

Globalization, Re-Discovery of the Malay 'Local,' and Popular TV Fiction through Audience Narratives

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of TV fiction can be partly explained by TV producers attuning their products to draw audience's attention. Narratives of love dominate the plots and almost always the good is pitted against the evil, rich against the poor - ultimately the good always wins. The formula may be clichéd, but in places where news of war, terrorism, diseases, violence, and conflicts usually prevail, respite from tumultuous realities of the world can often be found in popular TV fiction. Here, we study three popular Malay TV fiction, Julia, On Dhia, and Adam & Hawa to examine how TV fiction viewers relate to them through personal narratives and focus group interviews. Through their voices, we reveal that despite TV fiction viewers' constant preoccupation with Western-imposed globalization, the TV fiction set against the backdrop of globalization can encourage the viewers to re-route their ways to re-discover their imaginary 'good old days' that are often dismissed, neglected or forgotten.

Keywords: Malay 'local'; re-discovery; TV fiction; popular culture; postcolonial literature

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary global risks, for instance, violence, wars, and conflicts might have led to the questioning of the vulnerability of citizens both at the individual and collective levels. The series of racially-motivated attacks and confrontations between South Asian young immigrants and Whites in United Kingdom, for example, have motivated scholars to examine such social and cultural ambivalence from historical and cultural lenses (Kraidy 2002, Shim 2006, Shome and Hegde 2002). In Malaysia, 4.5 million individuals aged 15 to 25 years old are at-risk, with at least 500, 000 individuals admitted to have been involved in violence and crimes (Johan 2014, Samsudin 2010), while Malaysians at work and schools have each reported a jump from 542 cases in 2013 to 2,011 reports in 2014, whose delinquency includes, but are not limited to homicides, rape, theft, felony, and (aggravated) battery (Government Transformation Program 2014, Johan 2014). In sum, school students are largely exposed to crimes as staggering 1,632 cases are filed in 2014 as opposed to 1,042 in 2013 (Government Transformation Program 2014, Johan 2014). While not unanimous, statistics generally supported concerns; institutions and government now seek top-down interventions and strategies. Early detection, prison improvement programs, intensified arrests, increased court trials, improved psychological centers, and global violence prevention (World Health

Organization 2015) have resulted in the decline of street-related crimes (39.7% drop) and reduced public perception on crimes (52.8% public satisfaction) (Government Transformation Program 2014, Ministry of Home Affairs 2015, Samsudin 2010).

Despite the nuanced reading of these intervention strategies against a world of betrayal, strife-torn, filled with chaotic social and cultural unrests, what is missing from these issues was and is a discussion of the ways in which individuals exploit and seek respite from harsh realities of life, frequently captured in non-institutionalised, everyday experiences. One particularly feasible way of doing so is through examining television (hereafter, TV) fiction and its audience. This article aims at addressing this issue pertaining to TV viewers, with the objective of studying the ways in which they actively interrogate familiar themes such as nation and cultural identity in relation to particular social and cultural relationships and interactions with which they identify on TV fiction. The key to examining this aspect, as we argue, lies in an investigation of TV fiction viewers' voices to determine the ways in which they localise and navigate their identity to Malay contexts using cultural hybridity. The term "cultural hybridity" is often used to speak of globalisation and most importantly, postcolonial contexts. We wish to draw on this term and recontextualise and expand its employment to incorporate and explore the cleavages of re-localisation of Malay cultural identity among TV fiction viewers, that by virtue of their constant engagement with Western imposed modernization, possess an identity that for the most part, indexes to localised contexts. Because it adds to the contemporary debates, this study shows some of the many ways TV fiction industries in Malaysia deny the deep-seated misconceptions about the 'all-Western,' 'all-sinful' TV fiction by some critics (Bidin 2003, Rahman 2007, Siti 2013, Teoh 2007, Zunaidah 2006). In addition, this study may present interesting insights to contemporary inquiry as it will demonstrate how being modern and Malay can be seen as perpetuating in one way or another, a tension that co-exists. Specifically, on one level, one can undeniably surmise and react to issues that transgress globalised borders of culture and religion through distinct controversial, taboo, lewdness and sin-related issues manifested in TV fiction (Ruzy 2011). On another level, however, one identifies the TV series with the familiar, localised markers, referencing Malay 'local' and its associated conceptions.

We will firstly discuss the ways in which cultural hybridity is relevant to our discussion, pushing the boundaries of global issues and Malay cultural identities. It takes attention to examining how Malayness is associated with global and modern TV fiction, taking into account previous insights on the involvement of TV fiction viewers on these conundrums. It then shifts its trajectory to elaborate two issues, forgiveness and repentance. The motivation to examine these two notions is firstly because both our participants' focus group interviews and personal narratives have orchestrated the preponderance and emerging microcosms of forgiveness and repentance as constantly recurring, circulating, and dominant. Secondly, because of such recurrence of forgiveness and repentance, we press these issues further to support our contention in bringing readings describing TV fiction viewers' experience with the TV series that permit them to make connections with their familiar, local, cultural grounds. By doing so, we realign TV fiction, re-discovery of the Malay 'local', and global risks in the form of participants' voices as the ensuing discussion will reveal.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY, GLOBALISATION, AND RE-DISCOVERY OF MALAY 'LOCAL'

Before we get into discussion of cultural hybridity, we would first like to dwell on the notion of "globalisation," which is often used in three ways. The first approach signifies globalisation as the entity in which cultural imperialism has developed (Shim 2006). While

this strand may have probably evolved from America, this approach is considered as de-emphasising national and (local) cultural identities (Hewitt 2014). This approach, while being used variably throughout wide political settings, is considered a one-way direction of a Western idea resulting in the increased plurality of the local that leads to the proliferation of “cultural proximity” (Straubhaar 2007). In the second vein, globalisation lends credence to the outcome of globalisation projects (Caselli 2013, Giddens 1991). Centered on the integration and accentuation of modernities, this idea pushes the boundaries of the local and global because “the increasing traffic between cultures that the globalisation process brings suggests that the dissolution of the link between culture and place is accompanied by an intermingling of these disembedded cultural practice, producing new complex hybrid forms of culture” (Tomlinson 1999, p. 141).

