domain of those who dress in Malay attire; it allows for different forms of gendered self-expression. All three women were in their late teens and dreamt of making it big in Singapore, the capital of Malay movie-making.[46] Rosmah had already had her film debut: a small part in a historical drama *Tun Teja* (1961). Both she and Mahiyon are labelled as promising singers. Not yet recognizable, they occupied a peculiar position between ordinary cinemagoers and would-be-stars. In this, they are easily intertwined with minor fame. Even though their celebrity status was marginal, it still managed to stir the dreams of other, similarly

[43]Timothy P. Barnard, 'Decolonization and the Nation in Malay Film, 1955–1965', *South East Asia Research*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2009, p. 80.

[44]Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn, 'Introduction', in *Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia*, (eds) Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), p. 1. For conceptualizations of modernity in the post-colonial context, and in the Malay world, see also Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Virginia Matheson Hooker, *Writing a New Society: Social Change Through the Novel in Malay* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

[45]Connie Lim Keh Nie and Made Mantle Hood, 'Expressing Alternative Modernities in a New Nation through Iban Popular Music, 1960s–1970s', in *Discourses, Agency and Identity in Malaysia: Critical Perspectives*, (eds) Zawawi Ibrahim, Gareth Richards and Victor T. King (Singapore: Springer, 2021), p. 351.

[46]'Tiga dara dari Studio Merdeka', *Berita Filem*, April 1961, p. 12.

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Figure 3. Photograph of three aspiring female actors included in the April 1961 issue of *Berita Filem*. All are asked about their hobbies and favourite fashions: Hamidah, aged 18, replies 'traditional Malay clothes and modern fashions'. *Source:* National Archives of Malaysia, Accession No. 2008/0006503.

movie-struck fans. Five months later, the publication reported that Mahiyon had been swamped with letters from those who had read her short profile in *Berita Filem.* The interest was so great, in fact, that she struggled to respond to all the letters in a timely

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manner.[47] It is interesting to ponder whether the writers thought of her as someone like themselves—an ambitious person embarking on her journey to stardom—or as someone who had already achieved some level of success and therefore could guide them on their own path.

Photographs of fans in *Berita Filem* reflect a similarly heterogeneous approach to dressing. They show young men in recognizably local garments, such as *baju Melayu*, or with *songkok* on their heads, as well as in typical Western attire. The sartorial choices of fans varied from column to column, with gender playing a role. The 'Future film star' contest briefly described at the outset of this article is a case in point. Most male participants were pictured in polo shirts tucked into chinos or wide-legged trousers. Western-inspired clothing rose in popularity in the early 1960s and was commonly seen as a symbol of social mobility among the Malay youth. For men, this caused relatively little controversy, due to the fact it did not conflict directly with the Islamic modes of modesty (*aurat*).[48] The controversies it caused for women usually centred around garments that were seen as particularly revealing, such as the mini skirt.

The 'Future model' competition was a comparable, but much larger, undertaking that targeted female readers. For the most part, it displayed photographs of aspiring stars in *baju kebaya*, a type of tailored blouse made from lace or partially transparent fabric, paired with *sarong*, a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist. *Baju seniati*, which was a tight-fitting version of the outfit, or *baju kebarung*, were also popular choices. These sartorial styles were connected to local modes of dress and decorum. They were specifically Malay, but certainly not conservative. These were creative, modern, glamorous takes on existing female fashions, sporting low necklines. They were also in vogue and reflective of the decade. Film historian Rosalind Galt supports this when she describes *baju kebaya* as navigating between 'modesty and sexiness'.[49] Although Western dress, donned by popular actors and their fans alike, was not difficult to acquire by those perusing *Berita Filem*, it was rarely appropriated by women featured in the 'Future model' column.

