

Examining Filem Negara Malaysia's Animated Public Service Announcement on Public Health and Safety Issues

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Abstract

The former government-owned production house Filem Negara Malaysia or FNM was responsible for recording major historical events and generating thematic government campaigns. The most typical ones in this regard are animated public service announcements (PSAs) that address public health and safety issues. Despite its significance, little research has been conducted on its content, including the visual story and message intent. In light of this, a sample animated PSA titled *Nyamuk Aedes*, produced in 1978, was examined in this study. According to the findings, the plot of *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) can be divided into three acts: 1. the setup; 2. the confrontation; and 3. the resolution. There are also artistic impressions, Anthropomorphic cartoon characters, and amusing elements. As a visual narrative strategy, this animated PSA employs a binary opposition notion and a fear-based appeal to influence audience perception. We conclude that FNM's animated PSA not only communicates important public health and safety issues, but also helps to build a nation.

Keywords: Animated Public Service Announcement, Anthropomorphic Filem Negara Malaysia, Public Health & Safety

Introduction

The production of animated public service announcements (PSA) in Malaysia dates back to the British colonial era. According to scholars, the British government founded the Malayan Film Unit (MFU) as a film production studio at the end of World War II in 1946 (Al Imran, 2007; Hassan, 2007; Norizan et al., 2014). The British government planned for this film studio to be utilised as a propaganda tool to spread information to the Malayan people at the time. In contrast to films that rely on live-action and real human performers, animation has been used as a supplement to film documentaries (Arif, 2020). Titling, motion graphics, and visual effects are all examples of this. The production of animated PSAs was made possible, according to

Hassan (2007), by the availability of the animation camera Bell & Howell, which was obtained via the efforts of Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, the then Director of Information Department.

Unquestionably, the Malayan Emergency, which lasted from 1948 to 1960, was a turning point in history and boosted PSA's significance. Hee (2017) claims that anti-communist propaganda films were only made in 1948, when the British government declared war on communist insurgents, in *Anti-Communist Moving Images and Cold War Ideology: on the Malayan Film Unit*. During a regional conference of Information Officers in Singapore in August 1949, the government apparently reached a decision to utilise propaganda film as a weapon against communist militants (Hee, 2017). Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner to Malaya at the time, and Malcolm Macdonald, the Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, both backed this suggestion, which led to the MFU increasing its production of anti-Communist films for the South-East Asian market. MFU created many anti-communist films from 1948 to 1953, which were designed to mislead locals into rejecting communist doctrine. Hee (2017, p.8) stated that

“MFU film screenings in the 1950s did much to shape Chinese people’s collective visual identification with Malayanization policies, and their national imagining of “Malaya” as their new home. In the end, this led to the collective rejection of the MCP.”

In addition to anti-communist propaganda films, several PSAs on public health and safety were also produced by MFU. This claim is based on Finas' record of Documentary Film Achievement (1940-Current). In 1951, a documentary film titled *Wanted for Murder* (1951) was produced to raise awareness about tuberculosis disease. Five years later, MFU released *Valley of Hope* (1956), a documentary film on the British government's efforts to assist individuals with leprosy disease that causes skin and body part deformity. In 1961, a docudrama film titled *Sa-kali Cuchok Terus Sembuh* was released, emphasising the need of receiving a penicillin injection to treat Yaws disease, which is characterised by papillomas (non cancerous tumours) and ulcers. In 1971, the documentary film *Rancangan Membasmi Malaria* was released, detailing the government's plan to combat Malaria. Despite the diversity in messages, most of the PSA films have a relatively similar style in terms of visual narrative and cinematography. Among the common approaches used include live footage of real individuals and voice-over commentary. The animated visuals, on the other hand, were mainly used for title, opening credits, and schematics. According to Megat Al Imran (2007), the presentation style, which is heavy on monotonous and uninspiring government messaging, did not impress the audience.

FNM began its initiative to expand the quantity of animated PSAs in 1970, according to (Norizan et al., 2014). At the time, FNM's director-general recognized a chance to create a short series of animated trailers for television (Hassan, personal communication, 2008). Originally, these teasers (typically around a minute long) were used to mark several religious holidays of the three major ethnic races in Malaya.

