

“We Spoke Different Languages, Yet We Sang The Same Song”: An Analysis Of Multiculturalism In *Ola Bola*

Kavita Maheendran*

Taylor's University, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the portrayal of multiculturalism in the film, *Ola Bola*. In addition, the study also investigates the success behind the movie. The content analysis methodology based research utilised Structuralist Film Theory to write the analysis. Besides analysing the film, the researcher also analysed blogs and online portals to gather opinions from various perspectives. From the findings, a total of five themes (interracial friendship, cross cultural interaction, multilingual dialogues, portrayal of minority community and embracing colour blindness) were gauged from the analysis. As for the success of this film, it was found that marketing and promotion campaigns were the main reasons for *Ola Bola* to perform well at the box office. From the analysis done on blogs and portals it was found that most Malaysians enjoyed multicultural films, and they also hoped for Malaysians to stay united.

Keywords: *Ola Bola*, multiculturalism, content analysis, Malaysia, Structuralist Film Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

In the words of Hafeez (2012), films play a significant role as agent of socialisation that regularly work freely against the qualities and ethics of conventional social foundations. Movies are perceived as one of the central social foundations in the present day that contribute to the improvement of society. As explained by Garth Jowett (as cited in Hafeez, 2012), since its beginning in the nineteenth century, films have been a source of entertainment. This is significantly seen in the sales of movie merchandises, franchises of films, millions of fan following all over the world, idolising and idealising movie stars.

This phenomenon is not limited only to the popular Hollywood and British films but is also noticed among films produced in India and Korea (Hafeez, 2012). Ardent fans, award-winning directors, good looking actors and actresses, heavy marketing and campaigning, social media advertising, the spectacular usage of computer graphics in a film (as shown in trailers) are among the many reasons why a film becomes a

*Correspondence email: kavitamaheendran@gmail.com

blockbuster hit (O’Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013). Some of the Hollywood blockbuster hit movies include *Star Wars*, *Avatar*, *Titanic*, *Marvel’s The Avengers*, *Jurassic World*, *Fast and Furious 7*, the *Harry Potter* series and others; some of Korean box office hit films include *The Admiral: Roaring Currents*, *Ode to My Father*, *Train to Busan*. Popular Indian films include *PK*, *Baahubali*, *Kabali*, *Enthiran*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and many others (IMDb, 2016; Khan, 2016).

Similarly, the film industry in Malaysia has seen improvements in box office hits, audiences’ reception and improved storytelling. This is notable by the success of films like *KL Gangster*, *Ombak Rindu*, *The Journey*, *Maindhan*, *Polis Evo*, *BoBoiBoy: The Movie*, *Ola Bola* and *Munafik*. From films that featured genres that are relevant among its audiences like family, friendship, love, relationships, daily conflict to action, mystic, horror, indie films and recently, animation films are being produced as well. The evolution of the film industry in Malaysia is rapid, but it has not made history like how Hong Kong, Korea and India have done.

According to the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS), Malaysian films are defined as ‘films that are produced in Malaysia, or in any other places, but produced by Malaysians, or by companies registered in Malaysia with majority of its shareholders being Malaysians. And its two main objectives are: to develop the film industry to an international level, and to boost the growth of the local film industry as a destination centre for films in this region’ (Abdullah et al., 2015). Although multicultural films were produced, they did not garner sufficient support to make them successful. However, the recent achievement made by *Ola Bola* is commendable as it is the only movie that incorporated multiculturalism and garnered over RM16.5 million in gross box office receipts (Astro Shaw, 2016). This achievement is new to the local film industry as previous films that have portrayed sentimental values such as those by the late Yasmin Ahmad films barely profited half a million ringgit despite the production expenses costing up to 1.3 million ringgit (FINAS, 2016; Muhammad, 2009).

This paper will analyse the multicultural elements (body languages, dialogues, gesture, characters, context, scene, shots and setting) that are depicted in *Ola Bola*. To further understand the success achieved by the film, this paper will also examine the factors that contributed to the film’s good performance at the cinema and Malaysian audiences’ viewing patterns. Content analysis was used to uncover multicultural themes based on Structuralist Film Theory.

1.1 Problem Statement

Throughout the history of Malaysian film industry, there had been only a handful of multicultural oriented films that were produced. The late auteur filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad’s favourite theme to use in a film is multiculturalism; four out of her six films: *Sepet*, *Gubra*, *Muallaf* and *Talentine* (IMDb, 2016) used the theme. However her works are often negatively criticised for not portraying Malay as the only dominant race or discussing the supremacy of Islam in her works. Besides that, films like *Setem*, *Pappadom*, *Estet*, *Nasi Lemak 2.0*, *Kolumpo*, *Spinning Gasing*, *Paloh*, *The Big Durian*,

Judi-Judi King Boss (FINAS, 2016; Muthalib, 2004) featured multiple languages and various races which represent true Malaysian culture. To compare the performance of these films at box office with *Ola Bola*, it is obvious that the rest of multicultural-based films did not profit as much as *Ola Bola* did.

Surprisingly, *Ola Bola* was celebrated among Malaysians; many bloggers wrote greatly about the film. Karageorgu (2016) pointed out that because of the recognisable proof with film, the screen makes us engrossed in the narrating of the principle characters. Movies, along these lines with multicultural substance, are to make viewers trust that they know better of a specific culture and would feel somewhat less familiar in a multicultural situation. To explain the success achieved by *Ola Bola*, Malaysians could have placed high expectation on the director, Chiu Keng Guan, who also directed *The Journey*, the first Malaysian film that broke previous box office records (*KL Gangster* - RM 11 million) with a total of 17.17 million ringgit (FINAS, 2016).

