# TELEVISION CONSUMPTION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITY AMONG FEMALE JAVANESE DESCENDANTS IN MALAYSIA

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# ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to explore television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia. This study began with the enquiries about how Malay women of Javanese descent interpret their ethnicity and how television texts influence their interpretation of Javanese-Malay identity. The Javanese descendants who have been granted Malaysian citizenship are considered as Malays, even though in Indonesia, Javanese and Malay are two distinct ethnic groups. They have pleasantly enjoyed the status and the privileges of the Malays while maintaining some semblance of Javanese customs and traditions. As members of audience, they are exposed to representative images of Indonesia—the origin of Javanese—in foreign news and imported Indonesian soap operas, and at the same time they also experience narratives of subjectivity through local television content. With the presence of these local and transnational images of identity, along with their persistence of retaining cultural connections to Javanese imagined communities, the Javanese descendants are in practice compliant with two contexts of identity construction. This qualitative study employed audience ethnography as the methodology in which the data were collected through one-on-one interviews and participant observation in the field. The fieldwork was conducted in *Kampung* Parit Tujuh Baroh in Selangor district of Sabak Bernam, involving twenty respondents. The findings revealed that television played a substantial role in providing discourses of identity for the Malay-Javanese women to derive the definition of preferred and guided identities. The notion of preferred and guided identities, which constituted the concept of interpretive identity practices, explained how the Malay-Javanese women expressed their sense of belonging to multiple cultural identities. Their understanding of cultural, religious, and political discourses in television dramas, realities, and news illustrated their identifications with

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Javanese diaspora and Malay society. On the one hand, the findings describing the hybrid cultural life of the community under study could serve as an academic contribution to the field of ethnic and racial studies in the South East Asian region. On the other hand, the findings pertaining to audience interpretation of television and the concept of interpretive identity practices would contribute to the body of knowledge in media and cultural studies.

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# ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini ialah untuk meneroka penontonan televisyen dan pembentukan identiti campuran dalam kalangan wanita keturunan Jawa di Malaysia. Kajian ini bermula dengan persoalan bagaimana wanita Melayu keturunan Jawa memahami etnik mereka dan bagaimana teks televisyen mempengaruhi pemahaman mereka tentang identiti Melayu-Jawa. Masyarakat keturunan Jawa yang telah mendapatkan status kewarganegaraan Malaysia dianggap sebagai Melayu, walaupun Jawa dan Melayu adalah dua kumpulan etnik yang berbeza di Indonesia. Mereka menikmati status dan hak-hak keistimewaan Melayu dan juga mempertahankan beberapa adat dan tradisi Jawa. Sebagai penonton, mereka terdedah kepada imej Indonesia—negara asal masyarakat Jawa—dalam berita luar negara dan drama rantaian Indonesia, serta naratif subjektiviti dalam kandungan televisyen tempatan. Dengan kewujudan imej identiti tempatan dan transnational ini, bersamaan dengan kegigihan mereka mempertahankan hubungan budaya dengan komuniti bayangan Jawa, dengan demikian, dapat dikatakan bahawa masyarakat keturunan Jawa secara amnya terlibat dalam dua konteks pembentukan identiti. Kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan metodologi etnografi khalayak di mana data dikumpul melalui temubual dan pemerhatian turut serta di lapangan. Kajian lapangan dilakukan di *Kampung* Parit Tujuh Baroh, daerah Sabak Bernam, Selangor dengan melibatkan dua puluh wanita. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan bahawa televisyen memainkan peranan penting dalam menyediakan wacana identiti bagi wanita keturunan Jawa untuk membentuk definisi identiti terpilih dan terpandu. Idea tentang identiti terpilih dan terpandu yang membentuk konsep amalan identiti interpretif ini menjelaskan bagaimana wanita Melayu-Jawa berkenaan menyatakan semangat kekitaan terhadap beberapa identiti budaya. Pemahaman mereka tentang wacana budaya, agama, dan politik dalam rancangan drama, realiti, dan berita menggambarkan identifikasi

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mereka dengan diaspora Jawa dan masyarakat Melayu. Pada satu sisi, dapatan yang menjelaskan kehidupan budaya campuran masyarakat yang dikaji dapat dianggap sumbangan akademik dalam bidang kajian etnik dan bangsa di serantau Asia Tenggara. Pada sisi lain, dapatan berkenaan pemahaman penonton dan konsep amalan identiti interpretif menyumbang kepada badan pengetahuan dalam pengajian media dan budaya.

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*Memayu hayuning bawana, ambrasta dur hangkara*

To live is to do good for the world and stop the evil

Javanese proverb

Kuala Lumpur, 2017

Lily El Ferawati binti Rofil

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## LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| *Abangan religion* | A variant of Islam in Java which still maintain syncretism |
| *Adat* | Customary laws |
| *Akak* | An honorific used to regard older sisters or older women in Malay society |
| *Aqiqah* | A practice in Islam that marks a celebration of having a newborn by slaughtering a sheep or two |
| ASTRO | Asian Satellite Television and Radio Organization, a prominent Malaysian subscribe-based television service |
| Audience ethnography | A methodological approach to study media audience/users in their natural setting, using in-depth interviews and participant observation as the methods of data collection |
| *Aurat* | Parts of human body that must be covered according to Islamic sharia laws |
| *Bahasa halus* | The Malaysian Javanese term for polite speech in Javanese language |
| *Bahasa Indonesia* | Indonesian language |
| *Bahasa Malaysia* | Malaysian language |
| *Baju kurung* | A Malay traditional attire which consists of loose top and bottom that covers the entire body from neck to ankle |
| Banal biculturalism | Switching identity positioning which illustrates that bicultural interactions become part of people's banal realities |
| *Bangsa* | A Malaysian term for race or nation |

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|---|---|
| *Bangsa serumpun* | Race-bounded nations |
| *Banjarese* | An ethnic group of Indonesian origin |
| *Barisan Nasional* | National Front, a coalition of right wing parties that rules Malaysia |
| *Barongan* | The Malaysian version of *Reog Ponorogo* |
| *Basa alus* | A group of polite speeches in Javanese language |
| *Batik* | An Indonesian-Malaysian term for patterned cloth |
| *Berita malam* | Primetime news |
| *Berita petang* | Afternoon news |
| *Bik* | Aunt; an honorific used to regard the sisters of parents in Javanese society |
| *Bomoh* | Shaman; someone who is believed to have skills in sorcery and folk medicine in Malay society |
| *Bumiputera* | Sons of the soil; an authority-defined group of citizens consisted of the Malay ethnic groups and indigenous tribes in Malaysia |
| *Cerita bandar* | Urban-centred television dramas |
| *Cerita Indonesia* | Indonesia-originated television dramas |
| *Cerita kampung* | Rural-centred television dramas |
| *Cerita Melayu* | Malay-themed television dramas and movies |
| *Cina peranakan* | Malacca Straits-born Chinese |
| Collective-regulatory engagement | Television viewing in which the viewers are mediated by the social structures that constitute them as a member of their social community |
| *Conventional Malayness* | Situations in which the significance of Islamic standards of values is considered in following Malay cultural norms |

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|---|---|
| Cultural appreciation | A watching competency by which the audience accept or appreciate the cultural elements depicted in television narratives as a means of identifications with self and collective identities |
| Cultural distanciation | A way of content engagement in which the audience use their cultural capital to negate or reject inappropriate presentations of identities |
| Culture-preferred construct | The ways the members of a diaspora community maintain their culture of origin in everyday lives to manifest a distinct form of ethnic identity |
| DAP | Democratic Action Party, a Chinese-dominated left wing party in Malaysia |
| *Gotong royong* | Mutual work; a Malay term for *rewang* (mutual help) |
| Hybrid ethnicity | Situations in which members of a society deal with two or more different contexts of the construction of ethnic identity |
| *Ibu* | Mother; madam; an honorific used to refer to a married, middle-aged woman in Javanese/Indonesian society |
| Imagined communities | A concept of nationalism that depicts a nation as a community where the members imagine themselves as part of the group |
| Interpretive identity practices | The interpretation of communal actions and shared values, stimulated by mediated images of identity, which enables the members of a community to articulate collective identities |
| *Jaga undi* | Vote enumerator |

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|---|---|
| *Jalur gemilang* | The name of Malaysian flag |
| *Jamu* | Traditionally-prepared herbal medicine that is popular among the natives in Southeast Asia |
| JKKK | *Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung*, the committee for village development and security |
| *Kafir* | An Arabic word to refer to non-Muslims |
| *Kampung* | Village |
| *Kariah* | Neighbourhood |
| *Kebaya* | A Javanese-styled blouse with body-hugging cutting |
| *Kejobos* | A different term of *rewang* (mutual work) |
| *Kenduri* | A Malay term for feast |
| *Krama* | A highest level of polite speech in Javanese language |
| *Kuda kepang* | Javanese-styled horse dance |
| *Leklekan* | A cultural practice of staying late at night to celebrate a big event in Javanese society |
| *Madya* | A middle level of polite speech in Javanese language |
| *Mak cik* | Aunt; an honorific used to regard the sisters of parents or middle-aged women in Malay society |
| *Marhaban* | A community-based club where a group of women learn and perform *selawat* or hymns about the Prophet Muhammad |
| *Mbah* | Grandmother; an honorific used to regard the mother and aunts of parents or old-aged women in Javanese society |
| MCA | Malaysian Chinese Association; a Chinese-based component party in *Barisan Nasional* |
| MIC | Malaysian Indian Congress; an Indian-based component |

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| | party in *Barisan Nasional* |
| *Mukim* | Sub-district |
| *Nasi ambeng* | A Javanese style of mixed rice |
| NEP | National Economic Policy; Malaysia's national policy on restructuring economic parity among the country's ethnic groups |
| *Ngoko* | The lowest level of speech style in Javanese language |
| *Nyai roro kidul* | The Queen of the South Sea; a Javanese folklore about a mystical queen who rules southern territories of Java Island |
| *Padang bulan* | The Moon Light; a Javanese folksong |
| *Pak sidang* | A term used to refer to the chief of community in Javanese villages |
| PAS | *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*/Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party; an Islam-based left wing party in Malaysia |
| *Pesugihan* | A practice of seeking mystical assistance to get wealth or fortune in Javanese society |
| *Pilihan Raya Umum* | General Election |
| PKR | *Parti Keadilan Rakyat*/People's Justice Party, a prominent left wing party in Malaysia |
| *Puasa pati geni* | A Javanese practice of fast that restricts a person to do activities outside house and to have anything but plain rice and water to break the fast. |
| *Rancangan agama* | Religious television programmes |
| *Reog Ponorogo* | A Javanese-originated dance performance by which the main performer wears a huge lion-peafowl mask |
| *Rewang* | A practice of mutual help done by a large group of people |

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|---|---|
| | to prepare occasions such as wedding, circumcision, thanksgiving, and so on in Javanese society |
| *Sanggul* | Javanese-styled hair bun |
| *Selametan* | The Javanese term for *kenduri* |
| *Selawat* | Hymns containing praises for the Prophet Muhammad |
| *Selawat Perdana* | A live programme on TV AlHijrah showing singing performances of *selawat* |
| Self-regulatory engagement | Television viewing for fulfilment of the need of self-satisfaction and self-improvement in the process of subjectivity |
| *Shirik* | Actions of equating the existence of Allah with His creatures |
| *Sinetron* | Indonesian term for soap operas |
| *Sinoman* | Another term for Javanese *rewang* |
| Situated Javaneseness | Situations in which the members of Javanese diaspora situate their original culture in the contexts of local realities |
| State-guided construct | The negotiation of ethnic identity that illustrates how members of a diaspora community observe social discourses and realities which construct a dominant ethnic group in the county |
| *Surau kampung* | Village prayer hall |
| *Tablighi jema'at* | An India-originated Islamic movement which focuses on Islamic missionary work |
| *Tanah tumpah darah* | literally translated as the land of blood, contextually understood as homeland |
| *The ummah* | Islamic religious communities |

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|---|---|
| *Tudung* | A Malay word for a head scarf |
| UMNO | United Malays National Organisation; a Malay-based component party in *Barisan Nasional* coalition |
| *Ustaz* | An Arabic word for a male religious teacher |
| *Ustazah* | An Arabic word for a female religious teacher |
| *Wak* | Aunt or uncle; an honorific used to regard the older sisters or older brothers of parents and middle-aged persons in Javanese society |
| *Wali Songo* | Nine Saints; a renowned group of Muslim missionaries who promoted Islam in the island of Java in the 14$^{th}$ century |
| *Wanita* UMNO | A women wing party of UMNO |
| *Wayang kulit* | Puppet shadow play that is popular in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore as well as Brunei. |

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF MALAYSIAN JAVANESE IDENTITY, CULTURAL CONTESTATIONS AND MALAYSIAN TELEVISION

## 1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the fundamental information about the thesis, including a statement of the problem, the research objectives and questions, and situational backdrops of the research problem. Basically, this thesis seeks to explore television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia. It is guided by four objectives and seven specific research questions. To elaborate the research problem, this chapter also provides specific situational backgrounds of the study that describe cultural contestations between Malaysia and Indonesia and the question of Malaysian Javanese identity and television system and identity discourses in Malaysia. As this thesis is written from the perspective of the researcher as the first person, it is important too to give the justification for using such authorial identity in the writing of the thesis. The scope and significance of the study are also provided prior to the end of the chapter. Last but not least, this chapter is closed with a brief description of thesis organisation.

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## 1.2. Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study is to explore the interrelations between television consumption and the negotiation of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia. This study starts with the enquiries about how Malay women of Javanese descent interpret their ethnicity and how television texts influence their interpretation of Javanese-Malay identity. The Javanese descendants who have been granted Malaysian citizenship are considered as Malay according to the Federal Constitutions (see Kahn,

2006; Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Reid, 2001; Vickers, 2004), even though in Indonesia, the Javanese is a different ethnic from the Malay (Maier, 1999; 1997; Sekimoto, 1994; Tirtosudarmo, 2011). They have pleasantly enjoyed the status and the privileges of the Malays while maintaining some semblance of Javanese customs and traditions (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000; Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994, 1988). As members of audience, they are exposed to representative images of Indonesia—the origin of Javanese—in foreign news and imported Indonesian soap operas, and at the same time they also experience narratives of subjectivity through local television content. With the presence of these local and transnational images of identity, along with their persistence of retaining cultural connections to Javanese imagined communities, the Javanese descendants are in practice compliant with two contexts of identity construction.

In Malaysia, the construction of cultural identity can be understood through two contexts: "authority-defined" and "everyday-defined" social realities (Shamsul, 1996: 9). The former represents ruling government's projection of Malay and *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) identity (Shamsul, 2001, 1996; Tan, 2000) and the colonial-invented definition of Malay race (Kahn, 2006; Reid, 2001; Vickers, 2004). The latter refers to individual convention of everyday life where discourses of Islam and *adat* (customary laws) are closely intertwined (Healey, 1999; Ong, 1995; Stiven, 2006). Considering the existence of human agency and structure within micro dimension of audience's life (Alasuutari, 1999), this study argues that the Malaysian Javanese adhere to the state-defined ideas of Malay family, ethnicity and nationalism—imposed through social interactions and televised discourses—while retaining emotions, desires, allegiance and sense of belonging to Javanese cultural entity. Such negotiation of identity essentially results in the projection of hybrid identity practices in which the matters of being and

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becoming Malay intertwines with the manifestation of being a distinctive Javanese community.

The concept of identity practices proposed by Judith M. Gerson (2001) corresponds to the complexities of negotiating structural demands and human agency in the parallel trajectories of identity reconstruction. It is an interpretive strategy that can be used by the members of a diaspora community to apprehend manifold aspects of collective identities in the long process of becoming a citizen (Gerson, 2008: 192). Since television provides what Appadurai (2006) calls “imagined worlds”, the audience can imagine their collective identities by interpreting the identity practices of their community displayed in the *mediascape*. However, the audience’s interpretation of the images of identity is subject to their understanding of social structures and agencies underpinning their existence in various “interpretive communities” (Fish, 1980). Thus, television images of identity practices which ubiquitously exist in everyday lives reinforce the audience’s interpretation of their cultural and national “imagined communities” (Anderson, 2006, 1983), and consequently stimulate them to forge what this study suggests as “interpretive identity practices.” Extended from Gerson’s identity practices, the notion of the interpretive identity practices refers to the interpretation of communal actions and shared values, stimulated by the mediated images of the communions, which enables the members of a community to project collective identities.

Employing an ethnographic approach in studying audience, this study seeks to examine the female Javanese descendants’ hermeneutic aspects of television consumption in relation to their negotiation of multiple, intersectional identities. Taking the subjects’ constructive meaning as the research enquiry, the current study employs the

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hermeneutic distanciation and appropriation (Geanellos, 2000) in the contextual interpretation of everyday culture among them. This audience ethnography expects to present a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), explaining contexts in constructing the cultural meanings of the subjects' stored and lived experiences.

### 1.3. Research objectives and questions

In the end, the research findings are expected to achieve and answer the following research objectives (ROs) and research questions (RQs):

RO1. To access the television viewing patterns of Malaysian Javanese women in relation to their hybrid identities.

Before focusing on the subjects' mediated interpretation of identities, it is important to understand the overview of their television consumption. This can be achieved by addressing the following research question:

*RQ1. What are the television viewing patterns of Malaysian Javanese women in relation to their cultural, religious, and national identity?*

RO2. To explore Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of self and collective identities.

Islam, *adat* and Malay nationalism are the common denominators in discussing the construction of Malay society. Therefore, this study focuses on the subjects' negotiation of religious, cultural and national identities. The related research question for this objective is:

*RQ2. How do Malaysian Javanese women define their sense of Islamic, Javanese, Malay and national identities?*

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RO3. To investigate Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content in relation to self and collective identities.

The subjects' interpretation of televised identity narratives is the main focus of this research and this can be ascertained by answering the research question below:

*RQ3. How do Malaysian Javanese women understand and relate television narratives to their cultural and religious identity?*

RO4. To analyse the correlations between Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content and their construction of hybrid identity.

Finally, this study is interested in examining the possibility of the transnational and local television narratives in reinforcing the subjects' projection of mixed cultural identity. This objective relates to the following research question:

*RQ4. How does Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content represent their sense of Javanese-Malay identity?*

### 1.4. Malaysia-Indonesia cultural contestations and the question of Malaysian Javanese identity

Malaysia and Indonesia share the same cultural roots and have been commonly referred as *bangsa serumpun* (race-bonded nations). Yet, the two sovereign nations define ethnicity differently, affecting the conceptualisation of each country's dominant group, Malay and Javanese (Tirtosudarmo, 2011, 2005). As Riwanto Tirtosudarmo describes:

> Ethnicity—a realm that evolved in the continuous waves of changes in the social and political spheres—has been conceived differently by the political elites and founding fathers of the Malaysian and Indonesian states. On the one hand, "Malayness" has been conceived as a fundamental basis for state's ideology in Malaysia. On the other hand, "Javaneseness" or membership in this dominant *ethnie* has been largely associated with notions of cultural traits that make this Indonesia's largest ethnic group potential

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> political place in the prevailing "civic nationalism" dwindles (2005: 4).

The difference in ethnicity conceptualisation contributes to the contestations of cultural heritage between the two countries to a certain extent (Clark, 2013). Indonesia claims some 300 different ethnic groups which one from another is differentiated by "language, dress style, dietary habits, and dance" (Retsikas, 2007: 195). Based on this culture-based differentiation, Javanese and Malay are two discrete cultural entities. Malaysia, on the other hand, divides its multi-racial society by religion and customs in which the conceptualisation of race substantially places Javanese under the Malay racial category (Kahn, 2006; Milner, 2002; PuruShotam, 1998). It is not surprising that Malaysia and Indonesia have historically contended each other for rights over cultural ownerships.

Reportedly, Indonesia under its Ministry of Education and Culture accused Malaysia of "stealing" seven Indonesian cultural products between 2007 and 2012 (The Jakarta Post, 2012). The deputy minister Windu Nuryanti as quoted said that Malaysia claimed the East Java originated masked dance *Reog*, the Ambonese folksong *Rasa Sayange*, the traditional clothing style *batik*, the Balinese *Pendet* dance, the Sundanese musical instrument of *Anklung*, and the Mandailing's *Tortor* dance and *Gondang Sambilan* musical instruments (The Jakarta Post, 2012). Responding to the accusation, the Malaysia's then culture minister, Rais Yatim, expressed that Malaysia deserved the right of ownership over some cultural products of Indonesian origin due to the similarity of cultural roots (The Jakarta Globe, 2012). The claim of ownership, however, relates to the presence of Indonesian descendants and their preserved cultural heritage in Malaysia. As the Malaysian ambassador to Indonesia argued in 2007—clarifying the Malaysia's interest in recording *barongan* (the Malaysian name for *Reog*) as one of the national heritage—the Javanese descendants in Johor who had been living as

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Malaysians for decades still retained their cultural artefacts (Sulaiman, 2007). In fact, the *barongan* dance was once very popular among the Malay-Javanese communities in Johor and Selangor (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988).

The fact that the Malaysian Javanese remain attached to their original culture while conforming to the Malay society raises a ruminative question about their cultural identity. From historical perspectives, the Javanese in Malaysia are the offspring of the Javanese migrants who migrated from Indonesia prior to the independence period. These Javanese migrants include the Javanese traders who were involved in the business at the Straits of Malacca (Khazin, 1984; Reid, 2001; Vickers, 2004), a group of smallholders in Singapore who were regarded as "*Sheikhs*" (Spaan, 1994; Spaan, Van Naerssen, and Kohl, 2002), or the migrant labours who worked in plantations and estate construction (Guinness, 1990; Spaan, 1994; Tunku, 1967a). To date, the Javanese communities disperse across the Malay Peninsula and the East Malaysia but the majority of them concentrate in Johor and Selangor (Khazin, 1984; Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994, 1988). However, there is a clear dividing line between these Javanese diaspora communities and the current Javanese migrants. The former refers to the posterity of Javanese migrants who came during the pre-colonial and colonial era, while the latter is more likely to be referred to as Indonesian migrants who engage in labour force after the formation of Malaysia (Azizah, 1997; 1987; Spaan et al., 2002; Umi, 2010).

There are no official statistics mentioning the actual number of Javanese descendants in Malaysia because they are not a state-recognised ethnic/racial group, but they are the majority of Indonesian origins who make up the contemporary Malay population (Ong, 1995; Sekimoto, 1994). The Javanese communities in Selangor particularly dwell along



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the Malacca Straits, from Klang in the south and Hulu Selangor in the north. Their forefathers opened forest lands to establish the agricultural and residential areas where they live now (Khazin, 1984; Sekimoto, 1994). In the early settlement, the Javanese worked in paddy fields but later they preferred to cultivate cacao and coconut for living due to the demand from the state institutions (Sekimoto, 1994). Generally, they have been insofar pleasantly enjoying their ethnic status and privileges as Malays as it was defined by the British colonial authorities and the present Malaysian government for political reasons (Sekimoto, 1994; 1988). Today, the majority of Javanese descendants integrates in myriad private and public sectors, ranging from academic, social to political institutions (Noriah, 2001). They now constitute a part of the Malay society, who abide by the traditional and modern constitutions within the Malay hegemony. Their cultural identity is dependent on the political definition and redefinition of Malay identity. In addition, such definition revolves around the discourses of identity which are embedded in the national television system.

### 1.5. Television system and discourses of identity in Malaysia

The Malaysian television system came into service when Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) was launched on 28 December 1963, with the main role to promote national values and identity (Karthigesu, 1994, 1986; Syafiq, 2002). Supervised by the Department of Information under the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia, RTM serves to enrich people's lives and foster a caring society through the following directives:

> 1) to explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage the policies and the programmes of the government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public; 2) to stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve changes in line with the requirement of the government; 3) to assist in promoting civic consciousness and fostering the development of Malaysian arts and culture; 4) to provide suitable

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> elements of popular education, general information and entertainment; and 5) to aid national integration efforts in a multi-ethnic society through the use of the national language (Ministry of Information, 1983, cited in Zaharom, 1999: 4).

RTM runs a number of radio and television stations which cater for the need of multi-cultural audiences. At present, RTM owns and controls six national, two international, 17 state, and 11 district radio stations as well as two television channels—TV1 and TV2 which deliver programmes in certain languages that fit the target audiences (Roslina, Wan Amizah, and Ali, 2013). While the radio stations have its own segmented audiences and present content in the ethnic language of the respective audiences, the public television channels ascertain to promote the prominence of *Bahasa Malaysia*, which is de facto language of the Malays. According to the 1962's blueprint, the programming ratio in RTM is 39:26:26:9 respectively for Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil language (Juliana, 2006: 166). It should be noted that no programmes mainly target the Javanese audience on the RTM network, but the community which is considered as the constituent part of the Malay society can enjoy the broadcasts in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English alternatively. However, there are several programmes that depict the community which can be found in RTM or private-owned channels. Another public television channel is TV Alhijrah that is currently operated under the supervision of the Department of Islamic Affairs of Malaysia (JAKIM). Launched in 2009, the newly Free-To-Air (FTA) television focuses on providing Islamic content for viewers under 40 years old.

The era of private television in Malaysia began with the establishment of *Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad*—known as TV3—in 1983, and followed by Metro Vision and MEGA-TV around ten years later (Roslina et al., 2013, Syafiq, 2002). Following the launch of Malaysian satellite MEASAT I and II in 1996, the government grants a

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license to Asian Satellite Television and Radio Organization (ASTRO) to broadcast foreign channels and programs to local audience (Juliana, 2006; Roslina et al., 2013; Syafiq, 2002). The prominent pay-TV networks that offer 171 channels including 68 ASTRO own brands currently enjoy stable subscriptions from 56 percent of households across the country (ASTRO Annual Report, 2014). Another cluster of key-players in the private television sector is the prominent media conglomerate, *Media Prima*, which owns four major terrestrial channels: TV3, 8TV, NTV7 and TV9. The company claims to be the leading fully-integrated media house that serves 25 million audience, including 4.5 million newspaper readers and four million radio listeners (Media Prima Annual Report, 2014).