Despite the fact that previous local researchers have lauded FNM for its function and contribution to the country, several memorable animated PSA's have yet to be examined. As a result, many of its visual narrative and strategies are still obscure to the general audience. In this study, the researchers intend to examine an animated PSA entitled *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) or *Aedes Mosquito*. Produced and directed by former FNM animation director, Hassan Abd Muthalib, this particular animated PSA was the first to use whimsy and humour to

address public health and safety information. Two research questions are raised: (RQ1) How does the narrative structure of *Nyamuk Aedes* work?; (RQ2) What visual narrative strategies does *Nyamuk Aedes* employ?

Literature Review

It is critical for us to be informed of items or events as citizens of a country, particularly those that concern public health and safety issues. As an example, consider the Covid 19 epidemic. To deal with the global problem, various governments around the world have established special task forces, such as the National Center for Disease Control (CDC). Misconceptions and scepticism regarding the vaccine are among the difficulties that this agency is addressing. As a result, the organisation is working to keep the public informed about the Covid-19 problem and to encourage people to receive immunizations. Many experts believe that the government should consider employing trusted and dependable communication platforms. Scholars believe that if messages are given in the appropriate way, they will likely foster acceptance and impact people's desire to take preventive steps (Jones et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2018). In most circumstances, a public service announcement (PSA) on public health and safety issues is regarded to be one of the most successful ways to influence behaviour change (İnci1, Sancar & Bostancı, 2017). For example, Dennis et al (2021) in their study discovered that public service announcements (PSA) carrying Covid-19 messages that are customised to individuals' identities have a high potential to increase compliance with public health guidelines.

Technically, a PSA is a form of audio and visual communication that is broadcast over various broadcast methods such as television, radio, the internet, and social media. It is also regarded as a type of advertising, sponsored by either government agencies or other organisations, to promote causes and activities generally considered socially desirable" (Murry et al., 1996). It is a social marketing communication technique that consists of a brief, informative advertisement aimed to raise public awareness and/or influence behavioural change (DeJong, 2017). PSAs are used to inform or induce specific actions in specified audiences, usually for non-commercial gain, through the use of mass media (Rice et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 1987). It is important to note that public service advertising is not for profit, but they do seek to educate the public about public issues and promote a moral concept (Mishra & Henriksen, 2018). In this sense, PSA functions as a free advertising service that aims to modify public attitudes and behaviour by raising awareness on issues of public interest (Rodman, 2012; Dougan et al., 2010). Another significant aspect of PSA is also that its messages are repeated over and over which in the end allows the audience to remember. The repetitive nature of PSA, to a certain extent, could bring a positive impact on public health by changing viewers' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (Hether et al., 2008). However, the challenge in conveying public messages and sustaining interest among viewers is still unresolved. This is probably due to the fact that PSA messages often alert people about certain life-threatening situations which could then evoke a sense of fear.

According to Fairchild et al (2018), the use of the fear-based appeal has been occurring in public health campaigns from 1950 to 1970. This communication strategy, however, is said to be less effective and could backfire. For example in 1960 anti-tobacco PSA often featured fear through narrative and images and yet were unable to "frighten" smokers or persuade them to stop. Fairchild et al (2018) stated that a fear-based appeal does not make viewers respond with extreme disgust when faced with shocking images; instead, it could make a threat feel believable and evoke a sense of vulnerability.

When it comes to message delivery, Richardson (2020) believes that PSAs should not be taken too seriously and that a much softer approach is sufficient to persuade viewers to support a worthy cause. PSAs frequently incorporate funny effects, according to Terskikh (2017, p.159), which is a popular tactic in commercial advertising. The rationale for this is that the funny effect is seen to be more appealing than terror, and it can be imprinted in the viewer's memory far more quickly. Terskikh (2017) further states that when people laugh while watching a PSA, it's an indication that they're paying attention to the content. As a result, the message will be remembered for a long time. The use of animation is yet another effective strategy. According to a study conducted by Mayimuna (2011), animated PSAs may also improve material memory. Recent studies, for example, demonstrate that animated PSAs are more well-received by a group of pupils (Abdul Latif et al., 2013).