Similarly, another beauty pageant organized by the publication, 'Queen of Berita Filem', showcased female contestants dressed predominantly in Malay clothing. In fact, out of the 18 images included in the April 1961 issue, only five are of women in Western-inspired long dresses and skirts.[50] Shamsiah Ali, of Singapore, was depicted wearing a black-and-white ensemble that combined the features of *baju seniati* with a Western-style evening gown (Figure 4). While the shape and length of the outfit resemble the former, the fabric and monochrome colour scheme points towards the latter. Participants like her were, to paraphrase the words of Tan Sooi Bong, constructing vernacular, modern subjectivities that escaped dichotomies of rural/urban, East/West, and modernity/tradition.[51]

[47]'Renongan yg. sebat', *Berita Filem*, September 1961, p. 26.

[48]Junirah Djafar, 'Fesyen pakaian masyarakat Melayu Johor 1957–1970' [Johor Malay Community Dress Fashion 1957–1970's], *Munsyi Jurnal Pengajian Sejarah*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2023, p. 37.

[49]Galt, *Alluring Monsters*, p. 53.

[50]'Peraduan memileh Ratu Berita Filem', *Berita Filem*, April 1961, pp. 20–22.

[51]Tan Sooi Bong, 'Malay Women Singers of Colonial Malaya: Voicing Alternative Gender Identity and Modernity', in *Vamping the Stage Female Voices of Asian Modernities*, (eds) Andrew N. Weintraub, Bart Barendregt and Frederick Lau (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), p. 84.

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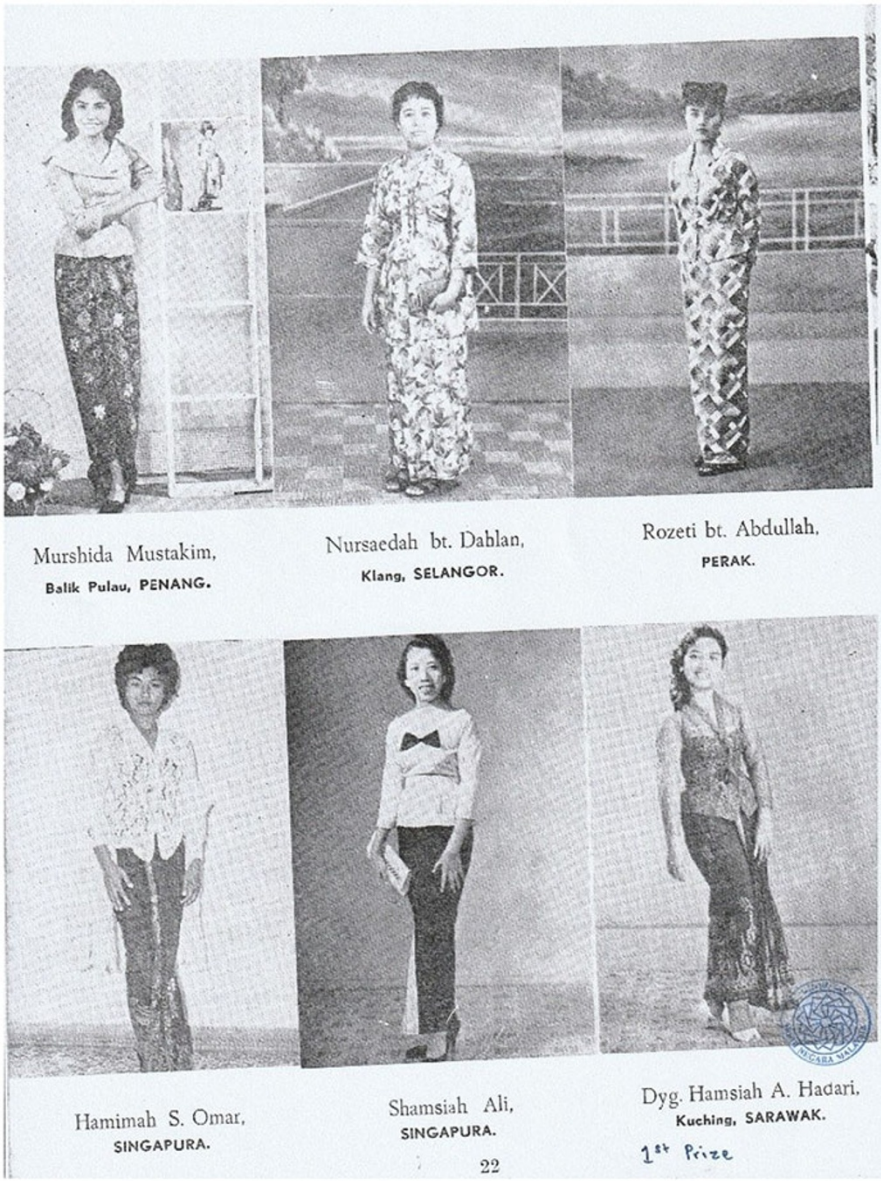