Generally, media in Malaysia including the broadcasting networks are heavily controlled by the authorities through regulations and ownerships. While the public television channels are fully owned by the Federal Government—ruled by *Barisan Nasional* (National Front)—the private ones belong to individuals who seem to have a close connection to ruling elites (Juliana, 2006; Mohd Azizuddin, 2008; Mustafa, 2005; Tapsell, 2013). The primary shareholders in *Media Prima*—which also maintains three radio stations (Hot FM, Fly FM, and One FM) and three dailies (*New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*)—appear to be part of UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), the dominant component party in *Barisan Nasional* (Mohd Azizuddin, 2008; Mustafa, 2005). The ASTRO's owner, Ananda Krishnan, is believed to be a close associate to Tun Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister (Juliana, 2006; Mustafa, 2005, Zaharom and Wang, 2004).

Adding advantage to the political ownership, some regulations that control the media seem to be politically in the government's favour (Zaharom and Wang, 2004).

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Apparently, broadcasting and print media are among the institutions that are regulated under the Sedition Act 1948. This act restricts freedom of speech and production of content which publicly challenge "particularly on the (sensitive) issues of rights of citizenship, Malay special rights, the status and powers of the Malay Rulers, the status of Islam, and the status of Malay as the sole national language" (Zaharom and Wang, 2004: 250). Some other ordinances that control television include the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 (which replaces the Broadcasting Act 1988), the Defamation Act 1957 and the Official Secrets Act 1972, which de facto legitimise the ruling regime to steer the people towards national unity and security under the *Barisan Nasional* leadership (Foo, 2004; Wang, 1998; Roslina et al., 2013). Apart from the acts, some policies also restrict the television broadcasting practices in the country. In the mid-1990s, the government sought to deal with the global cultural flow with the implementation of the Limited Open Sky policy that controlled the reception of foreign programmes (Zaharom, 2002). In terms of content, Malaysian television practitioners should refer to the VHSC policy that applies "zero tolerance" to the depictions of violence, horror, sexuality, and counterculture (Shriver, 2003: 17).

The stiff control over media through ownerships and regulations shows that media freedom in the country is practically restricted (Mohd Azizuddin, 2008; Tapsell, 2013). The reason behind this rigid action is that the Malaysian government priorities the development of economy and society which includes the maintenance of national stability and developmental journalism (Mohd Azizuddin, 2008: 83). The notion of developmental journalism here refers to the Malaysian way of journalism which assists the government with the process of development (Tapsell, 2013). The government consistently monitors the local media and makes sure that the press serves to deliver the government development agenda and to attract foreign investment in the country

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(Wang, 2001). This approach is in line with the concept of development communication promoted by UNESCO as a means to synergize the communication components with culture, science, and education in developing countries (Colle, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2008).

According to Royal D. Colle (2008: 127), development communication plays a pivotal role to "spread information about successful development experience as a stimulus to others, keeps a dialogue open among all concerned in a development project, and helps to smooth project implementation." The concept of development communication emerges as a guiding framework for authoritarian developing countries that wish to implement more lenient media system which primarily emphasises the prominence of national development (McQuail, 1994). Malaysia which gradually transforms from "soft-authoritarianism" to democracy (Means, 1996) designates media as a catalyst for nation-building while maintaining restricted control over media in order to avoid domestic disputes which may arise from multiculturalism (Hamzah, 2009). The development of media in Malaysia also extends to educating the nation and creating a knowledge society (Azizah, 2009: 53). In response to globalisation and the rapid development of communication technology, Malaysia established Malaysian Super Corridor (MSC) to facilitate the nation's needs for free-flow of information and to support the advancement of multimedia industry (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Syafiq, 2002). Broadcasting that becomes a part of the MSC apparently assists the construction of Malaysian society which excels in science, technology, economy, education, and culture (Silk, 2002; Syafiq, 2002).

Malaysia pays great attention to identity values in its television system. The guidelines for broadcasting must follow the content codes stipulated by the government and ensure



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the local and national values are well preserved (Karthigesu, 1994; Samsudin and Pawanteh, 2010). Generally, the public and private television should promote the local content which depicts Malaysian ways of life and represent the face of multi-ethnic Malaysians (Shriver, 2003; Samsudin and Latiffah, 2010). Apart from the local values, Malaysian television contents are expected to present the Asian goodness that concerns "healthy competition, gentle manners, modest clothing, respect for authority, family togetherness and concern for others" (Hagiwara et al., 1999: 5).

As argued by scholars, cultural representations serve to influence the construction of national and cultural identities (Appadurai, 1996; Gillespie, 1995; Hall, 2000; Thompson, 1995; Turner, 2005). Television narratives appear to be an engaging site for negotiating modern and traditional identities pertaining to sense of belonging to a particular region, country, religion, ethnicity, class and gender (Hall, 2000; Thompson, 1995). In Malaysian contexts, television particularly acts as the catalyst for nation building which must be based on the national identity that combines traditional and modern values (Kahn, 2001; Postill, 2008). As Md Azalanshah (2011) points out, the alternative modernity constructed by UMNO for Malaysians and Malay society concerns Malay *adat* (customary law), Islamic resurgence, and Asian values.

The construction of national identity in Malaysia seems to be heavily affected by the discourses of the National Economic Policy (NEP) and Islamic resurgence that took place between the 1970s and the 1990s. The NEP which was initiated to eradicate poverty and restructure economic parity among the ethnic groups turned to be an affirmative action for the Malay society, which successfully created *Melayu Baru* (New Malay), the new middle class Malays (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Jomo, 2004). At the same time, the Islamic resurgence that emerged as the counterbalance for the effects of

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the NEP, set the Malay society members to return to Islamic fundamentalism (Azmi and Shamsul, 2004; Chandra, 1986; Shamsul, 1997). In other words, to realise the pursuance of alternative modern identity, the members of the Malay society are expected to be economically and politically advanced as well as religiously sophisticated.

The Islamic movement also affected the broadcasting system by which more religious programmes were forced to be aired on the RTM networks (Zulkiple, 2008). Interestingly, only Islamic religious programmes are permissible on the Malaysian broadcasting channels (Barraclough, 1983; Schumann, 1991; Zulkiple, 2008). However, non-Islamic contents in various genres, especially the imported ones are still allowed on television to cater for the multicultural and multilingual audiences (Yousif, 2004). The allocation of special airtime to the Islam-related broadcasts indicates that the religion is referred to as "general moral code for all Malaysians" (Barraclough, 1983: 968). Indeed, Islam holds a very special position in the Malaysian society in which the promotion of national values in the media, especially television, is expected to foster national unity in line with the Malay culture (Norila, 1994). This corresponds to the establishment of national culture under the National Culture Policy which set the broadcasting programming to feature the indigenous and regional culture, promote the national culture, and respect Islamic values (Soong, 1990: 15).

In Malaysia, the acceptance of Islam is often misunderstood as the process of becoming Malay or *masuk Melayu* (Nah, 2003; Tan, 2000; Nagata, 1974). Nah (2003: 528) figures out that the Islamisation of *Orang Asli* (indigenous groups) through *dakwah* (missionary activity) has turned them into Malays and faded their ethnic attachment. It illustrates that non-Malays who decide to embrace Islam are required to deal with the cultural and

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social expectations of becoming Malay. In addition, these expectations of Islamic identity expand beyond religious aspects if they are women.

Malaysian Muslim women are heavily subject to the state-defined gender construction, affected by the implementation of the NEP and the Islamic resurgence. Through these discourses, the government expected Malay women to be highly educated and involved in the workplace, but at the same time they needed to restrain themselves from transgressing the social and cultural norms set in *adat* and Islam (Noritah and Washima, 2007; Stiven, 2006; Nagata, 1997; 1980; Ong, 1995). They have to represent the "Islamic femininity" by adorning themselves with Islamic modest attire (Noritah and Washima, 2007: 49). At the same time, they must adhere to the state's project of "family value" in establishing happy families (Stiven, 2006: 359). Moreover, the Malay women also need to maintain the "integrity of their bodies, families and the body politic" (Ong, 1995: 272). In negotiating these cultural expectations, they are exposed to the television images of "ideal mother" (Ong, 1995), and of "ideal Malay/Muslim women" (Noritah and Washima, 2007) which have some local underpinnings. As such, television enables the women of the Malay society, regardless of their ethnic origin, to imagine the governmental construction of Malay identity. Therefore, this thesis argues that the Malay women of Javanese descent can employ active interpreting of television texts in the process of negotiating identity sources which take place in their regular media use.

## 1.6. The authorial identity in writing ethnography

In writing the content of this thesis, I deliberately use first-person pronouns—I, my and me. The use of first person pronouns in academic writing seems to be against the grain, but it has become a trend in writing social and cultural issues nowadays. Ken Hyland

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(2002a, 2002b) argues that the employment of "author pronoun" such as I, me, my, we, us and our, is significant for the authors especially in the fields of humanities and social sciences as it exhibits a strong academic identity and helps to maintain a firm stance in presenting an argument. Hyland further describes that "decisions to employ a writer pronoun here are related to the fact that arguments in such 'soft knowledge' domains are less precisely measurable and clear-cut than in the hard sciences, and the extent to which a personal stance can help promote an impression of confidence and authority" (Hyland, 2002b: 3).

In point of fact, pronouns I and we are used in writing journal articles of both hard and soft disciplines for certain rationales (Hardwood, 2005a, 2005b; Kuo, 1999; Taş, 2010). Based on a corpus-based investigation, Harwood (2005a) identifies five plausible functions for using self-promotional pronouns in journal research articles. First, the self-promotion at the beginning of the articles can assist the authors to emphasise the argument of the novelty of the work they are presenting. Second, it claims to be recognition of the writers' authority over their study findings at the concluding remarks, which directs readers to the accomplishments that the writers have achieved. Third, authorial pronouns can also help the authors to self-cite and self-promote their previous study results for the purpose of manifesting the significance of the study. Fourth, the use of self-promotional pronouns gives a practical aid to stress out the authors' novel findings, which make the originality of the research that may not be addressed in other studies. Finally, the fifth value of first person pronoun in reporting an academic paper lies in the methodological procedures. The employment of I or we "can stress the writers' procedural innovations, highlight how methodological pitfalls were successfully circumvented, and record how the writers were more rigorous in their quest for sound data than was strictly necessary" (Harwood, 2005a: 1226).

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I personally find that using an author pronoun is more practical and instrumental particularly in reporting ethnography. This methodological approach, which I employ to study the Javanese audience in Malaysia, requires personal ties to the people, culture, emotions, and the entire process of data gathering. In writing an ethnographic thesis, ethnographers often use narration about their involvement in the fieldwork to present the data and tell about their relationships with the site, the respondents, and the discussions of the findings (Fetterman, 2010). Myriad ethnographic researchers write their theses using personal pronouns, including some scholars (Gillespie, 1995; Postill, 2008; Shetty, 2008; Thompson, 2000) whose work are cited in the next chapters of this thesis. Precisely, authorial pronouns "link the researchers to their findings" in a way to manifest the responsibility for the arguments they have (Harwood, 2005a). Furthermore, the ethnographic presence in the form of authorial identity helps to deliver the authors' reflexivity which is important in describing the findings of the study.

The authorial identity in some ways benefits both the author and readers. On the one hand, the pronoun "*I*" shows the role of the author either as the text representative, the architect of the text, the opinion-holder, or the originator of ideas (Tang and John, 1999). On the other hand, it helps readers to easily follow the ideas in the text. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) argue that an ethnographic text should convince the readers in terms of authenticity, plausibility and criticality which signify the presence of the ethnographer in the field and the text. The ethnographic text should invite readers "to see themselves in solidarity with the text's assertions," which can be achieved by employing personal pronoun, either single or plural (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993: 606).

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Most importantly, the use of personal pronouns can represent the author's self-reflexivity which inevitably emerges during the process of data analysis. Kate Lenzo (1995) identifies "I" in qualitative writing as a "self-reflexive" agent which shows the researcher's active involvement in the community under study. As media ethnographers become the part of their study (Alasuutari, 1999; Gillespie, 1995), subjective positioning and self-reflexive enquiries cannot be avoided. Instead, it can assist to provide a discourse of reflection with simple confessional, an engagement with emotions and unconscious processes (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, 2002). With my prior knowledge of Javanese culture, and as a Javanese myself, I must clarify that subjectivity and self-reflexivity will be appropriately present in some sections of this thesis, especially in the methodology chapter. That is possible because the fieldwork and the findings have somehow generated subjective meanings to me personally and cultural significance in the practical process of the study itself. For this reason, I am consistent with my stand to preserve the authorial identity in this thesis.

## 1.7. Scope of the study

This audience ethnography studies the female Javanese descendants' television consumption as one aspect of everyday culture and investigates the cultural meaning of their interpretation of television content in relation to negotiation of identities. As Ellen Seiter (2004: 462) argues, while anthropologies study culture as a whole, media ethnographers "study one aspect of a culture—such as television—and attempt to relate it to social identity." Therefore, this research focuses on the interrelations between television consumption and the hybrid identity construction among Javanese society members instead of the acculturation between Javanese and Malay cultures. Furthermore, this study discusses the female Javanese descendants as the members of a

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Javanese diaspora community and Malay society in Malaysia rather than the components of Javanese migrant society in general.

Basically, this study revolves around television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in a selected village in a Selangor district of Sabak Bernam. This study does not intend to discuss the concept of diaspora and hybridity in relation to migration studies. Instead, this study represents one of the studies about the construction of hybrid identities derived from media consumption among diaspora communities (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Barker, 1997; Gillespie, 1995; Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b). The concept of hybridity is complex, but in a simple term, it refers to the context of cultural amalgam between different races, languages and ethnicities (Martín-Barbero, 1993; Pieterse, 1995; Werbner, 2001). In media studies, hybridity is described as the articulation of nomadism in which the audience act as nomadic communities because they are bound to engage in various social, political and cultural locations in media content (Kraidy, 2005, 1999).

As this study follows the conventional practices of audience research, the negotiation of hybrid identity that will be discussed throughout this thesis focuses on how the Javanese female descendants interpret the representation of realities on television and make use of the imaginary experiences from the text to define their hybrid identities. The study does not analyse the content of television programmes in critical manners, but only refers to the programmes that are mentioned by the respondents. Also, this study seeks to explore the respondents' consumption of general content of television, not only specific genres. Therefore, the interviews will contain the questions that enquire their viewing of dramas, news, reality shows, and so on. In addition, the participant

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observation will be done by joining in the respondents' television viewing time and some community gatherings that they are involved in.

It should be noted that the study will not discuss gender roles nor does this thesis challenge feminists theories in spite of using women as the subjects of the study. The recruitment of female subjects is due to two considerations. First, women are recognisably perceived as heavy television viewers owing to their domestic attachment (Ang, 1996; Honeyford, 1980; Morley, 1999; Press, 1991). Moreover, Malay women in Malaysia are generally known as avid followers of television soap operas from non-Western countries, including Indonesia (Md Azalanshah, 2011). Second, in the Malaysian contexts, women become the focal point of the national modernity in which the social and cultural expectations are imposed to them to redefine and reconstruct their self and collective identities (Healey, 1999; Ong 1995; Stiven, 2006).

## 1.8. Significance of the study

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the literatures of Malaysian Javanese culture and society as well as studies of South East Asian ethnicities. The current literatures mostly focus the discussion on the historical aspects of the migration and the early settlements of Javanese migrants in Malaya, including Singapore (Khazin, 1988; Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Sekimoto, 1994, 1988; Spaan, 1994; Spaan et al., 2002; Tunku, 1967a, 1967b) as well as the cultural life of the current Malaysian Javanese communities (Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001). Due to the presence of cultural exchanges between Indonesia and Malaysia through television content, this study uses a different approach to construct the Malaysian Javanese community and presents the conceptual understanding of the community from the perspective of media and cultural studies.



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In general, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the influences and roles of media in the construction of hybrid identity among diaspora communities. Previous studies on such topic mostly concentrate on Asian diasporas in Western countries and investigate the communication and spatial integration of communities that are bound by racial and geo-political ideologies which contrast with the local values in the host country (see Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Barker, 1997; Gillespie, 1995; Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b; Gowricharn, 2009). In contrast, the diaspora in my study belongs to two cultural entities from the same racial stock which expectedly sets a different understanding of the notion of diaspora.

Specifically, this particular study proposes a conceptual notion for studying the correlations between media audience and the construction of hybrid identity. The notion which I refer to as "the interpretive identity practices" explains how television viewers interpret their everyday lives and community through the representation of realities on television. Essentially, it addresses the interpretation of communal actions and shared values, stimulated by mediated images of identity, which enables the members of a community to articulate collective identities. I elaborate this notion further in the chapter three.

Apart from contributing to the body of knowledge, this study also seeks to provide better understanding of cultural hybridity and hybrid identities which emerge from the acculturation of Indonesian migrants into Malaysian society. As mentioned earlier, there were quite significant numbers of issues of "claiming cultural products" between Malaysia and Indonesia in the last decade. It is understood that the cultural disputes always end up in government-to-government discussions and political diplomacy which

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significantly solves the problem. However, it is more important to make the people in the two countries understand that the cultural exchanges through migration and ethnic integration during precolonial and colonial times in the Malay world contribute to presence of cultural sharing between the two sovereign countries and peoples. Thus, Malaysians and Indonesians should share the same conceptualisation of shared culture and identities in order to avoid the same cultural conflicts in the future.

### 1.9. Thesis organisation

As the guidance for the writing process, I propose to divide my thesis into seven chapters. I begin with the introductory chapter, which contains the statement of the problem as well as the research objectives and questions. In this chapter, I also provide discussions of cultural contestations between Malaysia and Indonesia and the questions of Malaysian Javanese identity as the background of the research. As this research belongs to media and cultural studies, I dedicate a section in this chapter to discuss the television system and the mediated identities in Malaysia. The next section concerns my argument in using first-person pronouns throughout the body of this thesis. Towards the end of the chapter, I deliver a brief discussion on the scope and the significance of the research as well as the thesis organisation.

In the second chapter, I discuss the literature review of this research. At the beginning of the chapter, I present the theoretical and practical definition of ethnicity and race in relation to the construction of Javanese and Malay identity in Malaysia. After that, I briefly discuss the proximate correlations between television culture, identities, and cultural studies. It is followed by the literature discussion on the definition of hybridity and hybrid identities. To address the critical reviews about television and its prominent role in nation building, I also provide in-depth discussion on the influence of television

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in the construction of imagined communities. As this research focuses on “what audience do to media” in relation to their identity construction, I centralise the discussion on the literatures on the audience’s experiences with televised world in search of cultural, political, and religious identity.

The third chapter concerns the discussion on the conceptual framework that guide the analysis of the research data. I start the discussion with the conceptualisation and the implication of the theory of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984) in media studies. In the following section, I present my argument on the conceptualisation of the guiding framework for analysis, which I discuss in the contexts of theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990) and the theory of identity practices (Gerson, 2001). In this section, I propose the notion of “interpretive identity practices” as the conceptual framework as well as the constructive contribution to the literatures of television and identity studies.

The next chapter discusses the methodological approach of this research. I contend that my research follows the British school of thought in studying media audience, employing audience ethnography as the very methodology of the research. The chapter starts with the discussion on the applicability of the audience ethnography in television reception researches. It is followed by the description about my experiences in accessing the respondents and collecting the data in the field. In practice, my study employs in-depth interviews and participant observation as the data collection tools that appear to be the common techniques in ethnographic studies. As an ethnographer who spends a long period of time in the field, participating in the everyday culture of my respondents, it is important for me to also describe in this chapter about my empirical endeavours in experiencing the living aspects of the community and the culture. Finally,

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this chapter ends with the discussion on the use of NVivo 10 in analysing the raw data discovered from the fieldwork. This last section also concerns the procedural process of the data analysis.

Ultimately, I dedicate chapter five and six to discuss the research findings on a thematic basis. In this way, the chapter five will discuss the findings that represent the first pattern of findings, presenting the ways the Malaysian Javanese women in this study imagine hybrid identities on television. The next chapter will focus on the ways they project such identities from their interpretation of televisual discourses of identities in their everyday lives.

Finally, the last chapter serves to summarise the entire discussion in this thesis. It presents the concluding remarks that highlight to which extent the research questions have been addressed. Eventually, I complete my thesis with the discussion on the limitations of the study and the directions for other researchers who are interested in studying television and hybrid identity in the future.

## 1.10. Summary

This chapter serves as the introductory section of the thesis. Basically, it talks about the fundamental ideas of the study in general and specific manners. Some points that are highlighted in this chapter include the fact that Javanese descendants are constitutionally defined as the Malays but they maintain some semblance of Javanese identities in their everyday lives. A prior investigation that leads to this study reveals that the Javanese descendants feel the connection to Java and Indonesia through watching Indonesian soap operas. Therefore, this study further explores the consumption of television in relation to the construction of hybrid identity among

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female Javanese descendants in Malaysia. Studies on the relationships between television viewing and the formation of hybrid identity have become interesting focus in the field of media and cultural studies. Previous literatures on this particular topic are discussed in the next chapter.

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# CHAPTER 2: THE INTERPRETATION OF TELEVISION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter concerns the review of literatures related to the interpretation of television and the construction of hybrid identities. It starts with a brief discussion on the technical and practical definition of ethnicity/race as well as Javanese and Malay identity. It is followed by a discussion on proximate correlations between television culture, identities, and cultural studies. The next section discusses the definition and redefinition of hybridity and hybrid identities. The chapter continues with the critical reviews about the roles of television in nation-building and the construction of imagined communities in the fifth section. Finally, I end this chapter by providing in-depth discussion on the literatures that talk about the audience's experiences with television-mediated construction of cultural, political, and religious identity.

## 2.2. Ethnicity versus race: Defining Javanese and Malay identity in Malaysia

The definition of ethnicity and race in the contemporary plural societies is often ambiguous due to the human transnationalism and cultural homogenisation. The term ethnicity itself is tricky and frequently used to cover both ethnicity and race, which relates to the significance of cultural practices and the physical characteristics of people (Fenton, 2003; Olzak, 2006). According to Richard Jenkins (1998: 9-10), ethnicity refers to "a range of situations in which collectivity (sic) of humans lived and acted together, and which is typically translated today as 'people' or 'nation'" that is connected by the "belief in common ancestry." Similarly, Joane Nagel (1994: 152-153) defines an ethnicity as a large group of people who share the same "material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality." Further, Nagel (1994)

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emphasises that the members of an ethnic group are spatially and culturally situated within particular ethnic boundaries that are constantly changing. Both Jenkins and Nagel agree that ethnicity is a product of social construction of human race.

Human race as it is defined in anthropology refers to biological and cultural characteristics of people (MacEachern, 2011). Biological anthropologists distinguish diverse racial groups by identifying the physical features, including the skin colour, the hair colour and configuration, as well as the facial and the bodily characteristics (MacEachern, 2011: 35). In contrast, the cultural anthropologists define race as "a kind of ideology, a way of thinking about, speaking about, and organizing relationships among human groups: Who is your friend, or enemy? Who is a neighbour, or a foreigner?" that is utterly a cultural construction (MacEachern, 2011: 36). Furthermore, MacEachern (2011) argues that the cultural divisions of the human race have often focused on the differences in languages and geographical locations. In reality, the term race is politically used to precede a group of people over another. As Paul Gilroy (1998: 839-843) argues, race is an ultimate product of modern politics which is related to "a principle of power, differentiation and classification" which underlies the biological, nationalistic, cultural and genomic determinism of human population.

Considering the political aspects of race/ethnicity and the ambiguity of the terminology, most countries, including Malaysia, use both ethnicity and race alternately to characterise its population. The conceptualisation of ethnicity or race in Malaysia is greatly influenced by the political situations and the presence of migrants during the colonial times. Historically, the term "race" (translated as *bangsa* in *Bahasa Malaysia*) was used for the first time in the 1891 colonial census to classify the inhabitants of the Straits Settlements into six major headings: "European," "Eurasians," "Chinese,"



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"Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago," "Tamils and Other Natives of India," and "Other Nationalities" (Hirschman, 1987: 561-562). After the independence of Malaysia, the neutral words such as "community" and "ethnicity" were adopted to denote a section of the population who shared the common language, religion, custom, and allegiance (Del Tufo, 1947 in Hirschman, 1987: 562). Consequently, the inclusive category "Indonesian" was used since the 1957 census to classify all migrants from the Indonesian archipelago, except those who had been assimilated into the Malay community through marriage and adoption of Malay identity such as Javanese and *Boyanese* (Hirschman, 1987).

In the nineteenth century, when the Malaya was under the reign of British colonial, the Malay emerged to be a modern race with the coinage of "*bangsa Melayu*" or Malay race, in contrast to European and Chinese. Munshi Abdullah was the first Malay writer who used the term to explain the Malay identity as a racial entity that has its own ethnic origin, genealogy, culture and, most importantly, language (Reid, 2001; Milner, 2002, 1995; Shamsul, 2001). Adopting the European concept of race, Abdullah criticised the notion of loyalty to the kings, which was previously disseminated to be the key determinant of Malayness, as "a mere primordial attachment" (Milner, 2002: 51). Subsequently, he proposed Malay language as the prospective marker for the expansion of Malay race (Milner, 2002). As the Malay was an Austronesian language which became the *lingua franca* of the Indonesians, the unification of *Bugis*, Acehnese, Javanese, *Boyanese* and *Mandailing* under Malay race became possible (Ho, 2013; Reid, 2001). This corresponds with the definition of Malay in the Malay Reservation Act introduced in 1913 by the British colonials in Malaya which classifies any Muslim who belongs to Malayan race and speaks Malay or "any other Malayan language" into one racial category (Andaya and Andaya, 2001: 183). Moreover, the migrants from

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Netherlands East Indies (pre-independent Indonesia) were indeed the major contribution to Malay population who were regarded as "other Malaysians" in the 1911 colonial census (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Among them, it was the Javanese who constituted the majority of the Indonesian population in Malaya (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Tunku, 1967a, 1967b), and later went through the process of localisation to become Malays (Tan, 2000; Vickers, 2004).