Visual Narrative and Cinematography

Technically, the effectiveness of animated PSA relies on two important factors, the visual narrative, and the cinematography. The visual narrative is an essential process of combining concepts and ideas to create a coherent story. According to Selby (2013), visual narrative, which is also termed treatment, is usually inspired by the animation director who is responsible for the animation's look and feels. Therefore, the viewer can easily discern and appreciate the director's distinctive style. Consider comparing the full animation style of Disney's animation and the limited animation style of Japanese anime. Viewers may notice that Disney's animation (movement) style appears "smoother" than Japanese anime. This perception occurs due to the techniques called full animation and limited animation (Ogihara, 2014). Legendary Japanese animator, Otsuka Yasuo (cited in Lamarre, 2013), defines full animation style as a "dynamic image" and limited animation style as a "static image". Actually, this comparison can also be explained from the perspective of times and frame numbers. Full animation uses 24 frames per second (fps) which is commonly used for film media. In contrast, limited animation uses only 12 frames per second (fps) which is suitable for TV and digital media (Baker, 2017; Ogihara, 2014).

Cinematography can be defined as the art and technique in filmmaking (Heiderich, 2012) which utilises Lighting, Colour, Camera Placement, Framing, and Shot Structure (Kennedy et al., 2002). For instance, bright lighting or vibrant colour can be used to create a high mood or happy scene whereas a dim lighting or dull colour is suitable for creating a low mood or to suggest a sad, dramatic, or scary scene. The camera placement, framing, and shot structure are also crucial for depicting the characters' feelings and emotions (Kennedy et al., 2002). For instance, a wrapped fish-eye lens effect is best used for creating mental instability, and a zoom-in effect enables the viewer to feel the inner emotion of the character.

According to Whitaker et al (1990), there are two kinds of cameras in animation production which are the real camera and the virtual camera. For traditional animation, the animator would move the artwork left and right under the real camera to create a panning effect. As digital technology becomes available, the virtual camera is used to move around the subjects similar to a live-action camera. The successful use of camera techniques in animation, in the end, will help enhance the visual narrative.

Methodology

This study utilises a film analysis method, which is a close textual analysis approach for uncovering the animation director's concept and strategy for representing the visual narrative and cinematography (Kydd, 2011). The sampled animated PSA film was broken down into

various keyframes and then examined based on timeline, visual narrative, language, and message using the three-act structure, the Setup, the Confrontation, and the Resolution.

Table 1

Operational Definition

Code	Description
BP	The Beginning Point provides a visual representation that appears first in the timeline.
TP	The Turning Point provides a visual representation that marks the transformation situation
CP	Climax Point provides a visual representation that depicts a pivotal moment.
EP	Ending Point provides a visual representation that concludes the message.

