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Rediscovery of the Malay 'local:' youth and TV fiction in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that while TV fiction is coloured with narrative appeals, themes of love and binary opposition (good versus evil, love versus hate and rich against poor), TV producers continue to tailor their products to match audience's pleasure. Such formula may be clichéd, but in the world where news of war, terrorism, diseases and conflicts often make the headlines, respite from harsh realities of life can often be found through studying TV fiction. Drawing from theory of cultural hybridity, this article explores how youth relate to three popular Malay TV fiction, *On Dhia*, *Julia* and *Adam & Hawa* through interviews and personal narratives. Their voices have shown forms of rediscovery of the Malay 'local', providing glimpses into what it means to rediscover Malay local fragments in times of global risks and chaos, oscillating between a wide array of social and cultural uncertainties that continue to unfold for imagination.

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Introduction

Research by Bradford and Clark (2011) has shown that globalization shapes and nurtures youth in their engagement with adulthood. Emphasizing the many ways modernity and tradition intersect, Bradford and Clark (2011) argue that despite the prevailing forces of globalization that put youth at the centre of discussion,

aspects of tradition continue to shape lived experience. Globalization, rather than being totalizing and universal, is played out in particular, local and nuanced ways. Its scope and impact is contingent on a range of specific factors: history, culture, place, and so on. (p. 196)

While many trajectories can be delineated from Bradford and Clark's (2011) study on stigmatization and discrimination, many adolescents in various parts of the world also experience similar types of risks. In Malaysia, for instance, 4.5 million youth aged 15–25 years old are at-risk, with at least 500, 000 youth admitted to have been involved in violence and crimes (Johan, 2014; Samsudin, 2010, p. 24), including, but are not limited to homicides, rape, theft, felony, cyber-bullying and (aggravated) battery (Government Transformation Program, 2014; Hanif Suhairi, 2015; Johan, 2014). As a result, many governmental institutions have formulated approaches, interventions and strategies (Kuldas, Hashim, & Ismail, 2015). Early detection, prison improvement programmes, intensified arrests, increased court trials and improved psychological centres (*Care and Cure Clinics*) 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).

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Despite the nuanced reading of these intervention strategies against a world of betrayed, strife-torn, filled with chaotic social and cultural unrests, what is missing from these issues was and is a discussion of ways in which youth exploit and seek respite from harsh realities of life, frequently evidenced in non-institutionalized, everyday experiences. One feasible way of doing so is through examining television fiction (hereafter, TV fiction) and its audience. This article aims at exploring this issue regarding youth in Malaysia, with the focus of studying the ways in which youth 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, we argue, lies in the ways of how youth localize and navigate their identity to Malay contexts using cultural hybridity. The term, 'cultural hybridity,' is often used to speak of globalization and we wish to draw on this term to recontextualize and expand its employment to show how youth rediscover their Malay 'local.' 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 diverging' values by some critics (Bidin, 2003; Rahman, 2007; Siti, 2013; Teoh, 2007; Zunaidah, 2006). In addition, this study opens new inquiry to the contemporary issues as it will demonstrate that the issue of being modern and Malay at the same time can be seen as existing in a non-linear fashion, that in one way or another, results in a tension that co-exists. On one level, one can undeniably surmise and react to issues that transgress borders of culture and religion through distinct controversial, taboo and sin-related issues manifested in global TV fiction. On another level, however, one identifies the TV fiction with the familiar, localized markers and indexes in the reference to Malayness and its associated conceptions.