The conception of Malay identity cannot be separated from the construction of Malaysian Javanese identity, and vice versa. As Vickers (2004: 26) argues, the constitution of Malay identity is not utterly invented by the Europeans, but rather is "a local construction onto which colonial forms of hegemony were imposed," in which the Javanese presence plays a significant role. It was reported that the term "*Jawa*" (Javanese) used to be a common name to refer the people of *Majapahit* kingdom which spread throughout the present Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Southern Thailand, and the Philippines (Reid, 2004). Ras (1992) reported that there were intense interactions and cultural exchanges between the Javanese and the Malays during the *Majapahit* time. In fact, the images of *Majapahit* and Malacca appear to be dominant in the formation of Malay identity (Maier, 1999; Reid, 2004). It was mentioned in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* that the Malays in Malacca seemed to be "bastardized Malays (*Melayu kacokan*), mixed with Javanese from *Majapahit*" (Kassim, 1971: 175). After the Portuguese took over Malacca, the presence of Javanese in Malaya could not be traced (Khazin, 1984). Nevertheless, later in the post-colonial era, the Indonesian migrants who had been granted Malaysian citizenship were recognised as Malays through the process of localization, which involved social and cultural interactions (Khazin, 1984; Tan, 2000).

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The Malaysian Javanese are among the ethnic groups of Indonesian origin that constitute today's Malay population, which seem to be referred to as a "branch" of the Malay race (Milner, 2002). Although in Indonesia, Malay and Javanese are two distinct ethnic groups, the Malaysian constitutions view both societies as one under the same racial category. As the Malaysian definition of race is determined by "customs and religion" (Milner, 2002: 68), the Javanese are considered as Malay because they are culturally and religiously similar to the Malays. In addition, this conception of race construes "Malayness" as an "inclusive culture" because Islam as the key marker of identity enables similar Indonesian ethnic groups to be anointed as one racial entity (Reid, 2001). According to the Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia, Malays refer to those who "profess the religion of Islam, habitually speak the Malay language, and conform to Malay customs" (Yeoh, 2006: 2).

It can be said that the Malays may include any Muslim Malaysian citizens who habitually speak Malay and follow Malay *adat* (see Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Kahn, 2006; Nagata, 1974; Vickers, 2004). The *adat*, however, refers to the orthodox customs or customary laws, which originate from the pre-Islamic culture, that regulate "bilateralism in gender relations, openness about sexuality and sensuality, belief in magical healing and mysticism" (Khoo, 2006: 5). It basically originated from the Hindu-Buddhist culture which once prevailed in the Malay world and spread by the Javanese under the reign of *Majapahit* kingdom (Maier, 1999; Ras, 1992). The mutual interactions between the Javanese and the Malay in the past resulted in the invention of identical traditions, assuming that the Malay *adat* is "a mixture of Malay and Javanese styles" (Vickers, 2004: 41).

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Today, the Malaysian Javanese continue to practise their culture in their own-built communities. One of the common features of Javanese communities throughout Malaysia is the use of Javanese language in daily conversations of the communities, even though they abide by the constitution to speak the national language, *Bahasa Malaysia* (see Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994). As cultural language represents a cultural community (Kramsch, 1998), Javanese language also serves as one of the identifiers of Javanese communities in Malaysia, in the same way as various dialects of *Bahasa Malaysia* are used by different Malay communities across the Malay Peninsula (Asmah, 2016, 1983). The Javanese communities in Selangor particularly retain some authentic Javanese cultural elements such as the traditional dances (*barongan* and *kuda kepang*), the puppet play (*wayang kulit*), the signature dish (*nasi ambeng*), the traditional medicines (*jamu*), the practice of mutual help (*rewang*), and most importantly the Javanese cultural value that is known as *guyub* or togetherness (Noriah, 2001). The special feature of *rewang* in the Malaysian Javanese community is the involvement of men and women, in contrast to the practice of rewang in Indonesian Javanese communities that only involves women (Asmussen, 2004; Widayati and Aswandi, 2006; Martin, 2004). Asmussen (2004: 319) notes that the *rewang* in Java refers to women's work to prepare food for a certain event, done by those who are chosen "based on a household's proximity to the host in physical distance and in kinship."

As Sabak Bernam is known for its paddy field, the main economic activity of the Javanese in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh is agriculture, from the macro level paddy farming to the micro level home-gardening, which is typically characterised by the *perparitan* (drainage) system (Sekimoto, 1994; 1988). In the political area, most of the Javanese descendants occupy the prominent positions such as the former Chief Minister

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of Selangor, Dr. Mohamed Khir Toyo, the three-time elected Member of Parliament of Sungai Besar, the late Datuk Noriah Kasnon, and the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

The existance of Javanese descendants in Malaysian society is apparent and their identity construction is important to note. Their presence in the country's contemporary political and social scenes depicts that they are not a part of migrant society of Indonesia anymore and thus the literature about them should be shifted from historical to cultural perspectives. This is due to the fact that identity is no longer a product of colonial discourses, but rather an attachement of everyday culture in which television is present.

### 2.3. Television culture, identity, and cultural studies

Television culture, like other media culture, represents the dominant form of culture in contemporary world. Media culture that reaches people in the form of movies, television programmes, contemporary songs, and other cultural products provides symbols and codes for production and reproduction of identity (Kellner, 2003; Kellner and Durham, 2006). Douglas Kellner (2003: 1) points out that media culture which provides information that can be used by audience to construct their sense of class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, nationality, and the discourses of "us versus them" exists in "system of radio and the reproduction of sound; of film and its modes of distribution; of print media; and to the system television." The narratives of media culture, "offers patterns of proper and improper behaviour, moral messages, and ideological conditioning, sugar-coating social and political ideas with pleasurable and seductive forms of popular entertainment" (Kellner and Durham, 2006: ix). People live with culture and learn cultural codes and symbols from the cultural sources that are available

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in their everyday lives, including television. Crucially, such symbols serve a significant function as prerequisites for the articulations, significance, and productions of collective identities (Geertz, 2000).

Television remains the important source of visual entertainment and information as it is ubiquitously available and accessible to large populations. Despite the proliferation of new media, television has not dead yet. As one of prominent mass media, television retains its steady existence through healthy advertising revenues for its unbeatable power over massive audiences (International Television Expert Group, 2010). Most importantly, television continues to be a cultural agent which constantly provokes and circulates cultural meanings (Fiske, 2011, Hartley, 2008; Morley, 2005; Silverstone, 1994). Television is also still relevant to stimulating social and political participation (Boulianne 2011, Eveland Jr and Scheufele 2000; Livingstone and Markham 2008; Norris, 1996), even though it has previously been perceived as the main cause for declining social capital (Putnam, 1995).

Since the conceptualisation of the theory of Uses and Gratifications (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973), communication scholars have become more aware about people's motives for watching television and their satisfaction acquired from specific uses of the content. Regular audience engage in television viewing for various reasons, ranging from collecting knowledge and information (Blumler, 1979; Rubin, 1984) to relaxing (Anderson et al., 1996; Bryant and Zillman, 1984; McIlwraith, 1998), and from participating in fandom and popular trends (Eastman, 1979; Perse and Rubin, 1988) to enhancing identities (Abelman, 1987; Kubey, 1986; Lull, 1990). As uses, gratifications, and effects operate within the structures of understanding (Hall, 2001), the reception of television should be investigated from critical perspectives of audience's everyday

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lives. Therefore, studies on television audience should be investigated from ethnographic perspectives because the audience's views about television texts cannot be conceived of as self-evident facts, but rather as a process of making sense of contextual meanings (Ang, 1996; Machado-Borges, 2002). The fact that viewers situate television content in the structural contexts in culture and society makes it possible for media researchers to use a "critical studies" approach in their analysis.

Numerous media scholars (Ang, 1985; Brunsdon, 1989; Gray, 1987; Morley, 1986) adopt ethnographic methods to examine how audience construct the cultural meanings of their consumption of television within the paradigm of cultural studies. Presenting the results from qualitative in-depth interviews in *Family Television*, David Morley (1986) provides a critical analysis of the practices of television viewing in family in which gender relations and power exist. Similarly, Ien Ang (1985) investigates the reception and the negotiation of modern symbols in the American popular soap opera, *Dallas*, among Dutch viewers through ethnographic surveys. Focusing on the feminist enquiries in the consumption of soap operas among women, Charlotte Brunsdon (1989) and Ann Gray (1987) carry media ethnography to study women's engagement in soap operas. While these notable scholars focus on a specific genre, my study adopts a different approach to explore the negotiation of identities among a diaspora community, considering the significance of identity discourses in news, soap operas and reality shows. Marie Gillespie (1995) also uses this non-genre approach in her ethnographic surveys among Punjabi youth in Southall. I will describe further about this audience ethnography in the methodological chapter, but before that, I shall discuss the significance of cultural studies paradigm and its correlations to television reception researches.

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Essentially, “Cultural Studies” as an academic discipline first emerged in the mid-1950s, drawn upon Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society*, and later re-established in the 1960s in the University of Birmingham with the inception of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies/CCCS (see Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 1980). Underlining the definition of culture as “ways of life” and “social practices” in which significance of experience takes place, Stuart Hall (1980) conceptualises two seminal paradigms in cultural studies. The first paradigm takes up the conceptual reference to “culturalism”, associating culture with all social practices including everyday activities in which social being and social consciousness become the significant enquiries of human existence (Hall, 1980). Hall (1980: 63) further elaborates that culture also concerns “both the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions of existence; and as the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied.”

The second paradigm of cultural studies revolves around the analytical framework of “structuralism”. It was the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss that proposed structuralism as discursive analysis of formal structures in a discourse or text which constitutes one of cultural enquiries (Hall, 1980). For Levis-Strauss, culture includes “the categories and frameworks in thought and language through which different societies classified out their condition of existence” (in Hall, 1980: 65). In fact, language serves as a symbol of cultural identity (Kramsch, 1998). Hall (1980) agrees with Levi-Strauss that, unlike culturalism which subscribes no reference to the concept of ideology, structuralism operates in the forms and structures of ideology. However, the ideology here is defined as unconscious states in which all aspects of life are represented and lived, not only as the tangible forms of ideas (Hall, 1980).

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Despite the divergence, both paradigms conceive a process of communication as a part of the social life of a community in which the members share the common meanings and use the structural significance of language (Hall, 1980). In this way, consumption of television through which interactions with textual and contextual narratives represent a communicative event, becomes one of the central topics in cultural studies. Basically, the reception studies, including the negotiation of interpretive identities through the consumption of television, belong to the third area of contemporary cultural studies. As Gray et al (2007) describes, citing Professor Hoggart's inaugural lecture, three main areas of research in CCCS include: first, historical and philosophical debates on contemporary culture and social change; second, the sociology of literature and the arts; and third, the critical evaluation of "mass art, popular art and culture and the mass media" (Gray et al., 2007: 25-26).

As for Ann Gray (2003), texts make up one of the crucial elements in cultural studies which must be understood within the material contexts pertaining to the production, text, and readers. Gray (2003: 14) further describes that texts, in the form of popular media such as soap operas, are intertwined in people's everyday lives and "can be subject to analysis and in relation to national identity, race, class, gender and sexuality." Television is indeed a popular source of global knowledge which enables people to contact with alternative ways of life that differ from the ones they were born into (Barker, 1999). Thompson (1995) suggests that as a cultural subject, a person captures and makes sense of television messages in accordance with hger or his situated time and space. Thompson (1995: 94) adds that "televisual quasi-interaction creates what we can call discontinuous space-time experience," making possible of space-time travels, in which everyday lives in different times and spaces can be experienced by individuals

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through the comfort zone of a living room. In other words, television culture, represented by the images and narratives of communities, locally and globally, becomes a substantive part of everyday life that people put meanings into it in order to construct identities (Barker, 1999; Gillespie, 1995; Hall, 1996a).

Identities are never fixed or rather universal because every social subject experiences social changes which produce reconstruction and redefinition as well as multiplication of identities (Grossberg, 1996). This illustrates that there is no one pure identity or culture as people continue exploring various strands of identity which, in postmodern societies, are largely mediated. Thus, identity is better conceived as an ongoing process of becoming or a production of human attributes (Barker, 2012; 1999; Hall, 1996a, 199b). Identities also exist within cultural acculturalisation where people go through social process and cultural learning in which the roles of family, peer groups, education, work organisation, and most importantly, media are significantly at play (Barker, 2012). Therefore, media culture, identity, and society are closely related.

The construction and reconstruction of identities through everyday media consumption becomes one of the central discussions in cultural studies. Precisely, many researchers in cultural studies pay attention to the phenomena pertaining to how the mainstream observe hegemonic ways of living and how subaltern resist what the mainstream call as normal fashion codes, behavioural standards, and political ideologies (Durham and Kellner, 2006). This school of thought conceives culture as "a field of representation, as a producer of meaning that provides negative and positive depictions of gender, class, race, sexuality, religion, and further key constituents of identity" (Durham and Kellner, 2006: xxxii). As television provides the images of contemporary life across economic, political, social, and cultural domains, television can too mediate the construction of

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identity. However, the power of texts is insignificant without the authority of the readers (Gray, 2003; Hall, 2001; Livingstone, 1998).

As Stuart Hall (2001) argues, television messages become simply texts if the audience do not arrive at the point of realisation in the midst of reading the texts. This process is known as the process of decoding (Hall, 2001; 1980). The societal broadcasting structures of television undergo a discursive deal with the production of messages in order to determine how the messages are supposed to be interpreted. That is when messages are encoded in the form of a meaningful discourse which eventually reaches the audiences (Hall, 2001). However, Hall further contends that

> …before message can have an "effect" (however defined), satisfy a "need" or be put to a "use", it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which "have an effect", influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences. In a "determinate" moment the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment the "message", via its decodings, issues into the structure of social practices (Hall, 2001: 509-510).

Basically, Hall is saying that audience interaction with television texts is not a passive form. Television viewers, as Hall (2001, 1980) points out, are capable of locating the codes and signs within the texts to produce meanings through which they observe three strategic positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. First, audience may take "dominant hegemonic position" to locate the dominant code in television messages and decode the meaning of the messages in the same way as it is encoded. This decoding position is usually performed when audience engage in a television newscast or current affairs programme which unequivocally transmits hegemonic "professional code" that constitutes the dominant code (Hall, 2001: 515). Second, in

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interpreting television messages, audience can also situate themselves in "negotiated code or position" by recognising the legitimate meaning and at the same time operating restrictions on the access to such meaning. This negotiated decoding process primarily works on situated logics which are restricted by "local conditions" and "sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power" (Hall, 2001: 516). Third, to refrain from acquiring undesirable meaning, audience can operate with an oppositional code by considering the "politics of signification" in the texts (Hall, 2001: 217). In this way, they may understand the intended meaning of a discourse but they prefer to construct the alternative one which tends to be contradictory. Conclusively, the existence of these dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional interpretations of texts indicates that audience consumption of television is an active participation.

Because audience are active interpreter of texts, they have the capability and capacity to regulate their negotiation of identity discourses. They use self-knowledge and experience to interpret the textual and contextual representations of realities depicted across television genres (Bandura, 2001; Hartley, 2004). Practically, genres assist viewers to organise their television diet in relation to personal preferences, social practices, as well as everyday modes of conversations (Mittell, 2001). In other words, television genres and *mediascape* substantially contribute to the construction of people's everyday lives and identities. However, with the presence of globalisation of media followed by deterritorialization of culture (Appadurai, 2006; 1996), identities especially in diaspora societies become more and more hybrid (Hall, 1996a). In addition, as identity construction is a never-ending process, the emergence of hyrid identities is inevitable as concomitant of cultural hybridity pehonomena.

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## 2.4. Re-defining identity in mediated world: Hybridity and hybrid identities

Identity is one of the key points that underlie the discursive discussions in cultural studies. The features of identity are always in question because its nature continually transforms from one form to another. As Stuart Hall suggests, identity must be interpreted as "a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990: 222). In addition, Hall (1990) points out that, practices of representation and the subject of cultural identity are better understood as the matter of positioning enunciation. In his other article, Hall (1996a: 2) describes that identity concerns "pivotal relationship to a politics of location", "the questions of identification", "the questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming", and "the play of power and exclusion." In this way, Hall refers identity to,

> … the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate", speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produces subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken". Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject of positions which discursive practices construct for us (Hall, 1996a: 5-6).

Identity is a social construction that takes place in subjectivity which explains how a human being becomes a person, a cultural subject, as well as a member of society (Barker, 2012). Generally, a person exhibits and constructs both self and collective identities that represent their gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality. In dealing with the construction of such identities, one needs to negotiate their own verbal conceptions and emotional identification of the self which constitute their self-identity, and the expectations of their society which construct their social identity (Barker, 2012: 215). It

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is also important to discuss someone's subjectivity in terms of their attachments to culture and history which produce a cultural identity.

Cultural identity, as Hall (1990: 223) defines, is related to the ideas of "shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." Hall (1990: 223) adds that cultural identity reflects "the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history." In addition, the aspects of cultural identity are derived from the sense of belonging to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and national cultures (Hall, 1992). Sunch sense of belonging constructs social boundaries which signal membership and exclusion as well as a source of sharing criteria for self and collective judgement (Barth, 1998).

As identity is an entirely cultural and linguistic formation, cultural identity is no longer a matter of struggle, but a question of choice (Grossberg, 1996). Lawrence Grossberg (1996) suggests that cultural identities which construct a multicultural modern world need to be discussed in relation to three forms of modern logic: difference, individuality, and temporality. First, modernity promotes difference and "constitutes not identity out of difference but difference out of identity" (Grossberg, 1996: 93). This is because difference exists at the centre of identity and becomes the fundamental support for modern power (Grossberg, 1996). Second, the production of cultural identity goes through many processes of individuation, emphasising the significance of human agency; that is when an individual reflects on experience and knowledge, governs position of activity, and determines himself or herself as "the mark of a social identity"

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(Grossberg, 1996: 97-98). In fact, individuals tend to express themselves in certain ways that can be associated with their conventional customs and social status (Goffman, 2008). Third, modern power takes place in specific time and space, which makes cultural identity exist in the logic of temporality (Grossberg, 1996: 100). Apparently, modernity has its impacts on cultural identity and globalisation which becomes the fundamental site of modernity drives media to lead the construction of identity (Hall, 1996b; Tomlinson, 2003). I shall clarify here that I will not talk about modernity in a specific manner, but rather discuss its effects on audience's perception of modern representations in television, in relation to their conceptualisation of identities.

The role of media in the construction of identity has become an important topic to be discussed in cultural and media studies ever since the golden age of printing media. Benedict Anderson (2006) points out that print capitalism substantially contributes to the dissemination of communal imagery which ties members of a community in one limited "imagined community." Anderson (2006: 36) suggests that media consumers such as newspaper readers share the ideas of their "imagined world" mediated by the narratives of everyday life in the paper. In the age of electronic media, television has emerged as a powerful resource that provides images, language and symbols of distant locations which enable people to constitute, construct, redefine and reconstruct their identity. As Thompson (1995) notes, members of audience utilise the messages and meanings from television and absorb such meanings into their everyday culture in order to make sense of their existence. While interacting with the television texts, they produce meanings which serve as generators for negotiating self and collective identities. As audiences learn and make sense of a variety of cultural representations, their identities tend to be hybrid; that is when members of a community present several, alike and contradictory, identities (Hall, 1996a, 1996b).

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Hybrid identities are often defined as multiple forms of identity which constitute an individual who experiences various power systems within and outside their own cultural boundaries. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2006) points out, hybridity relies on the imbalance of power relations in culture, place, and descent. Some scholars relate the expressions of hybrid identities to the production of intra-group/inter-group relationships (Hansen and Hesli, 2009; Marotta, 2008; Newman, 2006). Hansen (2009) and Hesli describe a hybrid individual as a citizen who exhibits a high degree of inter-group tolerance while maintaining strong intra-group attachments. Similarly, Newman (2006) notes that hybrid identities emerge as the results of interactions among different cultural groups within frontiers. In contrast, Marotta observes (2008) that individuals with hybrid identities tend to create clear boundaries between their ethnic community and the others, perceiving that they possess contradictory characteristics to the ones expressed by a dominant group.

Despite such opinion, Marotta (2008: 306) argues that the construction of hybrid identities "is neither an intrinsically positive nor negative condition because it depends on the social, cultural and political context in which the hybrid subject resides and the personal strengths and weaknesses of particular individuals." As hybridity concerns "the process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences" (Bhabha, 1994: 252), I contend that it is inclined to be a positive condition. In this way, I agree with the notion of hybridity as "multi-scalar identity formation" suggested by Eva Swyngedouw and Erik Swyngedouw (2009). In their article about the construction of hybrid identity among the Congolese diaspora in Brussels, they describe that the hybrid Congolese urban community articulate "ways of being" and "ways of becoming" which represent their multi-scalar cultural affiliations: Black, African, European, Congolese and urban

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locus (Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, 2009: 87). Drawing upon this evidence, my study will look into "the process of becoming" in which the influence of two countries and ethnicities play a substantial role in the constructions of hybrid identities among Malaysian Javanese diaspora.

Generally, hybridity is a flexible concept which concerns the inclusive domain of mixture and comes in various terms. The word hybrid which originates from a Latin word, *hibrida*, is initially a scientific term in biology to name half-breed animals or plants and has been widely accepted as a technical jargon in social sciences (Stross, 1999). The metaphorical concepts of this biological term in cultural domains range from *mestizaje* (Martín-Barbero, 1991, 2006), *creolization* (Hannerz, 1987; Stewart, 2011), syncretism (Steward, 2011; Thompson, 1984), hybridism (Iwabuchi, 1998), hybridization (Pieterse, 2006, 1994; Shimoni, 2006), and hybridity (Garcia-Canclini, 1990, 2006; Bhabba, 1996, 1994; Hall, 1991, 2000; Pieterse, 2006). Elaborating on the subject matter of the term mixture, Charles Steward (2011) provides the different contextual definition of such concepts. He states that:

> *Mixture* is the most generic term for blending of distinctive elements in any sphere. *Hybridity* begins in race theory/genetics, but has long since been extended metaphorically, now largely synonymous with mixture. *Syncretism* is originally applied to religious systems, and extends to fusions of idea systems: philosophies, ideologies, ritual practices, science/medicine. *Creolization* is the process by which 'Creoles' are formed. Initially, a 'Creole' was a plant, animal or person of Old World origin, born and raised in the New World. Creolization thus involves indigenization and transformation. In linguistics a creole is a pidgin language learned as a first language by a succeeding generation (Stewart, 2011: 50).

*Mestizaje* refers to the situation of mixed culture and ethnicity in North and Latin America (García-Canclini, 1990; Martín-Barbero, 1991, 2006), while hybridism,



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hybridization, and hybridity have specific meanings beyond the notion of cultural diffusion. Koichi Iwabuchi (1998) argues that hybridism is a particular discourse of cultural assimilation in Japan which is different from the general concept of hybridity. It is because Japanese hybridism "aims to discursively construct an image of an organic cultural entity, 'Japan' that absorbs foreign cultures without changing its national/cultural core" (Iwabuchi, 1998: 72). On the other hand, hybridization concerns the process of locating relativeness in different cultures as a method for "an affirmation of similarity" (Pieterse, 2006: 672). Nikolas Kompridis (2005: 322) calls such process as "normativization" which results in the conceptualisation of hybridity as a domain for "negating the foreignness of the foreigner, the otherness of the other." Similarly, Homi K Bhabha (1996) refers hybridization to the process of articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence, which provides a space for negotiation of culture formation, which is neither assimilation nor collaboration.

In that way, the notion of cultural hybridism, hybridization, and hybridity is similar to the subject of cultural homogenization. As Marotta (2008: 304) emphasises, hybrid cultural spaces serve as "sites of closure, cultural homogenization and essentializing practices", which also accommodates the establishment of internal differentiation. In fact, hybridization that transforms global culture into a global mélange includes the subject of hybridity which represents a situation that supports "the assumption of difference between the categories, forms, beliefs that go into the mixture", but such mixed domains must have clear boundaries (Pieterse, 2006: 671). Using the term hybridization Baruch Shimoni (2006: 217) points out that the very element in the process of cultural-border crossing is people's "sense of boundaries."

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Aside from mixed domains, hybridity also refers to an "in-between" term to describe a cultural domain where a "third category" emerges as the results of mimicry and duplication. This kind of hybridity can be regarded as syncretism which describes a merger of religious forms (Pieterse, 2006). Taking *Kimbangism* in the Republic of Congo as an example, Pieterse regards this belief as a "third religion" which combines the exact elements of Christianity and the local traditional beliefs (2006: 668). The cases of syncretism also include a simultaneous practice of dual religions in which one religion becomes the alternative or complementarity to another (Stewart, 2011). Theravada Buddhism that is practiced in Thailand, Burma or Sri Lanka is one of the cases (Stewart, 2011: 50).

In terms of duplication, hybridity recognises a situation when double categories exist at the same time and place. This kind of hybridity describes that a hybrid person exhibits "two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, consciousnesses, two epoch that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of utterance" (Bakhtin, 1981: 360). Focussing on the cultural authority in postcolonial countries, Bhabha (1996, 1994) uses a different perspective to define hybridity as the construction of inbetweeness. Bhabha (1994) conceives of the "Third Space" as a hybrid culture/identity which represents an ambivalence of adaptation to nuanced colonial culture. It is seen as an in-between space, symbolising "the others of ourselves", because it arises from the endeavour of "renewing the past and interrupting the performance of the present" (Bhabha, 1994: 39).

Despite the polarity in the conceptualisation, hybridity in media culture simply represents the articulation of "nomadism" (Kraidy, 1999; 2005). Marwan Kraidy argues that hybridity substantially represents "a zone of symbolic ferment in which power

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relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed," not an in-between zone where dual institutions of power blend (1999: 460). Media consumers, as Kraidy perceives, are "nomadic communities" because they are bound to engage in various social, political and cultural locations (1999: 469).

The consumption of media as a nomadic participation has been confirmed by many media scholars especially those who study the construction of identity in diaspora communities. For example, Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins (2008) who explore the television culture of Turkish-speaking populations in Europe identify that transnational Turkish programmes substantially serve as the mediator for banal reality of Turkish life. The Turkish-language transnational television enables the diasporic communities "to travel the distance from the one to the other within themselves", representing their attachment and identification with Turkish and host country culture (Aksoy and Robins, 2008: 21). Similarly, Myria Georgiou's (2013a; 2013b) focus group discussions with Arab-speaking communities across some European capitals reveals that their consumption of transnational media produces the articulation of "strategic nostalgia" and "banal nomadism." Georgiou (2013a: 34) refers banal nomadism to "regular use of different media—as these are defined in terms of technology, language, and level of interactivity" which is associated with the users' construction of subjectivity "within singular and bounded cultural and political spaces." In the case of Malaysian television consumption, hybrid identity is discussed in a broader way in which the elements of local morality and foreign democratic values are seen as the mediators for the construction of hybrid identity among youth (Haryati, 2014).