Act I: The Setup

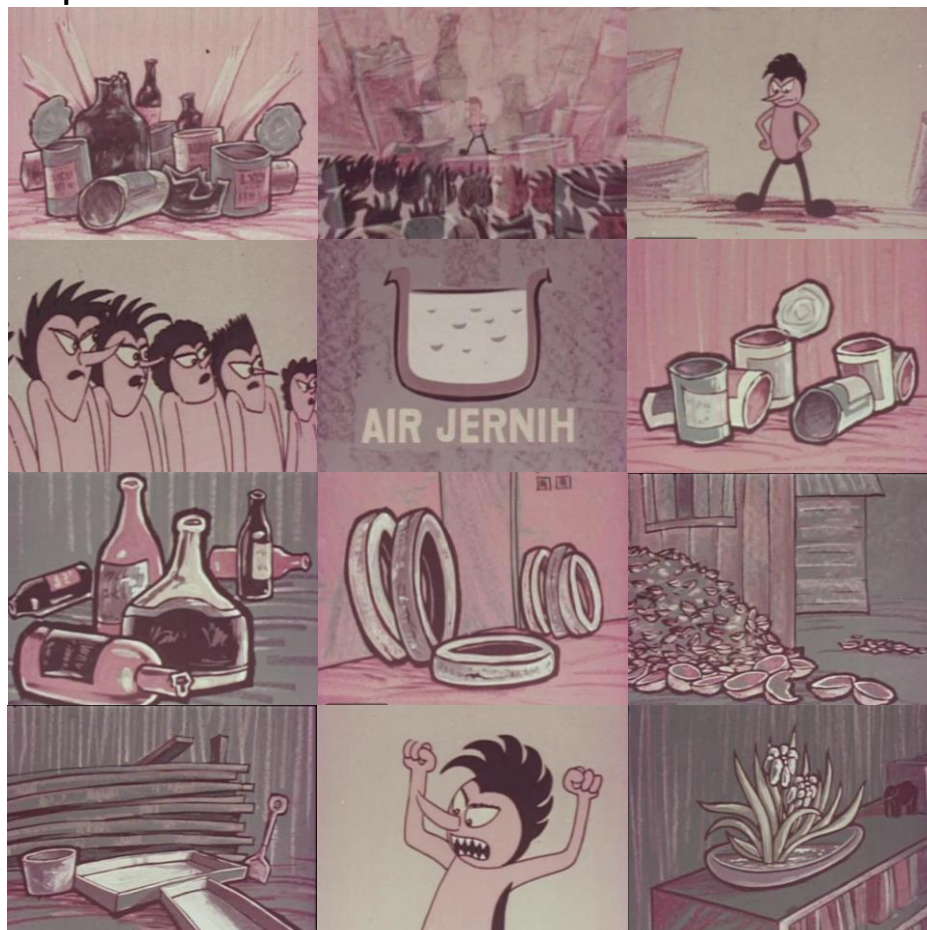




Figure 1. Act I: The Setup
(Source: Filem Negara Malaysia)

The Beginning Point (BP) of the timeline in this scene is 0:00:00:01, and it begins with a full shot of a trash heap before gradually revealing what appears to be a covert assembly location. The scene then shifts to a medium shot of a "Commander" standing in front of a swarm of mosquitoes. The commander then begins his address by detailing the optimal breeding conditions for *Aedes* mosquitos. Several accompanying graphics are briefly displayed on the screen at this point. Pictures of old cans, bottles, worn-out tires, an interior planter, and an aquarium are among them. The scene returns to the commander, who is carrying a drawing of a skull. At this point, he displays the drawing to the audience while saying, "There is no more hope." Two full pictures of a man resting on a bed and two youngsters playing complete the scenario. The image then shifts to a full view of the commander issuing a warning about the preemptive strike. The Ubat Jentik-Jentik or larvicide, a brief animated clip of trash cleanup, and combined efforts from several volunteer units such as the Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood watch), the Belia (Youth), and the Rela corps are among the supporting graphics (volunteer of Malaysian People).

Act II: The Confrontation

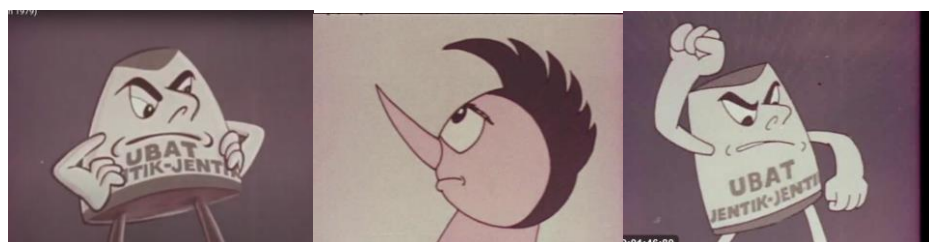




Figure 2. Act II: The Confrontation
(Source: Filem Negara Malaysia)

The timeline's Turning Point (TP) begins at 0:00:01:38 in this scene. It starts with a close-up (CU) of an anthropomorphic larvicide character (Ubat Jentik-jentik) sneaking into the scene. The film then goes on to show the larvicide figure beating Aedes mosquitoes in a series of images. In the final sequence, Ubat Jentik-jentik is shown stepping on the dead Aedes Mosquito and raising his two arms to signal victory.

Act III: The Resolution

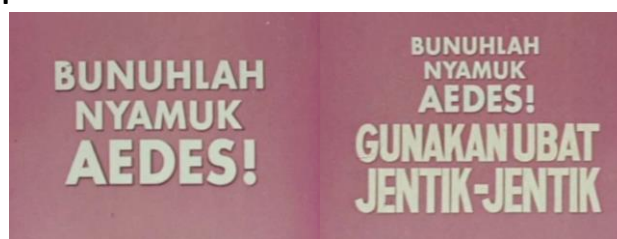


Figure 2. Act III: The Resolution
(Source: Filem Negara Malaysia)

Act III: There are two distinct frames in the Resolution scene, which lasts 5 seconds. It depicts a printed statement urging the people to join the effort to eradicate the Aedes mosquito. The scene concludes with a message suggesting that larvicide be used as a countermeasure.

