

**“For anak-anak Malaysia everywhere” :**  
**Memory, Trauma, and Healing in Hanna Alkaf's**  
***The Weight of Our Sky and The Girl and The Ghost***

Sharifah Aishah Osman  
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

**Abstract**

This paper discusses two novels by Malaysian author Hanna Alkaf, *The Weight of Our Sky* (2019) and *The Girl and The Ghost* (2020), as examples of multicultural youth literature that depict the reconstruction and renegotiation of the past as the means of forging a new narrative of the self that emphasizes the agency of Asian childhood. In describing herself as an “unapologetically Malaysian” author who writes especially for “anak-anak Malaysia” (“children” here also refers figuratively to citizens), Hanna suggests that her stories, in engaging with the past, whether as collective or personal history, are inextricably linked to issues of Malaysian national and cultural identity. Her portrayal of the race riots of May 13, 1969 through Melati’s struggles with mental illness and racial prejudice in *The Weight of Our Sky* reflects the coming-of-age of Malaysia as a nation. As traumatic as it was, the events of the May 13 conflict must be acknowledged as part of the Malaysian historical narrative and should not be forgotten or glossed over in the name of preserving national unity. *The Girl and The Ghost* explores a similar theme of emotional baggage: Suraya inherits a pelesit, a familial spirit, from her dead witch grandmother, and in her attempt to release it back to where it belongs, is forced to confront her own long-buried, sordid family history. In both these novels, Hanna implies that the path towards healing, both as a nation and as individuals, lies in the empowering interracial friendships forged between young people, like those between Melati and Vincent, and Suraya and Jing Wei, which celebrate the multicultural constitution of its citizens and the common humanity of all Malaysians. Drawing from fields such as memory studies, childhood studies, critical multiculturalism, and Malaysian Studies, this paper emphasizes the significance of engaging young people in the construction of memory and history--both their own and that of their country—while also addressing the numerous complexities and social realities such as mental illness and ethnic polarization that afflict Malaysia as a modern multicultural nation.

Keyword: agency in children’s literature, Bangsa Malaysia, Malaysian children's literature, national identity