

Malay Humor Magazines as a Resource for the Study of Modern Malay Culture

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INTRODUCTION

The study of humor generally and of comic books particularly is not especially new. Both fit within the broader category of play, a biologically based activity of all mammals (including human beings) which in large part motivates the acquisition of complex systems of learned behavior such as culture. As noted by Adam Gopnik:

The term, and the idea of "play" as an organizing activity in culture, comes from Huizinga's (1939) still provocative essay *Homo Ludens*. It was Huizinga who first noticed the absence of a tradition of festive comedy in the plastic arts, and he thought that this had happened because they had been denied, in their cultural youth, the qualities of highspirited improvisation that were so basic to the musical arts, that is, drama, dance, and poetry (1986:26-27).

Gopnik goes on to note that "the comic tradition in Western art is, before 1900, almost exclusively a satiric tradition, the tradition of caricature ..." (1986:27).

Scholars in a wide range of academic disciplines have studied play. Folklorists have recorded games and riddles, while jokes have been an actively researched subject in the fields of developmental and educational psychology for several decades (see, for example, Callois 1961; Piaget 1973; Whitt & Prentice 1977; and McGhee 1976). There is a Society for the Anthropology of Play, founded in the early 1970's. And there is an ongoing project on the crosscultural study of humor, headed by Donald Nielson of the University of Arizona. Still, little of this literature has taken comics or cartoons seriously as "real" culture. For example, Rourke's (1931) study of American humor as a reflection of national character depended heavily on comedy plays, even though it was completed during the heyday of American comic strips and cartoons. Folklorists, to the limited extent that they have dealt with comic strips, have had ambivalent if not negative attitudes about them. As Caro points out, "comic strips have attracted the attention of folklorists because they often incorporate folk motif, folktale plots, or structural patterns also found in oral narrative" (1983:413), but at the same time they assume "... that folklore in print is, to some degree at least, folklore extracted from its fundamentally oral context" (1983:414). Examples of this attitude are to be found throughout the period since the maturation of American comic art in the 1940's (Gallacher 1947; Brewster 1950; Botkin 1950; Smith 1952; and Brednich 1976). But perhaps this

critical attitude of folklorists, this tendency to see comic strips and cartoons as merely corrupt derivatives of folklore should not be taken too seriously by the rest of us who are more interested in interpreting and analysing culture than in capturing "pure" instances of it to preserve for posterity (see Dundes 1980: vii-xi).

Humor magazines have a more recent history in Malaysia than in the United States, but they are no less sophisticated.¹ Moreover, they have attracted less unfavorable attention from scholars and seem not yet to have been consigned to the research thrash-heap by local academicians, folklorists or others. But this may not last long. Datin Zakiah Hanum binti Hj. Abdul Hamid, head of the Malaysia National Archives, is completing a book on the history of cartoons in Malaysian newspapers. Also, it is rumored that several other Malay scholars are busy analysing Malay humor magazines. Hopefully, Malay "funnybooks" (the name by which they were known in the US during the 1940's and 1950's) will be treated with more respect by the scholars of Malaysia than were their counterparts by US scholars.

RECENT ORIGINS OF MALAY HUMOR MAGAZINES

When I first came to Malaysia in 1964, there were no Malay comics or humor magazines as far as I know. I brought along several issues of *Mad* for my own amusement, and sometime in 1965 found a new issue at a newstand. It had a cut-out of the *Mad* Zeplin, which I assembled and used as a prominent ornament in the front room of my place in Kampung Baru to ease the cultural shock (syok) of living in the exotic environment of the urban kampung. My neighbors were thereby certain of my insanity. Nonetheless, many read through my issues of *Mad* and asked a lot of questions about people and things pictured in the cartoons, many of which I could not answer with certainty.²

When I returned to Malaysia in 1971, there were occasionally published comic books in Malay at the newstands. Most of these were about Malay history, but a few were humorous. At this point I was able to begin to get even with my neighbors for having asked me all those questions about *Mad*.