This film, allows a better understanding of Malaysian audiences’ viewing patterns. Moreover, an analysis of this film will assist local filmmakers to produce films with similar themes and encourage them to make films that will not only gain recognition at International Awards ceremonies but also celebrate them with pride. It is quite common to witness Malaysian films being praised by outsiders rather than being supported by Malaysians. Yasmin Ahmad films are classic examples where films win numerous awards at festivals such as Berlin International Film Festival, Cinemanila International Film Festival, Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival, Créteil International Women’s Film Festival, Tokyo International Film Festival and Torino Film Festival but were negatively criticised locally.

Hafeez (2012) demonstrated that films are the most interesting inventive workmanship that hypnotises millions and leaves an enduring effect on its viewers. The author additionally expressed that considering the potential, previous Hollywood motion pictures frequently anticipated the topic of nationalism (p. 30). This is similar to *Ola Bola*, where the film represented elements of patriotism using sports.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the study conducted by Aziz, Hashim and Ibrahim (2014), they pointed out that with the influx of movies from abroad, especially from Hollywood, the local film industry is struggling to the hilt to survive, as a considerable number of audiences leans towards Hollywood, Hong Kong and Bollywood (especially top celebrity, Shahrukh Khan starrer) movies compared to local productions. Inevitably, Malaysian movies can’t bear to be restricted to its present space and should go past its usual range of familiarity. This is easier said than done as the business itself is battling with neighbouring nations (p. 39). Despite the inevitable obstacles faced by the Malaysian film industry, having some of the films gain attention from foreign countries and winning awards, it deserves applause.

It is important to note that the successes achieved by the recent films like *The Journey*, *Polis Evo*, *BoBoiBoy: The Movie*, *Munafik* and *Ola Bola* are not ordinary ones, as this is the first time where these films have surpassed previous box office record holder,

KL Gangster (RM11 million) with more than RM15 million. The reason *Ola Bola* was selected for this study is its multicultural portrayal in the film. Since P. Ramlee's era, the depiction of racial harmony was utilised in many movies however, those films did not gain such popularity and was not even the talk of the town (Muthalib, 2004).

This study aims to find the multicultural elements that are present in *Ola Bola* and also to analyse the usage of sports as a unity symbol. This analysis will also help in identifying the difference between *Ola Bola* and the rest of racial harmony depicted films based on previous studies. The research questions for this study are as follow:

1. How is sports used as a unity theme in *Ola Bola*?
2. How do the characters in *Ola Bola* signify multiculturalism?
3. What are the multicultural theme(s) presented in the movie?

By conducting this study, it will not only assist in understanding Malaysian audience but also to identify the 'winning-formula' of a successful film. It is not only to win awards but also to win people's hearts with messages conveyed in the films. As identified by George Gerbner (1976, cited in Hafeez, 2012, p. 29), "films create a new form of collectively known as the 'mass public' by transforming selected private perspectives into broad public perspective."

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Malaysian Cinema

Malaysia does not have a prominent ranking in the world cinema; however, Malaysian films stand out due to their cultural and historical significance. In the 1950s, the realist tendencies in the cinema began to emerge and the movies began to adopt more positive themes. It was due to the entrance of Filipino innovative film directors and producers in the cinema. The first film producers were from India and subsequently, film producers from China and Singapore also contributed to the Malay film industry. The earlier films in the Malaysian cinema were made in different languages, for example, Chinese, Tamil and Malay. The activeness of the foreign nationals can be observed in the earlier movies like *Laila Majnun* and *Penarik Beca* (influence of Tamil Cinema) and other countries like Hong Kong and Japan. During that period, the movies were made at Studio Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur. The likes of S.M. Chistry, Runme Shaw David Teoh were prominent film producers during this time. After 1962, most of the Malay films were made in the Malay language; dialogue delivery and characters were based on the 'bangsawan' style or Malaysian musical orchestra (Murat, 2009).

The studio era was dominated by Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris, both of which were Chinese business organisations, at that time, residing in Singapore. In the context of the directors, most of the movies were directed by the Indians, although the number of Malay citizens participating in film direction steadily increased from the 1960s. During this time, a third studio, namely, Merdeka studio came into existence. Conclusively, it can be stated that the Malay movies have distinctive feature that most of the roles were played by the Malay people; however, all the backstage work and

responsibilities were handled by Chinese or Indian filmmakers (Van der Heide, 2002). At the point when National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) was established in 1980s, it made another condition of support in controlling and helping the film business. A portion of the striking movies of that year include Jins Shamsuddin's *Bukit Kepong* (1982), Rahim Razali's *Matinya Seorang Patriot* (1983) and Othman Hafsham's *Mekanik* (1984). In spite of the fact that these movies are not as fruitful as the slapstick comedies by Aziz Satar and A. R. Abdul, the both serious and commercial comedies genre based movies secured the existence of the industry throughout 1990s. Subsequently, in the independent phase of the Malay cinema, it shifted to Kuala Lumpur and the production companies were headed by Malay Malaysians. During this period, most of the movie directors and writers were Malay and the number of Chinese and Indian movie directors steadily declined. However, a few Hong Kong filmmakers came over to Malaysia and made movies which were later dubbed in Cantonese or Mandarin and later released in Malaysia.

The 'bumiputera' movies were more associated with Malay tradition and culture. Yusof Haslam's *Gemilang* (1997), Harith Iskander's *Hanya Kawan* (1997), Nurhali Ismail's *Panas* (1998) are common examples of 'bumiputera' movies (Gray, 2015). Besides, directors like Adman Salleh, Mahadi J. Murat, Suhaimi Baba and Erma Fatimah made movies with a "profound understanding of the tensions, frustrations and idiosyncrasies that lie beneath the surface of Malay society". Contrasted with every one of these directors, Suhaimi Baba rose and effectively arranged the capacity to cross amongst arts and business. This time, likewise, saw the first RM6 million blockbuster hit *Sembilu II* (1995), an accomplishment that was unbroken; however later in the 2000s, the record was broken by *KL Gangster* series (Mohd Mokhtar-Ritchie, 2011).

