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Negaraku: The national anthem binding Malaysians in integration

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Abstract

When the Federation of Malaya declared its independence from the British in 1957, one of the most important symbols mobilized to create a collective national identity was its anthem, *Negaraku*. Its melody has origins from a French tune, popular in the Seychelles island c.1870 called *La Rosalie*, written by Pierre-Jean de Beranger. In 1888, it was performed in London when the sultan of Perak was invited by Queen Victoria. Around the 1900s, across Singapore, Indonesia and Malaya, the song was a popular hit in Malay *bangsawan* performances, recorded and played on gramophone records. It also comprised the soundtrack for the Indonesian film, *Terang Boelan* (1937). When the song was chosen as the national anthem in 1957, Malay lyrics were written for it by Sjaiful Bahri, an Indonesian. Its first group rendition was sung by a local church choir. The history of *Negaraku* provides a narrative of multi-ethnic interaction and social integration prevalent in Malaysia even before its independence. In the Malaysian context, integration is a process of creating a national identity among ethnic groups separated by varying cultures, religion, social aspects and settlements (Shamsul A.B. 2012). Towards this, the national anthem is inculcated through standard education and public broadcast media. This presentation proposes that *Negaraku* as a national anthem can be viewed as a platform for ethnic integration in Malaysia despite various contestations over time.

Keywords: national anthem, nationalism, identity, ethnic integration, symbolism