Such nomadic discourse of identity politics, as I argue, simply illustrates the praxis of "shifting identity positions" between two contradictory cultures, Western and non-



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Western. The Arabs (Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b; Slade, 2010), the Turks (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robins, 2008) and the South Asians (Barker, 1997; Gillespie, 1995; Thompson, 2002) in Europe strategically situate their subjectivity in traditionally religious culture ascribed by their parents and in modern Western society. Fien Adriaens (2014) describes the Belgian-Turkish girls in her study as occupying "hybrid cultural positions" when they locate the desirable and undesirable "ethnic accents" in local and global narratives of self, provided by transnational television programmes.

Such shifting identity positions emerge as the means of performing cross-cutting identities, representing their identification with traditional Turkish culture and Western youth phenomena (Adriaens, 2014: 107). Likewise, Chis Barker (1997) who examines the "soap talks" among Asian and Caribbean girls in Southall points out that the narratives in global soap operas such as *East-Enders, Neighbours, Hearthbreak High*, and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* encourage the girl to perform reflexive project of hybrid self. This enunciation of self-reflexivity in multiple locations of culture is derived from their experiences in family and peer groups which clearly culturally separate from each other (Barker, 1997). Similar to Barker, Marie Gillespie's (1995) ethnography in Southall reveals that young Punjabi Londoners also exhibit hybrid identity shifting when negotiating the cultural values and representations in Bollywood VCRs (Video Cassette Recorder) and Western soap operas.

Using a different approach of diaspora conceptualisation, this thesis seeks to explore the articulation of shifting identity positions or nomadic hybridity in a cultural community within an ethnic society. As many define, diaspora refers to the offspring of migrants who do not belong to a particular location of culture (Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1990; Karla, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005). Various diaspora communities in Western countries live through

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different experiences of post-migration syndromes, which concern the relationship between "home and away" (Karla et al., 2005). Such experiences include dispersal and scattering, collective trauma, cultural flowering, troubled relationships with the majority, a sense of community transcending national frontiers, and a promoting a return movement (Karla et al., 2005: 12).

The situations become worse when they are associated with a particular set of core features such as "victim," "labour," "trade," "asylum," and "cultural" (Cohen, 1997). For example, the subjectivity of Black diaspora in the West are always constructed within the historical dynamics of African subjectivity despite their strong integration into their host countries (Campbell, 2003; Gomez, 2004; Heywood, 2002; Manning, 2003). Similarly, the Arabs living in some European capitals have to deal with everyday anxieties in the light of Arab Spring and Islamic terrorism which to some Western media appear to be "embedded" in their culture (Georgiou, 2013b). However, Hall (1990) argues that diaspora is not necessarily related to sacred homeland. Instead, it should be defined in broader contexts pertaining to social form, a type of consciousness and a mode of cultural production (Vertovec, 2004). In this way, I contend that Javanese descendants in Malaysia constitute a distinctive diaspora whose life experiences are constructed within one locus of culture which exist between two different concepts of ethnicity.

Essentially, the Javanese diaspora in Malaysia constitute the Malay population which generally practice the similar culture as theirs. The Javanese diaspora in this context refer to the offspring of the Javanese migrants from Indonesia who migrated to the Malay Peninsula before and during European colonial times. Some previous studies point out that they prefer to be associated with colonial Javanese migrants rather than

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the modern Indonesian migrants (Spaan et al., 2001; Umi, 2010). Constitutionally, they constitute a part of the Malay society who are granted the citizenship status and ethnic privileges of "being" Malay (Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994). At the same time, they also observe their duties as the citizens of Malaysia by dealing with acts of citizenship. According to Engin Isin (2008), the notion of "acts of citizenship" refers to any acts done by citizens and yet-to-be-citizens of a state to show that they are legitimate members of the state's nation. It gives a political status to the individuals to claim rights and responsibilities as a citizen (Isin, 2008: 39).

Despite that, the Javanese descendants still retain some semblance of Javanese cultural identifications, especially the language and traditions, in their everyday lives (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000; Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994). Considering the presence of modern Indonesian migrant labour (Hamzah et al., 2012; Azizah, 1997; Kaur, 2004) and popular culture on Malaysian television (see Juliana et al., 2013; Md Azalanshah, 2011), I argue that the Javanese diaspora have space for observing their ethnic origin through their engagement in televised narratives. They are also constantly exposed to the depiction of the Malay society on television which represents their state-defined ethnic society, especially through the discourses of ethnic politics which have long become the political culture in Malaysia (Esman, 1994; Weiss, 2009). In point of fact, while UMNO dominantly rule and set the local norms for the Malay society and the entire Malaysian nation with its ethnic politics (Esman, 1994), the opposition coalition of PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), PKR (*Parti Keadilan Rakyat*/People's Justice Party) and DAP (Democratic Action Party) uses a different approach by implementing multi-ethnic and multi-religious political sentiments (Weiss, 2009). In this way, the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study are assumed to create a space for negotiation of hybrid identities.

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Through this study, I seek to explore the determinants of hybrid ethnicity in the Javanese diaspora consumption of television which match with the notion of hybridity as nomadism, inbetweeness, appropriation and distanciation. These determinants include "ethnic accents" which refer to the identifications with homeland, religion, language, history, and descent (Adriaens, 2014: 106-107). Furthermore, I believe that Malaysian Javanese situate their culture between Malaysia and Indonesia, especially if they watch Indonesian programmes. Apparently, Indonesian soap operas or *sinetron* (acronym of *sinema elektronik*/electronic cinemas) dominate the foreign programmes in local FTAs (Juliana et al., 2013). It is argued that most Indonesian soap operas concern stories about the complex life of women in a Javanese cultural setting (Aripurnami, 1996; Ida, 2006), and become a part of routine television consumption for women on the outskirts of urban cities in Java (Ida, 2006). The stories are mainly about the Engaging in television content from two different transnational location can enable the Malaysian Javanese women to experience "banal transnationalism" which represents "the mechanism of splitting—where the banality of the 'here and now' provides the stimulus for nostalgic dreams and fantasies about the 'there and then'" (Aksoy and Robins, 2008: 10). As their cultural origin was rooted in the past Indonesia while their cultural experiences take place in contemporary Malaysia, they are also more likely to exhibit "transnational subjectivity" (Georgiou, 2013a) by locating their experiences of transnational trajectories in cultural, social, and political discourses of the two countries. All of these nomadic discourses essentially describe people's sense of belonging to two or more cultural domains.

Aside from locating the elements of nomadism in hybridity, I need to consider the aspects of hybridity as cultural translation as well. In this matter, it is important to

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regard the production of hybrid identities as the means for "appropriation" or "adaptation" of any possibilities that underpin the process of cultural mixing (Burke, 2011: 76). As I mention earlier, hybridity concerns the process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences (Bhabha, 1994). For this reason, I need to explore the ways the Malaysian Javanese identify with the essential aspects of their ethnicity which they perceive as the most appropriate characteristics representing Javanese and Malay culture. I believe that Malaysian Javanese undergo the process of integration into Malay society through the course of "cultural adaptation and adoption." John Berry (1997) suggests that integration is one of acculturation strategies that illustrate how a cultural group merges with another group by maintaining their original culture while observing the other group's culture.

Essentially, the construction of identity in Malay society is one of the typical examples of "cycle of hybridity", in which a subject of category "goes from 'hybrid' form, to 'pure' form, to 'hybrid' form; from relative heterogeneity, to homogeneity, and then back again to heterogeneity" (Stross, 1999: 265). The Malay is perceived as a hybrid identity which emerges as the result of cultural interaction between Javanese from *Majapahit* and the Malays in Sumatera as well as Peninsular Malaya (Kassim, 1975; Maier, 1997). In the contemporary Malaysia, the Malays tend to claim ethnic purity as they stand as one inclusive ethnic group, being disconnected from their ethnic origins (Kahn, 2006; Reid, 2001; Umi, 2010). However, I believe that there still exists cultural heterogeneity within the Malay society, maintained by its constituent communities which prefer to retain their hybrid culture. The existence of Javanese along with the other Malaysian communities of Indonesian origin such as Banjarese, Acehnese, and Minangese confirms this assertion. With the presence of televised images of identities,

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encompassing the Malaysian and Indonesian contexts, I contend that the Malaysian Javanese can have a space for constructing their imagined communities.

### 2.5. Television and imagined communities: Towards building a nation

Television serves an instrumental function as the mediator for nation-building and the construction of national identity. As a nation is conceived of as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006, 1983), national identity can be imagined through symbols and rituals that are adequately available in media texts. Benedict Anderson (2006: 48) argues that "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for modern nation." Television which provides the representations of national culture and state ideology can too enable a citizen to construct the ideas of national solidarity that leads to the accomplishment of national unity and development (Durham and Kellner, 2006; Martin-Barbero, 2006; Price, 1995; Straubhaar, 2006).

Before I talk further about the importance of national identity in production and consumption of television, it is crucial to discuss its definition in considerable manners. As many scholars define, national identity refers to a condition in which the citizens of a country share sense of belonging to the country's geographical, political, social, economic, cultural, and historical space and characteristics (Hansen and Hesli, 2009; Higson, 1998; Smith, 1992). Specifically, Anthony Smith (1992: 58) construes national identity as "a sense of shared continuity, shared memories of history, and the collective belief in a common destiny." Smith (1992) further argues that such sense of communality is substantially derived from the sameness in cultural identity and ethno-history.

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However, in multi-ethnic countries where the population is characterised by civic and ethnic attachments, the construction of national identity becomes more complex (Bakke, 2000; Greenfeld, 1992; Hansen and Hesli, 2009). Civic and ethnic groups subscribe to different ideas of national characteristics, especially the historical and cultural aspects, and that subscription is either voluntary or inherited (Bakke, 2000; Greenfeld, 1992). Moreover, according to Hansen and Hesli (2009: 3), the constitution of national identity varies across different ethnic groups due to the variation in degree of attachment to in-groups (members of the same ethnicity) and degree of tolerance towards out-groups (members of different ethnicities). In this case, the definition of national identity falls into four categories: civic, ethnic, hybrid, and atomised national identities (Brubaker, 1996; Hansen and Hesli, 2009). Ethnic and hybrid citizens have a higher degree in sense of belonging to ethnic and historical attachment, but the former are less tolerant to out-groups than the latter (Hansen and Hesli, 2009: 4). On the other hand, civic nationalism emerges as the result of weaker ethnic attachment and stronger tolerance of out-groups, while atomised nationalism appears when citizens tend to restrain themselves from associating with ethnic and societal groups (Hansen and Hesli, 2009: 4).

Essentially, the complexity of national identity lies in the nature of the state and the features of the nation. In a postcolonial state like Malaysia, where multi-ethnic groups constitute the population, the construction of national identity seems to be a never-ending process for every ethnic group has its own ethnic interest in nation-building (Abdul Rahman, 2007; Shamsul, 2007). Shamsul (2007: 204-207) points out that Malaysia represents one case of "state-without-nation" because each of the ethnic groups offers its own "nation-of-intent", accommodating its preferred ethnic or religious attachments. In this way, the Anderson's notion of a nation as an imagined



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community (2006, 1983) seems irrelevant to the Malaysian concept of nation-building (Cheah, 2007). In addition, the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nation) coined by the former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad to unite the multi-ethnic citizens in the name of one country and one national language, as well as under the same constitution remains to neglect the notion of a nation (Cheah, 2007; Shamsul, 2007; Tan, 2000). Tan (2000: 469) argues that Malay political elites tend to maintain the dominance of "Malay identity" and "Malay culture" in the national identity, regardless of the significance of other ethnic groups.

In point of fact, Malaysia remains to be a "Malay nation-state" through which the cultural identifications of the Malay ethnicity serve as the backdrop of the national identity (Arakaki, 2004; Cheah, 2007; Tan, 2000). Even the Malaysian Constitution sets Malay ethnic language as the national language and Islam as the official religion of the country (Cheah, 2007: 47). The designation of *Bahasa Malaysia* (which is actually the original language of the Malay populace) as the national language and the recognition of Islam as the religion of the Federation confirm the government's attempts to "*Malaynise*" the multi-cultural Malaysians (Arakaki, 2004; Barraclough, 1983; Tan, 2000).

In the contexts of cultural industry, the features of Malay nationalism appear to be the key determinants in the construction of national culture (Norila, 1994; Zaharom and Wang, 2004). The government pays more attention to the imposition of Malay culture in the broadcasting system, while appreciating the aspects of Chinese and Indian culture that appear to be similar to the Malay culture (Norila, 2004: 39). At the same time, the media regulations continue to protect the government's interests in politics generally and the Malay population particularly (Zaharom and Wang, 2004). Despite the

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dominance of the Malay cultural identifications, the production of national culture remains as a real challenge if the media productions continue to separately exist in three ethnic-based platforms: Malay, Chinese, and India (Banerjee, 2000: 41). The reason is that the audiences become accustomed to the cultural imagery of their own ethnic identity instead of the images of the national identity.

Although it is difficult to actualise the national culture through media, Malaysian cultural industry continues to produce local content and keep cultural identity intact in the production. Taking the advertising sector as an example, the production of "Made-in-Malaysia" commercials must use the local values, norms, talents, and the lifestyles as the key characteristics of the presentation (Samsudin and Latiffah, 2010: 219). In addition, the sector also adapts the local consumer culture positioning (LCCP) in the advertising strategies to maintain the local and national identities (Mohd Helmi and Mohd Nizam, 2005). In the contexts of popular culture, Malay dramas and reality shows dominate the local channels and gain increasing popularity due to the cultural elements that enable the Malay audience to identify with (Juliana, 2010; Juliana et al., 2013; Rosya and Moris, 2014). Particularly, most Malay audience like watching Islamic dramas and reality shows as they enjoy the positive messages (Zulkiple, 1998; Faizul and Nor, 2013; Saodah et al., 2012) as well as the insightful information pertaining to public affairs (Juliana, 2011) which lead to the reinforcement of local identity.

As a matter of identity building, Malay audience tend to locate the cultural values and elements in their consumption of local and foreign dramas (Faizul and Nor, 2013; Md Azalanshah, 2011; Thompson, 2000). Md Azalanshah (2011) argues that Malay women in rural and urban setting use their cultural competencies by articulating moral capacity, cultural proficiency, selective consumerism, and adult capacity to negotiate the modern

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aspects of life depicted in non-Western soap operas. They engage in selective and oppositional viewing by considering the family and community values to deal with desirable and undesirable cultural elements in the soaps (Md Azalanshah, 2011: 152-190).

It is clear that television dramas have become a part of the daily life in Malay community (Thompson, 2000). In his thesis about urbanism in rural Malaysia, Eric C Thompson (2000) examines drama viewing in a Malay *kampung* and an urban community of Kuala Lumpur. Thompson (2000: 209) identifies that the Malay viewers can differentiate between *cerita kampung* (kampung-centred dramas) and *cerita bandar* (urban-centred dramas) which both present the local construct of modern identity. Accordingly, *kampung* dramas mostly represent the moral values and "idyllic simplicity" of the countryside life, while the urban dramas depict Malay middle-class families which offer the images of modernity for the Malay audience to observe the ideas of national development (Thompson, 2000: 213-235).

In fact, the production of drama in Malaysia is not free from the interference of *Barisan Nasional* government (Foo, 2004). The local drama producers often find themselves following the content codes which emphasise the *muhibah* (goodwill) values and the aspiration for better living as determined by the regime (Foo, 2004: 225-229). This enforcement of modern aspects of life shows that the Malaysian government indeed use television as a site for modernisation of the society (Md Azalanshah, 2011; Silk, 2002). Apparently, television images which ubiquitously exist in everyday contexts become the government's extended hand to promote the economic development as the core values of national identities (Silk, 2002). However, with the existence of racial segregation in television production that becomes a hindrance to the production of national culture

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(Banerjee, 2000), I would argue that the national identity in Malaysia television remains as a discursive idea.

The elements of Malaysia as a nation may not be tangible in the form of one fixed national culture, but the representations of Malaysian multi-cultural lifestyle in television are obviously present on national television. Furthermore, the Malaysian style of national culture is somewhat economy-centred instead of culture-centred. The implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) between the 1970s and the 1990s that produced a new group of middle class Malays (Jomo, 2004; Shamsul, 1997), became one of the factors for privatisation of Malaysian corporations, including media industry. Malaysian television, initiated by TV3, set to run profit-oriented business and took the opportunity to provide local audiences with the imagery of modern culture through import of foreign programmes, especially from Western countries (Karthigesu, 1994).

Even after the country was challenged by a religious movement of Islamic resurgence, which pushed the government to create more Islamic-friendly environment in the public system (Chandra, 1986; Mohamad, 1981), Malaysia continued to import ideas of modernity from foreign countries. It was achieved through the introduction of the Look East Policy which aimed to promote the work ethics of industrialised East Asian societies particularly to Malay natives (Jomo, 2010). One of the ways for the Malay society to imagine the Asian modernity, which combines ethical dimensions of corporate culture and traditional values, is through the consumption of soap operas from Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Md Azalanshah, 2012; 2011). In line with the goals of producing modern society—enforced in NEP, Look East Policy and another national plan of Vision 2020—Malaysia stands firm to maintain the economic-

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based model of national identity. It is apparent in the government's effort to promote Malaysia as a developed country through the productions of television images that mainly present the refurbishment of local identities that are masked in the form of economic development and modernisation (Silk, 2002).

Generally, the production and the representation of national identity in television system appear to be a substantive dimension for nation-building. As Monroe Price (1995: 4) points out, television serves a substantial function as "a generator of mass public imagery, inscribed with special powers." He further argues that "national television cannot be understood without a clearer definition for 'national identity'", which is transformed in "any given set of language practices, myths, stories, and beliefs propagated to justify a competing group in replacing them or shifting power among them" (Price, 1995: 15).

Many previous studies (Aslama and Pantti, 2007; Adriaens and Biltereyst, 2012; Beeden and de Bruin, 2009; Castelló, 2009; Merayo, 2013; Reijnders, 2007; Porto, 2011) have provided evidence that the elements of national identity appear in the visual and contextual aspects of television narratives, giving the audience a site to imagine "banal nationalism." The notion of banal nationalism, as Michael Billig (2009, 1995) proposes, explains that the deixis of nationhood is ordinarily available in everyday contexts through the appearance of national flag, language, product labels, as well as the everyday representations of the nation in mass media. Popular entertainment such as drama series (Adriaens and Biltereyst, 2012; Beeden and de Bruin, 2009; Castelló, 2009, 2007; Merayo, 2013; Porto, 2011), reality television (Aslama and Pantti, 2007; Reijnders, 2007), as well as the persuasive elements in advertisements (Mohd Helmi and Mohd Nizam, 2005; Hogan, 2006) and news programmes (Ardizzoni, 2005;

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Blondheim and Liebes, 2009; Scannell, 1996) instrumentally offers powerful messages about what constitutes a nation. However, this study will focus on the political discourses of nation-building which are available in local news. Apparently, political propaganda that is constantly distributed in Malaysian mainstream media perpetually influences the Malaysia's multiracial society to negotiate their conceptualisation of nation-building (Postill, 2008; Tan, 2000).

National identity is never fixed, but is constantly reconstructed and redefined in the light of social and cultural changes locally and globally. Evidently, global and regional influences play a significant role in re-constructing and re-shaping the national culture on television (Appadurai, 2006; Ardizzoni, 2005; Aslama and Pantti, 2007). For example, Ardizzoni's (2005) analysis of Italian television content reveals that local and regional values about religion and ethnicity have some effects on the production of Italianess in television programmes. A global television format that is locally adapted also influences the representation of national identity on television. Analysing a global adapted reality television programme in Finland, Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti (2007) locate the elements of "banal nationalism" in the programmes which serve as the generators for "flagging Finnishness." Similarly, Alexandra Breeden and Joost de Bruin (2010) who study the articulation of national identity in the American remake of the British sitcom *The Office*, points out that the aspects of national identity are important in the production of global-adapted television programmes. In a Malaysian case, local productions of television programmes in the 1990s that mostly imitate the western genre accommodate the local taste and preference (Zaharom, 1996).

Considering television texts as encoded messages that need to be decoded to have an effect (Hall, 2001), the construction of national identity through television programmes



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should be examined from the perspectives of the viewers. Glen Creeber's (2004) study on the broadcasting system of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reveals that the public service television which claims to be the representative of "Britishness" neglects the multiculturalism in the country. As the result, the diaspora communities that have become a part of the society cannot identify with the national culture in the broadcasting system (Creeber, 2004). Minority groups which are considerably underrepresented in national television usually have to negotiate the strange images of national identity as they have their own ideas of nationalism. For example, the youth from the ethnic minority of Lao Isan in Northeast Thailand are confronted with the ambiguities of local identity presented in Thai central television, which appears to be irrelevant to their Lao identity (Hesse-Swain, 2006). Similarly, mainstream television in Malaysia which propagates the ideas of modern Malaysia significantly contributes to the construction of national identity among *Iban* society in East Malaysia, but it does not change their preferred nationalist ideology (Postill, 2008).

Considering the element of human agency in the interpretation of national identity on television, and drawing on Shamsul's concept of "authority-defined" and "everyday-defined" identities (1996), I contend that a community which constitutes a larger domain of society tends to have their own preferred construct of identity along with their embracement of state-guided identities. In this way, I seek to explore the construction of these preferred and state-guided identities among the Malay women of Javanese descent who routinely engage in the images of their community on television. I believe that their construction of collective identities from the interpretation of television is rooted in their attachment to everyday culture and community which underpin their "interpretive communities".

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## 2.6. Television and interpretive communities: Interpretation of collective identities

As a human being who tends to monitor the practices of the people around them through reflexivity (Giddens, 1991, 1984), a citizen who constitutes a cultural community and a nation is apt to interpret the identity practices of their fellow communions (Gerson, 2008). In the contexts of media consumption, audience members are believed to interpret the texts in the same way as their cultural or national fellow communions do (Fish, 1980). Fish (1980) further describes that,

> an interpreter of a text is not an independent agent. Rather, they proceed not from him but from the interpretive community of which he is a member; they are, in effect, community property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too. The notion of "interpretive communities," which had surface occasionally in my discourse before, now becomes central to it. Indeed, it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around (Fish, 1980: 14).

Precisely, the notion of interpretive communities explains that members of a community share the same "ways of reading" and tend to have the same perspective towards cultural texts which concern their community. Their interpretation of the world is influenced by the constitutional normality or prompted by prior legitimate expectations (Fish, 1980). Consequently, what they see as normative may be seen strange by the members of other communities (Fish, 1980: 16).

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The thesis of interpretive communities also represents the contextual relationships between the producers of text—such as journalists—and readers in producing the shared meanings of the world (Berkowitz and TerKuerst, 1999; Rauch, 2007; Zelizer, 1993). As Berkowitz and TerKeurst (1999) point out, journalists create preferred meanings of the texts by collecting the information and influence from news sources and their news organisation. However, journalists as interpretive communities considerably subscribe to their collective interpretation of public discourses and less reflect on the positions they occupy (Zelizer, 1993). Through the discourses, Zelizer (1993: 233) further argues, news reporters "set standards of evaluation to appraise more general journalistic coverage" and to be more connected to their readers.

I would argue that the term readers of the texts can also refer to television audience as their interpretation of cultural texts on television represents active reading of contexts in which geographical factors and prior knowledge mediate the encoding process (Gamson et al., 1992). For example, Rauch (2007) reveals that activists who detach themselves from mainstream society tend to consume news from alternative media, including community television, and make sense of their diverging world in relation to the mainstream one. Their engagement in alternative media enables them to build their own subcultural capital, which is derived from their "claim of interpretive authority" (Rauch, 2007: 1008).

The conceptual framework of interpretive community is also applicable in the studies on the relationships between media and religion because "the notion of community is the key to the concerns, history, and doctrines of most religious cultures" (Lindlof, 2002: 62). Thomas R Lindlof (2002) categorises numerous media studies which touch upon the intersections between media and religion into four groups: genre communities,

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historical communities, institutional communities, and virtual communities. First, audience of genre communities which refers to media consumers who engage in a specific religious genre to construct their interpretive communities can be seen in Gillespie's (1995) ethnography of television use among Punjabi Londoners and Hendershot's (1995) study on Christian pop music genre (Lindlof, 2002: 67). Second, historical communities can be found in some previous studies such as Romanowski's (1995) and Stout's (1996) which explore the church views about media and focus on the reception of historical texts (Lindlof, 2002: 68). Third, the studies which focus on the relationship between journalists and its professional organisations (Berkowit and TerKeurst, 1999; Zelizer, 1993) represent the thesis of institutional communities as interpretive communities (Lindlof, 2002: 68). Fourth, in light with the transformation of religious experience from conventional sites to virtual space encourage scholars to apply the study of religious culture among virtual communities (Lindlof, 2002: 70). These four categories of interpretive community studies empirically prove that media use indeed constitute a part of everyday culture, transporting members of a community to the nexus of class, gender, and ethnic relationships in their social lives as well as to their religious affiliations.

Despite the diverse inquiries, the interpretive communities approach to television and religion studies concerns the active role of media users. The notion of active audience which have been greatly influenced by the Encoding/Decoding thesis (Hall, 1980) opens up a range of new investigations on the audience's negotiation of religious identity. The members of a conservative religious community may less engage in television viewing to restrain from bad influence for their religious faith (Hamilton and Rubin, 1992). However, for some religious groups, television can bring church services closer to home through religious programmes (Ardizzoni, 2005; Gaddy and Pritchard,

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1985; Taylor and Chatters, 2011). Furthermore, watching religious programmes is instrumental for religious families to supervise the negotiation of cultural identity among the family members, especially the children. Gillespie (1995) found that Hindu families in Southall actively encourage their children to participate in family religious television in order to enforce religious knowledge and beliefs as well as their traditional culture to the younger generation.

In some communities, religious affiliation practically constitutes cultural identity and even national identity. Emphasising that religion is a cultural system, Clifford Geertz (2000: 90) suggests that "religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of order." Many countries impose religious nationalism to their citizens through social constitutions, including cultural texts. For example, to impose Indian nationalism, Indian government promotes the prominence of Hindu epics in the form of drama series which are broadcast on state-controlled television channels (Mankekar, 2002). Mankekar (2002) identifies that the weekly serial *Ramayan* which adopts the scriptural narratives of *Ramayana* in turn reinforces Hindu nationalism especially to the Hindu communities.

Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) who studies the reception of television dramas in Egypt figures out that most television series in the countries constantly represent the Islamic model of national identity and influence the local audience to deal with the identity politics. The politics of religious nationalism definitely exist in countries that designate an official religion, including Malaysia. The ramification of Malay nationalism which dominates the conceptualisation of *Bangsa Malaysia* apparently is concerned to maintain the dominance of Islamic and Malay identity in the national

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culture (Arakaki, 2004; Tan, 2000). Moreover, as Islam is the dominant religion in the country, Malaysia constantly utilises its broadcasting system to promote Islamic morality as the national ethic codes for its multicultural citizens (Barraclough, 1983; Schumann, 1991; Zulkiple, 2008).

Television substantially serves as an engaging site for a state to disseminate religious and cultural symbols to its nation and beyond. However, such symbols have diverse meanings depending on how audience interpret and negotiate the conventional structures in their everyday lives. Purnima Mankekar (2002, 1999) provides us with a critical analysis of the reception of religious popular culture among multi-religious groups in India. Despite the tangible elements of Hindu nationalism, audience of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* locate the cultural codes in the epic series to negotiate their social discourse of self and others (Mankekar, 2002). While Hindu audience focuses on the religious codes which they conceive of as the representations of their cultural identity, the Sikh and Muslim viewers relate the moral and political codes pertaining to gender relations in the series to their everyday contexts in their own communities particularly and Indian society generally (Mankekar, 2002: 136).

The cultural codes in religious programmes bring members of the same religious community together regardless of their national attachment. It is argued that diaspora consumption of homeland-produced media represents a means of transnational bounding through which ethnic and religious identities and cultures are imagined at a distance (Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Gillespie, 1995). However, it should be noted that generational factors significantly determine the production of cultural meaning in the consumption of religious narratives in diaspora communities. Aksoy and Robins (2008) point out the existence of cultural distance which makes young Turkish population in

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Europe less reflect on the representations of Muslim festivals in Turkish television. Similarly, the Hindu youth in Southall watch "sacred soaps" and Hindu films through VCRs and adapted-programmes in local television due to the encouragement from their parents who want them to imagine their cultural values and beliefs (Gillespie, 1995). For older generations, viewing religious films and programmes generates positive implications through which they derive "a pleasurable act of devotion" and "mark of transformations in religious practices" (Gillespie, 1995: 89).

Precisely, television provides a set of power relations that are mediated through cultural symbols. Since messages are purposely encoded (Hall, 1980), the hegemonic or ideological elements of "culture" in television are also produced, censored, paid for, and broadcast within cultural and national boundaries and beyond (Abu-Lughod, 1997). The notion of interpretive communities is applied in this production of culture. As Lila Abu-Lughod (1997: 128) suggests, television serves a practical function for "writing against the grain" because it enables the producers to construe people in distant places as part of the same cultural worlds they inhabit. Indeed, local producers usually use local cultural values to construct the representation of community that audience can identify with (Tinic, 2006). On the other hand, the audience regardless of their distant locations, still can reflect the televisual cultural representations on their personal experiences in everyday lives (Abu-Lughod, 1997; Fingerson, 1999; Mankekar, 2002, 1993; Tuchman, 1994). This assertion confirms that television producers and viewers are framed in the cultural boundaries of interpretive communities.

Members of a community share communal experiences pertaining to values, traditions, and customs which may be different from cultures in other locations. As Fish (1980) points out in his notion of interpretive communities, the common values in a community

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may not be viewed as normal in other communities. Evidence from previous studies on the relationship between television viewing and the construction of cultural identities confirm that audience locate the similarities, the gap, and the alternative subjects between their culture and those represented on the screen. For example, La Pastina's (2004) ethnography on the reception of telenovelas in rural Brazil suggests rural audience view the urban culture as shown in the television programme at a distance through which they interpret the messages in accordance with their understanding of socio-political and economic contexts. Not only rural viewers, urban viewers who are more open to modern ideas also interpret cultural texts within a particular social and cultural context. Timothy Scrase's (2002) ethnography in a middle-class society of West Bengal, India, also reveals that cultural texts are negotiated in the account of "othering". The viewers in the middle-class West Bengali households identify the gap between the televisual culture and their everyday culture by which they use such labels as "non-Western", "non-Bengali", and "non-traditional" (Scrase, 2002: 331). The account of "othering" appears to be a common interpretation of television in relation to cultural identities (see also Mankekar, 2002).

Crucially, audience identify with "culture of location" in their consumption of television. They regulate themselves to determine what kind of cultural texts they want to observe when dealing with cultures from different locations. For example, the Chinese teens from immigrant families in the United States of America exhibit two modes of cultural consumption (Louie, 2006). The youth position themselves as Chinese diaspora and search for family and ethnic values when watching Chinese movies and dramas, but in contrast, they reflect on their American identity and seek pleasure in their consumption of American programmes (Louie, 2006). The diaspora girls in a Mexican American community of San Antonio in Texas also locate different

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culture of location through which they identify with Mexican, Hispanic, and American identities in their reception of telenovelas (Mayer, 2003).

Indeed, environment and experiences influence the ways people watch and understand television. For example, McMillin and Fisherkeller's (2009) cross-cultural study on teenage talking about television and everyday life reveals that youth experiences with family, peer groups, school, religious affiliation, and nationalism influence their interpretation of televisual teen culture that revolve around gender and class identities. Teenagers in Johannesburg, Bangalore, Munich, and New York actively negotiate gender and class positioning in their articulation of cultural identity when discussing their favourite television programmes (McMillin and Fisherkeller, 2009).

Similarly, Adriaens's (2014) visual ethnography of television consumption among Turkish diaspora girls in Belgium shows that indeed gender and class are the crucial determinants in teen cultural identity. As teenagers learn gender and class values through social interactions in family and peer groups, they also considerately reflect on family values in their interpretation of cultural texts (Adriaens, 2014; McMillin and Fisherkeller, 2009; Roussou; 2002). Nayia Roussou (2002) adds that youth, especially in a mixed society such as Greek-Cypriot community, actively locating traditional family values along with the linguistic elements of culture in their perception of mediated cultural identity. However, as age determines consumption and interpretation of television (Harwood, 1997), the understanding of cultural identities varies across age groups. Jake Harwood points out that "viewing television programmes that feature characters who come from the same age group makes audience experience elevated age identity and self-esteem" (Harwood: 1997: 210). In this way, I assume that the adults in

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my study may have different determinants of cultural identities in their interpretation of culture after television viewing.

After all are considered, my study concerns about how cultural or ethnic identities are represented on television and how audience negotiate such representations to construct theirs. Gail Coover (2001: 414) points out that "race is portrayed in the media in two ways: through the content of a message or program, and through the race representation of sources included in a program or story." In this way, the representations of ethnic identities appear in contextual and visual/textual elements of the televisual narratives. In his VCR experiments on White viewers' responses to race representation on television programmes, Coover (2001: 426) discovers that audience tend to identify with the presentation of racial ingroup characters than they did with outgroup. The recognition of characters from the same cultural or ethnic group is also a crucial indication of cultural identity. Even the characters and the dialogues somehow mediate between the audience and their culture (Shetty, 2008). Shetty's (2008) study on a community media in a Southern Indian society reveals that the traditional Tulu language used in a programme called *Pattanga* assist the viewers to construct the views pertaining to caste, class, and gender identities.

## 2.7. Summary

Television which is ubiquitously available in people's everyday life provides the cultural symbols for construction and reconstruction of identity (Kellner, 1995; Kellner and Durham, 2006). The combination of audio and visual in television narratives offer the representation of realities that audience can derive cultural meanings from (Fiske, 2011, Hartley, 2008; Morley, 2005; Silverstone, 1994). Moreover, television which remains to be a reliable source of political knowledge can lead to political participation

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and civic engagement that underline the acts of citizenship (Boulianne 2011, Eveland and Scheufele 2000; Livingstone and Markham 2008; Norris, 1996). Essentially, the identity refers to "pivotal relationship to a politics of location", "the questions of identification", "the questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming", and "the play of power and exclusion" (Hall, 1996: 2-5). In this way, I contend that the matters of becoming a member of an ethnic community as well as the citizen of a country that are also presented in television content can assist audience to define and redefine their identity.

With the globalisation of culture through media, culture becomes homogenized (Tomlinson, 2003) and identity tend to be hybrid (Hall, 2000). It is argued that media prompt the construction of hybrid identity because media facilitate the articulation of nomadism that enables audience to identify with various locations of culture (Kraidy, 1999; 2005). The fact that audience, particularly in diaspora communities, practice "shifting identity positions" between their ethnicity and nationality (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Barker, 1997; Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b; Slade, 2010; Gillespie, 1995; Thompson, 2002), shows that media users are hybrid. In my case, Javanese descendants who experience life between two ethnic entities—Javanese and Malay—and are exposed to multiple contexts of realities depicted in the local television programmes as well as the imported programmes from Indonesia ultimately engage in hybrid identity construction. In this way, I seek to explore their engagement in television-mediated construction of hybrid identity in several aspects. These aspects include the articulation of ethnic identification, the discourses of "here and now" and "there and then", the sense of belonging to few cultural domains, the sense of "inbetweeness", as well as the matters of cultural appropriation and adaptation.

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As media disseminate the ideas of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006) which unite the media users as a nation (Anderson, 2006), I believe the Javanese descendants tend to locate the cultural symbols and codes that represent their interpretive communities (Fish, 1980) as well as banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). In this matter, they can engage in dominant-preferred, negotiated, and oppositional viewing (Hall, 1999, 1980) to deal with the various contexts of culture, desirable and undesirable. As the consequence, they may articulate the account of "us versus others" (La Pastina, 2004; Mankekar, 2002; Scrase, 2002) which represent their identification with different locations of culture and cultures of location. As race/ethnicity is portrayed in media through the content of the discourses and the representation of the sources/characters (Coover, 2001), I would like to explore the Javanese descendants' identification with the culture and the members of their ethnic group and the other ethnic groups. Apparently, hybrid individuals are described as the citizens of a country who have strong attachment to in-groups and less tolerance to out-groups (Brubaker, 1996; Hansen and Hesli, 2009).

In general, audience television viewing practices are influenced by many factors but these factors are subject to the audience's uses and gratifications (Liebles and Katz, 1973) which I argue earlier in this chapter. For my study, I prefer to analyse the process of meaning making in audience consumption of television from the perspectives of theory of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984) as well as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989) which I will propose in the next chapter.

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# CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALISING THE INTERPRETIVE IDENTITY PRACTICES AS THE GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the notion of the interpretive identity practice as the conceptual framework of this research. Drawing upon the concept of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), and adopting the term "identity practices" from the theory of identity practices (Gerson, 2008), this thesis seeks to propose the notion of "interpretive identity practices" as a guiding framework to investigate the interpretation of media texts in relation to the construction of multiple identities, especially in a diaspora community. In this chapter, I initially discuss the conceptualisation and the implication of agency and structures in audience's media culture. Subsequently, I focus on the conceptualisation of the interpretive identity practices which I discuss within the contexts of the theoretical framework of practices (Bourdieu, 1990) and identity practices (Gerson, 2008). At the end of this chapter, I provide a figure which explains the operational structures of the notion.

## 3.2. Agency and structures in media culture

Discussing the existence of human agency and social structure within the micro dimension of audience's lives (Alasuutari, 1999), this thesis argues that Malaysian Javanese women adhere to the state-defined ideas of Malay family, ethnicity, and nationalism—imposed through social interactions and televised discourses. At the same time, they retain the emotions, desires, allegiance, and sense of belonging to Javanese cultural entity. Such negotiation of identity essentially results in the projection of hybrid "identity practices" (Gerson, 2001) in which the matters of being and becoming Malay intertwine in the manifestation of the desires to be a distinctive Javanese community.

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As I mentioned in the first chapter, the construction of identities in Malaysian contexts is commonly understood within "authority-defined" and "everyday-defined" social realities (Shamsul, 1996). Many local researchers draw on this concept of duality of identity formation in their studies. Pue and Kaur (2014) use that approach to study the construction of ethnic identity among a *Cina Peranakan* (Straits-born Chinese) community in Kelantan and a Punjabi Sikh group in Kuala Lumpur. The authors conceive that the members of *Cina Peranakan* and Punjabi Sikh are always framed in the contexts of authority-defined Chinese and Indian identity respectively while in an everyday basis, they cling to their own cultural locality and identity. Similarly, Julian C. Lee (2014) uses the authority-defined contexts to understand the vision of national identity in Malaysian public landscape. This theory of identity is also adopted abroad to examine the negotiation of identity among the immigrant communities in Germany (Sano, 2013).

I would argue, however, that the idea of "authority-defined" and "everyday-defined" social realities generally represent the people's collective experiences in dealing with social structures either in local or national levels. Even Shamsul (1996: 478) mentions that both social realities "are mediated through the social class position" which generates individuals to observe and experience their identities. In his other writing, Shamsul (2007) elaborates on his theory by giving a case of *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* divide as an example. According to him, the ideas of national identity imposed in the implementation of *Bumiputera*/non-*Bumiputera* categories are completely authority-defined social realities, while the nation-of-intent proposed by the subalterns such as Chinese, non-Muslim and radical Islamic groups are claimed to be based on everyday-defined reality (Shamsul, 2007: 206-207). It illustrates that the

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everyday-defined social realities can refer to the collective negotiation with social structures and the individual role as agents is less discussed.

Therefore, in analysing the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia, I would rather refer to the theoretical framework of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984) because it considers individual subjectivity. Anthony Giddens (1984: 3) argues that human action and cognition emerges as “a continuous flow of conduct”, that occurs with “purpose”, “intention”, “reason”, or “motive.” That is referred to as human agency which describes that people have both intentions and capability for thinking and doing what they like, and this condition follows the process of reflexivity in which people collect “mutual knowledge” from routines of social life (Giddens, 1984: 4). In his other writing, Giddens (1991: 35) describes that “all human beings continuously monitor the circumstances of their activities as a feature of doing what they do.” However, Barker (1997) argues that in interpreting television, audience tend to produce meaning instead of simply monitoring.

Notwithstanding the human capability in constructing their own actions, members of a society are also subject to the social structures that constitute their existence in the society. In the theory of structuration, Giddens (1984) points out that structure and system underlie social relations and social phenomena. In this way, human activities are also steered by the social system and structure that prevail within their social territory. To understand this social structure that bond members of a particular society together, Giddens (1984: 17) analyses the aspects of social relations in time-space reproduction of situated practices which does not necessarily represent the rules of transformation. He further argues,

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> I treat structure, in its most elemental meaning at least, as referring to such rules (and resources). It is misleading, however, to speak of "rules of transformation" because all rules are inherently transformational. Structure thus refers, in social analysis, to the structuring properties allowing the "binding" of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them "systemic" form. To say that structure is a "virtual order" of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have "structures" but rather exhibit presence, only its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents (Giddens, 1984: 17).

In a simple description, human agency is understood as a condition when someone activates his or her thoughts, emotions, desires, aversions, allegiances, and the like to rule his or her own actions and life (Little, 2011). In contrast, social structures refer to "the collective concepts, such as family, state, organisation, class and so on, that are independent of the human beings who constitute them" (Little, 2011: 88). These aspects of agency and structures are intertwined in human subjectivity and the construction of identities (Barker, 2012).

Some social theorists adopt the concept of human agency and social structures to build their theoretical framework for understanding social phenomena. For example, Albert Bandura subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency to conceptualise his Social Cognitive Theory (1989, 1986). According to Bandura, people are the social agents who use their own capabilities "to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (1989: 1175). This personal agency of self-believed efficacy operates in cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection process which enable people to self-regulate, self-reflect, and vicariously experience the actions and ways of pertaining to their social world (Bandura, 1989).

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Further, Bandura (2001) applies the conceptual framework of the social cognitive theory to examine people's negotiation of media messages. He suggests that human neurophysiological mechanism supports cognitive functioning that works for "processing, retaining, and using coded information" (Bandura, 2001: 2). Such cognitive functioning generates the capacity for symbolizing, self-regulatory, self-reflective, and vicarious capability (Bandura, 2001). Generally, members of audience have the capacity to symbolically imagine the wealth of information in order to develop knowledge (Bandura, 2001: 3). They also have self-regulatory capability to use their own standards of morality and generate self-satisfaction in order to deal with external expectations (Bandura, 2001: 3). Furthermore, those valued standards can guide them to evaluate, judge and verify the propriety of actions and thoughts performed by others through self-reflective means (Bandura, 2001: 4). Lastly, as electronic media provide images of reality, audience construct their social reality by experiencing it vicariously through "what they see, hear and read" (Bandura, 2001: 6). In other words, audience interact with media texts in an active mode by exercising their internal motivation and personal standards of values to construct the symbolic imagery of their social world in reflective and vicarious ways.

The use of human agency in the process of interpreting social world works effectively as symbolic communication (Bandura, 2001) as well as rational communication (Habermas, 1984). In the Theory of Communicative Action, Jurgen Habermas (1984: 20) describes that a rational person "interprets the nature of his desires and feelings in the light of culturally established standards of value, but especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted." In this way, people have their own "decentred understanding of the world" which enables them to deal with "the world of facts in a cognitively objectified manner

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and with the world of interpersonal relations in a legally and morally objectified manner" (Habermas, 1984: 216).

Revisiting the Giddens' concept of agency, it is understood that people exercise power by acting against the grain as a mean to intervene in the social world (Giddens, 1984). This form of power, as Foucault (1982: 781) points out, "applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him." Further, Foucault (1982: 781) argues that such form of power determines how an individual choose to become a subject to other people due to "control and dependence" or become himself/herself by following his/her own "conscience or self-knowledge." In relationships of communication, the domain of power emerges as the consequence of information exchange between two persons or more (Foucault, 1982).

Power to agency is like system to structures although Giddens (1984) carefully differentiates between social system and structures. Giddens (1984) defines structures as rules and resources which constitute social systems and exist as the base for human knowledgeability. Arguing about Giddens's concept of rules, William H. Sewell Jr. suggests that structures "are constituted by mutually sustaining cultural schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action" (Sewell Jr., 1992: 27). The term "cultural schemas", as Sewell Jr. (1992: 12) points out, is more applicable to describe non-human aspects which determine "specific value, extent, and effects of a resource." The resource, which comes in two forms, human and non-human, can be conceived of as the products of schemas which respectively represent the manufacture of authority and the naturally occurring power

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(Sewel Jr., 1992). Although he agrees with Giddens (1984) that human agency is the constituent of structure and not the opposite, Sewell Jr. (1992: 27) contends that "agents are empowered by structures, both by the knowledge of cultural schemas that enables them to mobilize resources and by the access to resources that enables them to enact schemas."

These aspects of agency and structures are intertwined in human subjectivity and the construction of identities (Barker, 2012). Precisely, identity formation is a social construction which occurs within representations (Barker, 2012; Hall, 1990). As people are likely to learn and make sense of a variety of cultural representations, human identities in postmodern times tend to be hybrid because members of a community present several, alike and contradictory, identities (Hall, 2001). They possibly exhibit senses of belonging to various cultural locations and nexus. In the context of diaspora, ethnicity becomes one of the apparent human qualities that need to be scrutinised.

In the contexts of media culture, the concept of agency and structures is discussed in relation to pedagogy. Arguing that audience are not passive, scholars suggest that media can serve as "public pedagogy" (Callahan, 2011), "popular pedagogy" (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003), or "a pedagogy of hope" (Poyntz, 2006). Be it a television programme (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003; Callahan, 2011), a video (Poyntz, 2006), or computer-mediated information (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1991; Willet, 2008), media content encourages audiences to activate their human agency in order to negotiate the social structures in the form of encoded messages. However, to what extent this media pedagogy works in a continuous way if the consumption of media, especially among the youth, is simply a temporal engagement of pleasure? Clearly, audience do not only acquire random information

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from media but they are also capable of filtering and using it for their personal gratifications, including identity work (Callahan, 2011; Willet, 2008).

## 3.3. Conceptualising the interpretive identity practices

This thesis proposes the notion of interpretive identity practices as the conceptual framework for understanding audience interpretation of identities through television consumption. Generally, it refers to the interpretation of communal actions and shared values, stimulated by mediated images of identity, which enables the members of a community to articulate collective identities. In my case, I focus on the negotiation of televised images of identities among a diaspora community in Malaysia. Basically, the conceptualisation of the interpretive identity practices is premised on the theory of agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989) which explains the ways people use various life aspects to characterise their identity without being imposed to one fixed construction of identity. The term "identity practices" is inspired from the theory of identity practices (Gerson, 2001), and sparingly use the suggestive points in the theory, along with the structural elements of the other two theories, to conceptualise the audience construction of interpretive identities.

The theory of identity practices, as Gerson (2001: 195) argues, provides ruminative enquiries about everyday routines and scrutiny which "enable researchers to understand how people experience and practice collective identities and how those practices change if collective identities are denied." In investigating a German Jewish migrant community in New York, Gerson (2001: 186-187) identifies that the members of the community construct their collective identities and articulate their hybrid German-American identity through "a search for origins" and the enunciation of "loyalty to the state." The search for origins lies in their identification with the cultural and social

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elements of their homeland, while loyalty to the state appears in their compliance with the acts of citizenship in the host country (Gerson, 2001). In this way, Gerson (2001) perceives that the German Jewish reflect on their hybrid identity, enunciating the multiple characteristics of their mixed identity which represents German nationality of the Jewish religion as well as American citizens.

Even though the theory of identity practices seems to be applicable in my study, I should clarify that I situated the body of knowledge of my conceptual framework in the key accounts of the theory of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984). Gerson (2001) points out that the theory of identity practices is appropriate to understand the complexities of negotiating human agency and social structures in the construction and reconstruction of identities among a transnational community. Therefore, it is more plausible to investigate people's negotiation of multiple identities from a top-down perspective, looking into the individual disposition and their observance of social structures which constitute their collective identities. As television delivers the components of social structures which are encoded in the form of intended messages, and audience are capable of negotiating such external influence through the articulation of disposition (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003), the experiences of identity formation become more mediated and prevail in their television culture. In this way, I contend that active audience are competent to use their human agency in order to negotiate the social structures in television narratives and images. The deal with human agency and social structures subsequently leads audience to identity bargaining which I regard as interpretive identity practices.

In interpreting media texts, audience tend to recall some past experiences that are stored in schema (DeFleur, 2010; Harris, 1994). In psychology of communication, the term

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schema appears as an enquiry for understanding how audience comprehend media texts. Harris (1994) suggests that in digesting television content, audience will likely to recall their prior knowledge and experience that match with the content. Indeed, when interacting with media texts, audience are very likely to activate their cognitive functioning, bringing back the memory of previous experiences that is stored in a schema, in order to make sense of the texts (DeFleur, 2010). Such stored memory can also include cultural memory that provides cultural supply of knowledge and symbols for the members of a cultural group (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). Cultural memory, whether it is experienced individually or collectively, refers to the aggregation of remembrance of the characteristics of shared identity which is situated in "dreamy reminiscence, personal testimony, oral history, tradition, myth, style, language, art, popular culture, and the built world" (Olick, 1999: 336). In this way, I contend that audience consumption of television serves as a means to reproduce practices, including identity practices. This assertion corresponds to the idea that structures substantially constitute people's practices, and in return, such practices are used to reproduce structures (Giddens, 1981; Sewell Jr., 1992).

To link the idea of practice, audience agency, and mediated social structures, I shall revisit the logic of practice which fundamentally underlies the notion of practice (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu (1990) argues that practice has logic and this practical logic serves as the generator of thoughts, perceptions, and actions that work on the logic of economy. For Bourdieu, practice is related to economic capital, which differs from cultural capital, because "all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit" (Bourdieu, 1977: 183). In *How Can One be a Sports Fan?* Bourdieu (1999) describes that social conditions where economy and



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culture take place enable the system of institutions and agents constitute sporting activities and entertainment. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1999: 429) suggests that "the system of the institutions and agents follows that one cannot directly understand what sporting phenomena are at a given moment in a given social environment by relating them directly to the economic and social conditions of the corresponding societies." This suggestion concerns that the practices of culture such as engagement in sports differ among class fractions due to the disparity of economic capital, symbolic capital, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1999). In other words, any rational practices acquire positions in a social environment by absorbing the economic, symbolic, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1999; 1990).

In the consumption of culture, however, the most important determinant to be considered is the cultural process, which is the production of meaning and this relies on the cultural capital (Fiske, 2011, 1987). Extending Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Fiske (2011) argues that popular culture which belongs to rational culture has its own capital which does not correspond to the material economy. By cultural capital, Bourdieu (1990: 123-124) refers to the cultural competence of a society member to use "the society's symbolic resources in religion, philosophy, art, and science" and it depends considerably on the system of economic production.

Contradictorily, Fiske (2011: 18) describes that popular cultural capital, which accepts social subordinations and strategies, "is an accumulation of meanings and pleasures that serves the interests of the subordinated and powerless, or rather the disempowered, for few social groups are utterly without power." In addition, it requires a set of cultural competencies which include "a critical understanding of the text and the conventions by which it is constructed", which emerge from the regulation of self-experiences and

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knowledge (Fiske, 2011: 19). Therefore, the consumption of culture in many societies, regardless of the economic capital that characterises the societies, is a matter of locating dispositions and values which have nothing to do with economic wealth (Fiske, 1987). For example, Lee's (2008) study on the reception of Japanese televisual culture among Korean female fans reveals that audience regulate their cultural capital to transcend the authority of content production and distribution through their selective, yet pleasurable viewing practices.

In that way, the consumption of television can be considered as articulating a cultural practice which requires cultural competence. This cultural competence relies inevitably on the audience's individual experience in family and society (Ang, 1996, 1985; Fiske, 2011, Katz and Liebes, 1990; Liebes and Katz, 1986; Morley, 2005, 1986). In *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang (1985) points out that it is the viewers' experience of everyday life that enables them to derive pleasure through their recognition of the complexity and everyday conflicts in the modern world, depicted in the melodramatic soap opera. Soap opera viewers which disperse among social classes deal with different realities, and therefore their interpretation of texts and cultural competence vary from each other (Seiter et al., 1991; Press, 1991). Emphasising the notion of active audience, Katz and Liebes (1990) reveals that the Dallas audience in Israel actively interpret the cultural meanings in the television texts in accordance with their understanding of real life occurrences. Precisely, the audience's ability to derive pleasure from their interpretation of cultural meanings available in the television texts is what Fiske (1987) calls as "cultural competence".

