

The Depiction of Social Realism in Yasmin Ahmad's Film: *Talentine* (2009)

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Abstract

Previous studies have claimed that elements of social realism are less emphasized in Malaysian films. Yasmin Ahmad's films such as *Talentine* (2009) are amongst those that have tried to incorporate elements of social realism in their narrative. However, there are not enough previous film studies that have confirmed this. Therefore, this study has explored social realism elements (Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost, and Tipichnost) contained in this film and aims to solve the question of how these social realism elements have been conveyed. Also, this study highlighted the importance of the existence of social realism in cinema and its role in providing awareness of racial disparities that cause racial segregation to the audience. This study was conducted using a qualitative method using a content analysis approach. The findings indicated that there were depictions of several social realism elements in *Talentine* (2009), namely 4 elements of Narodnost, 10 elements of Ideinost, 8 elements of Partiinost, and 9 elements of Tipichnost. It can be concluded that *Talentine* (2009) consists of social realism elements (Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost, and Tipichnost). The findings have rebutted the claims that elements of social realism are less emphasized in Malaysian films.

Keywords: Ideinost, Narodnost, Partiinost, Tipichnost, Social Realism, Yasmin Ahmad

Introduction

According to Galloway (2004), the term "social realism" describes a particular approach and a global attitude towards a subject. Its main purpose is not to entertain, but to convince the audience. Its objective is to reflect contemporary social life in many ways. Society is subjective. History and culture are representative of the actual exposure to social panoramas.

According to Shapiro (1973), it is claimed that the exploration of social realism and its exploratory artistic movement started after the true socialist movements of the 1920s and

1930s. During the recession of the world economy, there are escalation of racial conflicts, the increase of fascist internationalism and the production of great optimism after the Mexican and Russian revolutions. Social realism creates a figurative and realistic image of the "public", a context that includes lower classes and the workers, the labor unions and, involuntarily, politics. Shapiro (1973) also explains that American artists were dissatisfied with the French avant-garde. They separated themselves from the great society that led them to seek new vocabulary and new social interests. They found their goal in the conviction that art was a weapon that could counter the exploitation of capitalist workers and hinder the progress of international fascism. The interpretation of art at that particular time was quite different from Soviet socialist realism, which was a dominant force in Stalin's post-revolutionary Russia.

Jalin (2013) states that this realism prevailed in Europe in the eighteenth century. Realism also refers to the environment of the object or main character. It is because some films have meanings and some people can interpret the meaning behind a masterpiece. Everything in a film shows and tries to convey something related to politics and circumstances or situations that occurred at a given time. A director used his/her film to communicate with the public at that time.

Kasiyan (2017) affirms that social realism is an ideology that tries to bring art closer to the social context. The research suggests that social realism focuses on how a society is presented in a certain context to be applied to film.

According to Rukayah (2016), there are three main ideas that she primarily emphasized with regard to a masterpiece writing - first, a particular written work must have a social function. Secondly, the piece should gain a favourable impression from the public and third, the work proposed must be an ideology implemented by a certain individual with a good social standing as a public figure.

Hadi, Hamidon and Harun (2017) states that issues that pique the interests of writers around the 1930s were the issues of working-class and events. These problems were also treated in accordance with the ideas of social realism and social interpretation based on the presentation of several directors' works in film. It is also treated according to the ideas of social realism and social interpretation in the interests of political parties. This art processing feature is in line with the principles of art according to the four social aspects that are outlined according to their research. Art should discuss the role of the working class and its portrayal should be easily understood by the public, particularly on the subject of daily reality and ordinary life such as the worker, public and people in general. The work must be presented realistically and support the purpose of the country and party. This feature of implementing art is in line with the principles of art outlined in the social realism ideology. The work must be presented realistically to conform to the social realism presented.

Problem Statement

Beng (2015) states that Yasmin Ahmad's films are represented as a form of critique and social commentary. Same as the late P. Ramlee, the work and ideological priorities are rare. Yasmin had carefully laid out the delicate subject of her cinematographic art accessible to the public, an achievement that no Malaysian filmmaker has accomplished quite like P. Ramlee's film art.