Figure 4. Contestants in the 'Queen of Berita Filem' competition, featured in the April 1961 issue of *Berita Filem*. The winner, Dayang Hamsiah A. Hadari, is featured in the bottom right corner. Source: National Archives of Malaysia, Accession No. 2008/0006503.

'Queen of Berita Filem' commenced in December 1960, and continued for most of the following year, with finalists shortlisted in April. In the initial announcement, the editorial team hoped that 'many of our women' (*ramai kaum wanita kita*) would be

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enticed to take part.[52] 'Our women' addresses ethnicity even more so than nationality, as the occasional photos of Indonesian Malays prove.[53] Unlike its male-centred equivalent, 'Future film star', the ultimate winner here was determined through votes cast by readers, with winners announced in August 1961. The competition was only one among many strategies that *Berita Filem* used to activate its readership. Beauty pageants and star searches created a customer loyalty for the publication, which, ultimately, was pursuing profit.

Inadvertently, these endeavours were positioned at the junction of beauty, celebrity culture, and ethnic belonging. Because they granted ordinary young women short-lived celebrity status, and because that status was limited to the Malay public sphere, they exemplified minor fame. Interestingly, the competition's relationship with film was only tangential: the participants were never promised a movie part, a studio contract, or any other prize related to the industry. It was associated with fame, not film, attracting women in their teens and early twenties. The combined total of votes received by three women who took the podium was 9,387; a clear indication of how successful 'Queen of Berita Filem' was in generating interest.[54] Dayang Hamsiah A. Hadari of Kuching in Sarawak, East Malaysia, received the crown, selected from a group of 45 finalists. The competition did very little to offer the winner, and other young finalists, long-term career prospects. Its usefulness lay elsewhere; first, in the active participation it elicited from the fans, and secondly, in configuring gendered, ethnic ideals.

Romantic love and marriage

Fan publications reflected Malay discourse in the way in which they represented their stars. At times, stars themselves acted as agony aunts, helping their followers to navigate changing modes of conduct. *Berita Filem* ran a popular feature titled 'From heart to heart', where readers could send questions to Latifah Omar, a matinee idol (Figure 5).[55] Latifah's career in the movies started shortly after she won the title of Miss Universe Singapore in 1953, when she was only 14-years-old. A year later, the young ingénue appeared on-screen alongside P. Ramlee, a performer of truly legendary stature. His star was already shining bright in the firmament of Malay cinema. By the time the column debuted in 1960, Latifah was a household name, but she was only 21-years-old; a peer to most of *Berita Filem*'s readers (Figure 6). When 'From heart to heart' was cancelled in the second half of 1963, the publication's office was swamped with letters of protest and so the regular feature was reinstated in October of the same year.

The questions submitted each month to 'From heart to heart' went beyond simple enquiries about the star's private and professional life. Even the title of the

[52] 'Peraduan Ratu Berita', *Berita Filem*, December 1960, p. 12.

[53] An Indonesian contestant, E. S. Nurul Sa' adiah from Bogor, was featured in 'Peraduan memileh Ratu Berita Filem', *Berita Filem*, April 1961, p. 21.

[54] 'Keputusan peraduan Ratu Berita Filem', *Berita Filem*, August 1961, p. 2.

[55] American fan magazines used stars as hosts for advice columns as well. See Higashi, *Stars, Fans, and Consumption in the 1950s*, p. 191.