We will firstly describe how cultural hybridity is related to our discussion on youth, pushing the boundaries of the global and Malay local. It takes attention to discussing how Malayness is intertwined with global and modern TV fiction, taking into account existing insights on the involvement of youth on these issues. It then shifts its trajectory to elaborate on two issues, forgiveness and repentance, that encapsulate some of the many Malay 'local' aspects. The motivation to examine these two notions is firstly because both our participants' focus group interviews and personal narratives have demonstrated the preponderance and emerging microcosms of forgiveness and repentance as constantly recurring and dominant. Because of such recurrence and dominance, we press these issues further, describing youth's experience with the TV fiction that permit them to make connections with their Malay 'local.' Secondly, although previous recent readings by Chong (2005), Dahlia (2010, 2012), Hussin (1993), Liow (2009), Martinez (2004), Maznah (2008, 2011), Norman (2011), Peletz (2005), Rosya (2011), Rosya and Morris (2014), Ruzy and Shahizah (2010), Syed (2011a, 2011b, 2011c), Syed and Hamzah (2012), Syed and Runnel (2013), and Weiss (2004) have examined broadly on Malay traditions, aspects of forgiveness and repentance receive lack of attention. By examining these issues, we realign TV fiction and rediscovery of Malay 'local' by exploring youth's voices as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate.

Globalization, cultural hybridity and youth

Before we get into discussion of cultural hybridity, we would first like to dwell on the notion of 'globalization,' which is often used in three ways. The first approach signifies globalization as the entity in which cultural imperialism has developed (Shim, 2006). This approach, while being used in 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, globalization lends credence to the outcome of modernity projects (Giddens, 1991). Centred 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 globalization 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 globalization that signifies power distribution between the periphery and centre from the viewpoint of postcoloniality (Featherstone, 1995; Kraidy, 2002; Kusno, 1998; Shim, 2006; Shome & 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 rediscovery of Malay 'local,' resisting the global forces. Specifically, although Malaysian youth are prone to modern and Western elements (Cho, 2010; Maznah, 2008, 2011; Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy, & Raihanah, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Samsudin & Latiffah, 2011; Siti Zanariah, 2011), globalization, to a certain extent, encourages youth to rediscover their local, that they 'have forgotten in their drive towards Western-imposed modernization during the past decades' (Shim, 2006, p. 27). In Asia, examples include youth in China, India, Talibans in Afghanistan and youth involved in the recent North Sulu Borneo dispute over (home/host) land that exists in the boundaries of the Philippines and Malaysia (Campbell, 2013; Heng, 2013; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015) who actively recall the return to imaginary good old days, revisiting and strengthening their cultural roots. However, how has cultural hybridity of youth in Malaysia developed from the burgeoning industry of popular TV fiction when firstly introduced in the late 2000s onwards, given the recent political, cultural and social ambivalence?

Our article argues that, as youth engages with the narrative exchanges in *Julia, On Dhia* and *Adam & Hawa* within the spaces of modernity, these TV fiction invariably entail a regress to local customs and culture, in particular to Malay *adat* (customs), in their verbal and written responses. From watching, reflecting, resisting and analysing issues in TV fiction, this notion of rediscovery may also be applicable to the context of youth in Malaysia in their consumption of popular culture within the shifting, interchangeable and overlapping notion of cultural identity and globalization. In this sense, globalization serves as a backdrop against which the convergence of nation, modernity and cultural identity is made possible. In exploring the narratives of youth, such richness of voices and reflections provide a 'source of cultural knowledge' that 'can be quite usefully utilized to excavate the plurality of voices in ways that can tell us how the "encasement" of the Malay' youth has constructed their routes to rediscovering their cultural identity (Maznah, 2008, p. 297). Thus, the ways in which globalization is linked to youth in our study reflect an 'enterprise' of promoting local pride, while 'finding a balance' within the spaces of 'modernity' (Yeoh, 2001, p. 458) that seek to reframe and rethink hybridity among youth.

Our study, in addition, may also present examples to what Furlow (2009) argues as hybrid discourses for (re)constructing identity in Malaysia. While he observes that *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) traits (highly educated, self-confident, rational and tolerant Muslims), propelled by the former Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad (Maznah, 2011), are relevant to understanding Malayness, another competing variable surrounding identity project concerns *Asian Values*, that promote 'hard work, family, and community solidarity' (Furlow, 2009, p. 205). Specifically, although modern projects such as the growth in technology, urbanization and modernization colour the landscape of Malaysia, Malay youth are to conform to *Melayu Baru* and *Asian Values* concepts. In this paper, the voices by youth will demonstrate that some issues as seen on TV fiction, for instance, wallowing in alcohol, stand in stark contrast with repentance. Through these examples which we will show, they may extend the readings of cultural hybridity, globalization and Malayness as explained by Furlow (2009) and Maznah (2011).