However, Hassan and Ibrahim (2011) claim in their research that Yasmin Ahmad's films tried to convey the elements of philosophy. However, there is not enough data from previous studies that have confirmed social realism in Yasmin Ahmad's film, such as *Talentine* (2009). The research also suggests that issues of social realism are no longer seen as a discourse in

Malaysian films. However, limited studies have been conducted to explain why elements of social realism are missing in local films. Adnan and Abd Rahim (2014) also believe that elements of social realism are less emphasized in Malaysian films.

Objectives

- To analyze the existence of social realism elements (narodnost) in Talentime (2009).
- To analyze the existence of social realism elements (ideinost) in Talentime (2009).
- To analyze the existence of social realism elements (partiinost) in Talentime (2009).
- To analyze the existence of social realism elements (tipichnost) in Talentime (2009).

Literature Review

Social Realism Elements in Film

Seino (2010) explains how social realism should not be studied according to its existence but to be examined in terms of its presence in a film. Other researchers such as Olusegun (2008) have classified social realism in the category of narodnost, ideinost, partiinost and tipichnost. Soemanto (1999) posits that early adopters of social realism in the film industry possesses the desire to create an illusion of reality in film. It is quite extreme to say that social realism wants to make its viewers forget the fact that they are watching a film. This is what social realism is all about: the convention of the fourth wall where social realism attempts to bring real-life aspects into the film.

Narodnost Elements Depicted in A Film

Olusegun (2008) argues that narodnost is an overall element of a narrative and the main goal of a creator proposed in looking at a social approach to solve conflicts. Narodnost was a problem that occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries. A film should be able to bring forward the image that the creator wants to convey.

Wright (2004) states that social realism can be categorized under this narodnost element in two ways. First, the filmmaker must aim to capture the experience of actual events. Second, filmmakers have specific arguments or messages that they need to convey in regard to the social world and to use realism conventions to express these messages or arguments.

Soemanto (1999) postulates that the use of background in a film corresponds to the element of social realism. This background implementation is also useful to build the development of the dramatic structure of a film from beginning to end. As a film that focuses on realistic aspects, the natural elements of the film are also reflected in the action and appreciation of characters by actors, the preparation of realistic backdrops, the usage of more realistic, natural lighting, costumes, and props. A powerful film of social realism resides in the director's ability to translate reality into film in a realistic way and simultaneously to manipulate the background into a world of reality that reflects all the upheavals and problems facing society today.

Ideinost Elements Depicted in A Film

Wahab and Ahmad (2009) claims that it is important that we look at ideology. Chagnon-Burke (2002) explains that ideology is not an illusion but a view on social and cultural life. Ideology in this context is the fact that it is a real-life experience. In short, ideinost is an ideology created by an individual to convince others to believe in such propaganda.

Wahab and Ahmad (2009) further explains that ideology in a film can reflect the social and cultural conditions of society and has been structured so that it can be naturalized into society's norm and need not be questioned. For example, in the film that are used for this study, the basic ideas of the partisan system are to put both women and men in their defined roles. The idea that men as powerful beings and women are weak has long been rooted in the ideological system of society and is increasingly reinforced by movies and other cultural products.

Besides, Wahab and Ahmad (2009) states that ideology plays a role in communicating messages in movies. Furthermore, a dominant ideology or dominant idea in a society does not necessarily serve to conceal a state of dominance and subordination. Ideologies are used to lay down rules and ways for society to accept the true pattern of social relations in an effort for governments and state capitalists to continue the process of subordination and reproduction of an existing social order.

Partiinost Elements Depicted in A Film

Olusegun (2008) states that partiinost is an ideological platform that reflects the inequality of life in the Soviet era, and thus contribute to the socio-political development of the upper and lower classes. Partiinost is a separation between two classes, the upper and lower classes. This element also describes the separation between two groups within a place.

Wright (2004) states that this partiinost element works closely with the working class, and this element is focused on them. Social realism in films depict the problems faced by the working class and the 'lower class' including being homeless, unemployed and helpless against social inequality. Social realism creates an assumption that society is a fraud, a manipulation and a practice of embezzlement. A film should be able to emphasize and show its characteristics without having to look or act worse than the actual reality. According to the study, when humans are influenced by the environment, then the environment is directly brought into the film to portray the real situation as it is outside the film. Its main purpose is to show the truth, so that the audience can understand the real situation happening around them, the psychology behind it, face of the society and what the character is trying to convey in accordance to the creator's vision.