When I returned to Malaysia briefly in 1979 (on holiday from Chiang Mai, Thailand), there were two Malay humor magazines at the newstands, *Gila-Gila* and *Gelihati*, which had begun publication in 1978. *Gila-Gila* was obviously inspired by *Mad*. In the first several years of publication the style of cartooning was very similar; named features were in many cases direct translations from names of *Mad* features. Even today, details of the cover show a relationship to *Mad*.³ But it is important to recognize that even with the first issue, *Gila-Gila* was very clearly Malay rather than American in translation. First published several months after the first issue of *Gila-Gila*, *Gelihati* was another evolutionary step away from *Mad*. It not only

dealt with Malaysian politics, colonial history, and local social institutions, as had *Gila-Gila*, it dealt with traditional Malay literary forms and regional dialects, thereby thoroughly Malayizing what had been initially inspired by an American cultural form.

When I returned to Malaysia at the end of 1986, there were four new Malay humor magazines: *Humor*, *Komedi*, *Batu Api* and *Toyol*. None of these appears to have been published regularly before 1984. Clearly, there has been a comic revolution in progress since about 1970! It will, of course, require further comment, but first it may be helpful to look at the characteristics of these Malay humor magazines.

FORMATS OF SIX MALAY HUMOR MAGAZINES

THE COVERS

Gila-Gila covers deal with current events in a satirical manner. The 15 December 1986 cover, for example, pictures a flooded village, presumably in the Northeast, with a peasant family standing on the atap roof of their house, the flood waters only a foot or so beneath their feet, and a man approaching them in a rowboat, saying: "*Oppp...! Nanti! Nanti! Cakap dulu, partai apa?*" The 15 January 1987 cover shows four very anxious, trembling and perspiring gentlemen outside on the narrow ledge of a very tall high-rise building. Inside, an employee of the firm or cooperative is telling an inspector from Bank Negara, an auditor, and a policeman: "*Chairman, Managing Director, General Manager, Executive Director ... baru je keluar, Encik*" — to which the inspector replies: "*Tak apa, kami boleh tunggu....*" Finally, the 1 February 1987 cover pictures a Wilayah Day parade in Kuala Lumpur in which one man of the two carrying the leading banner, which reads "*Kuala Lumpur Terus Maju Jaya*" has fallen into a deep hole in the street, unnoticed by his partner.

Gelihati covers easily rival those of *Gila-Gila*. For example, the 1 December 1986 cover shows weeping male students leaving their dormitories, carrying their possessions with them, and the Education Minister standing by in a jaunty pose (and white suit) rhyming:

*Kita suruh dia belajar
Dia bantai hisap ganja
Suruh keluar 24 jam
Dia kata kita kejam*

The 1 February 1987 cover shows a smiling PM sitting among his Valentine's Day presents, reading this issue of *Gelihati* and laughing. In an open box nearby are bottles of "*Tonik Kuat Untuk PM*".

Batu Api frequently features political satire on its covers, also. The 1 February 1987 cover shows a man and his son on a motorbike. They have just come through the tollgate on the federal highway, and the father is

saying to his son: "Haa nampak tu ...sekarang ni Abah kena bayar tol 60 sen sehari... itu pasal belanja sekolah kau Abah potong...faham?".

Even *Komedi* has covers that deal with social issues. For example, the December 1986 issue shows three *budak rock* looking "off-cover" toward someone out of sight who is saying: "Ni le kerja korang! Kalau ikut aku ke sawah, ada jugak hasilnya..." One *Mat Rock* is thinking "Boring! Boring!" and the other *Mat Rock* and the *Minah Rock* have the same expression of hostile boredom. Also, a bit of graffiti on the low wall behind the spells out "sepi!"

Humor rarely, if ever, has a satirical cover. The covers, like the contents are concerned with visual slapstick humor, for the most part.

Toyol, too, seems not to have covers that deal transparently with the political and social issues of the day. One cover, January 1987, is probably about overcrowding in schools and the need for primary education for some older adults. It pictures a Cikgu coming into his classroom and being greeted by more than a dozen people of all ages and types, including a green toyol. He looks very confused and thinks: "Amboi ramainya, yang mana satu anak murid aku ni?"

Versions of the *Mad* like price tag vary from issue to issue, and are often innovative. For example, the 1 January 1987 issue of *Batu Api* has "Harga \$1.50 cukup hot!" and the 1 December 1986 issue of *Gelihati* has "singgit limaposen". In both instances the versions fit the self-image of the magazine: *Batu api*, forever working out innovative ways of talking about *batu* or *api* and *Gelihati* glorying in its renditions of folk speech.