Thirdly and what is argued as the thrust of this study is cultural hybridity of globalisation that signifies power distribution between the periphery and center from the viewpoint of postcoloniality (Featherstone 1995, Kraidy 2002, Kusno 1998, Shim 2006, Shome and Hegde 2002, Srivastava 1996, Yeoh 2001). In this sense, it maintains that the complex relations between being local and global may result in one way or another, forms of re-localisation, resisting the global forces. Specifically, although individuals are prone to modern and western elements (Cho 2010, Maznah 2008, 2011, Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy and Raihanah 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, Samsudin and Latiffah 2011, Shahizah 2012, Siti Zanariah 2011), globalisation, to a certain extent, encourages individuals to re-discover their local, that they may “have forgotten in their drive towards Western-imposed modernisation during the past decades” (Shim 2006, p. 27). In Asia, examples include young individuals in China, India, Talibans in Afghanistan or those who are involved in the recent North Sulu Borneo dispute over (home) (host) land that exist in the boundaries of the Philippines and Malaysia (Campbell 2013, Heng 2013, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015) who actively recall the return to the imaginary good old days, revisiting and strengthening their cultural roots. In the local Malay scene, the scholarship of, among many others, Hussin (1993), Liow (2009), Peletz (2005), and Weiss (2004) offers insights into broader economic and political contexts within which Malayness is elaborated. However, how do we explain the intermingling between cultural hybridity and TV fiction in Malaysia, given the recent economic, social and cultural uncertainties, risks, and chaos?

This article argues that, as TV fiction viewers engage with the narratives exchanges of *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa* within the spaces of globalisation, these TV fiction invariably entails a regress to local customs and culture in particular to Malay *adat* (customs) as demonstrated in their verbal and written responses. From watching, reflecting, resisting, and analysing issues in TV fiction, this notion of re-discovery of Malay ‘local’ is also applicable to the context of TV fiction viewers, especially in their consumption of popular culture within the shifting, interchangeable, and overlapping notion of globalisation and postcoloniality. In this sense, postcoloniality functions as the rhetorical device that not only pushes the boundary of knowledge, but also unlocks the convergence of nation, globalisation, and cultural identity. In exploring the narratives of TV fiction viewers, such richness of voices and reflections provide a “source of cultural knowledge” that “can be quite usefully utilised to excavate the plurality of voices in ways that can tell us how the ‘encasement’ of the Malay” TV fiction viewers has constructed their routes to re-localising their cultural identity (Maznah 2008, p. 297). In turn, we do not only acknowledge the Malay imaginary of globalisation, we have also attempted to bridge a gap between what is shown in *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa* and what the TV fiction viewers reflect, staging “a representation in which a postcolonial nation forms a dialogue with its colonial past” (Kusno 1998, p. 551). The endorsement of such postcoloniality made evident in TV fiction viewers’ narrative suggests the “enterprise” of promoting local pride, while “finding a balance” (Yeoh 2001, p.

458) within the spaces of globalisation that seek to reframe and reconsider hybridity among the TV fiction viewers.

However, critics like McLeod (2000) aver that the limitation with this narration on cultural hybridity is mostly concerned with “Does the agency for resistance” among TV fiction viewers “derive from the acts of representation by those from the nation’s margin, or is it found mystically within the nation itself?” (McLeod 2000, p. 120). Or in other words, the critiques against the use of hybridity to study TV fiction viewers audience is related to the failure to underscore whether the source of resistance derives from private or public constructs. Other critics argue that there is no clear historical and political influence when theory of hybridity is being employed (Kraidy 2005, p. 6). But there is a difference between understanding hybridity as an influence and as a point of elaboration. As Drichel (2008) puts it, it is used to interrogate forgotten spaces among TV fiction viewers “through continuous reiterations” (p. 605). In our study, we aim to reveal that TV fiction viewers who are involved in the direct consumption of popular TV fiction ‘business,’ for the most part, reclaim Malayness. Putting it differently, by using hybridity to study TV fiction viewers involved in the fundamental transaction of TV fiction, we argue that TV fiction viewers are able to relinquish and re-discover their Malay ‘local.’

RE-DISCOVERY OF THE MALAY 'LOCAL' AND TV FICTION

Many see the possibility of such adjustments of regressing to familiar, local contexts surrounding TV fiction as largely due to the 'dialogue' between the local and global. The Malay local, with reference to Malay *adat* (customs), suggests an interaction which can be viewed from the perspectives of cognitive, religion, and cultural tradition. Taib (1974), for example, has suggested that Malay *adat* beliefs and values situate between Islamic tradition and traditional beliefs and scientific inquiry. Although he cautions that the readings of these three nexus do not suggest easy understanding, a number of pointers can be accentuated concerning Malayness. Malays, firstly, want to live in harmony (Provencher 1972). This harmonious conduct which is commonly associated with the notion of *akal/budi* (emotion-reason relationships) is grounded in the ideas of compromise, respect, cooperation, tolerance, modesty, patience, forgiveness, and repentance (Bakri 2013, Khoo 2007, Hasan 2009, Norman 2011, Ruzy and Shahizah 2010, Wan Norhasniah 2010).