Tipichnost Elements Depicted in A Film

The fourth element of social realism is tipichnost. Seino (2010) further explains that there is a "social character" in English language films as a whole that raises themes in certain social contexts. This element represents the important character in a film. Beng (2015) states that tipichnost as an important artistic development or character in ordinary situations that gives meaning. Olusegun (2008) shows that the elements of tipichnost and narodnost are closely related to showing the situation and the conflict of a problem.

Wright (2004) states that many of the important social characters in the narrative of social realism films that are focused on the main character where they are constantly battling hardship against the 'system'. Social realism is integrated into English culture with narrative themes that not only focus on the social class but include poverty, family values, industrial practices, and new structures in society.

Brown (2007) states that social realism films usually represent real characters and locations. The common themes used in the films of social realism found in previous studies are social injustice, racial injustice, economic hardship, and caste differences. Many films produced in the 1990s consider race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class mobility narratives to

convey a more British feel than was seen in English cinema decades earlier. Such films respond to the more complex national identities that have become a hallmark of the country. The themes and questions of social realism drama are themes related to everyday events. Among the problems facing society in general are social and economic difficulties as well as human relationships.

Conceptual Framework of Study

From the literature review above, a conceptual framework was created.

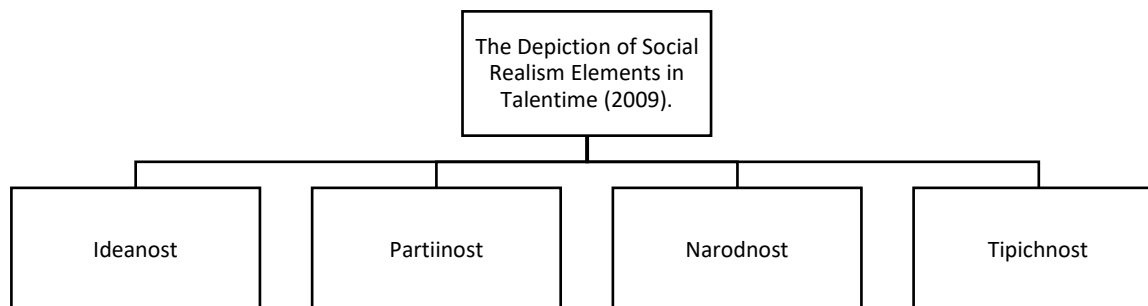


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Social Realism Elements in Talentime (2009).

Based on figure 1, it can be seen social realism are divided into four aspects which are Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost and Tipichnost.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach to the process of data collection. This research used content analysis using the coding book to analyze the existence of elements of social realism in Talentime (2009). The coding book was coded by minutes guided by elements of social realism, as stated by a previous researcher like Olusegun (2008). Talentime is a 2009 Malaysian drama film written and directed by Yasmin Ahmad. Genzlinger (2010) states that the focus of the film is Melur (Pamela Chong), one of the contestants, who sings pop songs with a very American sound while accompanying herself on the piano. She falls in love with Mahesh (Mahesh Jugal Kishor), the young man who delivers the letter to her telling her that she has been selected for the show without realizing that he is deaf and mute.

Results

The table shows the findings and analyzes the existence of social realism elements (Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost and Tipichnost) in Talentime (2009).

Table 1.

Findings and analyzes the existence of social realism elements (Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost and Tipichnost) in Talentime (2009).

No	Minutes	Element Of Social Realism	Descriptions
1	00.01.27	Ideinost	Hafiz is shown to be throwing dice to guess possible answers reflected his indifference in answering the exam and this made Kahoe feel offended