Aziz M. Osman, another director who has been consistent in delivering commercially successful films is worth taking note. He has the sense of balance between popularity and admiration towards his films. His films have properly developed plots, perceptive characterisations that can communicate well; these elements are found lacking in most of the Malay films. The 1990s era also saw the beginning of a new kind of art cinema. It is the kind which was capable of catching the attention of international funding. U-Wei Haji Saari carries on producing his personal sort of alternative cinema. His films dare to challenge the norms in the society. Hence, it created controversy in most of his films. His *Kaki Bakar* (*The Arsonist* - 1993) was screened at Cannes' Un Certain Regard in 1995. He then continues to obtain international funding for his films.

In 2000s, more independent filmmakers emerged to upstage their creations like Deepak Kumaran, Tan Chui Mui, Amir Muhammad, Ho Yuhang and James Lee. Yasmin Ahmad became the most awarded director internationally for her socially aware films. She began directing commercials and later she started producing films for silver screens. Unfortunately, her death in 2009 left most Malaysians from fully experiencing all of her genius works. Metrowealth Films performed better compared to Tayangan Unggul, Astro Shaw and Grand Brilliance in terms of box-office hit. Some

of the films that have raked in quite a high amount including *Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah* (2010), *Histeria* (2009), *Ombak Rindu* (2011) and *KL Gangster* (2011). Furthermore, a number of independent films made it to international film festivals which include, Amir Muhammad's *The Big Durian* (2003), James Lee's *Room to Let* (2004) and *Beautiful Washing Machine* (2002), all of Yasmin Ahmad's films, Ho Yuhang's *Min* (2003) and recently Nik Amir Mustapha's *Terbaik Dari Langit* (2014), to name a few. These films had decent plots that boldly expressed the society's voices. Alongside, the new era also witnessed animated films like *Nien Resurrection* (2000), *Putih* (2001), *Budak Lapok* (2004), *Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula* (2009), *Seefood* (2011) and the latest box office hit *BoBoiBoy: The Movie* (2016). The success shown by these animation features paved a new division in the local film industry to explore (Mohd Mokhtar-Ritchie, 2011, pp. 23-32). Above all, the recent past two years witnessed a great achievement at Malaysian box office which include *The Journey* (2014), *Polis Evo* (2015), *Ola Bola* and *Munafik* (2016) (FINAS, 2016).

2.2 Malaysian Audience and Movies

Over the years, the Malaysian film industry has been struggling to find its identity due to the confusion of whether to brand their films as Malaysian films even if they don't use 70% of 'Bahasa Malaysia' or Malay language (FINAS, 2016). As explained by Aziz, Hashim and Ibrahim (2014), "despite the fact that Malaysia is a small country, its film audiences are also varied and fragmented. Being in a multicultural society, the audience's disparate education, ethnic, class and economic backgrounds also divide the audience into different groups, with the mass audience (usually consisting of the working class Malays) contributing to the local box office collections" (pp. 38-39). As pointed out by Eswari (2014), "categorisation of ethnic groups has become an important mode in multicultural societies of legitimising marginality" (p.30). This was further supported by William Van der Heide (2002, p. 154) by quoting Mansor Putih "the question of the cultural identity of Malaysian film is a constant issue even for the least culturally minded film producer, since it is related to the need to attract a broad spectrum audience. It is still the case that more than 90% of the audience for Malaysian films is Malay and that 'cinema is probably the most racially segregated activity in the country today.'"

Abdullah et. al. (2014) and Hassan et. al. (2015) studied Malaysian audiences' viewing behaviour and patterns. Based on their findings, it was found that there are few factors that assist audiences to decide which movie to watch. Firstly, the genre is important: specifically love and friendship followed by family, war, travel and crime. Secondly, audiences consider factors such as the director, reviews and promotion, price of tickets and relationships portrayed in the film. Thirdly, most Malaysians consider going to a particular movie when they hear positive feedback from their family and friends. Finally, advertising and promotional campaigns have an impact on audience decision as well.

2.3 Multiculturalism in Malaysia and its Struggles in Movies

When the racial riots took place in 1969, it left a deep mark among all Malaysians. Then the state implemented a New Economic Policy (NEP) that favours the Malay ethnic group in many aspects including politics, economics, education, civil service, religion and culture. This caused disappointment among non-Malays. Later in 1971, a National Culture Policy (NCP) was introduced and it rooted the supremacy of the Malay culture; anyone who questions this, is prosecutable under the Sedition Act. When Najib Razak became the Prime Minister in 2009, he introduced the New Economic Model (NEM) after losing two-thirds majority in the 2008 election. He concluded that the NEP and NCP are threatening the country's economy, hence, he revised those policies by promoting 1Malaysia. Previous studies (Mohd Mydin, 2009; Noor and Leong, 2013; Wan Mahmud, Chang and Aziz, 2009) found that non-Malays believed stronger in racial unity compared to the majority while the Malays showed higher national and ethnic identification.

Due to the racial tension and political situation, the local filmmakers chose to express their thoughts on the issue, however, as highlighted by Fuziah Kartini and Raja Ahmad Alauddin (cited in Wan Mahmud, Chang and Aziz, 2009), films are viewed as part of the government arm and are expected to fulfil the government's needs. If a film is perceived as hostile towards the government's policies and aspirations, the film must be censored or banned. Due to suppressed freedom of speech, films are considered as one of the hopes to tell the story to generations to come (Muthalib, 2004). The release of movies like *Ola Bola* and other multicultural films functions as an agent of socialization (Hafeez, 2012).