Banners on the covers similarly may reveal something of the self-image of each magazine: "*Majalah Humor Nasional*" - *Gila-Gila*; "*Sumber Humor Rakyat*" - *Gelihati*; "*Humor & Satira Semasa*" - *Batu Api*; "*Majalah Humor Generasi Baru*" - *Komedi*; "*Lakaran Lucu Nasional*" - *Humor*; and "*Variasi Kartun Nasional*" - *Toyol*.

Other symbols of self-image appear regularly in other parts of the format. *Toyol* has toyols both as the main protagonist in cartoon features and as minor decorative fillers in other features such as the letters from readers section. In the past, before 1984, *Gila-Gila* had a Malay version of *Mad's* "What? Me Worry?" (Alfred E. Newman) on the cover and scattered through the magazine as a decorative filler. *Batu Api* has a humanized *semut api*, with large-bowl smoking pipe and a Chicago-style gangstar hat, as its mascot. *Humor* may also have a mascot, a humorous caricature of a *Mat Salleh*, who appears on the subscription form. *Gelihati* seems only to have its editorialist "Hail!", a long-haired Groucho Marx, as a persona. *Komedi* has an editorial "voice" named "*Tukang Karut*" but no mascot as such.

EDITORIALISTS AND EDITORIALS

Each magazine has its own voices, in addition to those of the cartoonists. *Gila-Gila* has two editorial features: "*ngomel sikit*" by *Minah Leter* and "*Geromal*" by *Mansasau Minah Leter* (son of *Minah Leter*), who was originally *Mansasau Minah Latah* (before 1984). The editorials are humorous and satirical, but serious-minded, too. Examples of topics from "*Geromal*" include: problems of rapid development in K.L., problems of youth and age, on being grateful for technological progress in spite of its problems, lessons on development from the Japanese example, the power of positive thinking, and differences and similarities of the poor and the rich. Lighter, but focused on women's rights is "*ngomel sikit*". Topics include such items as: why women must give instruction to men, an apology to those very few men who are actually thoughtful and kind human beings, men are not capable of long-term love, men like to be heroes, and the oaths of men are to be taken lightly. Most of the humor magazines print items sent to them by readers. A number of editorials on current issues by non-staff members have been printed in *Gila-Gila*, including two on nuclear warfare and one on the perils of development projects in Sarawak.

The regular editorial voice of *Gelihati* seems to be that of "*Hai!*". Recent editorials have dealt with choosing a *Mak We*, the responsibilities of marriage, the last Sunday of the month in K.L. when all bachelors are more or less equally poor, *frust*, and *frust lagi*. *Gelihati* also has guest editorials, some of which have included: "*Satu Peluru Satu Musuh*" by Fuzan Geno on student cadets, "*Wang Punya Fasal*" or on why "*orang tak tahu malu*" by Zainal Abidin Othman, and "*Sembur-Sembur*" on why shoes are lost at the mosque (by the same author).

Toyol's regular editorial voice is Wak Leter bin Wak Latah. And the column is titled "*ngomong*". Recent topics include: Let's be a progressive and dynamic generation, and how to change the long school vacation into something good. *Toyol* also has guest editorials.

Batu Api's editorial voice is Semut Api, whose column is "*Periuk Api*". The editorials are not as "hot" as might be expected. Recent ones have included: consider everything before getting married, and how the circulation of *Batu Api* is rising rapidly. *Komedi's* editorial voice, *Tukang Karut* seems equally unimaginative, recently apologizing for the irregular production of the magazine because of the economic slump. *Humor* barely has an editorial voice. To the extent that it is there, it is the voice of Tauke, in the letters from readers feature, "*Hello Tauke*". He specializes in very brief, usually humorous, replies to the letters.

The names of the magazines' regular editorialists and the names of their columns downplay their importance in a typically humorously self-critical Malay fashion, but the serious nature of the substance of the editorials shows that this is mere modesty. Most of the names are clear-cut in their meanings: *leter*/to chatter, to nag on and on/; *latah*/hysterical mimicry

(often accompanied by improper language); *ngomel* /to grumble or complain/; *hai!* (as in *hai-hui*) / exclamation denoting groans and woes/; *karut* / self-contradictory, obscure/; *ngomong* / gossip, chatter/; and *sasau* /does not follow a true direction/.