Secondly, Malay cultural identities exist within the realms of religion (Islam) (AB 2013, Bakri 2013, Hussain 2010, Mahathir 1970, Maznah 2011, Milner 2008, Taib 1974, Wan Norhasniah 2010). While religion foregrounds readings on Malayness, two specific concepts, forgiveness and repentance, which are intertwined in the greater circle of Malay *adat*-Islamic values, are central to this study. Firstly, while forming one aspect of *budi*-Islam, forgiveness is integrated into the Malay-Muslims’ beliefs and directed towards the concept of Oneness-of-God (Hussain 2010, Niewkerk 2008, Wan Norhasniah 2010). Forgiveness is largely inherent in discussions pertaining to Malay local perhaps because “the upmost aim is to uphold peace and harmony in their relationship” (Zainal 1995, p. 15) that intensifies the need to be “sensitive human beings that are gentle in nature” (Zainal 1995, p. 4) and evolves to minimise the involvement of Malays in war or violence (Milner 2008).

Thirdly, repentance, which derives from the Islamic principles, holds that even Malays standing below God irrespective of their statuses, roles, and gender, are equal (Izutsu 2002, Niewkerk 2008, Ryan 2014). Premised on the observation that almost everyone can relate to the notions of sinfulness and forgetfulness, repentance is the ultimate forgiveness asked from God. Ethics, in Islam, furnishes Malays with being accountable for their actions, positioned within two spectrums. On the one hand, God’s infinite goodness posits mercy,

forgiveness, and benevolence, and on the other hand, His wrath and severe, strict, and unrelenting justice which stand in binary (Jones 1999, Niewkerk 2008, Pieri, Woodward, Yahya, Hassan and Rohmaniyah 2014, Winstedt 1938). In the chronicles of Malay historical texts, illustrations of repentance can be seen. The extract below, from *Hikayat Pasai* (Chronicle of Pasai) can demonstrate the centrality of repentance in Malay *adat*: *Maka dilihat oleh Sultan Mahmud Shah seperti berita orang itu tiada sunggoh: maka baginda pun terlalu mashghul dan menyesal oleh membunuh Bendahara Seri Maharaja tiada dengan pereksa* (He prostrated with grief and repented bitterly that he had put Bendahara Sri Maharaja to death without due inquiry) (Winstedt 1938, p. 187). This extract documents the repentance of Sultan Mahmud Shah, (who ruled Sultanate of Malacca from 1446 through 1511 [Jones 1999]) after he realizes that he wrongfully puts *Bendahara Seri Maharaja* (equivalent to a European's vizier) and his family members to death, inviting a reading that, to a certain extent, allows a Malay local to rediscover his or her moral and cultural fragments.

However, the examples above are merely a fraction of the ways in which *adat*-Islamic precepts, through forgiveness and repentance, evolve to signify Malay spaces. One may discover similar trajectory of such re-discovering of Malay 'local' as they engage in popular, modern TV series. Yet, one needs to be conscious of the fact that although many Malay TV fiction are modern, diverse, multilingual, multicultural, and to a certain degree, liberal, some viewers watching these TV fiction still navigate their ways around strengthening their cultural and local identities. Another key factor to examining these issues is to explore Malaysia's mediascape. How are TV fiction viewers positioned with respect to engagement of globalization and the recall to their frequently forgotten, local pasts while watching TV series? The following discussion attempts to engage this issue by using Malaysia as an example and focusing specifically on the ways in which these viewers demonstrate their re-routing to Malay 'local.'

'STRATEGIZING' RE-DISCOVERY OF THE MALAY 'LOCAL:' LOCATING TV FICTION VIEWERS IN MALAYSIA'S MEDIASCAPE

The growth of modern TV works may presents into the transplantation of globalisation and Malay cultural identities through which different values and elements are subsequently meshed and embedded within the Malaysia mediascape. In Malaysia, *1Malaysia*, one of "sociopolitical arrangement" vehicles (Kraidy 2002, p. 317) upon which cultural globalisation is premised, renders it possible to delineate why TV fiction in Malaysia encompasses globalisation. Politically, Malaysia's government arranges five-layer gatekeepers of mediascape who govern, arrange, and negotiate against complex local, cultural fabrics with the many facets of modern, global elements, which we will show. Thus, to define globalisation as displayed in TV fiction can be difficult, but the most consistent thread commonly found linking globalisation to TV fiction is that it expands viewers' "imagination beyond the constraints of personal lives, physical locales and cultural boundaries" (Syed 2011, p. 83), orchestrating sense of freedom of choice, "upward mobility, and unhindered interaction" (Syed 2011, p. 85). The basic tenet foregrounding globalisation is consumer culture, encouraging viewers to change their lives, which most often progressed through TV's direct advertising in addition to "showing urban lifestyles, setting, and modern cityscape" (Mattelart 1990, p.47). Most importantly, luxurious lifestyles serve as a backdrop against which TV fiction is made available for viewers, enabling viewers to "indulge in the consumer culture freely available in the market" (Syed 2011, p. 85) and perpetrating "spectacular images of foreign and glamorous settings" (Geraghty 1991, p. 127). By virtue of globalisation, issues manifested in TV fiction are topical issues that figure as "repertoires of

images and social discourses that influence popular perception of larger issues,” consumed by TV fiction viewers to “be current and contemporary” (Syed 2011, p. 95), probably leading them to feel connected with the larger, global society in which they live. From scenes that show infidelity to poor professional morality, directness, exorcism, wars, violence, alcoholism, cohabitation, binge drinking, fornication and lewdness, to name a few, these have led to diverse manifestations of issues, in one sense a global dramatisation of globalisation.

