Between ethnicization and globalisation: Mediating contesting cultural identities of Malaysian youths

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Abstract

Globalization brings with it not only socio-economic challenges but also cultural unhinging. This study takes a closer look at the cultural experiences of Malaysian youths within the context of this unhinging by examining the youths’ perspective on the reality of ‘Malaysian’ culture amid cultural contestation precipitated by the globalisation forces, and the manner in which they negotiate their own cultural identities between ethnicization and globalization. The findings reveal that the younger generations have been subjected to the state’s nation building ideology which is based on Malay cultural nationalism while allowing sufficient breathing space for the development of their ethnic culture. At the same time, they are receptive to a global culture as a new basis for the development of their cultural identity. There are indications that the youths are grappling with their sense of a Malaysian culture. We suggest that a key solution to the Malaysian cultural problem is not necessarily that of harmonising the various ethnic traditions in order to shape a common culture, but that of creating an ethnically neutral national identity compatible with diversity.

Keywords: ethnicization, globalization, intranational subcultures, multiculturalism, national identity, youth culture