Rediscovery of Malay 'local,' TV fiction and youth

Many see the possibility of such adjustments of refocusing to 'local' values and 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. Malay youth, firstly, want to live in harmony (Provencher, 1972). This harmonious conduct which is connected to the notion of Malay's *akal/budi* (emotion–reason relationships) is grounded in the ideas of compromise, respect, cooperation, tolerance, modesty, patience, forgiveness and repentance (Bakri, 2013; Hasan, 2009; Khoo, 2007; Norman, 2011; Ruzy & Shahizah, 2010; Wan Norhasniah, 2010). This politeness translates into a Malay maxim, *biar mati anak jangan mati adat* (let

the child die but not the custom) (Bakri, 2013; Sulaiman, 2013) which has been used throughout, suggesting the longevity of Malay *adat* through normalization.

Secondly, religion resides in the hearts of many Malays (Bakri, 2013; Hussain, 2010; Mahathir, 1970; Maznah, 2011; Milner, 2008; Sulaiman, 2013; 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* values, are central to this study. Firstly, while forming one aspect of *budi-Islam*, forgiveness is integrated into the Malay-Muslim beliefs and directed towards the concept of Oneness-of-God (Hussain, 2010; van Nieuwkerk, 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 minimize involvement of youth in war or violence (Milner, 2008).

Secondly, repentance, which derives from Islamic principles, holds that Malay youth, irrespective of their statuses, roles and gender, are equal (Hussain, 2010; Izutsu, 2002; Ryan, 2014; van Nieuwkerk, 2008). 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, furnish Malay youth 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 (Jones, 1999; Pieri, Woodward, Yahya, Hassan, & Rohmaniyah, 2014; Winstedt, 1938). This exemplifies the Malay scheme of things, that repentance and forgiveness of others' faults is a human virtue.

Thus, this notion of 're-discovery' of the Malay 'local' is distinct in its own verse, perhaps different from the works of Khoo's (2007) 'reclaiming' and Stevens's (1996) 'reconstituting and recombining'. Although these two scholars have explored the connection and integration between being liberal, urban, modern and being a Malay, our study, however, shows the 'movement' surrounding the Malay world; inasmuch as a Malay subject deviates from *adat*-Islamic values (for instance, alcoholism and cohabitation), irrespective of the kinds of engagement with globalization complexities s/he traverses, s/he will return to the familiar grounds of Malay-Muslim ideals (for example, forgiveness and repentance). It is this 'non-linear circulation' (diverging and converging with *adat*-Islamic values) that we will show that distinguishes itself from the two 'static' perspectives proposed by Khoo (2007) and Stevens (1996).

'Strategizing' the rediscovery of Malay 'local': locating youth in Malaysia's mediascape

The growth of modern TV works may present insights into the transplantation of modernity, Malay 'local' and globalization through which different values and elements are meshed and embedded within the Malaysia mediascape. In Malaysia, *1Malaysia*, one of the 'sociopolitical arrangement' vehicles (Kraidy, 2002, p. 317) upon which cultural globalization is premised, renders it possible to delineate why TV fiction in Malaysia encompasses modernity. Modernity as displayed in TV fiction can be defined in many ways, but the most consistent thread commonly found linking modernity to TV fiction is that it expands youth's 'imagination beyond the constraints of personal lives, physical locales and cultural boundaries' (Syed, 2011a, p. 83), orchestrating sense of freedom of choice, 'upward mobility, and unhindered interaction' (Syed, 2011a, p. 85). The basic tenet foregrounding modernity is consumer culture, encouraging youth to change their lives, 'showing urban lifestyles, setting, and modern cityscape' (Mattelart, 1990, p. 47). When studied in relation to TV fiction, modernity draws attention to 'ideal fashion and glamour for its young viewers, enhancing 'urban life and consumption' (Matsuda & Higashi, 2006, p. 19). Most importantly, luxurious lifestyles serve as a backdrop against which TV is made available for youth to 'indulge in the consumer culture freely available in the market' (Syed, 2011a, p. 85), including 'spectacular images of foreign and glamorous settings' (Geraghty, 1991, p. 127). By virtue of modernity, 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 youth to 'be current and contemporary'