However, also existing side-by side with the many TV programs that have encountered and embraced globalisation as a result of liberalization of mediascape consumed by TV fiction viewers is the increased observance by a number of elites. This mandate, which encompasses regulation, promotion, and legalization (Mohd Muzhafar 2015, Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy and Raihanah 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015b, 2015c, 2016) likens to TV series that focus more on the agency of Malayness that, according to these scholars, politicians, and directors, give purpose and direction to TV fiction viewers' local, cultural identity. Specifically, they call attention to the ways in which the content in Malay TV fiction are to re-focus to reflect more issues that engage “Malay (ethnic) agenda” (Barr and Govindasamy 2010, p. 294), that simultaneously signify “Islamic Arabian glorious past” (Hoffstaedter 2011, p. 106). The mandate, under the microscopic guidance and patronage of some local leaders and media senior officials accompanied by the hands of lawmakers, set up a number of ‘gatekeepers’ to meet the requirements of this mission of re-calling the viewers’ attention to their cultural routes. Siti Zanariah (2011) references the gatekeepers to five layers of forces at work: the King, ministers, mass media laws, governmental agencies, and council for media-screening. The tasks, among others, are to enable local TV industries to orient themselves to “30 percent participation” of Malays in the proliferation “of world, commercial, and industrial practices” (Foo 2004, p. 29) while at the same time adhering to the framework of *Rukunegara* (National Ideology) which is oriented towards fostering national and racial unity and harmony deeply rooted in the beliefs of a united and democratic nation (Foo 2004, Malaysia *Merdeka* 2013).

It has also been noted that as this re-call to local cultural roots among TV fiction viewers grows strong, many TV industries are also compelled to realign the viewers with their familiar, local values and identity so that the viewers' integration of local aspects are balanced, rather than focusing only on elements of the foreign, Western culture. The re-enactment of cultural and religious TV stations and proliferation of Asian popular programs, for example, Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese TV fiction, have interwoven TV fiction viewers into the receptacle of some recognisable, local discourses. These resistance and conformation to government’s principles by TV fiction industries may scaffold, facilitate, and empower our understanding surrounding the content broadcast to popular TV fiction, and its viewers, as we will demonstrate.

CURRENT STUDY: VOICES FROM TV FICTION VIEWERS

This section provides information concerning methods used in our study regarding TV fiction viewers who re-discover their Malay ‘local’ surrounding contemporary cultural, social, modern ambivalence. Specifically, we ask: What can be learned regarding TV fiction viewers' regress to familiar, local Malay fragments set against the backdrop of contemporary global risks and chaos? Before addressing these issues, we explain our ways of gathering their responses. Particularly, we begin by describing the participants involved in this study before elaborating on the ways of how these methods inform us about how the participants deal with globalisation and their re-discovering the Malay ‘local.’ After that, we provide a summary on *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa* before presenting our findings.

PARTICIPANTS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

In total, eighteen TV fiction viewers were invited to participate in the current study. The participants, whose age ranged from eighteen to fifty (mean age: 33 years old) placed in three different groups, were reported in this study. While it was assumed that certain demographic characteristics such as socio-economic backgrounds were central determinants of sociocultural identities, limitations of participants in the present study did not allow examinations of such correlations. Of these, some studied in order to complete their first professional certifications in a community college, while others did so as part of retiring requirement in the military forces. It was important to include a broad spectrum of backgrounds among participants for this analysis because it provided platform for experiences to be shared and opinions to be expressed. Despite the fact that we were fully aware of other sampling framework, we chose purposive and snowball procedures to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling helped in this study because it established a “process whereby a group of subjects is chosen as respondents because they have certain characteristics” (Piaw 2012, p. 243). In addition, due to the fact that not all participants watched TV fiction and, similarly, not all Malaysians did so too (Ruzy et al. 2013), other methods may be limited in a sense that they could not capture, include, and exclude participants who watched the TV series highlighted in this study. In occasions in which purposive sampling was not possible, snowball framework was used. By using snowball technique, selected respondents suggested other respondents who were able to corroborate on issues as manifested in *Adam & Hawa*, *Julia*, and *On Dhia*.

However, doing a qualitative study resembling the current project was not easy and difficulties were inevitable along our ways of searching for participants. The fact that either some participants declined our verbal invitations, ignored our emails, or simply did not respond to our contact boards posted at local residential councils put our project behind schedule. Nevertheless, the subsequent repeated ringing telephones, including numerous emails and text messages meant that other participants were still interested. In addition, with the help of local informants and our (limited) background knowledge of geographical locations, we were finally able to reach and contact participants residing in the north and central Peninsular Malaysia.

PARTICIPANTS OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES

As with the focus groups discussed above, administering narratives to participants also posed some challenges. In our study, looking for participants to write a one-page, 1.5 spacing narrative at a given time in a specific location proved to be an arduous task. To a certain extent, constraints on time, location, and participants’ focus affected the timeline for this study. In addition to the inability to sound ‘local,’ we were forced to either wait for certain days or in occasions in which phone numbers were given, we failed to reach our desired contacts, despite consent and agreement established prior. Nevertheless, after inquiring further from a member of the local community, through purposive and snowball methods (Piaw 2012), we were able to gain access to sixty one participants who watched *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa*. Recruitment was done through a local community college in the north of Malaysia as well as a semi-urban residential council located in central Peninsular Malaysia after successful contacts through emails and phone calls. At the initial stages, we brought in one of the researchers’ mother to help enable some participants feel comfortable understanding the study and writing about their responses. In some other occasions, we brought in local towners to ironize language complexities. Out of sixty one, fifty personal narratives were taken for analysis, given the appropriate response by the viewers. Eleven were removed due to reasons that included, but were not limited to, invalid or irrelevant