Table 2

Script

Timeline	Scene	Script
0:00:00:00 - 0:00:27:00	Act I: The Setup	[Audio]: Background music (suspense) starts. [Commander]: <i>Dear fellow mosquitoes. Remember, Aedes (mosquitoes) can only breed in clear water contained in unused cans, bottles, and worn-out tires.</i>
0:00:28:00 - 0:00:53:00	Act I: The Setup	[Commander]: <i>Aedes (mosquitoes) do not only breed outside the house but also inside. If a person contracts Dengue fever, there will be no hope heh heh heh (wicked laughing), unless that person gets immediate medical treatment. For many years, Aedes (mosquitoes) have been known to kill humans, especially children.</i>
0:00:01:00	Act I: The Setup	[Commander]: <i>But be alert. Humans have realised the danger of dengue fever. They use a larvicide to destroy the Aedes</i>

		<i>mosquitoes. Because of that, so many (Aedes mosquitoes) have died. Several volunteer units such as Rukun Tetangga (Neighborhood watch), Rela (volunteer of Malaysian People), and Belia-Belia (Youth organisation) have joined hands to prevent Aedes mosquitoes from breeding. In addition, announcements regarding the effectiveness of larvicide were delivered in schools as well as public areas.</i>
0:00:01:00	Act II: The Confrontation	[Commander]: <i>As long as there is... Ubat jentik-jentik (larvicide)! ...run ... run</i> [Larvicide]: Heh... heh... heh... (wicked laughing). There is no more hope!
0:02:01:00	Act Ili: The Resolution	[Narrator]: Kill Nyamuk Aedes! Use larvicide!

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the analysis based on the research questions posed earlier will be discussed in the next section.

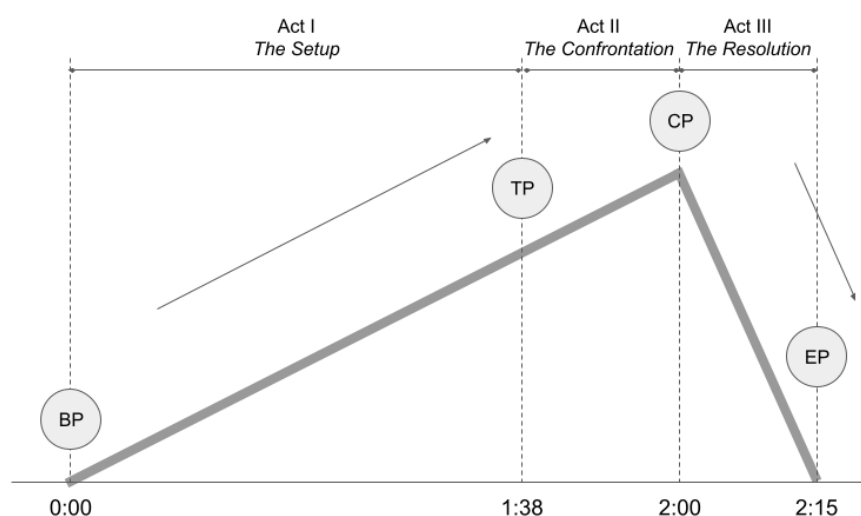


Figure 3. Narrative Structure of *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978)

RQ1: How does the narrative structure of *Nyamuk Aedes* work?

Nyamuk Aedes (1978) animated PSA lasts around two minutes and fourteen seconds (2.15 min). It was originally coloured, but due to oxidation, it took on a Sepia tone. The aspect ratio is 4:3, which was made for older televisions. The animated PSA by *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) uses a limited animation technique that is suitable for television .

Structurally, this particular animated PSA is divided into three constructs that include: Act 1: Set Up; Act II: Confrontation; and Act III: Resolution (Figure 3). Each of the constructs are differentiated by four keyframes labelled as the Beginning Point (BP), the Turning Point (TP), the Climax Point (CP) and the Ending Point (EP). As illustrated in the diagram (Figure 3), the visual narrative structure depicts an asymmetrical or left-skewed triangle. This is due to the fact that the Climax Point (CP) occurs at 0:00:02:00, which is nearer to the Ending Point

(EP) at 0:00:02:15. According to the three act narrative structure, the Climax Point is the highest point which can occur either near the beginning or near the end. Every keyframe has a role in inciting the narrative. In this case, the Beginning Point (BP) introduces the audience by showing the covert assembly location and the Aedes Mosquitoes; the Turning Point (TP) marks the start of the confrontation by showing Ubat Jentik-jentik sneaking into the scene; the Climax Point (CP) dazzles the audience with rapid changes in camera viewpoint, frenetic camera movement, quick music, and crushing sound effects; and the Ending Point (EP) brings the animated PSA to a close with a triumphant gesture of Ubat Jentik-jentik.