(Syed, 2011a, p. 95), probably leading youth 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, these have led to diverse manifestations of issues, in one sense a global dramatization of modernity.

However, also existing side by side with the many TV programmes that have encountered and embraced modernity as a result of globalization of mediascape consumed by youth is the increased observance by a number of political elites. This mandate, which encompasses regulation, promotion and legalization (Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy, & Raihanah, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), can be likened to TV series that focus more on the agency of Malayness that, according to these scholars, politicians and directors, give purpose and direction to youth's local, cultural identity. Specifically, they call attention to the ways in which content in TV fiction is to refocus to reflect more issues that engage 'Malay (ethnic) agenda' (Barr & Govindasamy, 2010, p. 294), and simultaneously signify Islamic past (Hoffstaedter, 2011). The mandate, under the microscopic guidance and patronage of local leaders and media senior officials accompanied by the hands of lawmakers, sets up a number of 'gatekeepers' to meet the requirements of this mission of recalling youth's 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). It has also been noted that as this recall to Malay 'local' roots among the elites grows strong, many TV industries are also compelled to realign youth with their local, familiar values and identity so that youth integration of local aspects are balanced, rather than only on elements of foreign, Western culture.

Current study: voices from youth

This section provides information concerning methods used in our study regarding youth who shift their attention to TV fiction as a means to seek respite from contemporary cultural, social and modern chaos. Specifically, what reactions do these youth describe regarding their rediscovering the Malay 'local' as they watch TV fiction? What can be learned regarding this regress to Malay, familiar, local fragments, set against the backdrop of contemporary ambivalence? Before addressing these issues, we explain our ways of gathering youth's voices. In this section, we begin by describing the participants involved in this study before elaborating on the methods. At the end of this section, a summary of TV fiction (*Julia*, *On Dhia* and *Adam & Hawa*) is presented. By elaborating on the participants and process of gathering the results, we reveal how TV fiction and youth reactions overlap.

Participants of focus group interviews

In total, 18 youth were invited to participate in the current study. These participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 50 (mean age: 33 years old) placed in 3 different groups, were reported. 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. Nevertheless, the youth were avid TV fiction viewers, with the majority of these recruited through a local community college and its surrounding areas in the north of Malaysia. Of these, some studied in order to complete their first professional certifications, while others did so as part of the retiring requirement in the military forces. It was important to include a broad spectrum of backgrounds among Malay youth 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 youth for this study. Indeed, purposive sampling helped in this study because it accentuated a 'process whereby a group of subjects is chosen as respondents because they have certain characteristics' (Piaw, 2012, p. 243). However, in the events where purposive sampling

was not possible, snowball technique was used. Using snowball technique, selected respondents suggested other respondents who were able to corroborate on issues as manifested in TV fiction.

Participants of personal narratives

As with the focus groups discussed above, administering narratives to participants also posed some challenges. In our study, looking for youth to write a one-page, 1.5-spaced narrative at a given time in a specific location proved to be an arduous task. To a certain extent, constraints on time, location and youth's focus affected the timeline of this study. Through purposive and snowball methods, we were able to gain access to 61 youth who watched TV fiction. Recruitment was done through a local community college in the north of Malaysia as well as a semi-urban residential council located in central Malaysia after successful contacts through emails and phone calls. Out of 61, 50 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 procedure for conducting focus group interviews

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, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). 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 reconstruction of Malay identities and (c) TV fiction and their guiding factors. By focusing on the rediscovery of the Malay 'local,' these questions which were adapted from Syed (2011a) and Ruzy et al. (2013) centred 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. After no questions asked, 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. Interviewees were informed that the interview would end in less than 40–45 minutes and that they were allowed to start, pause and finish at their convenience.