responses or no attempt at all. Member checks, which the ensuing discussions will show, were also used to ensure the corpus sought was appropriate for this study.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Having elaborated on the participants, the following description focuses on the ways of how we gathered our findings for this study. This study deployed semi-structured methodology of interviewing which helped ensure sensitivity to the language of the participants and how they adjusted to the topic of the research (Fossey et al. 2002), connecting what they find important in TV fiction to the research in question. Designed to elicit information in an informal fashion, the focus group interview questions were divided into three: a) Nature of viewership practices, b) TV fiction and re-construction of Malay identities, c) TV fiction and their guiding factors. By focusing on the re-discovery of the Malay ‘local,’ these questions which were adapted from Syed (2011a) and Ruzy et al. (2013) centered on the following items; ‘By taking examples from *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa*, why do you watch Malay dramas?’ ‘What aspects of *adat* (customs) do you observe?’ ‘What aspects of religion do you observe?’ ‘What aspects of language do you observe?’ The rationale for adapting these questions was to ensure their validity (Maxwell 2005). By nature of focus group interviews, guiding questions were adapted and prepared but the flow of discussion depended upon the interaction of the subjects. This method allowed for flexibility as “this flexibility takes control of the uniqueness of the specific case and the emergence of new theory” (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 539).

In conducting focus group and individual interviews, there was a set of protocols followed. The interviewees were firstly briefed on the upcoming interview and consent sheet was administered. When they were clear and had no questions, interviewees signed the consent form, indicating their understanding. Other set of protocols followed McNamara’s (2009) framework, although we were fully aware of other interviewing techniques. Specifically, McNamara’s (2009) suggestions on ways of choosing a setting, planning, explaining the interviews, and implementing follow-through questions, including other implementation aspects of interviews were observed. Finally, interviewees were informed that the interview would end in less than 40 to 45 minutes and that they were allowed to start, pause, and finish at their convenience.

Interpreting interviews, however, was not completed in a one-directional approach. Instead, it saw participants’ responses as a dynamic, fluidic process as interpretation made by participants was not easily singled out (Alasuutari 1999, p. 4). Therefore, transcripts were re-read for comprehension checks. While using Alasuutari’s (1999) approach for analysing focus groups, such approach argued that interpretation process had to be studied in relation to multi-disciplinary contexts that include, but were not limited to, politics, religions and most importantly, culture, signaling the need to extract passages (Alasuutari 1999, Siwale 2015). These passages emerged by way of phrases, expressions, or ideas voiced out by participants (Kvale 2007) who, in this context, were informed of their ways of re-discovering the Malay ‘local’. Subsequently, these passages formed codes and themes that in one way or another helped us to interpret these interviews.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings of the interviews and narratives for this study, member checks were employed (Creswell 2007, Piaw 2012, Stewart 1998). Member checks were conducted to minimise concept effect, an effect concerning the ways of how researchers could interpret data differently other than the ones endorsed by the participants (Piaw 2012). Two peer debriefers reviewed the results; while one peer checker holds a degree in mass communication, another holds a doctorate degree in adult education.

Both have been teaching in the areas of media, communication, and education for more than seven years and are familiar with studies involving media, identity, and audience responses.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURE FOR ADMINISTERING PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Having elaborated on focus group interviews, narrative writing triangulated the results. Narrative writing is essentially a focus on participants' stories, directed towards "his or her experiences" (Creswell 2007, p. 480). In this study, narrative writing presented accounts into describing how popular TV fiction shaped participants' 'local-ness.' Fifty of these were scrutinised. Through an open-ended (McNamara 2009), bilingual (Malay and English) question, the direction of the personal narrative read, 'How have the Malay dramas and the culture you observe helped or help to shape you as a Malay?' functioning as a useful interrogating step. As with the focus group interviews elaborated above, participants were first told of the direction of the study, including information surrounding consent and privacy. After explaining and answering some questions related to the mechanics of writing the narratives, the participants signed the consent form and again, McNamara's (2009) important techniques for administering personal narratives were observed. Participants were informed of the sixty minute duration to complete the narratives and over the course of their completing these narratives, the researchers were present to entertain any questions the participants might have. Once completed, they were thanked and narratives were collected.

After the participants wrote these stories, multiple readings (McNamara 2009) were conducted. We then re-wrote the story using the framework of Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2000). Their framework maintained that in order to retell, researchers identified the key elements of the narratives. This was performed by indicating [S] for settings, characters [C], actions [A], problem [P], and resolution [R]. While "settings" meant the landscape told by participants, "characters" represented the interaction between the participants and the issues they saw on TV. "Problem" and "action" were all stages of events that required viewers to discuss their reactions, connecting the past into the present. "Resolution" framed the turning point in light of what happened in the participants' stories.

ADAM & HAWA

Adam & Hawa introduces us to the main protagonists- Ain and Adam. After completing her secondary school examination, Ain works part-time for a kindergarten. While working at the kindergarten, Ain becomes acquainted with Adam Mukhriz but after seeing Adam's wild encounters with women in local bars, Ain does not take part in seeking Adam's attention. Instead, Ain continues to work. In one of the nights, Ain is unfortunate; Ain is caught in bed with Adam by the authorities and local towners. Shortly after, Ain is arrested for charges on close proximity and later forced to marry Adam. Ain further develops a sense of revenge for Adam, questioning Adam's silence the night she is taken to police. Years later, Ain still despises Adam and has difficult time accepting Adam as her husband and in the months that follow, Ain decides to pursue higher education, a dream she has kept for a long time. Separated by thousands of miles from Adam, Ain, however, starts to lose her affection towards Adam and distances herself afterwards. When Ain leaves to pursue college education, Adam repeatedly finds ways to look for Ain in Australia, but he is unsuccessful. Eventually, when Ain later goes for pilgrimage in Mecca, she accidentally meets Adam. After series of repentance, apologies, confrontations, and unpleasant verbal exchanges, Ain relents to Adam's wish of having his wife back.