LETTERS FROM READERS

All six of the magazines feature letters from their readers. For the most part, spelling and grammar appear to be only lightly edited, providing data on the usage of Malay language by the most ardent and extrovert fans that are probably best used as a guide to interesting research topics rather than directly as linguistic data. Obviously, writing is a more self-conscious act than speaking, and there is some evidence that the magazines select certain kinds of letters. The letters published in *Gila-Gila's* "*Hai KP*" (Ketua Pengarah or Koleksi Peti?) are subjected to careful selection, and some may be ghost-written by staff, in order to "set up" joking replies by the editor. This style is very similar to that of *Mad*.

Gelihati's "*Hello! Hello!*" features letters written, partly at least, in youth argots and regional dialects, and the editor's responses use words and phrases from these as well. The letters in fact, fit well into the overall emphasis on word play and the sub-ethnic Malay humor that is so well developed in *Gelihati*. *Toyol* has the same emphasis on sub-ethnicity and word-play in most of its features, but the letters from readers are somewhat disappointing in this regard. Moreover, *Toyol* has one of the least well developed letters-from-readers pages. *Batu Api's* "*Salah Kerop*" is not lengthy, but it is especially rich in the *budak rock* and *budak blues* argot(s). *Humor's* "*Hello Tauke*", is filled with English loan words and has some letters in regional dialect. *Komedi's* "*Apa Depa Kata*" is similar, and occasionally has "*Mat Salleh*" impressions such as "*Boleh taken juge ini magazine, saya percaya time akan dateng ini magazine boleh jadi itu like MAD!*" Incidentally, all of these magazines receive letters from time to time in which readers have discovered a resemblance of the magazine to *Mad*.

SHORT, STORIES AND POETRY & RIDDLES

All of the magazines except *Humor* have short stories. They cover a full range of themes: love stories (especially about *frust*), ghost stories, short character studies, true-confessions, etc. A few are superb by any standard, many others are probably among first published works of hopeful young writers, and many others are just fillers (to make paging come out right for staple-binding). *Gila-Gila* has serialized stories that continue from one issue to another. *Batu Api* could and may have serialized stories, because it is like *Gila-Gila* and unlike the other magazines in being published twice a month.

Gelihati has two poetry features: "*Pantai Blues*" and "*Sajak Sengkek*". "*Pantun Blues*" is a cartoon feature that usually consists of single page with

six separate cartoons, each with its own double rhyme in addition to the usual speech "bubbles". Several example of doublets follow:

*Ayam berkokok hari dah pagi
Baru nak rock gomen tak kasi*

*B.M.W. dia warna biru
Dapat makwe kuat cemburu*

*Tangkap pecah masuk pencuri
Tangkap basah kawin free*

"*Sajak Sengkek*" includes poems in both quatrain and free-form, usually one poem per issue. Unlike "*Pantun Blues*", which includes rhymes from both regular staff and from readers, virtually all of the "*Sajak Sengkek*" poems are contributed by readers, and there are no accompanying cartoons. Example sets of lines from several different poems follow:

(from "*Khas Untuk Kutu Blues*")
*mengapa kau jadi kutu
siang malam asyik merambu
sampai mataku naik babulu
memandang kau asyik di situ*

(from "*Empat Nombor*")
*tak tikam kot dia naik
tikam kot tak naik
kadang-kadang miss satu angka
last-last tak untung*

(from "*Lumpur Kuala Lumpur*")
*Lumpur
di Kuala Lumpur
menghancur
iman pun gugur
takbur
dosa dan noda bertabur
hancur!*

Batu Api has poetry features in each issue, but only one named poetry feature, and it "*Konsep Sebuah Lirik*" is concerned with song lyrics, which here I consider under the heading of poetry. But first, I want to mention a one-time feature, "*Gila Talak (Gurindam Seloka Huruhara Blues)*", which may be broadly translated as "A Case of a Man's Post-Divorce Depression (A Proverbial Verse in the Context of the Public Tumult Blues)." The first of the twelve quatrains is:

*Ini tragedi di pentas dunia
kisah si teman yang hidup menduda
dulu dah kawin berdasarkan cinta
tak sampai setahun porak peranda*

The last is:

*Gilalah talak penyakit yang parah
hendak dirawat bukannya mudah
andainya tersilap membawah arah
ke wad gila akhirnya berhijrah*

This “proverbial verse” (Wilkinson’s gloss for the Tamil word *gurindam*) is accompanied by appropriate cartoons with their speech bubbles. The *gurindam* was submitted by a reader to *Batu Api*, and the cartoons are the work of a staff artist. The regular feature, “*Konsep Sebuah Lirik*”, makes fun of the plots and words of popular songs. The actual amount of lyric produced varies, depending on the jokes. An example of the “workshop” nature of this feature follows:

*Siapalah aku tanpa dirimu
Bagai pantai terbiar sepi
Siapalah aku tanpa cintamu
Bagai insan dibalut kerinduan*

Ini dia kalau kau orang nak tahu... Sebelum budak ini mencurahkan perasaan cintanya pada orang ... langsung dia tak jengkal mukanya tu dulu... Main syok sendirii aje. Rupanya orang tak suka. Lepas tu bila orang dah tak layan, baru sedar dek untung dan baru terasa dia tu siapa. Kalau orang yang dia gilakan tu tak ada pun tak apanyeee... Sekarang dia terasa dianya tu macam pantai tak ada orang datang, sunyiii aje... maka bertambah-tambahlah sedar dirinya tu siapa... sekalipun orang tak cinta kat dia. Akhirnya tinggallah dia macam orang ketagih candu.

*Cinta itu amat mengasyikkan
Rindu amat memilukan
Perpisahan amat meyksakan
Namun ada pengajaran*

Sekarang ni barulah dia tahu, macamana perasaan kalau dah syok dekat seseorang tu...Khayaaal dibuatnya. Bila jam teringat tu pulak, alamaaak...sayunya. Haaa..., bila budak tu dah belah baru dia rasa tak senang diam. Macam jantungnya tu kena picit-picitlah...Tapi eksen pula tu...Sekurang-kurangnya di kata... dia dah tau macamana rasanya. Betul juga tu...duluuu...memang dia tak tau langsung...etc. (seven verses in revision)

Batu Api’s “Konsep Sebuah Lirik” is always accompanied with cartoon vistas that lack speech bubbles or “balloons”.

“*Inilah Saya*” is a regular feature of *Batu Api*. It is part game and usually part poetic. It is created entirely by readers who submit entries, which are probably selected by the editorial staff. One problem for the editors, to which they speak from time to time, is that almost all the entries are from females. Each is a series of lines with initial letters that form the author’s name. An example follows:

Tingkahlaku dan Rentak Hidup

- S* = *Selalu ketawa suka berjenaka*
A = *Adab dan bahasa selalu sederhana*
A = *Andai bersuami biar yang rajin dan lucu*
D = *Dalam hidup, aku yatim piatu*
I = *Indah dan kaya memang tidaklah*
A = *Anak sulung selalu mengalah*
H = *Hidup damai, pada Tuhan berserah*
 Binti Surati, 20 tahun

Gila-Gila has a regular feature named “*Senandung GG*” (Humming [the tune] GG) in which the original lyrics of a popular tune are transformed to fit the *Gila-Gila* frame of mind. New titles for new lyrics to old songs include: *Kami Serupa* from *Kita Serupa*; *Stanza Bengang Sebuah Kepala* from *Stanza Sepi Sekeping Hati*; *Angan-Angan* from *Angan-Angan*; *Sekadar Sindiran* from *Sekadar di Pinggiran*; and *Aku Hanya Penjaja* from *Aku Hanya Pemandang*. The last of five verses of *Aku Hanya Penjaja* follows:

Berniaga di kaki lima
Tanpa geran dan lesen kedai
Kau nak angkut
Apa nak kubuatkan

The *teka-teki* riddling form is used from time to time by all of the Malay humor magazines, but *Gila-Gila* uses it in every issue through the feature “*Profesor Serba Tau*”, who appears in several places in each issue. The professor’s appearance has changed over the years, taking on more distinctive features, and he has more and more served as a major voice of the magazine, becoming perhaps a replacement for the ersatz Malayized image of Alfred E. Newman. On the surface, only the professor’s answers are sillier than the questions; but occasionally, especially when the answer seems more peculiar than the question, there is a clue to special bits of Malay and Malaysian culture. Perhaps one example will serve:

Man asks: *Kenapa orang yang mati tak boleh bercakap?*
 Answer: *Takut ramai orang minta number ekor.*

This of course refers to the supposed practice of successful race-track gamblers of digging up corpses that have suffered a violent death, saying *jampi* and asking for signs on which horse to bet on in which race.