Interpreting interviews in this study 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 reread 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, signalling the need to extract passages. These passages emerged by way of phrases, expressions or ideas voiced out by the participants (Kvale, 2007) who, in this context, directed their responses towards the notion of rediscovering the Malay 'local.'

Process and procedure for administering personal narratives

Having elaborated on focus group interviews, we gathered youth's voices through narrative writing. Narrative writing is essentially a focus on participants' story, directed towards 'his or her experiences' (Creswell, 2007, p. 480). In this study, narrative writing presented accounts into describing how Malay TV fiction shaped youth's 'local-ness.' Fifty of these were scrutinized. 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 60-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 rewrote 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 the light of what happened in the participants' stories.

Unfortunately, due to the settings of informal and semi-structured interview designs, studies by virtue of focus group interviews and personal narratives suffer from research difficulties, in particular reliability and validity. The shortcomings, as illustrated in any methods of scholarly scrutiny, lie in the failure of corpus to emerge in the forms of numerically quantifiable frequencies due to construct ambiguity, construct diffusions or the nature of construct in hand, which are usually not observable. Although these shortcomings ring true to any research, scholars, however, are positive that audience narratives and focus group interviews are important because they represent truth (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; McNamara, 2009; Riessman, 1993). Nevertheless, in order 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 minimize concept effect, an effect concerning the ways researchers interpreting differently other than the ones endorsed by the participants (Piaw, 2012). Putting it differently, this study employed member checks so that what was asked or mentioned by participants was not interpreted differently by the researchers. 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 the works in the intersection of media, identity and youth.

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 in Australia, Adam repeatedly finds ways to look for Ain in Sydney, but 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. Broken-hearted, 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 afterward, 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 have no knowledge. Eventually, Azwan and his mother regret their wrongdoings and apologize, 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 revealed that participants in our study indirectly identified plethora of issues and in particular highlighted the difficult relationship between journeying into different fragments of chaotic and unsettled realities and redonning the robe of the Malay 'local'. We focus on the ways of how youth in this study described their rediscovering the Malay 'local'.

'Home-bound:' rediscovery of the Malay 'local'

We begin by reading Jasmine's personal narrative through the extract shown below:

Macam diaorang sampai ke rumah baru, macam dah suci lah. Walau zaman moden, melayu patah balik ke rumah diadengan katil baru dan new carpet. Last-last, Adam & Hawa tu nangis jugak lah.

I see a way of life returning to a new house, purified. Though they live in times of modernity, the Malays return to their homes, with new furniture, new rugs, as seen on the final scenes of *Adam & Hawa*. I did cry, too.

Jasmine is a student at a local community college who studies for transfer courses to qualify for an associate degree. *Adam & Hawa* continues to inspire her to advance her career. While her background attempts at presenting her various life priorities, the narrative above suggests her sensitivity towards protagonists' moments of forgiveness and repentance, translating what she observes as a comfortable experience. By inserting 'new furniture' and 'new rugs,' the use of these phrases emphasizes the kinds of effects supporting the arrival of Malay subjects to a better place, pronounced Malay 'local' elements. To a certain extent, the participant perhaps addresses such protagonist experience (read: Adam) of repenting to rhetoric of *suci* (purification) in the light of modernity (read: *zaman moden*). Putting it differently, although the participant elaborates Adam's experience of repenting against the backdrop of modernity, such action further purifies him.