Cultural competencies in the interpretation of television texts also heavily rely on the characteristic of agents and the social structures which constitute them. Md Azalanshah



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(2011) suggests a kind of cultural competencies which he regards as “watching competencies” to investigate how agency and social structures work in audience negotiation of modernity through the consumption of foreign soap operas. In his study about Malay women negotiation of modernity through non-Western soap opera texts, Md Azalanshah (2011) emphasises that the premise of cultural competencies lies heavily on the audience’s moral capability, cultural proficiency, cognitive capability, and adult capacity. Md Azalanshah (2011) further describes that Malay women who are avid followers of soap operas from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Latin American countries reflect on the family and community values which underlie their everyday lives in order to negotiate the cultural aspects of modernity in the soaps.

Now I have so far discussed the notion of practice, schemata, and cultural capital, yet I have not touched upon the spine that connects all these concepts to the process of meaning making which leads to the construction of interpretive identity practices. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the construction of identity is a matter of using cultural resources in human subjectivities (Hall, 1996). As people observe and experience such resources through social interactions in social institutions such as family, community, and schools (Bandura, 1991, 1989), they deal with the social structures that are embedded in those resources. These individual’s social experiences are mainly recorded in human brain in the form of self-schemata (Markus, 1977) that generates and organises rational practices (Bourdieu, 1990, 1997). Subsequently, the structured practice, as I believe, is the point of departure when individuals decide to operate their agency in order to deal with the social structures which constitute them as a member of a cultural or religious community, a social class, and a nation. In operating this agency, individuals activate their self-regulatory, self-reflection, symbolising, and vicarious capabilities (Bandura, 2001) to verify and regulate the cultural meanings in

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television images and narratives. This process of meaning making leads to interpretation and negotiation of identities.

Again, people learn about identities, by dealing with social structures, through social institutions which provide them with the materials of identity practices (Gerson, 2001). However, they also observe and negotiate the symbolic presentations of identities on television (Kellner, 1995; Kellner and Durham, 2006), and such negotiation requires cultural competence (Bourdieu, 1990; Fiske, 2011, 1987). In other words, television provides symbolic social structures of identities that audience take into account to construct and articulate their own interpretive identity practices. Precisely, the notion of interpretive identity practices explains the situations in which audience interpret the communal actions and shared values on media, including television, to define and enunciate their preferred and guided identities. By preferred identities, I mean to refer to the ideas about self and collective identities that are derived from the regulation of individual power and values in which the role of an individual as an agent is dominant. In contrast, guided identities are constructed from the observance of social structures in which hegemonic power strongly controls.

To link this interpretive identity practices to the conception of hybridity, I now describe how elements of hybrid identities are construed whether as a part of preferred or guided identities or the combination of both. The notion of hybridity as nomadism explains the possibilities of media consumers to situate their identity position in two or more locations of culture through adaptation and appropriation (Adriaens, 2014; Barker, 1997; Gillespie, 1995; Kraidy, 2005, 1999). In this way, audience who exhibit interpretive identity practices would also likely identify whit the materials of preferred identities, which usually prevails in their cultural belongings, and the cultural codes of

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guided identities which are imposed by the authoritative power. The preferred cultural codes and the guided cultural codes are significantly different but not necessarily oppositional.

## 3.4. Summary

This chapter discusses the interpretive identity practices as the guiding framework for the analysis of this study. The conceptual framework of interpretive identity practices concerns audience negotiation of self-agency and symbolic social structures which emerges from their regulation of personal experiences and appropriation of standards of values in family and community. Essentially, the concept of identity practices (Gerson, 2001) explains how hybrid citizens construct their identity through the search for cultural origins and the articulation of civic duties as part of their negotiation of everyday social structures. As media messages can serve as symbolic social structures that offer a site for public pedagogy (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003; Callahan, 2011; Poyntz, 2006; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1991; Willet, 2008), I argue that the Malay women of Javanese descent in my study can use television content to generate politics of identity. Hypothetically, the symbolic social structures in the television content can assist them to learn about the interpretive identity practices by exercising their dispositions.

Drawing upon the theoretical framework of human agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984), I contend that the Malay women of Javanese descent in my study exercise their cognitive and behavioural capabilities to deal with the symbolic cultural and social expectations encoded in television messages. As human beings, they are capable of producing self-reflexivity by monitoring the circumstances and the social activities around their locus of identity (Giddens, 1991). As media users, they have and

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tend to exercise the self-regulative, self-reflective, symbolising, and vicarious capabilities in which self-standards of moral and experience are taken into consideration in understanding social word (Bandura, 2001). In this way, I argue that they can use their own dispositions to construct their identities, either in guided or self-preferred ways, with the assistance of television cultural discourses.

In brief, this particular study seeks to examine the consumption of television as a form of articulating human agency and symbolic social structures (Giddens, 1984) to construct interpretive "identity practices" (Gerson, 2001). Television messages as encoded texts (Hall, 1999) provide the symbolic social realities that represent the audience's existence within their interpretive communities (Fish, 1980). However, as individuals have social cognitive capabilities that are derived from self-experience and knowledge (Bandura, 2001), they tend to make sense of their existence according to their motive, desire, and intention. Such process of meaning making is better understood as cultural competence (Fiske, 2011, 1987). The result from operating human agency and exercising the cultural competence in watching television is translated into the course of cultural hybridity. As I mention in the previous chapter, some of the aspects of hybridity can be understood in the form of cultural nomadism (Kraidy, 1999; 2005), inbetweeness (Bhabha, 1996, 1994; Pieterse, 2006), appropriation (Burke, 2011), and distanciation (Aksoy and Robin, 2008). Ultimately, the media audience can use all the cultural and social materials within the contexts of such forms of hybridity to construct "interpretive identity practices." It is expected that such construction of interpretive identity practices emerges from the audience's negotiation with preferred and guided construct of identity. Subsequently, it leads to the construction and projection of hybrid identities.

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This particular study inquires Malaysian Javanese television viewing patterns that represent self-identification with their cultural, religious, and national identity. Such self-identification can be understood by examining their disposition of "agency" in response to "social structures" from "social institutions" and "symbolic social structures" available in "television" narratives. It is assumed that such negotiation with the discourses and images of identity mediated by social institutions and television takes place in human cognitive functioning that produces "cultural competence." This cultural competence can also describe the Malaysian Javanese viewing patterns as inquired in the first research question.

Given such cultural competence, the television viewers are expected to identify multi-scalar elements that construct the representation of "cultural hybridity." The Malaysian Javanese's representation of cultural hybridity in this context will be examined in reference with the notion of hybridity as "nomadism," "inbetweeness," "appropriation," and "distanciation." This investigation of hybrid identity construct is to answer the second research question, which inquires the Malaysian Javanese women's definition of religious, cultural, and national identity, and the third research question, which seeks to examine the study subject's interpretation of television content in relation to self and collective identities. Finally, this research attempts to analyse how Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content represent their sense of Javanese-Malay identity. The answer for this research question can be extracted by investigating their "preferred construct of identity" and "guided construct of identity." Ultimately, all the answers to the research question will illustrate the consumption of television in relation to the construction of "hybrid identities" among Malay women of Javanese descendants in Malaysia. Figure 3.1. below shows the conncetion between the research questions and the conceptual underpinnings.

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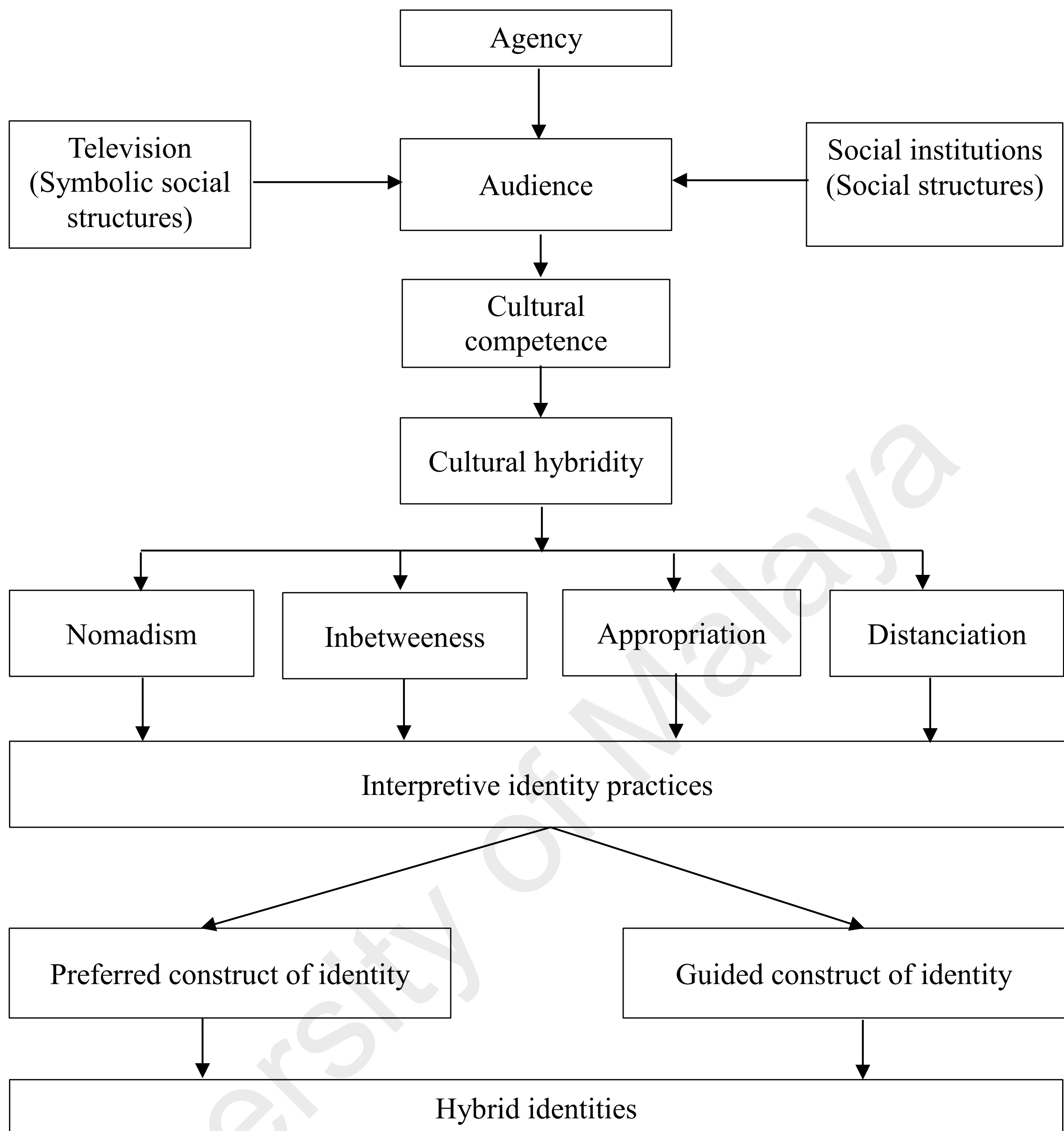


**Figure 3.1:** The framework of the interpretive identity practices

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# CHAPTER 4: AUDIENCE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE JAVANESE IN KAMPUNG PARIT TUJUH BAROH

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the structural concept of audience ethnography and its applicability to studying a Malay-Javanese community in Malaysia. Audience ethnography is one of the prominent methodological approaches in media and cultural studies. It is an appropriate empirical method used by researchers to explore the specific cultural meanings of media use. However, similar to the other methodologies in qualitative research, audience ethnography has some limitations particularly in terms of validity, which I will address in this chapter. This chapter also concerns a discussion of the data collection techniques used in this research which include in-depth interviews and participant observation. It is followed by a reflective description of my actual experiences in dealing with the community, the culture, and the respondents in the field. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the use of software-assisted applied thematic data analysis.

## 4.2. Ethnographic approach in studying television audience

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology that requires a researcher to spend a period of time with the community under study in order to observe and record their lives in natural settings (Fetterman, 2010; Gobo, 2008; Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007). This methodological mechanism has been long adopted in studies that focus on the production of meaning by media audience. According to Moores (1996: 3), ethnography of audience refers to a methodological practice for “investigating the social world of actual audiences, using qualitative techniques—most notably the extended period of participant observation ‘in the field’ and the unstructured conversational interview with

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informants." The main aim of this particular ethnography is to understand the media consumption "from the virtual standpoint of actual audiences" (Ang, 2006: 136). In addition, it serves an instrumental purpose for understanding "the media practices and meanings people attach to media, and as a way to document everyday media practices in detail" (Perala, Helle and Johnson, 2012: 12).

The ethnographic approach to audience studies emerged in the early 1980s within the British Cultural Studies (BCS) community (Hermes, 2010). It began with Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" thesis (1980) which significantly inspired some other researchers in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), University of Birmingham. Among the early television audience ethnographies are Ien Ang's Dutch Dallas study (1985), David Morley's *Family Television* (1986), Charlotte Brunsdon's study on woman television audience (1986), and Ann Gray's study of feminine Video Cassette Recorder (1987). However, these studies explore the audience's engagement with certain television programmes simply through qualitative interviews and analysis. The lack of time spent in the field has made an issue for some anthropologists (Gray, 2003; Seiter, 2004, Spitulnik, 1993). Debra Spitulnik (1993: 298) notes that critics raise the important points that are missing in ethnography of media audience, including detailed participant observation and actual immersion in the audience's life.

Addressing the critiques, contemporary audience ethnographies deliver proper practices of traditional ethnographic techniques. For example, Vicki Mayer (2003) explores the Mexican American's reception of telenovela in San Antonio through interviews and participant observation which includes field notes taking and television co-watching. Similarly, Thais Machado-Borges (2007) who studies the Brazilian youth's telenovela consumption uses complementary methods such as structured conversation and essays

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along with the other primary methods. Another telenovela study that can be considered as a proper ethnography is La Pastina's study of audience in rural Brazil (2004). Through a year-long work in the field, Antonio C. La Pastina (2004) carries out triangulation of in-depth interviews, surveys, focus group discussion, archival readings, and participant observation to explore the rural Brazilians' engagement in popular telenovelas. Audience ethnography is also used by some media anthropologists such as Abu-Lughod (1997), Makekar (1999), Shetty (2008) and Postill (2008) to understand television consumption and the politics of identity in non-Western countries.

Audience ethnography seems to be an appropriate methodology to study Malaysia's multicultural society and multilingual audiences. Malaysian media serve three major ethnic audiences who speak different languages (Malay, Chinese and Tamil) and other audience groups who share the national language *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay) and/or English (Banerjee, 2000; Karthigesu, 1994). The Malay-speaking audience have the options to watch various television programmes and movies as well as read newspapers that depict their community and culture. Similarly, the Chinese and the Indians can choose their ethnic media that are delivered in Mandarin/Cantonese or Tamil. Despite the language-based separation of local media content, the local audiences can also enjoy foreign content in various languages, mainly English.

It should be noted that this study focuses on the relationships between television consumption and the construction of identity among Malaysian Javanese women, who constitutionally belong to Malay society. These particular women experience the aspects of life around Javanese and Malay cultural domains. They maintain some semblance of Javanese culture in their daily lives while conforming to the cultural and social expectations of being Malays. As mentioned before, the members of Malay audience

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have the choice to negotiate their cultural identity through Malay culture-based media. It is understood that the female Javanese descendants are also bound to observe the representations of Malay identity on television programmes that are targeted to Malay-speaking audience. They can enjoy Malay dramas, telemovies, news, and television realities which represent the Malay culture and ways of life. At the same time, they are also exposed to the cultural content from the neighbouring countries, especially Indonesia (the origin of their ancestors). Both local and Indonesian content can be sources of cultural texts for the Javanese descendants to construct cultural meanings and identities.

## 4.3. Accessing the community through in-depth interviews and participant observation

My audience ethnography took place at Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh in Selangor district of Sabak Bernam. Like many other Javanese villages in the district, this particular *kampung* (village) has a large population of Javanese descendants. My first arrival in the *kampung* was back in 2011 when I joined a homestay programme which was promoted by the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia in order to introduce the rural life to international students studying in the country. On one occasion, I encountered a group of the *kampung* women who were discussing a television programme that they were particularly following. I joined them to ask more about their community and culture. Recognising my Indonesian accent, they spontaneously regarded me as a Javanese and asked to continue the conversation in the Javanese language. They also claimed to enjoy Indonesian soap operas as part of their everyday media diet. From this short visit, I observed that the Javanese women in the *kampung* remain attached to their Javanese identity, and engage in the consumption of culture from the origin of their ancestors.

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I occasionally kept in touch with my host family and when I decided to conduct the fieldwork in the *kampung*, this family helped me to access the community. The fieldwork that took place between April 2013 and September 2014 employed "partial immersion" (Delamont, 2004). This mode of fieldwork allows researchers to spend part of their time, "oscillating between the field, university and home" (Delamont, 2004: 218). Prior to the fieldwork, I paid several visits to the *kampung* to collect basic information about the community and to investigate the applicability of the respondents to my research objectives. These preliminary visits brought me closer to the community members who eventually recognised me as their "casual acquaintance." As a Javanese myself, I share some knowledge about Javanese cultural system and traditional convention with the community members in general. This prior "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) is instrumental for media ethnographers who in practice study their own culture (Alasuutari, 1999).

Despite the researcher's prior knowledge about the community, accessing the fieldwork site and the people under research should follow the ethical standards and key methods. Even though my previous host family helped me to find the respondents, I still needed to report the chief of the community about my presence and intention of coming to the village. For this reason, I presented the letters of permission for accessing the research site (refer to the Appendix D) which was authorised by my supervisors in the university. Apart from accessing the research site, accessing the research subjects also requires a couple of techniques, including interview. Interview is the most effective data collection tool to reach the research subjects in ethnography. Giampietro Gobo (2008: 191) argues that ethnographic interview serves "to reveal the cultural meanings used by actors, and to investigate aspects of the culture observed" and provides a clearer picture to the prior observation. Most of the time, interview is instrumental to "break the ice" between the

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researcher and the researched in the beginning of fieldwork (Fetterman, 2010; Gobo, 2008).

Interviews in ethnography are divided into several types. Fetterman (2010) suggests that an ethnographer can choose to deliver a structured or semi-structured interview if he or she wishes to gain comprehensive information about the community being researched from the insider's point of view. However, the use of informal interviews which employs "a mixture of conversation and embedded questions" seems more appropriate because it allows a healthy rapport to be established (Fatterman, 2010: 41). Moreover, conversational interviews in less formal ambience are likely to enable the ethnographer to share reflective insights with the interviewees (Gray, 2003; Murphy, 2008, 1999). An ethnographer can also employ retrospective interviews to acquire the study subjects' past experiences and historical information (Fetterman, 2010).

Most audience ethnographers mainly employ in-depth interview which is subsequently followed with thorough analysis. Morley (1986), Radway (1984), Ang (1985), Gray (1992, 1987), and Katz and Liebes (1990, 1984) are among media researchers who use this qualitative interviewing technique. Although they did not purposely carry an ethnographic study, their work is generally conceived of as prominent examples of audience ethnography due to the insightful cultural meanings they generate from the audience's interpretation of media use (Seiter, 2004). Some ethnographers prefer group interviews to gain immediate shared information from the study subjects and to record the details of their interactions (Gobo, 2008; Ritson and Elliott, 1999). However, one-on-one interview appears to be more practical to avoid the clash of timetable among the respondents and to minimise the dominant opinion from certain respondents (Md Azalanshah, 2011; Murphy, 1999).

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In this particular ethnography, I decided to conduct a one-on-one interview with a total of twenty respondents, aged between 44 and 72 years old. During the preliminary fieldwork, a group of ten women was selected from their community network through a snowballing technique (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Oliver, 2006). The results from the preliminary interviews led to early findings about the respondents' viewing patterns and community activities that needed to be focused on in the primary fieldwork. Due to the relevancy of their feedback to the research questions in the preliminary interviews, nine of the initial respondents were selected again to participate in the primary study, along with eleven new respondents.

The respondents belong to the second generation and third generation of Javanese migrants who have good command of Javanese and *Bahasa Malaysia*. Nearly all respondents from the former category speak mainly Javanese while the latter generation shifts between *Bahasa Malaysia* and Javanese in their daily conversations. I decided to interview them in *Bahasa Malaysia* for cultural and practical reasons but I still allow them to respond in Javanese. Apparently, the Malaysian Javanese speak *ngoko* dialect, which is the lowest level in Javanese language system. Growing up in a strict Javanese community in Indonesia, I am compliant with the cultural expectation to use *madya* (the middle) and *krama* (the highest) speech when conversing with older people. Although *ngoko* is an acceptably proper dialect used among Malaysian Javanese (Noriah, 2001), I preferred to use *Bahasa Malaysia* during the interview sessions because I was personally not comfortable to speak *ngoko* to elderlies.

The interviews ran informally within two to three hours in the respondents' house for their convenience. I prepared a set of questions comprising four sections: television



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viewing patterns, life history, ethnic relations, and civic engagement. Each interview began with whichever section, depending on the respondents' awareness of the current issues. For example, when I visited one of the respondents for an interview session, this particular respondent mentioned the Malaysia Airline's MH370 flight incident right after inviting me to sit. Apparently, she was following the news about the incident and was aware that seven Indonesians were among the 239 passengers on board the flight which went missing on 8 March 2014. Reading the scenario, I used the particular subject as the point of departure for the interview. This tactical means of interview is effective in encouraging the respondents to express their honest opinions on any issues discussed without being influenced by the sentiment of the questions.

It is also important to act as a casual acquaintance instead of presenting ourselves as an interviewer to the interviewees. As Maria Bakardjieva (2005: 79) suggests, researchers can play a role as a "welcome visitor" in order to be accepted in the private life of the research subjects. This method allows the respondents to act naturally and give genuine responses of their own accord. My experiences during the preliminary fieldwork dealing with low self-esteemed respondents led me to come up with a different approach of interview. For example, when making an appointment with a 72-year-old living-alone respondent, I offered to accompany her to watch television on her free time. She agreed and invited me to a morning session of her daily television viewing. Throughout the session, I smoothly embedded the interview questions to our friendly, casual conversations. As the results, she could openly acquaint me with self-generated, reflexive information which appeared to be more natural compared to her responses in the preliminary interview. In the previous interview, she seemed to be awkward to discuss certain matters with me whom she regarded as *budak U* (a university student).

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Consequently, she tended to be hesitant to express her thoughts because she was afraid that her answers might not meet my expectation.

Interviewing lay members of audience requires fundamental humanistic approaches to bring out some respect for both interviewers and interviewees. Seiter et al. (2013) point out the importance of setting the distance to maintain the empirical nature of the research and to deal with the ethical issues which may arise. An interviewer should minimise rigid control over the interviewees to avoid awkwardness. At the same time, he or she should refrain from establishing intimate proximity that can drag her or him too deep into the respondents' private confidence. Considering the existing limitations of interview, a genuine audience ethnography requires participant observation in order to collect more naturally occurring data in the field (Alasuutari, 1999; Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

Participant observation is the key method of ethnography which goes together with interview. Hamersley and Atkinson (2007) point out that the responses given by the study subjects can give basic description that leads to observation. As David Morley contends:

> Should you wish to understand what I am doing, it would probably be as well to ask me. I may well, of course, lie to you or otherwise misrepresent my thoughts or feelings, for any number of purposes, but at least, through my verbal responses, you will begin to get some access to the kind of language, the criteria of distinction and the types of categorizations, through which I construct my (conscious) world (Morley, 2005: 172).

Morley's argument shows the importance of participant observation as part of the audience ethnography approach to study media audience. Ann Gray (2003: 16) indicates that participant observation would bring media and cultural studies closer to "proper



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ethnographies” as touted by critics. This particular method has been widely used in many audience studies (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 2000; Gillespie, 1995; La Patina, 2005; Ritson and Elliot, 1999). La Pastina (2005) argues that audience ethnography should return to its traditional practices that involve fieldwork and in-depth immersion with the data sources to establish thorough understanding, self-reflexivity, and the rapport between the researchers and the study subjects.

Participant observation involves collecting field notes, tallies, drawings, photographs and other forms of material evidence (Crang and Cook, 2007). In Parit Tujuh Baroh, I used a voice recorder to record the interviews and casual conversations that I had with the respondents. For an ethical reason, I provided a form of consent (Appendix E) to each of the respondents and read the terms for them. The interview proceeded upon the respondents’ agreement which was indicated by their willingness to sign the form of consent. I also asked permission from the respondents to use a voice recorder to record our conversations before we started the interviews. In some community gatherings such as as *rewang* and *leklekan*—which I will describe further in this chapter—I used a photography camera and camcorder to capture the moments, certainly with permission from the committee.

Other than watching television, I also participated in the respondents’ cultural and political activities. Most of the respondents joined a Koranic congregation in the *surau kampung* (small praying hall) every Friday. They learnt to improve Koran recitation skills and exercised their knowledge about Islamic teachings. As I observed, these women sometimes asked the *ustazah* (female teacher) about some important points that they collected from Islamic programmes on television. Apparently, the Friday congregation turned to be a public sphere for my respondents to discuss some television

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content. At the peak of PRU13 (*Pilihan Raya Umum 13*/Malaysia's 13th General Election), which was between the mid April and early May 2013, some of the respondents joined in the electoral campaigns of the five-yearly political function. Four respondents actively participated in door-to-door campaigns to drive the *kampung* people into voting *Barisan Nasional*'s candidates. They also served as the *jaga undi* (vote enumerator) on the Election Day who recorded whoever voted the candidates from the incumbent government coalition parties. I enjoyably followed my respondents around during the campaign period and the Election Day. In the midst of delivering their tasks, I noticed that these respondents would not hesitantly update each other on the information pertaining to their job scope and electoral news.