			because he and other friends responded in earnest.
2	00.03.14	Tipichnost	Cikgu Anuar is willing to cheat and try to bribe Mr. Tan to help him to win the heart of Cikgu Adibah.
3	00.05.11	Ideinost	This scene illustrates that the attitude of the tardy Cikgu Anuar when he had a meeting, which made Cikgu Adibah angry but she is actually just teasing and Cikgu Anuar smiled towards her teasing.
4	00.06.19	Tipishnost	Cikgu Adibah noticed the sneaky behavior of Cikgu Anuar who is holding the pocket to the left in order to sabotage the ballot's drawing.
5	00.13.53	Partiinos, Ideinost	Yasmin Ahmad wanted to convey the patriotic nature in her movie by showing students standing still while listening to Negaraku but showing that only Mahesh didn't stop when the song was played.
6	00.23.05	Tipichnost	In this scene, Cikgu Adibah appreciated the song that is sung by Melur. Maybe the song has something to do with her own love story or her personal life.
7	00.25.28	Partiinost	This scene includes a touching scene where Melur's father brought her home from school and Melur riding on his back. In this scene, it shows warmth and familiarity Melur had with her father, a relationship that is considered awkward in Malay culture.
8	00.28.18	Tipichnost	With his sense of humor, he never fails to make Embun laugh even when she's sick. Ismail's characteristics are different from Dr. Baya in terms of their attitude towards Embun.
9	00.31.55	Ideinost	During the scene at the dining table, the poem read by Melur is very clear in describing the meaning of death, life, and birth. The scene of Ganesh's burial ceremony was shown when Melur read that poem. Melur's grandmother, who was eating using a spoon and a fork, suddenly felt as if the poem was aimed at her because she was the oldest in that household.

10	00.32.55	Partiinost	This scene points out the differences between Mahesh's family and Melur's family as Mahesh is amazed by the close relationship that Melur's family had with each other.
11	00.42.18	Partiinost	It was interesting to see how Hafiz was like in his daily life. He is always with his guitar, always spending his time alone under the tree, usually by himself during prayers in the mosque and by himself while waiting for his turn to practice. Kahoe, on the other hand, is striving to be a great student, struggling to succeed in life. Between Kahoe and Hafiz, they both have their own disadvantages and advantages, but it exists on different circumstances.
12	00.44.26 01.05.25	Tipichnost	Embun gives Hafiz a piece of advice to Hafiz. She described two things that kept her alive, that she believed in him and loved him very dearly.
13	00.47.59 00.51.42	Partiinost	Yasmin is also trying to consolidate the stereotypical views of the Chinese people on the Malays. That Malays in general, whether they are successful or not, always receive adequate assistance from the government. The economic privileges granted to the Malays are still considered to be a thorn in the flesh to the Chinese which is unfair and a biased assumption. Kahoe's prejudice against Hafiz was personal because of his father's constant anger towards him. In truth, Hafiz is a truthful and self-reliant character on the right track even though through Kahoe's glasses his achievements were all due to his Malay privilege.
14	00.48.57	Ideinost	Ms. Tan and Cikgu Anuar had a very close relationship, making the audience wonder what the meaning behind their intimacy and shared jokes. This scene cannot be interpreted simply as one action could have many underlying meanings.

			Perhaps Yasmin Ahmad wants to convey that despite their differences, people can still genuinely enjoy each other's company.
15	00.55.19 01.04.48	Tipichnost	Doctor Baya is so harsh in treating Embun, Hafiz's mother. A doctor should not have this kind of attitude because the patient needs the doctor's full support and understanding to remain strong in the face of their sickness.
16	01.14.17	Narodnost	In this scene, Mei Ling is shown to be surprised upon seeing Melur going out with Mahesh so early in the morning after announcing that her singing practice began at noon. Mei Ling then shares her doubts about Melur's purpose and her relationship to Mahesh with Melur's grandmother. Mei Ling allegedly saying that Mahesh and Melur went to a hotel and committed adultery. However, Mei Ling and Granny are shown to have taken no action to confirm their suspicion.
17	01.19.08	Ideinost, Partinost	In this scene, it is clear that Datin Kalsom looked cynical and disgusted with Mei Ling because it was Mei Ling who provided her with food and asked about whether the food is <i>halal</i> but when it's prayer time the Datin forgot to bring a telekung.
18	01.24.32	Partiinost	This scene shows Datin Kalsom who was shocked to have found Mei Ling praying. Melur's mother later explained that Mei Ling is a Muslim. This fact surprised the Datin. Datin Kalsom further questioned Mei Ling's using her Chinese name even after she had converted to Islam. Melur's mother and Mawar explain that even though Mei Ling converted Islam, she did not become a Malay. Here Yasmin attempts to correct the Malays mindset about Islam. Mei Ling's character as a Muslim is hoped to educate the public that being a Muslim