On the broader level, we see these insights working in tandem with Dahlia's (2014) study whose respondents echo similar response in observance of Malays' return to their local, cultural spaces. In her research on the involvement of Malay women in popular culture scene, she interviews her Malay respondents on their reactions towards films. One of the respondents articulates her reactions in the following way; 'Everyone has a past. My ex-husband and I ... used to go to nightclubs. But I came back to Islam just in time' (Dahlia, 2014, p. 415). Dahlia further links the respondent's reactions towards 'religiosity' in how the respondent perceives Malay religious values as 'informing strengths of character' (Dahlia, 2014, p. 414 & 415). If we cross-examine the respondent in our study and Dahlia's (2014), we might see a line of thread. Notice Jasmine's use of 'returning to a new house' with Dahlia's respondent's of 'came back to Islam just in time;' they suggest a close relationship between repentance and *adat*-Islamic principles where 'a new house' is seen as consistent with 'Islam' and *suci* (purity). These two parallel responses draw an understanding that equates Islam as a symbol of purity where it surrenders good from evil (Hussain, 2010; Izutsu, 2002; Johns, 1981), and that it may 'facilitate' in the 'recent calls for more research' on how such regress to 'localness' is 'critical' (Ryan, 2014, p. 446). It is, however, inconclusive to find out whether repentance and forgiveness will enhance the religiosity of these protagonists; nevertheless, the two respondents (read: ours and Dahlia's, 2014) have shed light on how they conceptualize their review of Malayness as seen on TV series.

However, while reading from personal narrative above represents the notion of *suci* (purification) and repentance, another interviewee, Syarifa, observes the invisibility of the forgiver:

Actually, Julia has gone far after she forgives the villain- Amir. I wish the series had shown how she lived her life after forgiving Azwan. The baby will, hopefully, not suffer. Where has she gone to?

Being a widow, Syarifa helps at a local mosque, cooking for nightly religious events or classes. While attending religious classes at night, she sees her friends who can support her emotionally on regular basis. In her response, while being motivated by Julia's absence in *Julia*, the reaction given by Syarifa seems to indicate her position as being critical about the meaning of forgiveness in the context of Malayness. By asserting that the protagonist's life is imperative to the Malay world, Syarifa is able to comment about the invisibility of the forgiver in the discourse of forgiveness, observing the detached

relations among the protagonists subsequently after forgiving. To revisit, Julia (in *Julia*) leaves after forgiving Azwan, Azwan's mother, Sophia and Amir. Such observation by Syarifa describes the potential of vanishing and moving away from the shadows of Azwan and Amir, a move that Banks (2001), Milner (2008) and Provencher (1972) believe will result in harmonious relationships, leaving behind any confrontations to avoid 'blood-shed' (Syed Husin, 1965, p. 118). In other words, Julia's conduct at the end of scenes in *Julia* reflecting her avoidance of further conflicts is seen to be consistent with Malay precept's standpoint on forgiveness, in which she closes 'an account of offense against God or any of His creation' (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2001, p. 21). This strategy of Julia disappearing from the knowledge of the public after forgiving Amir, Azwan, Azwan's mother and Sophia reflects her starting a new leaf, leaving behind unnecessary complications, returning and conforming to Malay 'local' concepts.

We are also reminded of another participant's reaction that centres on the return to local and familiar, cultural values. Such return to Malay 'local' which the ensuing participant observes is parallel to the discussion of how youth's cultural identity is not always 'static and stable that they must be considered as dynamic and flexible' (Johansson & Lalander, 2012, p. 1086). The participant, Mazlan, who works for a clothing store, views such return to Malayness in the following way:

Watching Malay TV dramas can present good values such as repentance from mistakes. As we are well aware, it is inevitable that Malay dramas have their bad sides such as drinking and going to the bar in certain stories but most of the stories will show that the Malay subjects return to religion.

Mazlan, whose primary occupation is business, juggles between his business and classes at a local community college. A father of five, his favourite TV fiction is *On Dhia*. Centred on the emerging theme of repentance in TV fiction, his reaction towards TV fiction underscores the journey Malay protagonists' experience which almost always intersects with religious, local spaces. His response suggests the pre-occupations of 'good values,' 'repent from mistakes,' 'bad side' and 'religion' and describes the experience Mazlan observes of returning to local, familiar values as cleansing and purifying (read: bad side). On one level, the respondent probably wishes his writing to be seen as consenting to this change, making a claim on the purifying element of religion to strip away drinking habits.