RQ2: What visual narrative strategies does *Nyamuk Aedes* employ?

Unlike FNM's previous PSAs, which used real human performers to depict government issues, *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) uses visual narrative strategies that combines fiction and nonfiction and is conveyed using animated cartoon characters. The major goal was to portray Aedes mosquitoes as a true public enemy while simultaneously educating people on how to get rid of them. The animator accomplished this idea by creating two fictional anthropomorphic characters, Aedes Mosquito and Ubat Jentik-jentik (larvicide), who play antagonist and protagonist, respectively. Both characters were represented with limbs and legs and the ability to communicate like people, thus making the animation fascinating and amusing. According to Guthrie (1995, cited in Laksmadewi et al., 2017), these anthropomorphic qualities are often used in marketing communication because of their favourable influence on consumer behaviour. The animated characters, despite this, lack the adorable and likeable qualities that most viewers associate with cartoon animation. This is most likely owing to the idea that cartoon characters are intended for younger audiences, and that exploiting them to carry public messages would be inappropriate. Having said that, the animator used exaggeration and comedy to strike a balance between serious and non-serious.

In our analysis, *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) presents a visual narrative that is similar to post-war propaganda films released during the Malayan Emergency period in the 1950s. In a metaphorical sense, the Aedes Mosquitoes could be compared as communist militants and Ubat Jentik-Jentik as the government or enforcer. This idea is supported by a number of additional depictions. For example, the secret dumpster depicted at the beginning of the PSA could be compared to the Malayan jungle, where communist militants were hiding; the listing of volunteer units namely Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood watch), the Belia (Youth), and the Rela corps (volunteer of Malaysian People) could be compared to the Home Guard, which was formed by the British Administration to combat communist insurgents; and the counter measure agendas by the government can be seen as a tactical warfare used by the British to combat the communist insurgent. Hassan (2011) claims that propaganda films produced during the Malayan Emergency period were successful in influencing people's minds to reject communist ideology and recognize the British as heroes. He uses the docudrama *The Kinta Story*, written and directed by Harry William Govan in 1949, as an example of how the film effectively propagates the idea that a joint effort and spirit of collaboration between the government and the people may eventually overcome the enemy.

The next strategy employed in the visual narrative of *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) is the fear-based appeal. As discussed earlier, fear-based appeal could make a threat feel believable and evoke a sense of vulnerability (Fairchild et al., 2018). Scholar asserts that fear-based appeal has been utilised in health promotion programmes for at least sixty years with the goal of changing behaviour (Simpson, 2017). Despite this, there are growing concerns that such an approach might be right or wrong depending on the validity of the premises in the argument.

Regarding *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978), the plot to exterminate mankind uncovered by the character of Aedes Mosquito's commander exemplifies the fear-based appeal. This theme is supplemented by two images that symbolise death (Fig. 4), a slogan "Tak ada harapan lagi" or "There is no longer hope," and suspense background music that plays from the beginning to the completion of the presentation. Overall, the animated PSA was successful in instilling anxiety by provoking occurrences that could affect humans if they disregard public health and safety issues.

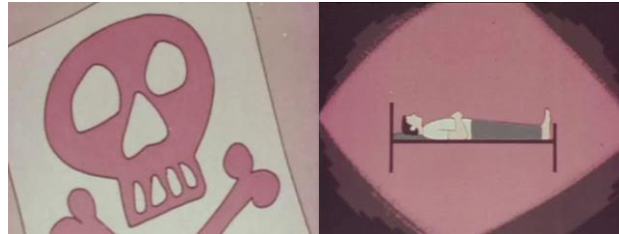


Figure 4. The skull head and a dying man.
(Source: Filem Negara Malaysia)

Conclusion

As previously discussed in this article, FNM's animated PSA *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) was made possible by a variety of factors, including creative storytelling that followed a three-act format with a Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution, as well as artists' impressions, exaggerated cartoon characters, fear-based appeal, and comical emotions to improve the attraction. Another reason is that the story introduces the binary opposition notion, which depicts the outcome of a conflict between two animated creatures, the Aedes mosquito (enemy) and the larvicide (hero). Despite its repetitive and basic content, *Nyamuk Aedes* (1978) successfully informed the public about the Aedes Mosquito's potential harm. In this sense, it not only communicates critical public health and safety issues, but it may also be regarded as a historical piece that contributed to nation-building.

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