ON DHIA

On Dhia introduces viewers to a tragic love entanglement involving Zikir, Rafie, Azmi, Melli, and Dhia. While Rafie secretly falls in love with Dhia, Dhia ignores Rafie and accepts Azmi's marriage proposal instead. Brokenhearted, Rafie deals with this rejection very poorly; Rafie starts socializing with the girls he meets at a bar at a local town nearby, a bar that Melli frequents. As Melli is envious of Dhia, Melli sets up a plan to tackle all the men Dhia dates, including Rafie. Rafie begins dancing, and later, Melli and Rafie get home and sleep in the same bed. After successfully capturing Rafie's attention, Melli furthers her second plan- to retain Azmi. This time she plans on having Azmi sleep with her, resulting in Azmi and Melli getting caught in bed unlawfully by the authorities and local town leaders. As Dhia's days of marriage with Azmi are approaching, Dhia discovers the news of Azmi's 'infidelity' but forgives Azmi for his conduct. Melli who gets pregnant months afterword, becomes more aggressive; she gate crashes Dhia's wedding and demands that Azmi be responsible for the baby she carries. After hours of verbal altercation and unpleasant encounters with Melli, Dhia gives up and asks that Melli be married off to Azmi instead. While having to give up her future with Azmi, Dhia is introduced to Zikir. Zikir quickly turns his attention and affection towards Dhia and immediately ties the knot with Dhia. However, months later, the relationship turns sour. Dhia's mother-in-law who regards Dhia as foolish and ignorant influences Zikir to either oust Dhia from his house or have Dhia enter into an agreement to a polygamous relationship with Zikir. Dhia ultimately chooses to enter into such agreement and Dhia's world, as expected, breaks into pieces. Later, after Zikir learns that his mother has resolved to using witchery to possess him into ill-treating Dhia, he leaves his mother and seeks Dhia for forgiveness. Shortly after, however, Dhia falls ill, diagnosed of an untreatable cancer. Before she dies and before *On Dhia* ends, Dhia blesses Zikir's future marriage engagement.

JULIA

In *Julia*, we are introduced to three central characters, Julia, Amir, and Azwan. After commencement, returning home poses more problems ending in discord and frustrations for both Amir and Julia. Tensions arise when Julia reunites with her parents, having to confront issues concerning marriage, career, and her in-laws. While her parents insist on marrying Julia to a prospective suitor they admire, Julia follows through with her decision to work and advance her career as an engineer. Amir, on the other hand, after not seeing Julia for months, decides to initiate conversations with and later marries Nurain who happens to be a florist at the place where he works. Upon hearing Azmir's marriage, Julia is left between returning to live with her parents and living alone. She chooses the latter and months later befriends and marries Azwan. But her marriage to Azwan does not last long. Her mother in-law, however, despises Julia and decides to use black magic against Julia. Azwan also physically abuses Julia, leading Julia to file for divorce. Acting as an accomplice to Julia's shattered marriage, Azwan's mother plays the role of a culprit, forcing Julia to move out of Kuala Lumpur to a place where Amir, Azwan, and her parents has no knowledge of. Eventually, Azwan and his mother regret their wrongdoings and apologise, and after forgiving Azwan and his mother, Julia leaves, packs her bag, and rides in a car to an unknown place.

RESULTS

Having sketched the above trajectory, our analysis has revealed that participants in our study indirectly identified plethora of issues and in particular highlighted relationship between journeying into different fragments of chaotic and unsettled modern, global realities and re-donning the robe of the Malay 'local.' Our study revealed that in engaging with global and chaotic, risky issues inherent in TV fiction such as lewdness, sins, and taboo, traditional and cultural aspects are viewed as central to their negotiation, which in one way or another, have come to be deeply embedded in the grounds of Malayness. The following section reports four of the major findings concluded in our study.

RETURNING 'HOME:' RE-DISCOVERING THE MALAY 'LOCAL'

We begin by reading Ahmad's reactions through the extract shown below:

Something macam Adam pergi ke kelab malam, minum arak dan menari. Although dia keluar malam dan minum arak, dipengakhiran Adam & Hawa, dia pergi Haji atau Umrah, lepas tu dia mintak ampun dan bertaubat. Dia dah buat rumah baru yang bersih lah kiranya, rumah lama dia tinggalkan.

Adam goes to nightclubs, dancing and sipping alcohol. However, when he goes out and drinks alcohol, at the end of the scene of *Adam & Hawa*, he goes for Hajj and Umra, repenting and seeking for forgiveness. He has probably made a new house, purified, as he leaves his previous home.

One of our respondents, Ahmad, learned how to craft when he was small. Born to a family of six, he is the youngest in his siblings. While working on a local community college certification, he watches *Adam & Hawa* as *Adam & Hawa* is his favorite TV fiction. The narrative above by Ahmad suggests his sensitivity towards the protagonists' moments of forgiveness and repentance, translating what he observes as a comfortable experience. By using words such as "new house" and "purified," the use of these phrases emphasizes the kinds of effects supporting the arrival of Malay subjects to a better place, pronounced Malay *adat* values. The participant perhaps, to a certain extent, addresses the protagonist experience (read: Adam) of repenting and rhetoric of purified (read: purification). In other words, although the participant elaborates Adam's experience of repenting from sins (read: sipping alcohol) that in one sense abets an idea of the proliferation of globalization, such action of repenting further purifies him.

