

## **Conference Paper**

*"I Found Home in a Strange Paradise": Contesting Moral Economy and Becoming Moral Ethnicity in African Malaysian Encounters<sup>1</sup>*

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Theme 3: Host and Settlers Communities: Addressing Anxieties and Enabling Acceptance, ***International Metropolis Conference***, 14-17 November 2024.

Presentation Date: **15 November 2024 (3.00 PM, Friday)**. Organised by **Metropolis International and KITA UKM**. Venue: **Swiss-Garden Hotel, Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur**

### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of African migration and diaspora living in Malaysia is multifaceted, involving various sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions. To understand this complex issue, it is essential to explore several key aspects: the acceptance rate of African migrants, the construction and reconstruction of Malaysian worldviews, and the impacts on sociopolitical fabrics and demographic landscapes. Below, I will provide a theorised analysis supported by recent evidence and data.

### **Malaysian Acceptance Rate and Worldview Constructions**

Both official policies and societal attitudes influence the acceptance rate of African migrants in Malaysia. Historically, Malaysia has maintained a selective immigration policy, prioritising skilled labour, investment, and education. African migrants often enter Malaysia as students, tourists, or business professionals.

Recent data indicates that around 20,000 to 30,000 African nationals live in Malaysia, primarily from Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and other sub-Saharan African countries. The acceptance rate, in terms of legal entry, appears moderate, but societal acceptance is a more complex issue.

The presence of the African diaspora has led to evolving Malaysian worldviews. Initially, many Malaysians viewed African migrants with suspicion, influenced by stereotypes and media portrayals. However, interactions at educational institutions and through business engagements have gradually reshaped these perceptions.

1. Educational Interactions: African students contribute to cultural exchange and mutual understanding, predominantly in private universities. Studies have shown that these students face challenges and need help breaking racial barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> Do not cite this conference paper since they are used for presentation purposes and not the actual manuscript draft for a publication purposes.

2. **Business and Economic Contributions:** African entrepreneurs and professionals in Malaysia bring diverse perspectives and economic contributions, fostering a more inclusive worldview among Malaysians.

### **Malaysian Views on Developing Countries**

Malaysian views on individuals from less developed countries, including African nations, have evolved from a predominantly economic perspective to a more holistic understanding of cultural and human capital. The African diaspora has shown that individuals from these regions can significantly contribute to Malaysian society, challenging earlier prejudices.

### **African Diaspora and Demographic Landscape in Malaysia**

The African diaspora has subtly transformed the demographic landscape of Malaysia. While the numbers are manageable, their presence is notable in some urban regions and educational institutions.

1. **Population Statistics:** According to recent estimates, the African diaspora in Malaysia is relatively small compared to other foreign nationals but is growing. For instance, the number of African students in Malaysian universities has increased by approximately 10% annually over the past decade.
2. **Urban Integration:** African communities primarily concentrate in urban centres like Kuala Lumpur, contributing to the city's cultural mosaic. This urban integration has implications for housing, services, and local economies.

### **Construction and Reconstruction of Moral Economy and Moral Ethnic Identity**

The presence of the African diaspora has highlighted crucial issues regarding identity, racism, and nation-building within Malaysia.

1. **Identity and Racism:** The integration of African migrants has prompted essential discussions on racism and xenophobia. Incidents of racial profiling and discrimination have been reported, yet these negative encounters have also spurred public discourse on inclusivity. A respondent from a local NGO working with African migrants noted, "These incidents, while unfortunate, have brought necessary attention to the systemic issues we face. It's pushing the conversation towards a more inclusive national identity."
2. **Nation-Building:** Multicultural interactions contribute to the broader narrative of Malaysian nation-building. A professor of sociology at a Malaysian university commented, "The presence of African students and professionals is reshaping our national identity. It's no longer just about Malays, Chinese, and Indians; it's about embracing a global perspective that includes everyone contributing to our society."

## **Conclusion**

The African diaspora in Malaysia plays a crucial role in shaping and reshaping the country's sociopolitical fabrics and discourse on identity, racism, and nation-building. Their presence challenges existing stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive and global perspective among Malaysians. Although there are challenges, the contributions of African migrants to education, business, and cultural diversity are significant, demonstrating that individuals from less developed countries can play a pivotal role in developing host nations.

Malaysia's acceptance of African migrants facilitated through avenues such as education and business, often encounters societal ambivalence. Official immigration policies have generally been selective, favouring skilled labour and students. Estimates suggest that around 20,000 to 30,000 African nationals in Malaysia originate mainly from Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan. While these figures indicate moderate acceptance at an institutional level, societal acceptance is varied.