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Figure 5. Latifah Omar in *Gurindam Jiwa* [Sonnets of the Soul] (M. Amin, 1965).

Figure 6. Latifah Omar in *Bawang Putih, Bawang Merah* [Garlic and Shallots] (S. Roomai Noor, 1959). This was the twelfth film she appeared in.

column hints at its character, fostering a sense of intimacy between *Berita Filem*, the star, and the worshipping fans. The topics covered in the letters often strayed away from film, to include 'issues such as morality, social norms, honesty, and [...] love'.[56] As someone living in the public eye, for whom appearance mattered a great deal, Latifah was well-positioned to discuss beauty. For instance, one reader enquired

[56]This was also the case for columns in Turkish film magazines in the same time period. See Dilek Kaya (formerly Kaya Multu), 'Between Tradition and Modernity: Yeşilçam Melodrama, Its Stars, and Their Audiences', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2010, pp. 417–431.

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about make-up and effective remedies for acne. 'A white person's remedy is astringent, a Malay's person remedy is to grind almond skins and brush', was the actor's advice to a young woman concerned with skincare.[57] Not unlike other stars, such as Maria Menado, Latifah featured in the pages of glossy magazines as an ambassador of modern femininity. In another section, which also followed the Q&A format, she listed *baju seniati* as her favourite fashion trend. However, she admitted she also wore revealing clothing (presumably that did not cover the knees or the décolleté), adding that Malay women could wear such clothing, as long as it was appropriate for the occasion.[58]

Notably, Maria Menado had made a series of similar comments in the press several years before: as uncovered by Barnard, the actress also defended wearing revealing clothing, seeing it as modern (*chara moden*).[59] Anyone familiar with the Malaysian climate of today will recognize the contrast between the comment and current modes of female Muslim dress. Since the 1980s, wearing *tudung*, a scarf covering the head and the neck, as well as everything but a woman's feet and palms, has become mainstream practice. According to Gaik Cheng Khoo, Malay identity nowadays is equated with visibility. To be a Muslim in Malaysia came to signify a person who makes their identity evident in public by 'marking it clearly on the body'.[60] This was not the case in the 1960s, and *Berita Filem* makes this abundantly clear.

Tan foregrounds Malay women in showbusiness as contradictory figures, as they simultaneously projected desirable aspects of Malayness and subverted patriarchal models of femininity. This is because stars, Latifah included, entered what was seen as a traditionally male domain, 'by moving out of the home and community into the modern public sphere and the urban areas'.[61] Stardom further compounds this paradoxical situation. Driskell observes that values attached to celebrity—consumerism and individualism—are, on the surface, antithetical to Islam and religion on the whole.[62] Women especially had to manoeuvre between being independent and career-driven, while also presenting themselves as aligned with existing moral customs.

One way for Malay fan magazines to align celebrity with Muslim values was to underline uncontroversial elements of fame, including talent, and the private lives of stars as spouses and parents. These elements can be observed in Latifah's replies in 'From heart to heart'. Again, Driskell suggests that *Majallah Filem* often paid special attention to an actor's familial bonds. While this is not, in and of itself, unusual—off-screen lives are important elements of star personae—the regularity with which this

[57]'Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar', *Berita Filem*, May 1963, p. 9. Note that Latifah's name is often spelled with double t, but I used a standard spelling for consistency.

[58]'Pertanyaan dan jawapan diantara pembacha [sic] dengan Latifah Omar', *Berita Filem*, October 1961, p. 22.

[59]'Maria Only Wears Shorts at Home', *The Straits Times*, 3 December 1957, p. 7, cited in Timothy P. Barnard, 'Women, Film, and Modern Malay Identities', in *Modern Times in Southeast Asia*, 1920s–1970s, (eds) Susie Protschky and Tom van den Berge (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), p. 129.

[60]Gaik Cheng Khoo, 'Taking Liberties: Independent Filmmakers Representing the *Tudung* in Malaysia', in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, (ed.) Andrew N. Weintraub (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 202.