NEWS, NARRATIVES AND DIALOGUES

Toyol’s “Jenaka News” and *Gila-Gila’s “Itu Ini Begitu Begini”* are regular features that have sifted out funny bits of news and made them funnier. The *Toyol* feature is more-or-less in Newspaper form, with cartoons arranged next to the stories. *Gila-Gila’s* feature is in more purely cartoon

format. A common purely narrative form is that of occasional articles in all of the magazines dealing with the lives of their employees, especially the cartoonists. The most common characteristics of the cartoonists are that they are young (some are teenagers), male, Malay, and rarely university-educated. A few have been in or through ITM. At least two work at UKM, and another lives in Kampung Baru. *Gelihati* has several regular features in the form of personal narrative, but written by various authors: "*Dari Fail Budak 'U'*"; "*Lepak-Lepuk*"; and "*Ngok...Ngek... Ngok...Ngek*" (latest narrative is "*Belajo Le Rajin-Rajin*"). And all of the magazines from time to time have joke dialogues without benefit of cartoons.

There are more of these non-cartoon features, and each of the features touched upon in this essay is deserving of much more thorough treatment.

CARTOONS

Of the six humor magazines, only one is notably lacking in world-class cartoons (or perhaps it should be "cartoonists"), *Komedi*. It also has the least expensive publishing format and the youngest cartoonists. But even *Komedi* has had several superb cartoonists and it improved artistically with every issue. There are different styles of drawing within each magazine, with the full range from realistic through surrealist to simple line drawings in all except *Komedi* and *Humor*. Some of the drawings in the other four are as good as any now being produced anywhere in the world. Most of the cartoons have words, which are of special importance in social and cultural analyses; but in each magazine there are wordless cartoons, most often in *Humor*. There are two characteristics of human faces that have been noticed by Western social scientists, but neither has been studied carefully enough to be taken very seriously at the moment. One of these is the possible preoccupation of Malay cartoonists with teeth, and the other is what might be called "loud" eyes. "Not much is left", you may respond, and who could argue with you?

The topics of the cartoons are enormously varied. Malay history and legend receives a fair amount of attention, including such regular features as "Dollah & Raffles" in *Batu Api*, "Tak De Dalam Sejarah" in *Toyol*, "Maharajalela vs. Birch" in *Gila-Gila*, and one-time cartoons such as "Jebat 'N' Tuah" in *Gelihati* and "Sop Kaki Ayam" in *Batu Api*. Other ethnic groups figure regularly in all the Malay humor magazines. The British show up in some of the historical series such as "Dollah & Raffles" and "Maharajalela vs. Birch", of course, but also in *Batu Api's* "Pemburu". The Japanese appear in two series of *Gila-Gila*: "Yushimura" (a WW II Japanese soldier), and "Pendekar vs. Ninja". Indonesians have appeared in recent issues of *Gila-Gila* and *Gelihati* in their role as illegal immigrants. *Batu Api* has two occasional features, "Aborigine" and "Dayak vs. Kuda Liar" on Orang Asli, and in one instance Thai language is part of a feature in *Komedi*. Foreign television shows and movies intrude