			does not necessarily make one a Malay. Melur's mother and Mawar further clarified, that 'Mei Ling' has a good meaning which is 'beautiful flower'. Mei Ling retained her Chinese name to show her being faithful to her roots and it is her right to do so. Her continuing to cook and eat Chinese food like Dim Sum and eat using chopsticks, is also her right to preserve her own culture but her religious intentions remain intact and unified with her belief as a Muslim.
19	01.26.20	Narodnost	Each character has their own influence on other characters, and this is shown in a neat and organized manner. Melur is shown to be pressing the piano key elegantly which is due to Mei Ling's teachings when Melur was a child since they had lived together for a long time. In this scene also portrays Mei Ling making use of the piano to cure the loneliness in her heart.
20	01.28.36	Ideinost	It is clear from this scene that Mei Ling prevents Melur and Mahesh from being together for fear that they are intending to do something against the Islamic religion.
21	01.30.48	Ideinost	The conversation between Mei Ling and Melur's mother seeing Melur and Mahesh sleeping together in the living room as acceptable behaviour.
22	01.33.19	Narodnost, Ideinost	Mahesh's mother said the children were similar to a light bulb. Despite her principle, she punishes and destroys the hope of Mahesh's towards love. Mahesh's mother was given an opportunity to rectify the situation after the death of Ganesh, but unfortunately, the same mistake was repeated.
23	01.36.51	Tipichnost	In this scene Ismail gives Embun strawberries. Afterward, Hafiz, who was visiting her, found out that her mother had passed away. This makes the audience wonder whether Ismail

			an angel of death who takes Embun's life?
24	01.41.04	Tipichnost	This scene shows Mahesh's mother sitting on a table with three chairs. Mahesh's mother was drowning in sadness in her days after the death of Ganesh. This is a reflection of how lonely that particular moment was, even though there were many people around her.
25	01.44.51	Partiinost, Narodnost	It's hard to understand what Mahesh is saying during the scene at the stairs. Mahesh is a charming boy who cannot speak but he still has a heart and feelings. So in this scene, the director might want to portray the attitude of people who don't care about those with disabilities.
26	01.49.21	Tipichnost, Ideinost	Towards the end of the story, where Hafiz sings a song on the Talentime stage, Kahoe suddenly joined Hafiz in his performance by playing his traditional musical instrument. This implies that the community is in great need of one another especially in Malaysia.

Findings and Conclusion of Study

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that Yasmin Ahmad has successfully integrated the elements of social realism in *Talentime* (2009). There were 4 elements of Narodnost, 10 elements of Ideinost, 8 elements of Partiinost, 9 elements of Tipichnost. *Talentime* (2009) have different sides of human life and their conflict. The story of three friends involved in an audition for a talent show, *Talentime* (2009) is full of Yasmin's interpretation of Malaysia's multicultural identity as a show in this film. The same applies to her work in *Rabun*, 2003; *Sepet*, 2005; *Gubra*, 2006; *Mukhsin*, 2006; *Muallaf*, 2008).

The narodnost element appearing in *Talentime* (2009) is a general element of a story and the creator's main goal in raising social related to main event in Malaysia. Yasmin Ahmad proposed to consider a social approach to conflict resolution. Yasmin spoke about the issues of Malaysian society represented mainly by the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Yasmin is capable of playing with the emotions of her audience. However, the public might misrepresent the plot of the film, and each conflict in the film may seem to be political.

The partiinost element in *Talentime* (2009) has shown a metaphorical approach to the current political scenario in Malaysia. Yasmin's cultural context remains a taboo that most people are not yet aware. Although this is an increasingly widespread reality in our time, as it is often the culture of our society that prefers to be a toxic society.

The ideinost element in *Talentime* (2009) can still be seen as a liberal view towards the Islamic value in the face of racial pluralism and religion in Malaysia. Is a marriage union or

a relationship in the name of religion still considered wrong and contrary in Malay culture? This open-minded view is seen as polluting the privileges of the Malays, as some political parties have always propagated.

The tipichnost element of *Talentine* (2009) implies that Mei Ling must be a Malay as a Muslim. This film depicts cases of Islam as a universal religion which is not linked to a race. Yasmin Ahmad has shown that we have to put each other in our own shoes to understand the problems and culture of the different races.

It can be concluded that *Talentine* (2009) consists of social realism elements (Narodnost, Ideinost, Partiinost, and Tipichnost). The findings have rebutted the claims that elements of social realism are less emphasized in Malaysian films.

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