[61]Tan, 'Malay Women Singers of Colonial Malaya', p. 84.

[62]Jonathan Driskell, 'Islam and Stardom in Malay Cinema: From "Ibu Mertuaku" to "Salam Cinta"', *Situations*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2019, p. 53.

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is done in Malay periodicals stands out. 'Almost every article on a star discusses his or her family at some point, often with accompanying pictures',[63] and the statement rings true of *Berita Filem* too. This representational scheme ties stars to Malay interpretations of personhood.

Berita Filem's readers were interested in Latifah's opinions on romance or, more specifically, on how to walk the line between romantic desires and patriarchal expectations. This is where the column exposes a lot of nuances regarding Malayness and self-actualization. M. Zaini Shah from Parit Buntar in Perak described the following conundrum: 'I love a girl and that girl also loves me, but both our parents do not know about us. Can this bring happiness?' In revealing emotional dilemmas, readers such as him were publicly asking important questions about modern Malay subjectivities. Latifah's reply read:

> Love is not something that can be played with. In fact, it can destroy you. To answer your question, it is better to explain this love to the people who are entitled to [know]. If this is done, maybe it will bring happiness to you.[64]

Here, the column does not negate the importance of heterosexual romance, or a love marriage, as long as it coexists with the preservation of family. When another reader asked the star whether she thought love should precede marriage, or whether the spouses should get to know each other after the nuptials, she remained firm in her belief that love comes first. That was indeed the case for her own relationship.[65]

Marriage as a theme comes up, in various forms, across many issues and articles in *Berita Filem.* An article published two months later, in December 1961, closely echoed Latifah's views. Allegedly authored by Roseyatimah, an 18-year-old who started her acting career as a child, the piece proclaims:

> In chasing my dreams to build a family, let me write not as ROSEYATIMAH, the star of *Dang Anom* but as Rose Yatimah, the child of Jasni [and] my mother, Neng Yatimah [...] If I am allowed to choose, I would rather choose my own life partner than have one forced onto me by my parents. I want my choice to be celebrated by my parents to ensure it meets the family's conditions.[66]

It is notable that Roseyatimah's piece links love marriage to familial obligations (Figure 7). People are connected to each other through love, which is a reflection of God's will. If that is the case, then an arranged marriage that does not satisfy both parties would be akin to a sin. What the framework suggests is that the modern outlook on romance did not contradict traditional values, such as filial piety and kinship.

[63]Driskell, '*Majallah Filem* and Stardom', p. 119.

[64]'Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar', *Berita Filem*, May 1963, p. 9.

[65]'Pertanyaan dan jawapan diantara pembacha dengan Latifah Omar', p. 22.

[66]'Rayuan Roseyatimah untuk dipertimbangkan oleh masharakat [sic]', *Berita Filem*, December 1961, p. 35. In original: 'Dalam mengejar chita hendak mendirikan rumah tangga, biar-lah saya menulis bukan sabagai ROSEYATIMAH, bintang film *Dang Anom*, tetapi sabagai Rose Yatimah anak Jasni, beribukan Neng Yatimah [...] Jika saya di-izinkan memileh, saya lebeh suka memileh teman hidup saya sendiri, daripada dipaksakan kapada saya oleh kedua ibu bapa saya.'

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Figure 7. Roseyatimah in *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* [The Three Over-age Bachelor Warriors], the first film she starred in as an adult (P. Ramlee, 1959). Here she is shown with the film's director and star, P. Ramlee.