Lee (2015) conducted a study on Yasmin Ahmad films and found that films that portray multiculturalism leave an impact on viewers and they assist audiences to understand an issue from different viewpoints. There are only a few notable films that successfully depicted various races by raising societal issues and unity instead of mocking the minorities. Some of the films include *Sepet*, *Talentine*, *Gubra*, *Spinning Gasing*, *S'kali*, *The Big Durian*, *Paloh*, *Estet*, *Pappadom*, *Nasi Lemak 2.0*. Yasmin Ahmad produces true multicultural elements in her films: the common themes that are represented in her films are interracial-relationships, embracing colour blindness or diversity. Basic themes like acceptance, tolerance, trust and 'love conquers everything' are depicted through multiracial casts in her films (Beh, 2006). The reason her films are criticised by the government, Islamic bodies and some elements of the Malay community is the portrayal of tolerant form of Islam (Khoo, 2008) and her works are often accused as "mencemar budaya" (corrupting culture) (Beh, 2006). Highlighting the struggles faced by every Malaysian within and between cultures and religions (Khoo, 2008; Lee, 2015) and by understanding the elements that were shown in previous local multicultural films, it helps the researcher to analyse the selected film thoroughly. The listed themes in this section will be compared to *Ola Bola* in order to present an overall representation of multiculturalism in the film.

2.4 *The Success of a Film*

As discussed above, based on the study conducted by Aziz, Hashim and Ibrahim (2014), the success of a film in Malaysia is based on a few criteria. The criteria include quality of a script (storyline and narrative), production values, technology, director and actors. Lee (as cited in Aziz, Hashim and Ibrahim, 2014) pointed out that the Malaysian film industry lacks quality scripts probably due to a poor reading habit and culture among Malaysians. Local filmmakers' great obstacle is to pass through the Censorship Board in Malaysia (Film Control and Enforcement Division under the Ministry of Home Affairs). A conflict occurs between filmmakers' creativity and the need to toe the censorship line.

Another factor that contributes to the success of a film is its marketing practice. Based on the ideas of O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), there are two key terms that describe a film's engagement with the commercial marketplace; marketability and playability. Marketability means how appealing a film is to its prospective target audience while playability implies how well the audiences will react to the film once they commit to watching it.

Furthermore, similar to the discussion above, Elberse and Eliashberg (2003) stated that word-of-mouth has a significant influence on a film's performance at the box office. This was proven in a study conducted by Holbrook and Addis (cited in O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013); they found that online word-of-mouth is linked with marketing campaign and it could lead to an increase of box office for a film. Aziz, Hashim and Ibrahim (2014) also emphasised that budget and promotion of a film determines the outcome of it. With little amount allocated for the budget can hinder the filmmaker's creativity and a lack of promotion will not be able to reach wide range of audiences to watch the film in the cinema. To put in a nutshell, although factors like director, storyline, technology used, casts and production values are considered by the audiences before making a decision, without a proper marketing campaign and positive word-of-mouth, a film's performance will not be able to achieve success.

2.5 *Ola Bola*

The plot begins with Marianne, a young television programme producer, who is baffled by her working life in Malaysia. Deciding that she has had enough, she plans to leave for better opportunity in England. Be that as it may, her one last task drives her to find a story so stunning, it truly changes her life. “It is a story set in the 1980s amid tumultuous economic times, about an unlikely team of footballers whose disagreements have left them with a streak of embarrassing losses. Personal issues have caused each of them to crack under pressure while the team slowly falls apart. They have only one chance left for international glory, and this multicultural team had to find it in their hearts to overcome their individual odds and unite for the sake of an entire country. But unknown to them, their greatest test is yet to come, one that will make or break their fighting spirit and the nation's hopes and aspirations. At once a powerful lesson from the past and a hopeful missive for the future, *Ola Bola*, a fictional tale based on true events, invites us to celebrate our differences and unite as a nation with

a collective goal. This poignant zero-to-hero story reminds us that there is beauty in our diversity and strength in our unity” (Astro Shaw, 2016).

With 113 minutes running time, the director of the film, Chiu Keng Guan managed to produce a film embedding the spirit of unity for Malaysians to be inspired. He is popular for his knack of casting non-actors and *Ola Bola* was done beautifully (The Cave Man, 2016). The director mentioned in an interview that it is difficult to teach someone football in a short time but acting can be taught to them and few takes will be able to achieve the scene that he wanted (Khor, 2016). The director's aim was to give the ‘Malaysian-ness’ feel to the film. He succeeded as the film portrayed multiculturalism very well, besides that, the depiction of team work, dedication shown by the football players and some of the memorable dialogues (“Kita menang sama-sama, kita kalah pun sama-sama” — we win together, we lose together) certainly have captured many Malaysian hearts. As written by few bloggers, some of the audiences in the cinema were heard whimpering while watching the movie.

3. METHOD

This study uses narrative content analysis. The analysis was done by reviewing the scenes that were chosen in regard to the themes that are related to multiculturalism. There were immersions in the scenes to reveal the aspects of how the filmmaker had used specific tools, actors or dialogue to bring about the element in that particular scene. It was done through the researcher's own sense of understanding through experience and personal reading on textual data concerning the study. Narrative analysis refers to the act of studying the data and links the researcher's own opinions to the findings (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004).

The use of narrative content analysis is deemed as suitable for the study as it takes into consideration the extent of the scenes and the meaning that it tries to tell the audience. Sandelowski (cited in Merriam, 2002) stated that narratives are participants' own experience that is in story format. It acknowledges the cognitive, and motivational dimensions of making the data (in this research, it refers to the scenes in the film). Merriam (2002) adds that any analysis using the content analysis will require a descriptive account of the study's findings. She adds that “data should be compressed and linked together, at the same time convey the meaning that the researcher has gotten from studying the findings.”

The sample chosen for this study is only one film which is *Ola Bola*. The researcher watched this film three times in a day, while taking note of the scenes that depict multicultural themes. Based on the ideas of Neuendorf (2002), by watching a film multiple times in a day for analysis allows the researcher to ‘read between lines’ or to understand the scenes beyond its visuals and dialogues. Hence, to analyse the film, the researcher analysed the same film three times in a day with two hours of break in between.