into the humor magazines in several ways. "Streethawk", a television series from the U.S. is the basis of a dramatic cartoon series of the same name in *Gelihati*. Tarzan shows up in funny cartoons regularly featured in *Gelihati* and *Komedi*. And the names of American wrestlers and motorcycle racers appear in the cartoon conversations. Ghosts, spirits, and bomohs are to be found regularly in the cartoons of all six Malay humor magazines. For the most part, the treatment of them is accurate in terms of traditional Malay culture. Political satire is very common, appearing regularly in all but one magazine, *Komedi*. *Gila-Gila* has a regular series, "Malay Dilema", which plays through the various possible meanings of the title of that well-known book. *Toyol* published an "inside cover", buried in the middle of its January 1987 issue that shows the Agriculture Minister riding a milk cow burdened with green coconuts. He is holding up a coconut with straw in one hand and a glass with straw in the other hand, and he is saying "Hai...Nak minum susu dan air kelapa muda saya la agenny". Above these scenes is a large banner in red letters (on a green background) which says "SWING". UMNO party politics are commented upon, as are corruption, the "look East policy", prison conditions, and the military, as well as (in a very sly fashion) the powers of royalty, and the pressures to conform. A very large part of the cartooning is devoted to modern youth. One such feature is "I.B.C.", which appears regularly in *Gila-Gila*. It pictures an ethnically integrated gang of boys who attend a *sekolah menengah kebangsaan*, who are busy bringing teachers and *makwes* under their control. Other examples include *Batu Api*'s "Episod Cinta dari Kampus" and "Minah", and *Gila-Gila*'s "Makwe Korner"; but in fact the fascination with *budak blues*, *budak rock*, *budak jiwa-jiwa* and *budak U* is simply pervasive, appearing in many one-time cartoons. Moreover, such concerns as *frust*, *syok*, *saspen*, *silap teknik*, *perasaan*, and *khalwat*, which appear as the plots to many of the cartoons are the special concerns of young people. An interesting "oversight" or avoidance on the part of Malay humor magazines is the *dakwah* movement, which has begun to be addressed in recent issues of *Batu Api* but as yet not in a very insightful way (a joke about a girl in jeans commeting to her *dakwah* friend about a long haired boy, to which the *dakwah* girl replies that a women wearing pants should not complain about a man wearing long hair; and several instances of *frust* involving a beautiful *dakwah* girl).

LANGUAGE USAGE IN MALAY HUMOR MAGAZINES

Many of the major dialects of Malay are represented in the various features of Malay humor magazines. Some dialects that would seem likely to appear, but don't (so far in the small amount of analysis done so far) are Aceh, Bugis, Mandiling, Korinci, and Tapanuli. Also, there is only a little bit of Trengganu dialect. Dialects that appear to be represented (on the basis of a tiny sample) in the Malay humor magazines include: Batang

Kapas (var. Minang), Boyanese, Javanese, Kedah, Kelantan, Kuala Kangsar, Pahang, Parit, Penang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor, Tapah, Temerloh, and Trengganu. Foreign languages include: Arabic, Chinese (principally Hokkien, Cantonese, and Teochiu), English, Japanese, Punjabi, Tamil, and Thai. In addition, there are argots for children and juveniles, *budak U* and *budak blues*.

English is the major contributor other than the base, which is Bahasa Malaysia. Mock English lessons appear as features in *Gila-Gila* ("English 322"), *Toyol* and *Komedi*. Mostly, it is "strange" English, rather than the "Malaysian" English one might expect.

CLOSING REMARKS

Obviously, this is just an introduction to research to be done rather than even a tentative analysis. In my spare time in the months to come, I hope to gather more data and to discover more publications about Malay humor magazines. My approach to fieldwork has been simple: find Malays who will explain the humor magazines to me. I need eventually to select an "expert panel" of native informants so that I receive more balanced interpretations. And I need to put the instances of significant events of all sorts found in the magazines through a computer to track the matter of frequency and co-occurrence.

Finally, I will end with a quote from a recent issue of *The Straits Times* (Singapore):

There is a role for cartoons in our society. Cartoons created today are not like those of yesteryears. This is very obvious in the daily cartoon that we read in the papers. They are not meant to bring out laughter only. They portray, in a simplest form, the varied problems besetting today's society. (Anuar Othman 1986)

NOTES

¹In 1980, the same could not be said of Thai humor magazines, for example.

²There were a few other humor magazines similar to *Mad* in the U.S. during the 1950's and early 1960's including *Cracked* (for a while its closest competitor) and *Crazy*, but by the mid-1960's *Mad* was easily the dominant magazine of this type.

³One such original detail was the way that the price was stated: "Our price \$1.50 cheap" / "Harga kami \$1.50 murah" - with variations dropping either "our" / "Kami" or "cheap" / "murah".

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