The article continually downplays Roseyatimah's star status, instead emphasizing her ordinariness as a girl (*gadis*) on the lookout for a suitable husband. Barnard posits that taking care of the household, seen as a female duty under the patriarchal world order, acquires new meanings in the face of decolonization. To support one's home is to support 'the newly formed nation'.[67] Similar points regarding the importance of household management and childrearing—and its symbolic relation to taking care of the country's future—have been made by Chie Ikeya's scholarship on Burma.[68] Thus, female stars covered by *Berita Filem* were not simply describing their private lives. They were also signalling their readiness to contribute to a bigger, national cause. This emphasis narrativized Malay actresses as necessarily more connected to the domestic sphere.[69]

In a caption alongside the main text, the readers are asked to respond to Roseyatimah's plea, in no more than 50 words. *Berita Filem* once again sought to elicit emotional reactions. Again, such mode of address highlights the participatory nature of Malay fan magazines. It also reflects a tension between individualism and communal Islamic values, often shifting between the two. In yet another incarnation of 'From heart to heart', the writer takes a decidedly more conservative stance on one reader's dilemma. A man from Kampung Tengah, a village in Pahang, writes:

[67]Barnard, 'Women, Film, and Modern Malay Identities', p. 129.

[68]Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), pp. 100–115.

[69]Driskell, '*Majallah Filem* and Stardom', p. 119.

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> I am staying at the home of my uncle who has a daughter. I consider my uncle to be like a father, but I know that my uncle seeks to matchmake me with his daughter, the girl loves me. What is your opinion if I were to reject [this offer]?

'If seen from a religious perspective, there is nothing wrong with someone marrying their cousin, as long as they love each other', reads the response. It advises the man to accept his uncle's wishes, as a way of repaying his kindness.[70] While this seems to suggest a more traditional world view—in other words, being open to an arranged marriage—the comment leaves some room for interpretation. Note how marrying one's cousin comes with a proviso: 'as long as they love each other'.

Exchanges between fans and the star provide insight into the negotiation of Malay subjectivities during the post-colonial transition, revealing different, and necessarily complex, attitudes towards tradition and change. The magazine's preoccupation with marriage, one of the central tenets of Malay life, additionally gestures towards contemporary sociocultural shifts. Demographic data shows that, from 1957 onwards, Malay women were entering marriage at a later age, in their early twenties. By contrast, in 1947 teenage marriage was a prevailing norm among girls.[71]

Conclusion

This article outlined some of the key formats and themes pertinent to *Berita Filem* in the early 1960s. From editorials to Q&A columns, the periodical was dedicated to facilitating interactivity. The editors routinely illuminated modes of minor fame: publishing the stories of extras, bit players, or simply people they plucked from obscurity. While emphasis on fan participation was common for fan magazines generally, its proportion in the publication was unprecedented. What is more, *Berita Filem*'s male readership presents something of a contradiction to the established knowledge on movie magazines in the West. A similar case can be made regarding the rural background of most of its correspondents, as opposed to the usual assumptions of urbanism. As such, *Berita Filem* highlights the significance of shifting the boundaries of the discipline to a post-colonial site. It opens new possibilities for unpacking shifting visions of masculinity and gender. Malay film magazines—or, broadly speaking, Southeast Asian magazines—provide us with a nuanced view into the past that is often muddied by current political agendas. It is important to recognize Malays who grew up in the 1960s as the first generation of Malaysian movie fans, actively shaping their communities.

Regular competitions, namely 'Future film star', 'Future model', and 'Queen of Berita Filem', bestowed celebrity status on ordinary young men and women with astonishing speed. Minor fame, as a recurring motif across the pages of the magazine, reveals how Malay youth navigated between tradition and aspiration. This type of fame was both achievable and fleeting. In addition to being a mechanism through which they could achieve recognition, minor fame foregrounded the relationships between cinematic modernity and local versions of Malay personhood. Young cinephiles corresponded with the journalists—and each other—to share their emotional investment

[70]'Dari hati ke hati oleh Latifah Omar', *Berita Filem*, October 1963, p. 47.

[71]Charles Hirschman, 'Demographic Trends in Peninsular Malaysia', *Population and Development Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, March 1980, p. 113.

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in popular culture. While movies were part and parcel of that, the magazine seemed to occupy itself with issues that went far beyond it, debating aspects of modernity and progress within the ethno-religious community it represented. The question of what it meant to be modern resonated loudly through Malay publics. This was crucial at a time when its society was transitioning from colonial rule to a true sovereignty. In many ways, *Berita Filem* promoted economic as well as cultural modernization.

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