On the broader level, we may see these insights working in tandem with Dahlia's (2014) study whose respondents echo similar response in observance of Malays' returning to their religious, local, and cultural spaces. In her research on the involvement of Malay women in popular culture scene, she interviews her Malay respondents on their reactions towards popular films. One of Dahlia's (2014, p.415) respondents has articulated her response this way, "Everyone has a past. My ex-husband and I...used to go to nightclubs. But I came back to Islam just in time." If we cross-examine the respondent in our study and Dahlia's (2014), we might see a line of thread. Notice my respondent's use of "made a new house" with Dahlia's respondents' of coming "back to Islam just in time;" they suggest a close relationship with repentance and *adat*-Islamic principles where "a new house" is consistent with 'Islam' and 'purified' (read: purification). These two parallel responses draw an understanding that may equate Islam as a symbol of purity where it surrenders good from evil (Hussain 2010, Izutsu 2002, Johns 1981), facilitating in the "recent calls for more research" on how such regress to 'localness' (in this case, returning to Malay 'local') is "critical" (Ryan 2014, p. 446). Such experience of re-localizing oneself to familiar grounds of cultural fragments, as narrated by Ahmad may suggest hybrid and "new complex forms of culture" (Tomlinson 1999, p. 141).

Another participant in our individual interview, Ena, is able to discern a number of points concerning God- and human relations. The following reactions highlight what she says:

To me, it is true if you can get information about to become closer to god, like Adam in Adam & Hawa...but it doesn't show just that. We must be able to follow what they do, putting modest outfit when in Mecca...when you put on modest outfit, and say good things about god, you are more calmer...(smiling)

To me, it is true if you can get information about becoming closer to God, like Adam in Adam & Hawa...but it doesn't show just that. We must be able to follow what they do, putting modest outfit when in Mecca...when you put on modest outfit and say good things about God, you feel calmer...(smiling)

Individual interview participant, Ena, has been a stay-at-home mother for almost 20 years. While baking at home and managing her boss's appointment at work, she also engages herself with the novel, *Adam & Hawa* to relieve stress. Watching *Adam & Hawa* as she bakes cookies, in addition, is something that she enjoys doing too. In this exchange, Ena is observant of the ways of how *Adam & Hawa* benefit her Malay self. Firstly, that watching *Adam & Hawa* can bring remedies to ironing ties with God is central to her articulation (read: you can get information about becoming closer to God). That watching *Adam & Hawa* serves as a reminder concerning *aurat* (nakedness) and sub-associations with Malay *adat* (read: we must be able to follow what they do) functions as the secondary point embedded in her narration. While surmising the 'goodness' in watching *Adam & Hawa*, the participant is seen as a moral and tradition observer, promoting, in one sense, the return to religious fragments that in some ways upgrade the Malay selves (read: you feel calmer). We exemplify the connection this participant attempts to link with what Johns (1981) and Izutsu (2002) contend regarding purity and Islam. On the one hand, this participant's narration may be geared towards acknowledging the central usefulness of religion. On the other hand, his experience dealing with *Adam & Hawa* is equated with psychological strength TV fiction brings to the fore (read: you feel calmer). Thus, by reading this elaboration, we are open to a plethora of narratives other than the ones we are taught to cherish.

The next example illustrates a focus group participant's reaction towards what he sees in *Adam & Hawa* on making stronger ties between a child and mother. Individual interview participant, Rosli, says the following:

Speaking of Adam & Hawa, just like our friend here says...when Ain goes to Haji and when she jumpa Adam kat situ...automatically macam it makes the bond between Ain dengan maknya stronger...this is what I want to show to my anak-anak. Mak Adam peluk Ain macam anak dia sendiri.

Speaking of *Adam & Hawa*, just like our friend here says, when...Ain goes to Haji and sees Adam there...automatically it seems like making the bond between Ain and his mother stronger...this is what I want to show to my children. Adam's mother hugs Ain like Ain is her own child.

Rosli, is a military officer, having served in Malaysia and Indonesia. When he is not working, he works out in what he calls, his mini-home gymnasium. At night, however, he watches *Adam & Hawa*. Here, by acknowledging the narratives of *Adam & Hawa* that intersect with *Haji* (pilgrimage), the participant is able to articulate a number of positive implications firstly through associating *Haji* with parenting styles (read: automatically it seems like making the bond between Ain and his mother stronger) and secondly leaning towards his own family members (read: this is what I want to show to my children), reflecting the usefulness of the scene in *Adam & Hawa*. Viewed this way, the participant perhaps wishes to be seen as a sayer and educator, straddling his views between religion and positive implications of being a repentant, suggesting "two or more" hybrid "strands that

intertwine” (Ryan, 2007, p.196). While scholars refer these readings to a symbol of purity that cleanses the soul (Hussain 2010; Wan Norhasniah 2010), another perspective leans towards generating greater awareness on the importance of *fard al-kifaya* (Hooker 2000, Kurzman 2005, Mustapha 2005). Central to being a Malay, *fard al-kifaya* pertains that to “improve the conditions of Muslims,” one must accentuate good deeds within their social and cultural spaces. These two ways imbue the ways of how questions of Malay cultural identities are played out with different trajectories and meaning, constructing some of the routes to clarity regarding repentance.

Our last TV fiction viewer, Mala, describes her experience dealing with TV fiction, *Julia*, seeing how a Malay subject’s experience can resemble a ‘catalogue,’ where lives can be ‘flipped’ from various tendencies of ‘evil,’ often violent chaos, to arriving at familiar, cultural, local roots. Mala has the following to say:

Remember Amir’s life from zaman sekolah ke zaman dia bernikah? His life is soooo like a catalogg, boleh susun, dari yang manis, yang buruk, dan yang elok...Amir bukan je duduk sama-sama dengan wanita lain masa dia stadi dan awal-awal dia kaki minum, lepas tu kita boleh switch kepada gambaran masa dia dah buat baik dan jadi imam.