In addition to the film, 16 online blogs and reviews by news and lifestyle portals were also used in order to understand the film from the viewpoints of others. Other than analysing the film, an email interview was conducted with Astro Shaw's Associ-

ate of Marketing and New Media Mr Mohd Faizal Mohd Fauzi to understand their marketing strategy that contributed to the success of the film.

3.1 Structuralist Film Theory

Structuralist Film theory is a popular film theory to examine the narrative and film content. A film theory assures a complete analysis of the film content. In the theoretical analysis of the films, the instrumental and poetic modes of reception and the response to the film are examined. The film examination also comprises the possible storyline and idea generated by the film even though it tends to have influence on the political and the aesthetic position of the film writer and the director.

Structuralist film theory is an approach that examines the films on the basis of symbols and codes to convey meaning to the audience. It is similar to linguistic theory wherein different languages are used to construct meaning in the communication. However, as films are moving constantly with time, this theory uses a temporary framework to analyse the films. The theory is based on the assumption that the most significant aspects in films are the underlying structures. It further analyses the factors that shape the consciousness of film goers. This theory is in contrast to existentialism and phenomenology, where emphasis is given to the individual consciousness in order to examine some specific behaviour.

Broadly, it can be stated that structuralism is an approach to examine the human activity in terms of relationships and the position of human beings in these relationships. In this approach, all the entities are examined in the same framework and the entities are reduced to be equal. It visualises the conceptual framework of semiology or the science of signs (Aaron, 2007).

In the view of Tzvetan Todorov (cited in Aaron, 2007), the film or narratives can be studied in three levels, namely, semantic (the content), the syntactic (structure) and rhetoric (point of view). Among all these approaches, the structuralist method's deductive approach identifies the culture that drives the story and recognises the hidden codes below the text surfaces. The advantage of structuralism lies in its ability to apply systematic and scientific rigour. Structural analysis can be used to analyse the network of repetitions and differences for the scientific interpretation of the films and support the journalism style film critic without any bias. The film critic who studies with the help of structuralism will examine film genre, auteurist criticism and narrative investigation.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

To answer the research questions of this study, the researcher watched the selected film for three times in a day in order to thoroughly identify the multicultural themes portrayed in the movie. The first viewing is a basic viewing where the researcher viewed as an ordinary audience. The second viewing is when all the scenes, shots, characters, dialogues are noted down and classified under themes. The selected themes were adapted from the previous studies conducted on Yasmin Ahmad films as discussed in the literature review. As for the final viewing, the researcher tried to make meaning of

the shots, composition, mise-en-scene, music, dialogues and each main actors' establishment in the film.

Other than film analysis, the researcher also analysed and referred to a total of 16 blogs and online news and lifestyle portals in order to understand from various points of view. By providing the views from these blogs, it allows the researcher to comprehend the analysis as a whole with more opinions to be discussed towards the end of this paper. Plus, interviewing the Associate from Marketing and New Media of Astro Shaw, helped to add value to the writing of this paper.

3.3 Structuralist – Narrative Analysis

The findings of the paper utilised a combination of narrative analysis at the same time incorporating the structuralist theory. This allows the researcher to connect the themes based on own experiences as a member of the society. Moreover, the usage of structuralist concept allowed the researcher to look beyond the visualisation or dialogues. This is because some scenes are taken in a way with not much dialogue, however, the director uses the shots of facial expressions, gestures, body language and music in order to convey a message or an emotion. Thus, this extension is useful in writing a film analysis from a wide perspective.

4 FINDINGS

The following sections present the findings of this study by handling the Research Questions one at a time.

RQ1: How is sports used as a unity theme in *Ola Bola*?

The only theme or subject that is different in *Ola Bola* compared to other films that portrayed multiculturalism is sports or football to be specific. The depiction of a historical era of the celebrated football team among Malaysians in the 1970s till early 1990s brings back fond memories. The then Malaysian football team legends consisting of the famous Mokhtar Dahari, Soh Chin Aun, Santokh Singh, R. Arumugam, James Wong, Hassan Sani (Khor, 2016), were strongly supported by Malaysians.

From the analysis of the film, it can be noted that the portrayal of *team spirit patriotism, passion and dedication and sacrifices* of each player *to realise the dream* of qualifying for the Olympics were the significant themes portrayed throughout *Ola Bola*. The opening and closing title of the film states that it is *Inspired by real events. All events, characters, names and locations portrayed in this film are fictional*. This was emphasised twice in this film mainly to avoid comparison between the reel and real characters. In an article published by the *The Star*, the real football players (Hassan Sani, Datuk Soh Chin Aun, James Wong and Santokh Singh) stated that they were not happy with the alteration of the history where the final winning goal was actually scored by James Wong (portrayed as Eric in the film) instead Khalid Ali (portrayed as Ali) is shown scoring the final goal. They also stated that the score line was exaggerated; however, they admitted that it brought good memories and that it is a good inspirational movie to the current footballers and younger generations as well (Ravi, 2016).

From the beginning of the film, the director established good characterisation for each lead role. The main characters highlighted in the movie were Chow Kwok Keong or Tauke, Muthu Kumar, Ahmad Ali, Eric Yong, Ong Tiam Cai and Rahman. Each of the football players is determined to succeed in the Olympic Qualifier despite the struggles they are facing. For instance, Tauke, the captain of the national football team, who is also the eldest in his family, carries a great responsibility towards his family and his girlfriend. He is torn between wanting to give them a good life and pursuing his dream in football. The 1976 defeat to South Korea was a painful memory for him, and he swears to do all he can to be in the Olympic Qualifier of the 1980 Games (Astro Shaw, 2016). Another point to note is Tauke's decision not to accept the offer to join a football club in England because he wants to be a champion in his own country. Another example is the character of Muthu, who is also the eldest in his family. His ambition to pursue football has caused a rift between him and his father because of his failure to fulfil the duties as the eldest in the family by helping out with his father's work (plucking coconuts) and taking care of his three younger brothers who are between 10-12 years old. Muthu says that football is all he knows and he really wants to achieve in the sports he is passionate about. Although each of the players' struggles might be different, their dream is one, which is to play at the Moscow Olympics.

