

Ethnic Relations: Some Related Editorial Issues

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Abstract: This study discusses a book entitled *Hubungan Etnik* (Ethnic Relations) which was withdrawn from being used in Universiti Putra Malaysia because of errors and poor editing in its content. Political parties claimed that the book and the researchers tried to create racial sentiment in their writings. They also claimed that in some of the ethnic conflicts mentioned in this book the authors had in favoured to the government and aggravated other parties. Were the mistakes and errors in the book planned by the researchers? Or was it merely poor editing in the book production process? This research studies the actual fact behind the problems. The errors were checked studied and compared to the actual facts based on the criticism raised by the opposition party. The comments made by the editors of the book have also been used in this study. This study concludes that all the mistakes and errors were due to the lack of professionalism in publishing the book, especially the lack of editorial support before the book was printed.

Key words: Malaysia book publishing, writing ethics, writing skills, book editing, professionalism, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

In October 2004, the government decided that ethnic relation would become obligatory subject for all university student beginning academic session 2006. Following stated decision *Hubungan Etnik*'s a multi-researched book edited by Jawan and Ahmad (2006), the 1st book that responded to the government decision. About 6 months after its publication received criticism from various parties, especially member of parliament from the opposition parties (Jawan and Ahmad, 2006). Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed who spoke in the house said the government was prepared to make amendments if there were factual mistakes in the book (New Straits Times 18 in July, 2006). However, he said the contents were based on facts. Among the contentious parts are:

- Labelling as extremist the 1999 election appeal of the Malaysian Chinese Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu) which was endorsed in principle by the Barisan National parties
- Blaming Indian youths for the 2001 Kampung medan incident
- Blaming the DAP for the May 13, 1969 riots (page 78)

Mustapa told the house that the government stood by its stand that incidents listed in the textbooks were

correct. Ethnic relations is a mandatory subject for university students beginning from 2006 academic session. This is the reason for the fast publication of the book. The Star 19 July, 2006 reported the Minister of the Higher Education Ministry as saying that the ministry will not withdraw the ethnic relations module being used at Universiti Putra Malaysia as it is merely a teaching guide not an authorised textbook. UPM found it necessary to come up with a guide as this compulsory course involved thousands of students. It is not a book in the real sense as it did not go through the editing process that a textbook would undergo. He said a typographical error on the propagation of Islam would be corrected. He was referring to Article 11 (4) which was misquoted as no religion except Islam can be taught or preached to non-Muslims which should have been Muslims. The Ministers stand was that Suqiu demands in 1999 were extremist as they went against Article 153 of the Federal Constitution on the rights of Bumiputras while the DAPs involvement in rallies during the May 13 incidents is a historical fact, although other political parties were involved. He added that the line on Indians' anti-social behaviour in the Kampung Medan incident was taken from a study by Dr. Denison Jayasooria presented at a Convention in 2003. Mustapa added the public university students were free to give other views. Those who do not agree (with the guidelines) can debate it during the ethnic relations class. Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang said in a

statement later that Mustapa had given a most unsatisfactory answer to his supplementary question in Parliament yesterday. He argued that the course module was biased tendentious and divisive. A police report was also made by Ronnie Liu Tian Khiew of Democratic Action Party (DAP). Following the Polemic, the Prime Minister and Cabinet directed that the book be withdrawal from use in the university. This move confirmed that the book indeed had weakness as claimed by various parties. The editors of this book are not new faces. They are considered senior academician in their respective area. Jawan, a professor in ethnic relations obtained his B.A from University of North Carolina, Masters degree from Appalachian State University and Doctorate from University of Hull. He teaches in the field of Politics and Development.

His area of expertise is government and politics and he has a deep interest in ethnic relation election politics and political culture (Jawan, 2006). Ahmad is Jawan's colleague at the same department in the Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He teaches Islamic thought and civilization. He has written enteries for several prominent figures for Nusantara Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy. Among the famous figures in this publications are Hamka Sheikh Daud Fatani, Arshad Banjari, Shamsuddin Sumatrani and Burhanud din Al-Helmy. Ahmad (2003, 2005, 2006a-f) has also published many books based on his study of Ibnu Khaldun. Jawan and Ahmad are well known for their research and publication. Their other co-researchers book published in the same year by UPM press is Inter-ethnic relations selected readings. With Victor King, Jayum published Ethnicity and electoral politics with UKM press in 2004. Jawan and King (2004)'s thesis entitled Iban politics was published by Penerbit UKM. By looking at their