Remember Amir’s life back in school and when he gets married? His life can be likened to a catalogue; we can arrange from sweet memories and transgressions to his good days...Back in the days when he studies, he cohabitates and drinks alcohol, then we can switch to the pictures where he gets it together and becomes an *imam* (leading prayers in mosque).

Mala, being a 37 year old stay-at-home mother, nurses her disabled child. While baking cookies to finance her disabled child’s treatment, she also watches *Julia*. In her reaction towards what she sees about Amir in *Julia*, she probably wishes to be seen as benefiting from the TV fiction, by integrating the ‘snapshots’ of dramatic episodes in *Julia* to reflect what it means growing up as a Malay in uncertain, sporadic and unpredictable global complications. Specifically, by equating Amir’s life Mala sees in *Julia* to a moving, mobile life ‘catalogue,’ Mala criticizes, imagines, and constructs different present and futures, where while involving oneself in a tumultuous, often dangerous environment (read: he cohabitates and drinks alcohol), one is able to move on by selecting various phases in lives. This sense of ‘catalogue’ Mala references illustrates how the daily encounters among family and Malay peoplehood in general can give an opportunity for TV viewers to inscribe certain meaning and connotations into these postcolonial (hybrid), globalized experiences (Bhabha 1994, Shim 2006, Young 2003). Mala’s voicing out her opinion is a reflexive comment of her encounter with *Julia*, and how the experience she goes through while watching *Julia* as a Malay subject allows her to re-fragment and re-organize her life to familiar freedoms and pleasant memories through returning to familiar ‘sounds’ of local routes through praying and forgiving. In addition, the ‘catalogue’ Mala describes is not always stable and cohesive; it is rather changing and dynamic, weaving from one ‘snapshot’ to the other. The fact that Amir’s life, as seen by Mala in *Julia*, is colored with socio-cultural complications is challenged by what we know about Amir in final glimpses of *Julia*; Amir transforms into a repentant (read: He gets it together and becomes an *imam*). These changes are present somewhat in a form where it allows TV viewers like Mala to flip through journeys of Amir’s re-discovering his local-ness in mere seconds, providing a sense that the narratives framed in TV fiction cut across space, people, and time.

Our study which discloses how TV viewers react to TV series, *Julia*, *On Dhia*, and *Adam & Hawa* exposes two agendas. Firstly, we see a clear desire of Malay project with greater emphasis in religion. While studying audience responses, we are furnished with the narratives that mark religious themes that include but are not limited to purification and cleansing of the soul which are demarcated by the concepts of good versus evil. Specifically, the narratives of the Malay subjects returning to Malay ‘local,’ vis-à-vis *adat*-Islamic values,

are seen as foreshadows in which they reinforce the sense of belonging and common spirituality. Bound by *adat*-Islamic (Malay customs/Islamic) principles, these voices and discussions show that by repenting, they demonstrate the ability to start a new leaf and ultimately devote and return to God. This brings us to the second point- the vulnerability of humanity (Malay subjects) and their dependence on God, irrespective of various social and cultural beliefs. While forgiveness permits the sense of being accountable for severe repercussions, repentance reclaims the fundamental *fardhu kifayah* (communal duties) (Niewkerk 2008) that seeks to strengthen and benefit social and cultural ties. In addition, while seeking for redemption of *dosa* (sins) in multiple domains: between husband and wife and between parent and children and among friends, this symbol amalgamates good and eliminates evil. We recall a TV fiction viewer in our study, Ahmad, who also notes that Malay subjects are bound for “a new house, purified” as they return to repentance and forgiveness, perhaps making them culturally transformed, employed to evoke a sense of re-discovering the Malay ‘local.’

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to elucidate some of the many ways audience reacts to popular TV fiction in times of sporadic, uncertain global risks. In this paper, we have shown that through the lens of cultural hybridity, we see that Malay moral currency is intensified. Firstly, it reveals the installment of peace and harmony that re-localises Malay subjects to leave behind negative, saddening, tragic life narratives. Secondly, it unveils a rendering of Malay subjects who assume full responsibilities for his or her actions, signifying accountability by forgiving and repenting. Its implications, as we have shown above, may establish a powerful cause for reminiscing ‘good pasts,’ inviting a reading that, to a certain extent, permits Malay subjects to relinquish their local and cultural fragments. As respondents observe the deviations from and convergence with *adat*-Islamic values through the notion of hybridity’s re-localisation (Shim 2006), these audience responses are examples of Malay subjects returning “to the imaginary old days, revisiting and strengthening cultural roots” (Shim 2006, p.27). Thus, while issues in popular Malay TV fiction display constant engagement with modernisation, these narratives of TV fiction could inspire audiences to regress, re-routing their ways to rediscover Malay ‘local’ that is often dismissed, neglected, or forgotten.

The re-discovery of Malay ‘local’ is one of the many stories that can be told concerning our experiences in which TV fiction viewers seek respite from harsh, often chaotic, social and cultural tensions that exist in various shape, contours, and consequences of a plethora of global risks. The time and the space in which these TV fiction are broadcast against the backdrop of *IMalaysia* is, arguably, modern, and to a certain extent, liberal. Drawing from theory of cultural hybridity, we highlight that, regardless of the prevailing notion of globalisation, this regress to the Malay ‘local,’ through precepts of forgiveness and repentance, governs the Malay cultural worldviews. Specifically, although the popular TV fiction set against the backdrop of globalisation can potentially disrupt and risk local sensitivities and norms, there seems to be a movement of allegiance to the receptacle of recognisable, local Malay tradition. Thus, while the convergence with Malay *adat* (custom) is considered as fleeing from the often competing, unruly, chaotic, and dangerous risks, this return to forgiveness and repentance often constitute the responses in youth’s constant, personal, decentralised, unofficial engagement with globalisation.

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