The portrayal of the characters in the film is relatable to many Malaysians, not in becoming the best football player but the battles they have to fight in life in order to realise their dreams. Though the film featured the difficulties faced by minority groups, it is relevant to any ethnicity as we all do go through financial struggles, opposing viewpoints of family members and most importantly to bear the responsibility as a member of the family while at the same time trying their best to achieve their own goals as well. This simple concept is used in the film beautifully depicting themes like *sacrifice, team spirit, passion and dedication*.

The director directed all of the players, the coach, family members of the players to depict *patriotism* in the film. The specific scenes that portrayed the theme intensely are the army physical training followed by the shots of the country's landscape and the final locker room scene where all of them decided to give it their all despite knowing that Malaysia had boycotted the Olympics along with 66 other countries because of Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. The beginning of the story showed the players expressing their individual goals and they sounded selfish. The vigorous training along with an army's order to look out for their team members while being out there on the field (battle field) gave a huge impact, and when “*Inilah barisan kita*” (this is our border) was sung, the shots of Malaysia's beautiful landscape (waterfall, mountains, island, forest) panned the scene, leaving an impact on its audiences. This scene was mentioned by eight blogs and portals; the authors agreed that it moved them (The Man Cave, Vulcan Post, Zieda Nazri, My Psychology, Cinemaniacs, Eastern Kicks, WL Jack and IMROTTENSUN).

RQ2: How do the characters in Ola Bola signify multiculturalism?

The overall cast in the film showed one of the best examples of a multiracial community compared to previous films produced locally. Throughout the film, there was *no mention of any race, or religion*. The characters identified themselves by calling their names or in some scenes by teasing each other based on their position in the football team. For example, Ong Tiam Cai or Ah Cai who was a substitute player for the past eight years, never stopped believing that he will play in the national team one day. He was often teased by his teammates because of his dreams to play at the Moscow Olympics and working hard to become a better player. In another scene, where Ali and Eric are arguing in the locker room, Ali says that Eric wants to steal the spotlight of becoming like the next top player ‘Samsul Super 10’ and, to gain that he bribed the coach to let him play the striker position (while he was a substitute goalkeeper). In this fierce scene, while racial epithets could have been used, Ali points out that Eric was only a substitute goalkeeper and it is not fair for him to be placed as striker.

To illustrate Malaysian-ness in the film, the director used *patriotism or love for the country* as the backbone of the plot. This was established in each character when different scenes had them talk about their dream. Despite their daily life struggles, the characters' dream was to win the Olympics Qualifier. This was shown when Tauke did not accept the offer to play with a club in England, instead he chose to play for his motherland. Then when Muthu was training hard at night with Ali, both stated that they do not want to lose again; later Muthu mentioned, “*Ali, empat tahun ini lama sangat, kita tak boleh kasi malu negara kata lagi*” (we have waited for four years, it's too long, we shall not disgrace our country). This particular scene was shot by highlighting the determination on their faces; then a long shot was used revealing Ali and Muthu training from the other end of the field and Muthu's voice echoes in the football stadium. The shot was simple yet determination and patriotism were portrayed through the projection of dialogues and the way both the players looked at each other with a light nod agreeing to each other's opinion while training extremely hard. In another scene, during the army physical training prior to the final match, the teamwork portrayed depicted patriotism very well. The loudness and stern projection of dialogues lift up audiences' spirit. Some of the things mentioned by the trainer include treating the game like a final war (“*Jika awak kalah, awak mati*” - if you lose, you will die), teamwork (“*kerjasama adalah senjata kamu yang paling kuat*” - teamwork is your best weapon) look out for your mates (“*I cover you*”, “*Rakan-rakan kamu, mereka adalah nyawa kamu*” - your mates are your life) and always bear in mind that this battle (football match) is for your family and country. The shots of intense army-style training followed by patriotic dialogue lift up the spirit and make the players strive harder to achieve success. One of the shots where all the players run uphill in one straight line with Tauke leading them signifies that the entire team has come together to fight this uphill battle. Another shot had them crawling under the barbed wires. Each of the players were shot separately moving towards the camera and all of the shots were edited one after the other focusing on the expression and movement; this again portrayed the hardship all of them are sharing and moving together in a single

direction no matter how tough it is.

Finally, the depiction of *sportsmanship* in this film has brought the multicultural characters together. Their love for the same sport, made them go through sacrifices and hardships in order to win the game for the country. This was obvious when no matter what was thrown in their way, all of them came back to play football again. Despite not liking the decision of coach Harry to place Eric as the striker, Ali still played. Tauke left the team but came back to ensure that the team qualified for the Olympics. When Muthu's brother was in hospital after an accident, he shared his thoughts with Tauke saying, “I thought I know nothing except football, but now I realise, I'm nothing... My only hope is to leave this national team with glory, just once”. Although Muthu's father strongly opposes his decision to play football instead of being a good son for the family, he never lost his hope that he will be able to make his father proud one day. In another scene where the conversation between the coach and Tauke takes place, the coach highlighted, “football is about team work, one player doesn't win the game and also one player doesn't lose the game”. This line sums up the whole plot where love for football was shown in each character.

RQ3: What are the multicultural theme(s) presented in the movie?