As mentioned earlier, participant observation can provide comprehensive information which enriches and strengthens the feedback from interviews. The respondents who may not be able to speak openly during the interview are more likely to be outspoken in their private domain (Fetterman, 2010; Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007; Seiter et al., 2013). I had several respondents who spoke cautiously when giving the answers to the interview questions but they seemed to be vocal in their daily life. One of them who I particularly selected as the "key informant" (Fetterman, 2010) of this research was in fact quite expressive in her everyday performance. This particular informant had difficulties in articulating her thoughts during the interview sessions but she was pretty talkative when having casual conversations with me off the sessions. For instance, she would point me to some topics discussed in Ustaz Khazim Ilyas' talk show on an ASTRO channel every time she encountered the promo video of the show in between drama slots. This particular respondent also liked to discuss television content whenever she encountered her friends in some occasions. It appears that community gatherings

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can somehow serve as "public sphere" (Habermas, 2006) for television conversations among the Javanese women in this study.

In general, participant observation is one of the instrumental data collection methods in audience ethnography. While the previous studies only carry out in-depth interviews (for example Ang, 1985; Gray, 1992, 1987; Katz and Liebes, 1990, 1986; Morley, 1986; Radway, 1984), the current audience ethnographies embrace the requirement of immersion in the field. Furthermore, this empirical tool helps the ethnographers to justify the qualitative validity through the implementation of a triangulation approach (Hamersley, 2014; Maxwell, 2012; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Roldán, 2002). By employing in-depth interview and participant observation in a partially immersed fieldwork, this study had addressed the very fundamental methodological issues of audience ethnography.

## 4.4. Living fieldwork: The community, the culture and the female respondents in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh

Before I came to Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, I never knew that there was a community of Javanese descendants which made up virtually the entire population of a *kampung* in Malaysia. A typical *kampung* in Malaysia usually refers to a political stronghold of Malay population (Shamsul, 1997), which I previously conceive of as a homogenous society of Malay "pure" race. From my initial observation of the Malay communities in Kuala Lumpur and in the media, the Malays tend to have strong awareness of their conventional customs and overwhelming compliance with Islamic rules. Even more significant is the fact that all Malays were born Muslim. In contrast, as I observe in a slightly plural Indonesia, Javanese entity does not affiliate with a particular religion and its traditional customs are partially adapted to Islam. Clifford Geertz's *The Religion of*



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*Java* (1976) described that in the process of embracing Islam, Javanese attempted to preserve their animist belief which they transformed into *abangan* religion, the variant of Islam in Java. Therefore, my previous assumption about the Malaysian Javanese was that they withdrew from any connection to Javanese culture and completely integrated into Malay society.

In fact, the Parit Tujuh Baroh looks like a typical Malay *kampung* in terms of the architectural and the ethno-spatial landscape. Most of the houses adopt Malay-styled architecture in which the walls are made of wood and stand on the posts slightly higher from the ground. This kind of architecture seems to be everywhere throughout Malaysia, especially in rural areas (Sekimoto, 1988).

Located around 120 kilometres away from the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, the *kampung* is by no means remote from modern aspects of living (see the Figure 4.1.). It is reachable by modern transportation and connected highways. On a daily basis, the residents work and buy groceries in the nearest town, Sekinchan, which is just seven kilometres away. At the same time, they have pleasantly enjoyed the access to basic amenities such as electricity, water, telephone and cellular system as well as Internet connection. The *kampung* is also equipped with wireless Internet hotspots that are provided by the Federal Government under the programme of *Kampung Tanpa Wayar 1Malaysia* (1Malaysia wireless village). The *kampung* received the status as *Desa Lestari* (well-performed village) from the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development for its achievement in promoting rural entrepreneurship. In fact, the local women in the *kampung* are empowered to participate in the communal cooperative that runs several enterprises such as bakeries, homestay, and home-gardens.

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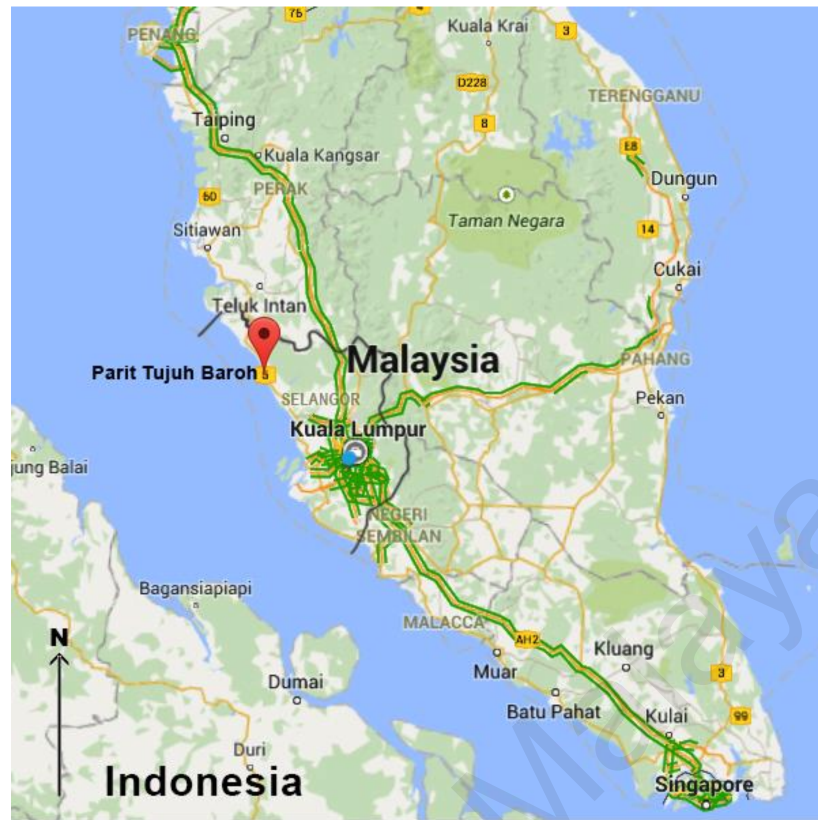


**Figure 4.1:** The map of the Malay Peninsula, Malaysia

Based on the records provided by the *kampung* headman, who is also known as *Pak Sidang*, Parit Tujuh Baroh was established by a group of 14 Javanese migrants, mainly from Ponorogo in East Java. It is also known by the name *Papitusulem* which stands for Parit Pitu Sungai Leman. *Pitu* refers to the Javanese word for *tujuh* (Malay) or seven (English), while Sungai Leman is the administrative *mukim* (sub-district). Since its establishment in 1935, the *kampung* has developed from a dense forest to 1,491 hectares of agricultural and residential areas. The areas include several *kariah* (neighbourhoods) such as *Parit 7*, *Taliair 7*, *Parit 6*, *Taliair 6*, *Kampung Sungai Labu*, *Taman Aman*, and *Taman Ria*. As of 2010, the *kampung* had a population of 1,440 which dispersed in some 288 households. According to *Pak Sidang*, the Javanese descendants make up almost 90 percent of the population, while the other 10 percent consists of the Malays of Banjarese descent and the native Malays who married to the local people. The Javanese concentrate on the land adjacent to the coastline of the Malacca Straits while the

Banjarese and the Malays reside near the paddy fields. The plan of the *kampung* is provided in the Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.2:** The plan of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh

Interestingly, the woman status in this *kampung* is still influenced by her land ownership. Some women that I interviewed tried to compare their social position in the community based on the acreage of the paddy field and garden. Those who possess many acres of paddy fields, garden or free land gain more respect and occupy important posts in the *kampung* organisations. However, this women's social status is not the extensive effect of their gender role in relation to men. In fact, they share the same portion of the ownership and control over their land with their husband and siblings. Furthermore, the land ownership signifies a family status instead of an individual rank of significance in the *kampung* social structure. It also shows the prominence of the family in the early establishment of the *kampung*. The families which own wide acreage

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of the village land are mostly the close posterities of the pioneer settlers and they are related each other within an ancestral kinship.

I was fortunate to stay with one of the prominent families throughout my fieldwork. My foster father is the son of a former village headman, who works as a secondary school teacher and serves as the treasurer in the village-branch UMNO. My foster mother, who acts as one of the study respondents, holds a supervising post as the deputy chief of the *Wanita* UMNO (UMNO's women wing) in the *kampung*. Most of the *kampung* residents respect this family not only due to their influential contribution to the community but also because their extended families occupy almost a half of the *kampung*. A senior respondent informs me that my host family and their relatives are well respected because they are *orang ada* (rich families) who inherit a big portion of the *kampung* land.

I locate the *kampung of* Parit Tujuh Baroh as a desirable site to undertake the fieldwork because several Javanese-based cultural traditions are still preserved here and I believe that the communal attitudes towards the maintenance of the culture may influence the negotiation of identity among the study subjects. One of the traditions is *rewang* which literally means a practice of mutual help. *Rewang* originates from Java that is usually practiced by the rural people in conjunction with celebrating particular occasions such as wedding, circumcision, thanksgiving, and so on.

Another cultural tradition that I encountered during the fieldwork—which I had never seen before—was *leklekan*. According to the director of the Department of Information of Selangor (that I interviewed during the event), *leklekan* is the Javanese term for staying late at night in order to celebrate a big event in the community. I was fortunate

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to experience this rare event which at that time was held to rejoice in the good fortune for the nomination of a Javanese community member as one of the election candidates to the Malaysian Parliament. Even though the chief claimed that the event was a part of the department's annual programmes to appreciate the local culture, I believed that it served as an electoral campaign of the candidate because it was held during the PRU13 campaigning period. Moreover, the director of the Department of Information from the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia was present to officially introduce three *Barisan Nasional* representatives that contested in the local state and federal constituencies.

I will discuss *rewang* and *leklekan* further in the finding chapters as both cultural traditions represent the cultural identity of the Javanese community in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, including the women involved in this study. The reason for mentioning *rewang* and *leklekan* in this chapter is to provide the readers a general picture of the traditional practices that the respondents are involved in. I believe that both traditional traditions serve as cultural platforms for the respondents to practice their identity. The sense of belonging to their community and the recognition of its cultural belongings seem to influence their interpretation of television contents in relation to their identity. I will discuss this hypothetical point in the following chapters. Furthermore, I expect to talk about the correlation between the two cultural elements and the construction of identity from the individual perspectives of the respondents.

The respondents in this research were considered as a "purposive sample" which were individually selected using a "judgemental sampling" technique. According to Fetterman (2010), ethnographers normally use the technique to select the most appropriate research subjects based on their judgement on the applicability of the

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subjects to the research questions. In addition, this sampling is best achieved by conducting a casual investigation to the field in order to personally select them based on the criteria that are set for the research (Fetterman, 2010). This sampling technique is consistent with the idea of a purposive sample, which refers to a group of research subjects that are selected based on specific characteristics set to achieve the research objectives (Daniel, 2012; Wimmer and Dominick, 2013).

In this research, the selected respondents met two criteria: active viewers of television and the women from the earlier generations of the Javanese migrants. In the field, I met many potential respondents who claimed to like watching television. However, I only selected those who could confirm that they watched television on a daily basis. In fact, when I interviewed the first group of the respondents in the preliminary study, some of them were unable to answer most of the questions pertaining to television consumption. Consequently, I had to exclude them from the research sample. It should be noted that I only chose female respondents because women were recognisably perceived as heavy television viewers because of their domestic attachment (Press, 1991; Honeyford, 1980). From my prior investigation in the research site, I found that the *kampung* men in Parit Tujuh Baroh were not into watching television due to their personal and professional commitments outside the house. However, during the interview sessions with several respondents, the husbands of these women were co-present and sometimes commented on several issues that we discussed. They also provided some information about the community in general and reflectively told their experiences living with Javanese migrant parents.

In point of fact, half of the respondents were the daughters of the migrants from Java, while the rest were born from mixed parents who still had close relations to Javanese

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migrant settlers. Despite that, I only restricted my sample to include the women of the second and third generation only. As Itzigsohn (2000) argues, the earlier generations of migrants usually remain attached to the values, practices, and institutions of their origin. In this case, I chose the women whose one of the parents or grandparents was a migrant from Java.

As mentioned earlier, this research involved twenty respondents who were selected through a snowball sampling technique (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Oliver, 2006). At first, I selected my foster mother as the initial respondent to be interviewed. She then recommended her mother to be the next respondent. Luckily, her mother was an active member in several community clubs who certainly introduced me to her fellow friends in Friday congregations and *marhaban* (the community-based club for *selawat* lovers). In one of the *marhaban* meetings, I met several women who agreed to be my respondents. After I interviewed this first group of respondents, they suggested me to recruit their sister, cousin, daughter, or other close relatives in my sample. The recruitment of the respondents in this snowball sampling ended when the sample size was considerably appropriate and at the point that the feedback from the respondents had shown uniformity and answered the research questions. As suggested by Lindlof and Taylor (2011: 114), snowballing technique is a convenient method of sampling to study sub-cultures that have "certain attributes in common" in which the subjects might be difficult to recruit. Hence, most of interview-based qualitative studies use a small-sized sample (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006).

Qualitative researchers deal with a multiple process of interpretation and they act as the interpreter of texts (Wolcott, 1994). Ethnographers in particular search for the meanings available in the narratives of their study subjects through double-hermeneutics or

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interpreting the subjects' interpretation of the texts (Barker, 1997). To deliver better interpretation, an ethnographer should exercise "reflexivity" and communicate the text in such a way that readers can feel the author's presence in the text (Fettermen, 2010; Wolcott, 1994). Therefore, an ethnographic text usually presents the author's identity in the form of the first-person pronouns and in relation to his or her study informants (Fetterman, 2010; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b).

An ethnographer usually regards the informants by pseudonyms to keep the confidentiality of their real identity (Fetterman, 2010; Maxwell, 2012). Following this ethical matter, I identify my respondents throughout this thesis by my own assigned names which I list down in the Table 4.1. In addition, I use an honorific before the names to differentiate each of them based on their age and familial generation. In fact, in the field I regarded the respondents using Javanese honorific titles such as *mbah* (grandma), *ibu* (mother), *wak* (older aunt), and *bik* (younger aunt) as well as Malay honorifics such as *mak cik* (younger aunt) and *akak* (big sister). I used the titles with the respondents' consent and preference. Two respondents preferred to be called *mak cik* and one was convenient with the honorific of *akak*. This preference of the horrific titles somehow signifies which ethnicity they want to be identified with.

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**Table 4.1:** Personal particulars of the respondents

| Respondents | Age | Occupation | Education | Husband's descent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Mbah* Ton | 70 | Homemaker | Grade 5 | Javanese |
| 2. *Mbah* Ngat | 62 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 3. *Mak Cik* Dah | 55 | Dressmaker | Form 3 | Javanese |
| 4. *Ibu* Bari | 47 | Koran teacher | Form 6 | Javanese |
| 5. *Mbah* Sar | 66 | Homemaker | N/A* | Javanese |
| 6. *Ibu* Ara | 51 | Homemaker | Form 5 | Banjarese |
| 7. *Wak* Jah | 55 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 8. *Wak* Ati | 58 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 9. *Bik* Rus | 51 | Retailer | Form 6 | Javanese |

**Table 4.1,** continued

| Respondents | Age | Occupation | Education | Husband's descent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. *Mbah* Man | 62 | Farmer | N/A | Javanese |
| 11. *Akak* Ain | 44 | Homemaker | Form 5 | Javanese |
| 12. *Ibu* Mon | 51 | Koran teacher | Form 5 | Javanese |
| 13. *Mbah* Rin | 58 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 14. *Mak Cik* Gam | 57 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 15. *Ibu* Nal | 49 | *Nasi lemak* vendor | Form 5 | Malay |
| 16. *Mbah* Min | 63 | Homemaker | Grade 6 | Javanese |
| 17. *Ibu* Par | 47 | Dressmaker | Form 5 | Javanese |
| 18. *Mbah* Uki | 67 | Homemaker | Form 2 | Javanese |
| 19. *Mbah* Yan | 72 | Homemaker | N/A* | Javanese |
| 20. *Ibu* Nan | 43 | School teacher | First degree | Javanese |

*) N/A = never attend formal education

The respondents disperse in two different *kariahs*, *Parit* 6 and *Parit* 7, where Javanese descendants concentrate most. Each *kariah* has its own social groupings for certain community activities such as *rewang* and Islamic congregations. The residents who share the same *kariah* usually tend to socialise among themselves and only attend a *rewang* event that is held particularly in their neighbourhood. My respondents dominantly come from the *Parit* 7 *kariah*, the social centre of the *kampung* where many community events take place. The *Balai Raya* (community hall) and the office of JKKK (*Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung*/the committee for village development and security) are located in this particular *kariah*. Government officials and visitors are usually welcome and entertained in these central village concourses. Apart from that, compared to the other *kariahs*, more households in *Parit* 7 take part in the homestay programme, providing a place to stay for visitors from other parts of Malaysia and abroad that come to the village to learn about the culture and the rural life of the Javanese community in the village.

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I am surprised that many respondents are still active in community activities in spite of their late age. Most of them become the members of certain community associations, especially *Wanita* UMNO. Two respondents hold the supervising posts in the action committee while the rest claim that they are simply a supporting member who serves whenever they are needed. Despite its political affiliation, the core values of *Wanita* UMNO in Parit Tujuh Baroh focus more on social, cultural and economic surveillance. The organisation is responsible for empowering the *kampung* women in terms of economic and religious enhancement. Apparently, the Islamic congregations that attract senior *kampung* women to study the Koran in the *surau kampung* are under the supervision of the wing party. The chief who also participateed in my study leads the members to manage the community-owned bakery shop, to attend cooking and crafting workshops, and to be involved in *rewang* activities.

Overall, the respondents strongly embed their sense of belonging to their cultural locality. They do not only reside in the *kampung* for living, but also participate in the enhancement of the social and cultural capital. Only a few of them were born in the *kampung* while most of them were originated from the close neighbouring villages—some where from other states—and married to the locals. They moved to the kampung as early as teenage age since they were married at young age. Despite their place of origin, they have become core members of the community in the *kampung*. They pleasantly claim their affiliation to the Javanese culture and society in their locality. Most importantly, they are proud of the Javanese root in their family and retain their mother tongue for the sustainability of the community's culture. In addition, they actively participate in community a club or workgroup which represents their cultural embeddings. The details of each respondent's cultural embedding are described in the Table 4.2 on the next page.

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**Table 4.2:** Cultural embedding of the respondents

| Respondents | Having Javanese parent(s) | Having Javanese grand-parent(s) | Speaking Javanese mainly | Residing in the *kampung* ≥25 years | Currently joining a community club/ workgroup |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Mbah* Ton | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 2. *Mbah* Ngat | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 3. *Mak Cik* Dah | - | √ | √ | - | - |
| 4. *Ibu* Bari | - | √ | - | √ | √ |
| 5. *Mbah* Sar | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 6. *Ibu* Ara | - | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| 7. *Wak* Jah | - | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| 8. *Wak* Ati | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 9. *Bik* Rus | - | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| 10. *Mbah* Man | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 11. *Akak* Ain | √ | - | √ | - | √ |
| 12. *Ibu* Mon | √ | - | √ | - | √ |
| 13. *Mbah* Rin | √ | - | √ | √ | √ |
| 14. *Mak Cik* Gam | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 15. *Ibu* Nal | - | √ | √ | - | √ |
| 16. *Mbah* Min | √ | - | √ | √ | √ |
| 17. *Ibu* Par | √ | - | - | √ | √ |
| 18. *Mbah* Uki | √ | - | √ | √ | √ |
| 19. *Mbah* Yan | √ | - | √ | √ | - |
| 20. *Ibu* Nan | - | √ | √ | √ | √ |

## 4.5. Analysing the data using applied thematic analysis with software-assisted inductive coding

The data of this research were examined carefully using applied thematic analysis with the assistance of computerised data management programme, NVivo 10. In the needs of transparency and validity of qualitative data analysis, especially in the writing of a doctoral thesis, it is important to describe how the raw data is transformed into an explanatory form without violating the quality of the research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Bringer, Johnston and Brackenridge, 2004; Suria and Marohaini, 2011; Welsh, 2002). Welsh (2002: 6) argues that the use of qualitative analysis software helps

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researchers to claim a particular tapestry based on their research questions and objectives, and create broad agreement among them about what is being dealt with to enhance "the quality, rigour and trustworthiness of the research." Therefore, a thorough description of the deconstruction and the reconstruction of the data, including the development of the codes and themes, need to be addressed.

The key feature of thematic analysis is identifying specific patterns within the research data that will be presented into themes (Aronson, 1995; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest MacQueen and Namey, 2011). These themes serve to describe the meanings of the phenomena that the researcher is trying to deliver to the readers (Boyatziz, 1998; Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman, 1997). There are two types of coding in analysing qualitative data: inductive and deductive coding. The former refers to the coding process in which the codes are developed and re-developed based on the raw data (Boyatziz, 1998; Thomas, 2006). In contrast, the latter represents the method of clustering data into priori codes that are developed before the data analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Thomas, 2006).

This particular research uses the inductive method of coding with some combination of multiple analyses as suggested in the applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011). The concept of analysis appears to be appropriate for ethnographic text reading because its coding system moves beyond data clustering and focuses more in an interpretive endeavour to present explanatory information to the readers (Guest et al., 2011: 10). This inductive coding process follows Thomas' inductive model (2006) which comprises of five steps: "preparation of raw data files, close reading of text, creation of categories, overlapping coding and uncoded text, and continuing revision and refinement of category system" (Thomas, 2006: 241-242). As shown in the Figure 4.3,

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the inductive analysis enables ethnographic text to be examined several times before the final themes, which represent the findings, appear.

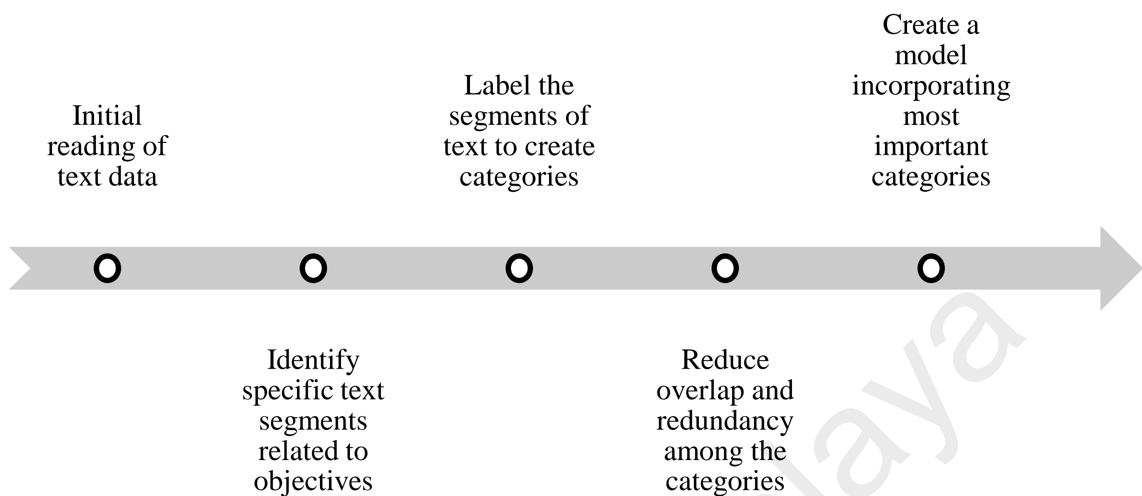


**Figure 4.3:** Inductive coding process, adapted from Thomas (2006: 242, Table 2)

During the analysis, the respondents' feedback was interpreted using a hermeneutic approach (Ricoeur, 1976, stated in Geanellos, 2000). Taking the subjects' constructive meaning as the research enquiry, the current study employs Ricoeur's hermeneutic distanciation and appropriation to contextually interpret the respondents' negotiations of everyday practices. According to Geanellos (2001), appropriation is a method of interpretation that allows the interpreters to make sense of respondents' views about certain meanings in the same way as their interpretation of the world. It may reflect in their shared history, culture, tradition, and language (Geanellos, 2001: 114). As a Javanese, I share the same language and some cultural customs with my respondents. It is an advantage for me as a researcher as the shared knowledge can assist me to generate reflective insights in producing ethnographic findings (Fetterman, 2010; Gray, 2003; Murphy, 2008). However, it can be a challenge too because it can lead to subjective interpretation. Therefore, distanciation is also important to be taken into account in analysing qualitative data.

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Basically, distanciation concerns five steps (Ricoeur, 1973) but Geanellos (2000) summarises the practical meanings of the notion in four forms. The four forms of the distanciation include "a) fixation of the spoken into the written word, dialogue is recorded as writing and meaning becomes more important than the actual words; b) eclipse of the author's intention, the written word makes the text autonomous and open to unlimited reading and interpretation; c) emancipation of the text, the text is freed from the context of its creation and able to be read within different socio-political, historical and cultural traditions; and d) differences between spoken and written words, spoken dialogue is face to face, whereas the written word overcomes this limitation" (Geanellos, 2000: 113). These comprehensive ideas of distanciation enable the researcher to avoid the construction of excessive subjective meanings.

After the interviews had been transcribed and the field notes were filtered, the first step to do was to import all the raw data files onto NVivo 10. I categorised the transcripts and the fieldwork notes alongside the pictures as the internal data which served as the primary sources for analysis. It should be noted that the interviews were turned into verbatim transcriptions and each of them was twenty to fifty pages long. Although NVivo 10 provides transcribing functions, I chose to transcribe the interviews onto Microsoft Word documents. The list of the nodes can be seen in the Appendix A.

Before the coding starts, it is important to design a database in the NVivo 10 to determine cases and classifications that will be useful to connect the qualitative and quantitative data which a researcher may have (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). A case in NVivo represents a unit of analysis and a type of case is regarded as one classification system which consists of attributes and attribute values (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013:

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123-130). This database setting is instrumental if a researcher seeks to run a cross-case analysis to test the findings across the units of analysis. Apparently, NVivo 10 facilitates the cross-case analysis through a matrix coding query. To proceed with the matrix coding query, an interpreter need to: "a) compare cases on a specific factor, b) examine and determine the significance of patterns of association in codes, or c) generate a coding table for cases in the form of a statistic program" (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013: 256-259). This NVivo coding query seems to be more relevant to the study that aims to run theory testing, which is a rare occurrence for a qualitative project (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013: 244).