Looking more deeply in this narrative, we can associate his reading to what I have alluded earlier with respect to repentance. Repentance is one path a Malay takes to finding his own *fitrah* or spirituality. In a similar vein, Yasien (1999) says the following pertaining to repentance:

Within his spiritual nature lies the deep, universal moral intuition that human beings are creatures of God to be respected. A return to his soul or his spiritual nature will require of him to return to its sources of nourishment. He will then rediscover the origin of his moral intuitions, which is his innate spiritual nature or *fitrah*. By so doing he will come to know his Creator, for 'he who knows himself, knows his Lord.' (p. 6)

To address the relationship between the respondent's reaction and the reaction above, let us focus on the overlapping key words. While in the respondent's narrative we have found, 'his moral intuitions' and 'good values' to work simultaneously, 'return to his soul or his spiritual nature' and 'to its sources of nourishment' correspond to 'return to religion.' These words, while functioning as glue cementing the kinds of issues in his schemata and what he sees on TV, conjure up increasingly positive associations Malay subjects make with respect to-rediscovering themselves as members of morally spirited Malays. Thus, the connections of participants' views and what is manifested in TV fiction we have found here seem to operate in tandem, reinforcing certain ideology that unveils some of the processes in which youth employ to come towards an understanding of reconnecting themselves to more familiar, local discourses.

Finally, this idea of reintegrating the Malay 'local' flavours can also be seen in one of the focus group interviews. One TV fiction viewer, Lala, describes her experience dealing with TV series, *Julia*, seeing how a life as a Malay subject today resembles a 'catalogue,' where lives can be 'flipped' from various tendencies of 'evil,' often violent chaos to arriving at familiar, cultural, local roots. Lala has the following to say:

Remember Sophia changes dari zaman sekolah ke zaman rumahtangga? Hidup Sophia dah macam katalog dah, kita boleh pilih kod kehidupan yang kita ada ... Sophia dulu dia memang duduk serumah dengan yang lelaki lain

dan buat jahat kat Julia tetapi dia dah berubah, dah solat, dah selalu berbuat baik. Julia pulak last-last dia ampunkan lelaki dan perempuan yang dah buat salah kat dia.

Remember how Sophia's life has changed; from her school days to her marriage? Her life can be likened to a catalogue where she can choose her life's codes. Sophia used to live with her boyfriend and do nasty things to Julia but now Sophia has changed; she now prays and does good things. Julia, however, forgives men and women who have done wrong things to her.

Lala, being a 37-year-old stay-at home businesswoman, clerks for a private accounting firm. While watching *Julia*, she also indulges herself in watching *Adam & Hawa*. In her reaction towards what she sees in *Julia*, she probably wishes to be seen as benefiting from the TV fiction by culminating the 'snapshots' of dramatic episodes in *Julia* to reflect what it means growing up as a Malay in uncertain, sporadic and unpredictable global complications. If we revisit *Julia*, Sophia is envious towards Julia's success, both in Julia's personal and public spaces. Sophia gets very upset over Julia's employment right after college, including Julia's short marriage with Sophia's former lover, going behind Julia's back and telling unreal and unfounded allegations; how Julia has slept with men to get to Julia's position as the lead engineer at a renowned engineering firm in Malaysia. Julia, however, goes on with her life, forgiving Sophia before Sophia gets sick and bed-ridden.