Interracial-friendship

There was no attempt to create racial or religious divide in the film, although there were many tense situations. The team spirit was depicted very well throughout the movie by focusing on the ultimate dream of the team which is to play at the Olympics 1980. Interracial-friendship was portrayed among the characters in the film to signify multiculturalism. Tauke as the captain portrayed a responsible role as a leader by looking out for his team mates. When Muthu's brothers got into an accident, he took the trouble to drive Muthu to the hospital, waited with him and listened to his difficult situation. Music, was a device used for friendship especially when Tauke and Muthu were on the way back after an argument at the hospital. The song “Arena Cahaya” is played with the lines that goes, “*walau dunia menjadi gelap gelita, pegang dengan penuh percaya, kepada mimpi kita; apakah maksud hidup tanpa pelbagai suasana, lift your dreams way up high, lift your goals to the sky...* (although the world is covered in darkness, hold on tight, to the faith in our dreams, what is the meaning of life without challenges)”. This song fits perfectly with the shot shown and it complemented the plot very well. The friendship between Tauke and Rahman is also a great form of multicultural representation. Tauke often shares his frustrations with Rahman while Rahman advises and motivates Tauke to have a positive mind so that the rest of the team will be encouraged under Tauke's leadership. The reciprocal friendship portrayed is also found among Ali and Muthu, Ah Cai and Abu, the public at a funfair, sports commentators and among Tauke-Ali-Muthu's colleagues at their JPNS office.

Cross Cultural Interaction

Throughout the film there are plenty of scenes that showed interaction among various races. Some examples are the bonding between Tauke and Rahman, Tauke and

his team mates, Muthu and Ali, Ah Cai and Abu, football commentators and public at the funfair. For instance, when Muthu's brothers are admitted to hospital due to an accident, Tauke borrowed a car from Rahman to send Muthu to the hospital. Muthu scolded his brothers for being careless, and his father ranted at Muthu for not being around and blamed him for the accident. Tauke stayed with Muthu until he was comforted. Conversations between Rahman and Tauke are another cross cultural dimension where both of them did not show any form of racial discrimination. Rahman freely expressed his thoughts and constantly motivated Tauke to play the role of the team's captain responsibly. Furthermore, to portray the communication between various races, common themes like *acceptance, tolerance, trust, hard-work* and *chasing dreams* together were shown. The depiction of these values is imbedded for easy interpretation among audiences. When these values are shared among various races, it allows the audiences to be able to relate it to their daily friendships. This movie sets out to be an exemplary example of multicultural harmony that many would envy to experience.

Multilingual Dialogues

Other than English, *Ola Bola* used Malay, Tamil, Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese languages in the film. The usage of multiple languages indirectly portrayed the appealing aspect of living in a multiracial country, allowing an open mind to a society with rich culture and tradition. About 90% of Malaysian films uses only one language despite the fact that it is multiracial country. In *Ola Bola*, there were two scenes where the Indian sports commentator spoke in Tamil freely while his Malay and Chinese friends somewhat understood what he's saying while in another, an Indian can be seen speaking in Chinese to his Chinese friends at the funfair while watching the final football match. Scenes like these were common back in the days where different races spoke each others' languages. The usage of multiple languages in this film showed respect for all the different communities though it might have been better if Tamil had also been used in the opening title and during credits (only Chinese and Malay/English wordings were used).

Portrayal of Minority Communities

Director Chiu has given equal importance to all three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. This is not portrayed in many other films that normally feature the 'hero' to be of the majority race while the villains are of minority communities. This theme is important due to the current political situation in Malaysia where a certain tenseness exists among the various races. The depiction of the struggles faced by the minorities is told boldly and in *Ola Bola*, the director has given each character, Tauke, Rahman and Muthu, equal importance.

Though hailing from a poor family, Tauke determines to lead his team as a good captain and at the same time assists his family by doing odd jobs in order to support the family financially. He has three younger sisters and was brought up by a single mother who is ageing. Besides that, knowing that he turned down the offer to play

with a club in England so that he can be a champion in his country can be an inspiration for many younger generations. On the other hand, his sister Mei Leng also made a big sacrifice by not continuing her education overseas despite getting straight A's in her exams; she also expressed her frustration to her brother and told him that he has gotten the chance that he wants but he is not putting it to good use (when Tauke left the football team after a misunderstanding).

Rahman, who is a father of twin daughters and a third child on the way, is from a middle-class background. He works as a commentator's assistant and dreams of becoming the next football commentator. The struggle Rahman faces in his career while also trying to care for his family is intense. He and his family are very close and scenes of him spending time practicing his skills with his daughters are heart-warming. Though Rahman plays a Malay character (of the majority race), the character was given the same amount of character establishment along with the rest.

Muthu comes from a poor family background, he is the eldest and has three younger brothers who are about 10-12 years old. Muthu's father is against his passion of playing football as he thinks that he, as the eldest, should be helping out the family while helping his father doing coconut plucking work. He works at the same office where Tauke and Ali are (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Selangor) and with the money saved, he brings it back to his father. His father threw tantrums at him even at public places but that did not stop Muthu from pursuing his dreams which is to become a good football player.

All the three characters were portrayed as facing hardships, family conflict, financial instability, misunderstanding, sacrifices, chasing dreams, and responsibilities which are faced by Malaysians in their daily lives. This contributes as a strong factor for audiences to feel a sense of belonging. This is what being Malaysian is all about. It is never about the skin colour, race, religion, education or finance stability but at the end of the day, all face very human struggles. The film shows how friendships make hurdles and obstacles easier to bear.

Embracing Colour Blindness or Diversity

In one scene, Tauke goes over to Rahman's place to express his frustrations because of the strategies introduced by the newly appointed coach from England. Tauke said that the new coach has brown hair and blue eyes and he's not like one of them. Rahman then replied, “you see, (while pointing at both of their skin colour) different what? Aren't we still brothers?”. This is probably the only scene that pointed out a somewhat sensitive topic which is skin colour but it did not intend to hurt anyone instead it is the director's way of saying that regardless of our differences we are the same, we are Malaysians.

The army-style training is another scene that tested audiences' emotionally. The vigorous training has made the entire team realise that there is only one way to succeed in the qualifier and that is by working together as one team with the same spirit. Shots where the team mates help each other pass through an obstacle is a representation of embracing diversity and acceptance. The scene where all of the players play a friendly

match in the rain is another subtle portrayal of embracing colour blindness. Other than that, the scene at the funfair with different races having fun and when the football players went on stage dancing with the performers is another depiction of embracing colour blindness. This theme was also present in scenes where the sports commentators interacted with each other.