research and publication it is evedent that they are respectable as scholars. Their names have never been associated with any unethical practice in writing or and publication such as plagiarism recycle documentation manipulating data and research finding slander what else to raise people conflict. Therefore to say that Hubungan Etnik was published to create racism tension is baseless. According to Ronnie Liu Tian Khiew in his police report, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) was upset and unhappy as the ethnic relations course which is being taught in the local universities especially at the UPM manipulates the historical facts. Despite supporting the government's policy in introducing ethnic relation as a compulsory subject to strengthen ethnic relations in the country the DAP raised concern about the government's move because the book had made factual errors and was unacademic. The editors admitted that it was a rushing work and completed published it within 3 weeks. They considered the publication as internal notes for students. A statement was also been printed on the copyright page, early draft not suitable for quotation. But the book was distributed among the students interview with Jawan and Ahmed.

THE MISTAKES AND ERRORS

There are misspellings and other type of errors that can be dedcted in ethnic relation. Besides that Table 1 has shown other crucial problems which the DAP considered sensitive and dangerous to the political stability of the multiracial Malaysian society. By examining the problems raised by the political parties, it is very clear that the problems could be solved by a good editor to look after the racial sensitivity in the book. It is indeed not a political problem but lack of editorial competence.

Table 1: Mistakes and errors in Hubungan Etnik Panduan Pengajaran

Chapter pages	Issue	The text
Unit IX political development in the context of ethnic relations: The development of current politics	13 Mei 1969 tragedy DAP as the reason for the conflict	DAP yang kebanyakannya terdiri daripada orang-orang cina telah mengadakan perarakan di Kuala Lumpur sambil menghina dan mengeluarkan kata-kata yang menyakitkan hati orang-orang Melayu. Rentetan daripada itu orang-orang Melayu telah bertindak balas
p. 78	Kampung Medan 2001 incident only Indian	Perbuatan anasir luar yang ingin mengganggu ketenteraman di kawasan tersebut dan mewujudkan ketidakstabilan politik. Masyarakat Melayu di kawasan tersebut telah hilang sabar terhadap sikap anti-sosial sekumpulan remaja India dan mereka ingin memberi suatu pengajaran
p. 79	Claim by Suqiu	Tuntutan Suqiu ini dilihat sebagai satu langkah untuk menghapuskan kontrak sosial yang telah dicapai oleh orang-orang Melayu dengan orang bukan Melayu sebelum ini. Isu ini boleh mencetuskan konflik dan pergaduhan antara kaum kerana perkara-perkara pokok yang menjadi tunjang hubungan antara kumpulan etnik yang telah termaktub dalam Perlembagaan Malaysia tidak seharusnya dipersoalkan oleh mana-mana pihak

Table 1: Continue

Chapter pages	Issue	The text
Unit X: Islam Hadhari and ethnic Islam relations: 10 Islam Hadhari Principal and ethnic relations p. 85 p. 59-71 and 73-77 p. 99-100 p. 100-101 p. 81-88	Freedom of religion and Islam Hadhari Ethnic relation and Constitution Wawasan School National Culture Policy Islam Hadhari	Larangan penyebaran agama selain Islam kepada orang bukan (Artikel 11 (4), Perlembagaan Persekutuan)

DISCUSSION

Hubungan Etnik is only one of many books published in an unprofessional way. But in this case, it fell to the hand of opposition parties who then brought it to the Parliament. The controversy had many implication for publishers, writers, editors and librarians. A publisher regardless of its status as a government publisher or a private company a university press or a department in a university faculty must adopt publishing professionalism in their business. They must implement and practice the refereeing system when deciding to publish a book. A referee must be appointed from among reputable scholars and experts.

The editors must also do their part to produce quality books. And in the context of the research today an acquisition librarian must be aware of the quality of a book published in the book trade. An acquisition librarian must know the needs of readers, students, teachers or lecturers. They must also realise that not every new title is good and suitable for a library's collection. A writer must work with an editor to ensure the quality of his or her book. They must thoroughly check and correct the manuscript and galley proof before it goes to the press.

CONCLUSION

This study discussed editorial aspects and issues raised in the publication and withdrawal of Hubungan Etnik. The book has been published without undergoing the normal process in book publishing. No refereeing system was implemented in the publication of the book and no proper editing was done. Type of errors misspelling and wrong facts were among mistakes that appeared in the book. When the new edition of the book published at the end of 2007, it received no complaints as the publishing process followed the standard and professional way in publication. They identified experienced authors conducted workshop to thoroughly checked the manuscript before it was printed.

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