By equating the lives of Malays Lala describes in *Julia* to a moving, mobile life 'catalogue,' Lala critiques, visualizes and constructs different presents and futures, where while involving oneself in a violent, often dangerous environment (read: Julia's encounter with Sophia in *Julia*), one is able to move on by selecting various phases in lives. This sense of 'catalogue' Lala cites demonstrates how the daily, often unconscious encounter among family and Malay peoplehood in general gives an opportunity for TV viewers to inscribe certain meaning and connotations into these global, hybrid experiences (Bhabha, 1994; Shim, 2006; Young, 2003). Lala'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-compartmentalize her lives to familiar freedoms and pleasant memories through returning to familiar 'sounds' of local routes through praying and forgiving. In addition, Lala's description of the 'catalogue' is not always stable, static and cohesive; it is rather changing, developing and dynamic where one can oscillate between one 'snapshot' and the other. The fact that Sophia's life, as witnessed by Lala in *Julia*, is surrounded by sociocultural complications is challenged by what we know about Sophia in final glimpses of *Julia*; Sophia transforms into a poised, mature and responsible adult in which Sophia apologizes to Julia of her mistakes and her baseless allegations against Julia (Julia is laid off due to these allegations). These changes (read: Sophia repeated apologies to Julia) are present somewhat in a form in which it allows TV viewers like Lala to flip through journeys of Sophia's rediscovering her 'local' quickly, providing a sense that the narratives framed in TV fiction traverse across spaces, people and time.

Developing the narratives of rediscovery of the Malay 'local'

The participants used in this study, however, cannot be said as prominently representative of specific Malay youth. Youth in our sample were only limited and no more likely to have hailed from the north and central Peninsular Malaysia. Some described their experiences in relation to Malay-ness, while others elaborated their reactions regarding principles of religion, yet some other respondents came from residential areas who described their perspectives of TV fiction by reintegrating the territory of familiar Malay/Muslim local, cultural fragments. Furthermore, variations of language use in interviews and personal narratives limited to only Malay and English may pose some limitations as we do not know whether such regress to familiar Malay cultural subjectivities can be generalized to Malay youth who speak three to four languages simultaneously. With these issues in mind, future large-scale research is needed, specifically determining whether such recalls to local cultural Malay elements progress in later life stages.

Conclusion

The rediscovery of Malay 'local' is yet another demonstration of our purpose to describe experiences in which youth seek respite from harsh, often chaotic, social and cultural tensions that exist in various nature, shapes, contours and consequences of a plethora of risks. Earlier in this essay, we set out to frame our study via the use of cultural hybridity, significant to study how the global and local elements are played out, by taking Malay TV fiction and their audience as examples. The time and the space in which these TV fiction are broadcast against the backdrop of *1Malaysia* are, arguably, modern, and to a certain extent, liberal. Thus, while previous studies on Malay TV series are linked to various issues of modern and vulnerabilities of cultural and social ambivalence, for instance, alcoholism and cohabitation (Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy, & Raihanah, 2014a, 2014b), this study has sought to indicate that there are movements here in the ways in which youth also reflect their ways of returning to familiar, local Malay elements. We are witness to the ways of how TV fiction provides spaces of new forms of transformation that, one way or another, constitute the responses in youth's personal, decentralized, unofficial continuous experience with Western-imposed modernization.

In this paper, we have suggested that while the TV fiction depicts Malay culture at risk due to global influences and trends precipitated by commercialization, the closures in each of the TV fiction, specifically underscoring the tenets of repentance and forgiveness, illustrate the agenda of bringing back the viewers to overarching Malay/Muslim precepts. These spaces on TV fiction provide the Malay subjects in our sample to imagine the Malay peoplehood in general with the encouragement and benefits they experience with *Julia*, *On Dhia* and *Adam & Hawa*. The reversion to local, social and cultural spaces here also places them in a strategic position. By bringing their voices, youth negotiate the array of social and cultural uncertainties that continue to unfold for imagination, forming different presents and futures and giving a particular shape and character into their lives. While the convergence with Malay 'local' is considered as escaping from the often competing, unruly, chaotic and dangerous risks, this return to forgiveness and repentance demonstrates, to use a youth's words, their arriving at a 'new' home. In this paper, we have provided somewhat limited and partial accounts of the many ways in which although the TV fiction themselves show various Malay worlds in complications, the youth's narratives demonstrate dynamic negotiations between risky behaviour and acceptance of traditional Malay norms.

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