The final locker room scene is probably the highlight of the film, when all of them were down after knowing that Malaysia has boycotted the Olympics; Tauke gave his team a choice of whether to play or not. Then Ah Cai stood up expressing his frustration for not being able to play as he is the substitute player. Then one by one each player stood by Tauke and Muthu who pleaded with their team to at least win this game for the people who came to watch them play. Ali then said, “*kita menang sama-sama, kita kalah pun sama-sama* (if we win, let's win together; if we lose let's lose together)”. Then the team walked out with hope and determination for the second half of the game. This scene portrayed multicultural Malaysians at its best.

4.1 Discussion and Recommendations

Ola Bola sets out to portray multiculturalism or *Malaysian-ness*. It is rare to have a local movie that incorporates all races and embraces their differences without discrimination. *Ola Bola* has set itself apart by using football to tell a story. Though the movie was inspired by the then Malaysian national football team, the depiction of the hardships the players had to go through has made the storyline stronger. The five themes (interracial-friendship, cross cultural interaction, multilingual dialogues, portrayal of minority community and embracing colour blindness) identified in the findings were presented well. A true multicultural film is where the stories of the minority are portrayed sensitively as important to a country. Character development in the film also reflected with the theme really well. These elements may have contributed to the tremendous success achieved by *Ola Bola* at the box office.

The email interview with Mr Faizal¹, an associate with marketing and new media at Astro Shaw, revealed that the success of a film at box office depends on the marketing campaign initiated prior to the release of a film. He stressed that while production value may be high, without a planned marketing campaign with a generous budget, success for a film can be difficult. He further asserted that the medium chosen to carry the promotional and marketing campaign plays an essential role to reach the targeted audiences. Traditional media (radio, television and newspaper) was their main choice but due to the rapid progress of technology, they used new media as well. Mr Faizal also pointed out that campaigns differ from one film to another, “through live marketing we would be able to gauge the audience reaction to a film and tweak our marketing where necessary to boost ticket sales”¹. When questioned on the failure of other multicultural films, he stated that, those films lacked ‘marketing power’ because they did not reach the targeted audience and eventually were unable to “expand that pool of audience”¹.

¹ Mohd Faizal Mohd Fauzi, faizal_fauzi@astro.com.my (28th November, 2016)

This interview assisted in identifying the secret of success of *Ola Bola*. This view concurs with previous studies conducted by other scholars (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2015).

Multiculturalism oriented films are needed to eliminate discrimination and tensions between racial groups. As stated by Hafeez (2012), the release of movies like *Ola Bola* and other multicultural films functions as an “agent of socialisation” in society plus they represent patriotism. Such initiatives are needed in Malaysia as the strength of the country lies in unity. Besides that, films, through their moving images and imitation of reality help building bridges between cultures. It can be noted that this film successfully portrayed multiculturalism in various forms, especially in using sports.

Twelve out of sixteen blogs and portals used to analyse the film, wrote positive feedback and experiences about the film. Four blogs argued that the story did not stick to the original story of the actual football legends. Moreover, some also criticised the acting skills of the new comers. Based on the analysis done on the online pages, the feedback was mostly positive; especially concerning the cinematography, director Chiu’s handling of the beautiful shots in *The Journey* were repeated here and it succeeded to make audiences fall in love with the country again. The bloggers also claimed that they were touched by some of the dialogues and that they are able to relate to the hardships and struggles portrayed by the characters. In addition, the authors also highlighted their wish for Malaysians to live harmoniously together as they did once upon a time as seen in the movie. This supported the opinion by Karageorgu (2016) where she stated, “due to the identification with film, the screen makes us part of the story-telling of the main characters. Films, therefore with multicultural content, are to make viewers believe that they know better certain culture and would feel a bit less familiar in a multicultural environment”.

By using the above methods, the researcher was able to answer all the questions. The application of Structuralist Film Theory gave freedom to the researcher to analyse a scene beyond words, gestures and expressions. The music, gestures and expressions shown by the actors were interpreted and listed in the findings section. To complete the paper, within a short time, this method was suitable. However, there are still many aspects that can be explored on *Ola Bola*.

In future, more studies on local films should be conducted in order to increase the information because until today there are still gaps to be filled and identified. Other than that, more content analysis based studies on *Ola Bola* can be done; this helps to expand the perspectives on the movie by various researchers. Besides that, future studies to understand why multicultural based films are produced less and less can be carried out as well. Furthermore, other multicultural elements can be used to be tested and quantitative method can be used to analyse the impact on audiences.

5. CONCLUSION

Ola Bola is a great film that portrayed the elements of multicultural or ‘Malaysian-ness’ as a whole through the spirit of sports. As pointed by Zabedah, Sualman and Eka (2013), films that address multicultural elements could educate the Malaysian society to live under one roof as one nation. Films like *Ola Bola* should be produced more in order to serve the community. In a way, this will be a reference point for generations to come. As highlighted by Beh (2006), multicultural and multiethnic themes are practiced as something to be improved in days to come. Unfortunately this is not realised by the filmmakers as ‘multilayeredness’ of cultural-historical formations, leave a huge impact.

From the findings, it can be noted that a film like *Ola Bola* is able to reach a wide range of audiences. This can be a tool for uniting all Malaysians. Besides that, the success achieved by this film should encourage more filmmakers to produce films that portray multiculturalism as it is able to impact its audiences.

To gain loyal support from Malaysians, filmmakers should take initiative in understanding their target audience or their viewing behaviour. From this study, it can be concluded that the success of a film is not always about the star power of the actor or director but the other factors that filmmakers should capitalise on for the marketing campaigns to use.

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Kavita Maheendran has recently completed her Master of Communication. She is currently working in a broadcast media company. Her main areas of research interests include film studies, performing arts, cultural studies and political communication.

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