It should be noted that this particular study uses only one unit of analysis, examining a respondent's experience as a single variable. Moreover, the aim of this research is not particularly to compare the findings across demographic attributes because, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the respondents come from the same social backgrounds and therefore they have the attributes in common. In addition, this research expects to present "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) that goes beyond words counting and clustering to explore the respondents' cultural experiences with television through wider semiotic and contextual analysis. The respondents indeed come from different generations which may influence their interpretation of identity but I argue that their cultural experiences and communal values—through which their cultural attachment and embedding take place—are more significant. This argument will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters.

In analysing the raw data, I started the coding procedures by reading the interview transcripts and subsequently moved to the notes and the pictures. The notes here concerned about my unexpected encounters in the field when I joined some particular

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occasions with my respondents. In practice, the notes and the pictures were coded in reference to the cases that the respondents might say in the interviews. As I transcribed the interviews on my own, I had already captured the general picture of my respondents' feedback. Therefore, in the first level of the interpretation, I simply coded each passage of the interview transcripts according to the research objectives and questions.

The first level of analysis concerned four steps following the research objectives. Firstly, I identified the respondents' statements about their television viewing patterns. The codes for this particular objective turned to represent political, religious and cultural engagement of television consumption which explained their negotiation of television-based identity construction. Secondly, the coding process set to explore the respondents' interpretation of self and collective identities. In this matter, I examined the respondents' answers to the questions pertaining to their everyday culture and life history. Thirdly, I read the respondents' feedback about how they interpreted the television texts and images in regard to their religious, cultural and national identities, as well as their reflections on such texts and images on their everyday experiences. Last but not least, I explored further to examine the correlations between the respondents' interpretation of television contents and their construction of hybrid identity. It was to explore the respondents' identifications with Islamic, Javanese/Malay and national identities in interpreting television narratives to show their sense of belonging to Javanese or Malay identity.

From the first level of interpretation I identified more than 50 initial codes that were clustered in the NVivo style of folders called nodes. I simply labelled these nodes according to the main point of the passages in each category. At this point, I realised that there were some redundancies and overlapping ideas in the nodes which needed to

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be turned into some focused nodes. Therefore, I re-read and re-interpreted the passages that had been coded to narrow down the findings into addressing the research questions. In analysing qualitative data, it is possible to code a passage into more than one category, and this multiple coding process is much easier to be done in an NVivo project (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The software programme also facilitates the researcher to build the objects of reflection through its handy tool namely memo. In the memos, the interpreter can write his or her comments about certain aspects in the coded texts that raise a question of reflexivity or a reference to the literatures. Most importantly, the interpreter can code the memos into nodes to strengthen his or her initial findings.

After the second level of interpretation, I deducted and merged some typical initial nodes to have around eleven focused nodes. These focused nodes eventually turned into four themes, following the research objectives. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme can represent a research question or objective. Compared to non-software assisted coding process, deducting or merging categories in NVivo is much easier because it is similar to creating, removing or combining folders in a computer directory. We can also name and rename the categories that we have made previously to meet the updates in the final level of interpretation.

I must clarify that the interpretive framework used for the guidelines of analysis is based on the conceptual framework which has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, as the interviews used unstructured questions which ultimately generated long disorderly answers, there were some points that emerged as a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2012, 1967). The unplanned encounters in the field and the inductive logic derived from the analysis can be "a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses" which contribute to the novelty of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 2012: 3). The

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results of the unexpected coding encounters were then formulated into a theoretical notion which I call the interpretive identity practices. Ultimately, this particular study suggests the notion of interpretive identity practices as a contribution to the field of cultural and media studies.

### 4.6. Summary

In brief, this study employed audience ethnography as its methodology by using in-depth interviews and participant observation to investigate television viewing experience and its correlations with the construction of hybrid identity among Malay women of Javanese descent in Malaysia. The research was completely conducted in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh at the district of Sabak Bernam in Selangor. The selection of the methodology, including the issues pertaining compatibility of the methodological approach as well as the research site was well described in the beginning of the chapter. Basically, this ethnographic study of rural television viewers was an explorative work on the cognitive and experiential negotiation of identities and everyday culture in which television played a central role. Precisely, it examined the experience of the Malay-Javanese women in the selected *kampung* with television narratives and images right in their natural setting.

This qualitative study adopted the basic ethnographic methods of data collection. It recorded the study participants' lived experiences through in-depth interviews and participant observation. A group of twenty Malay women from the second and third generation of Javanese migrants participated in this study by which they were selected through a snowballing technique (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Oliver, 2006). The fieldwork that took place around a year used the method of partial immersion (Delamont, 2004) that allowed the researcher to stay in the field for a long period of

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time, but not in a continuous mode. During the observation in the field, the researcher was involved in the respondents' television viewing and communal activities. Ultimately, the data collected from the field were analysed thematically through NVivo-assisted inductive coding. From the fieldwork data, this study reveals that the relationships between television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia can be understood through two thematic discussions of findings: imagining hybrid identity in between two nations (Chapter 5) and projecting hybrid identity between two cultures (Chapter 6).

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# CHAPTER 5: IMAGINING HYBRID IDENTITY IN BETWEEN TWO NATIONS

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a half of the findings, which explains the television viewing patterns of female Javanese descendants in Malaysia and their interpretation of television contents in relation to self and collective identities. The discussion of the findings in this chapter also serves to achieve the first and third objectives, which are to access the television viewing patterns of Malaysian Javanese women in relation to their hybrid identities, and to investigate Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content in relation to self and collective identities. From a hermeneutic analysis of the research data, it shows that the Malaysian Javanese women imagine their hybrid identity from television by locating essential aspects of identities and negotiating cultural hybridity. In locating essential aspects of identity, they exercise "self-regulatory" and "collective-regulatory" engagement in several kinds of programmes across genres and locations. At the same time, they negotiate cultural hybridity in two modes of interpretation: "cultural appreciation" and "cultural distanciation."

## 5.2. Locating essential aspects of identity

Audience seek a range of visual imageries which represent them as a member of gender community, social class, ethnicity and/or nation (Barker, 1999; Thompson, 2011). In their consumption of television, they do not simply attend to the visual representations of their world and monitor every situation which symbolises the cultural norms and values of their particular community (Fish, 1980; Hall, 1992). Instead, they produce meaning from the symbolic circumstances of life to construct the substantive ideas about their existence within the community. In the process of meaning making, they

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derive self-reflexivity (Barker, 1997; Giddens, 1991) as well as collective commonalities (Fiske, 2011; Price, 1995) from the television representations which subsequently signify their identifications with a particular society. In this matter, I contend that as a member of certain "interpretive communities" (Fish, 1980; Lindlof, 2002), the audience, including the female Javanese descendants in this study seek to locate essential aspects of identities in television texts to conceive "who they are?", "what constitutes their community?", and "what does not make them the 'others'?".

In the contexts of this study, Malaysian Javanese women substantially search for personal and shared qualities of an "ethnically-hybrid" person and member of community in religious, cultural, and informational television programmes. The evidence from the ethnographic interviews reveals that they engage more with Islamic realities and dramas as well as local and foreign news, which depict their "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006). They routinely watch *rancangan agama* (Islamic programmes), *cerita Indonesia* (Indonesian *sinetron*/soap operas), *cerita Melayu* (Malay television series and movies), *berita petang* (afternoon news), and *berita malam* (primetime news). The details of the participants' viewing patterns are presented in the Appendix F in the end of this thesis.

Television genres or formats are certainly unclear in the consumption of television among the Malaysian Javanese women in this particular study. The reason is that they categorise television programmes based on the essential features that they focus on. For example, they classify televised sermons and shows that talk about a topic on Islamic teachings or practices as *rancangan agama*. For *cerita Indonesia* and *cerita Melayu*, they identify the visual and audio presentations which depict the representations of the realities in Indonesian and Malay society respectively, even though the genres and



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formats are completely different from each other. The television genre of the programme that they regard as *cerita Indonesia* is actually soap opera as it concerns a melodramatic narrative that runs for a prolonged period of time. In his study on the Malay women's engagement with mediated modernity, Md Azalanshah Md Syed (2011) regards Indonesian television series along with series from Japan, Korea, and Latin American countries as soap operas due to its sensationalistic narrative. In contrast, though it contains the word "*cerita*" (narrative) as in *cerita Indonesia*, *cerita Melayu* for the Malaysian Javanese viewers refers to Malay television drama series and movies. When they say "*cerita Melayu*" they refer to Malay dramas or televised P Ramlee's movies.

In discussing the findings of the study, I prefer to regard Indonesian soap operas and Malay drama series as "Indonesian dramas" and "Malay dramas" respectively. Some local authors use particular terms such as "*drama bersiri*" (serial dramas) (Karim, 2014) and "drama" (Abdul Wahab et al., 2006) to name the genre of television drama series from Asian countries. However, I will use both terms interchangeably with the respondents-owned terms of *cerita Indonesia* and *cerita Melayu*. As for *berita petang* and *berita malam*, I name both programmes as "news" even though the respondents differentiate between both programmes based on the content. They identify local news mostly in *berita petang* but they can recall foreign and sport news along with the local news in *berita malam*.

In reading the religious, cultural and informative content of television, the Malaysian Javanese women engage in "self-regulatory" and "collective-regulatory" viewing to locate the essential aspects of their hybrid identity. Self-regulatory engagement is related to the consumption of television to fulfil the need of self-satisfaction and self-

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improvement for the process of subjectivity. On the other hand, collective-regulatory engagement refers to television viewing in which the viewers are mediated by the social structures that constitute them as a member of their social community.

### 5.2.1. Self-regulatory engagement

In the social cognitive theory of mass communication, Albert Bandura (2001) argues that human beings possess and exhibit self-regulatory capability to deal with external esteem and demands. They self-regulate and self-direct the motivation and action to gain self-satisfaction through operating "internal standards and evaluative reactions to one's own behaviours" (Bandura, 2001: 3). Drawing upon this notion of social cognition, I contend that the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study perform self-regulatory engagement in television content to satisfy their needs of directive enlightenment for the gratification and enhancement of the self.

The Malaysian Javanese women exercise the self-regulatory engagement in two ways. Firstly, they locate the cultural narratives in Malaysian and Indonesian television programmes which they prefer as the representations of their cultural identity. They have personal motivations and own-perceived standards of cultural values to determine the propriety of their cultural structures and agents. Secondly, they seek ideal Islamic morality in the representations of social and cultural realities in Malaysian and Indonesian television content to enhance the particularity of their Islamic identity. In seeking such preferred Islamic values, they discernibly negotiate the desirable and undesirable images of religiously cultural life in *cerita Indonesia* and *cerita Melayu* to construct the ideal standards of Islamic virtue.

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#### *5.2.1.1. Locating preferred cultural representation in between Malaysia and Indonesia*

Cultural productions such as television dramas or soap operas provide narratives about cultural features of society in which audience can identify with (Turner, 2005). However, in order to make sense of such narratives, the audience need to have particular knowledge and experiences which link their narrative of self to the mediated narratives (Barker, 1997; Castelló, 2009; Livingstone, 1998). Sonia Livingstone (1998) points out that audience tend to be selective in their consumption of television in which they process the semantic representations of their world using prior knowledge about their social world, communities and events. Such semantic representations can be in the form of the cultural elements such as folklore, music, gastronomy, dress codes, rituals and so forth which substantially represent a cultural community (Castelló, 2009). Similarly, the Malaysian Javanese women in this particular study identify the representations of their culture in television by acknowledging linguistic accent, traditional dress codes, and culturally religious values.

Malaysian Javanese communities preserve their ethnic language in spite of their compliance with speaking the national language (Mohamed, 1996, Noriah, 2000; Sekimoto, 1994). However, in their articulation of *Bahasa Malaysia*, they preserve some Javanese particles such as *kok* and *ta* (Noriah, 2001). During the fieldwork, I observed that the Javanese in Parit Tujuh Baroh sometimes add the particle *kok*, *ta*, and *toh* in their *Bahasa Malaysia* sentences. For example, a twelve-year-old son of a respondent asked his younger sister by saying, "*Adik mahu apa toh*?" (What do you want, little sister?) In another occasion, when I joined one of the respondents shopping for daily groceries in a wet market near the *kampung*, I heard her asking "*kok mahal*

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*toh*? (Why is it so expensive?) as she bargained a kilogram of fish to a local Chinese fishmonger. Apparently, this Javanese articulation influences them to relate to the language expressions in Indonesian dramas which also contain such Javanese particles.

In the interviews, I asked the respondents about their favourite television drama series (see the Appendix B and the Appendix C). As expected, most of them prefer watching Indonesian dramas to watching Malay dramas for several reasons. First, it is the language that makes them fond of watching the programme.

> I like watching *cerita Indonesia*. They are entertaining. It is so different from *cerita Melayu*. I don't know. It seems like there is something missing (in the Malay dramas). They should adopt *cerita* P Ramlee (P Ramlee's movies). The current (Malay) dramas are nothing comparable to P Ramlee's. P Ramlee's are not boring and they are similar to Indonesian dramas, especially the dialogues (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 31 March 2014).

> The local programme that I like is *cerita* P Ramlee (P Ramlee's movies). The characters in P Ramlee's movies use mixed language. It sounds like *cerita Indonesia*. It is because people in the past pronounced "saya" (I) as "sayaa". Now (it is pronounced as) "saye" (*Mbah* Uki, 67, interview, 20 June 2013).

> During the afternoon I watch this *cerita Indonesia*. It airs two episodes in a row. This girl (the female lead) likes to mock the guy who is fond of her. In the class, she does everything but studying. She also likes to scold her classmates. If she gets angry, she shouts at everybody. But the way she speaks is fascinating. Why have I never heard you speaking like that? (*Mbah* Uki, 67, television-time conversation, 29 May 2014).

*Mbah* Ton, whose both parents originated from Kebumen, a regency in Central Java, claims that she watches Indonesian dramas practically every day. She also likes P Ramlee's movies that are broadcast on television. Comparing with Malay dramas, she



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conceives that Indonesian dramas and P Ramlee's movies are more entertaining due to the style of the language.

Similar to *Mbah* Ton, *Mbah* Uki also compares the language style in P Ramlee's movies with the dialogues in Indonesian dramas. She identifies that the pronunciation of dialogues in P Ramlee's movies is similar to the ones in Indonesian dramas. Apparently, she also likes the language style of Indonesian dramas. On one occasion, I joined her watching an Indonesian drama series, *Heart Series*, on Astro Ria. While watching, she narrated me what the series was about. The drama which is adapted from an Indonesian movie entitled *Heart* tells a story about the high school life of middle class teenagers in Indonesia. Referring to the main female lead, she asked me if I spoke like she and the rest of the casts in the drama did. Actually, I always followed *Mbah* Uki almost everywhere during the fieldwork because I appointed her as my key respondent whom I mainly focused on for participant observation. I never used *Bahasa Indonesia* in front of her because she practically spoke Javanese all the time. She only used *Bahasa Malaysia* when conversing with non-Javanese.

*Bahasa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Indonesia* are similar in many ways, but each language is spoken in different accents and styles. As I have lived in Malaysia for more than eight years, I am accustomed to using semblance of the local colloquial expressions. However, I still retain my *Bahasa Indonesia* accent most of the time. During the fieldwork, I spoke mostly in Javanese as it is the everyday language in the community. However, I interviewed most of the respondents using *Bahasa Malaysia* for practical purposes. The rest of them, including *Mbah* Uki, preferred to answer in Javanese.

Language becomes an important aspect for the female Javanese descendants to identify

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with when locating cultural representations in the consumption of television. As Malaysian citizens, they are observed to use the national language, *Bahasa Malaysia*, which is de facto the language of the Malays. However, they admire the accent of *Bahasa Indonesia* because it sounds formal and pleasing.

> Apart from the moral stories, Indonesian dramas are better in terms of the acting and the dialogues. The dialogues sound like formal speech. I like to listen to it (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

> I like the dialogues (in Indonesian dramas). They sound like formal speech. I like it. I watch one drama which cast Indonesian and Malaysian actors. They use both languages. I sound like them when I speak *Bahasa Malaysia*. Some people identify me as an Indonesian. I say, indeed I am an Indonesian descendant (*Mbah* Min, 63, interview, 20 May 2014).

Knowing that I am an Indonesian, most people that I met in the field tried to impersonate the characters in Indonesian dramas when they spoke to me. *Ibu* Par was one of them. Sometimes she tried to utter some Indonesian words to me when we encountered in a *rewang* gathering. She speaks fluent *Bahasa Malaysia* with a strong Javanese accent as she speaks Javanese on a daily basis. Even when I interviewed her in *Bahasa Malaysia*, she spilled out many Javanese words that she could not find the equal terms in *Bahasa Malaysia* with exact meaning. Similarly, *Mbah* Min also uses Javanese in her daily conversations. She even admits that people have mistaken her as an Indonesian due to her strong Javanese accent.

Interestingly, both particular respondents regard the dialogues in Indonesian dramas as formal speech which contributes a factor for their inclination to watch the dramas. Speaking as an Indonesian native, I find that most of the dialogue in Indonesian dramas is colloquial expressions. It is understood that they perceive the dialogues as formal

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most likely due to the pronunciation which equals the style of *Bahasa Malaysia* used in songs and poetry. As I observe, Malaysian singers and poets articulate lyrics in the same way Indonesians pronounce Indonesian words. Similarly, the style of the dialogues in P Ramlee's movies sounds the same as Indonesian.

Apart from the language, the Malaysian Javanese women prefer to watch Indonesian dramas because they can reflect their everyday experiences on "the location of culture" in the dramas. They can derive a sense of belonging to the localised culture and the cultural locality depicted in the Indonesian dramas. As the members of a rural community who live a rustic life, they can relate to the cultural representations of the ordinary life in Indonesian dramas. They perceive that Indonesian dramas represent a *kampung* (village) life, while Malay dramas symbolise an urban modernity.

> A couple of years ago, (the narrative of) *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* was so relevant to our *kampung* life. The local dramas were not. The drama was "*cerita kampung*" (which) touched upon the *kampung* people (who) still love to wear *kain batik* (patterned sarong). The local dramas seem to be "*cerita bandar*", only depict rich families who run a corporate company. It is impossible for us to relate to such narrative. Is that (drama) about us? In real life, the Malays do not live that life. But the dramas portray the Malays driving luxurious cars (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

> For me, the local dramas are not interesting at all. The story always concerns a life within a corporate company, in high buildings. I don't like such stories. I better watch Indonesian drama. It is interesting because the soundtrack is reminiscent of *zikir* (Islamic chants). Most Indonesian dramas use an Islamic song (as the soundtrack) that mentions the Allah's names. I have never heard such song is played in the local dramas. Only recently I heard it (in a local drama) on TV AlHijrah, but the drama seems to copy an Indonesian drama (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 29 April 2014).

*Ibu* Nan who works as a teacher at a secondary school in a neighbouring *kampung* can

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differentiate between *cerita kampung* (rural-centred dramas) and *cerita bandar* (urban-centred dramas). For her, Indonesian dramas, such as *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*, provide the cultural representations of a *kampung* life that she can relate to, while Malay dramas focus on the symbolic life or urban communities, which is irrelevant to her situated culture. The dichotomy of *cerita kampung* and *cerita bandar* indeed exists in the consumption of television dramas among Malay women. Thompson (2000) suggests that the Malay *kampung* women in his study pleasantly enjoy the narratives of *cerita kampung* and *cerita bandar* as part of the process of transforming into the modern world. While Malay women derive pleasure from the images in *cerita bandar* to imagine the ideas of modernity (Md Azalanshah, 2011; Thompson, 2000), Javanese rural women in my study would rather retain a reflexive identification with suburban life in Indonesian dramas.

The drama *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* that was broadcast on the local channel TV3 in 2006 adopts a Malay archipelago's popular Cinderella-like fairy tale with the same title. The title literally means Shallot and Garlic but it illustrates the tale of the good which is symbolised as *putih* (white), will always overcome the evil—signified as *merah* (red). As agents who have their own narratives of experience to understand media messages (Tomlinson, 1991; Tuchman, 1994), audience from different locations of culture can interpret the images presented in a television drama in many ways. For example, the Malay women in Md Azalanshah's study (2011) identify magical practices and unpleasant moral attitudes in the drama as inappropriate and take these cultural images as part of their daily negotiation with the side effects of a modern life. In contrast, my respondent specifically captures a Javanese cultural image in the drama, referring to one of the characters who is depicted as a typical Javanese woman in traditional attire. Due to the traditional image of the character, she conceives that the



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drama represents a *kampung* life, relating it to her experience of wearing such attire when she was young.

Similarly, *Mbah* Rin likes watching religiously-themed Indonesian dramas more than Malay dramas due to her personal identification with the cultural representation in the former. As a member of *Tablighi Jema'at* (an India-originated Islamic movement which focuses on Islamic missionary work) who has visited Indonesia to join a congregational gathering, she is quite knowledgeable about the Islamic practices and norms in the country. She prefers the representation of culture in Indonesian dramas due to its Islamic theme. I find her pious based on her way of dressing which is compliant with sharia rules by which she adorns a large piece of headscarf that covers her entire upper body from hair to stomach, except the face. Due to her piety and her experiences as a rural woman, she tends to evaluate television content from a conservative perspective. Therefore, she rejects the representation of urban culture in Malay dramas which she finds irrelevant to her current location of culture. She particularly favours an Indonesian series *Islam KTP* (Non-practicing Muslims), which is aired on a local channel TV AlHijrah, due to its explicit moral and religious messages as well as the reminiscing Islamic soundtrack.

Both *Ibu* Nan and *Mbah* Rin locate the materials of their culture within the representation of rural/suburban life in Indonesian dramas. They use self-experiences to regulate their engagement in the dramas. With such cultural disposition, they are capable of locating the cultural/religious elements in the drama to reflect on. This illustrates how they negotiate the cultural texts in the media to construct their identity.

Apart from the language and the location of culture, some of the respondents watch

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television programmes based on their personal identification with the country where the content originates from. They engage in Indonesian dramas because they regard themselves as an Indonesian. They plainly claim the Indonesian descent because their ancestors originated from the Indonesian island of Java. Similarly, they like viewing local programmes due to their nationality and current domicile in Malaysia.

> I don't know why I like *cerita* Indonesia, (it is) probably because my father originated from there (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 31 March 2014).

> News is number one. I watch news about the government because I am a Malaysian citizen. … I am an Indonesian; of course, I like *cerita* Indonesia (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

> It is actually similar (between Indonesian and Malaysian programmes). I watch Indonesian programmes because I am an Indonesian. I watch local programmes because I live here (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

Hall (1996a) contends that identity is a continual production of human practices and values that takes place within representation. Clearly, the Malaysian Javanese women in this study locate their preferred cultural identity by identifying the linguistic and religious aspects of culture in Indonesian and Malaysian television productions. They activate their cognitive functioning by recalling their self-experience with traditional life to situate such elements of culture and subsequently self-regulate their interpretation of the culture to determine the essential aspects of identity. It is argued that these female members of Javanese diaspora exercise self-regulatory engagement in Indonesian and Malaysian cultural productions that represent their situated cultural lives as rural Javanese women. This negotiation of culture appears to be a common identity practice among the members of an ethnic diaspora who search for "common culture" in their consumption of television (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy & Robins, 2008; Creeber, 2004;

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Georgiou; 2013a; Gillespie, 1995).

#### *5.2.1.2. Seeking ideal Islamic morality in between Malaysia and Indonesia*

Islam is the focal point of Malay identity as it is one of the key determinants for someone to be a member of Malay society (Milner, 2002, 1995; Reid, 2004, 2001; Shamsul, 2001). In fact, it is argued that non-Malays who convert to Islam have to deal with cultural and social expectations of becoming Malay (Nah, 2003; Tan, 2000; Nagata, 1974). Furthermore, the religious values of Islam are considered as the general codes of moral conducts for all Malaysians (Barraclough, 1983). For Malays, learning and improving Islamic knowledge and moral attitudes are a deal of pleasure that they benefit from watching Islamic programmes (Faizul and Nor, 2013; Saodah et al., 2012; Zulkiple, 1998). For the Malays of Javanese descent in this study, improving knowledge in Islam through television viewing is a negotiation of identity in the process of becoming Malay. In dealing with such negotiation, they seek the ideal standards of Islamic moral conducts in both Malay and Indonesian television programmes, and evaluate the standards based on their prior understanding of Islam.

In point of fact, the Malay-Javanese women in this study claim that they watch Islamic programmes as their main television diet. The majority of them routinely tune in to the Islamic sermon *Tanyalah Ustaz* (Ask an *Ustaz*/male religious teacher) and *Tanyalah Ustazah* (Ask an *Ustazah*/female religious teacher) on TV9. Those who subscribe to Astro Oasis favour *Kalau Dah Jodoh… Ustaz Khazim Elias* (If it is meant to be… Ustaz Khazim Elias), which focuses on the topics pertaining to the common issues in marriage life of Muslim families. The other programmes that they alternately engage to acquire Islamic knowledge include *Al Kulliyah* (Islamic lecture, TV3), *Halaqah* (A circle of Islamic knowledge, TV9), *Semanis Kurma* (literally "as sweet as dates", a talk on



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marriage issues, TV9), *30 Minit bersama Ustaz Don* (30 Minutes with *Ustaz* Don, TV AlHijrah), *Tiga Ustazah* (Three female religious teachers, TV AlHijrah), and *Jom Kongsi Bersama DMFK* (Let's share with Datuk Mohd Fadzilah Kamsah, Astro Oasis). These women consume Islamic content for several reasons. First and foremost, they watch the Islamic programmes to improve Islamic knowledge.

> For example, we can learn about Islamic teachings from *Tanyalah Ustaz*. Regarding compulsory prayers and the supplementary practices around the prayers, we can learn from (*30 Minit Bersama*) Ustaz Don (*Wak* Jah, 55, interview, 22 April 2014).

> I watch (Islamic programmes) because it (the content) is related to our life. For example, the questions asked in *Tanyalah Ustaz* represent our inquiries about life, Islam, and we want to know the answers too (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

Secondly, they find the Islamic content useful for the purpose of betterment of self and community. In this sense, they review their Islamic practices and seek guidance for nurturing children and society.

> I watch *Al Kulliyah*, *Halaqah*, and *Tanyalah Ustazah*. As a Muslim, I want to know what is lacking in my religious life. From watching the religious programmes, we acquire additional information to fill the empty space of our religious knowledge (*Akak* Ain, 44, interview, 28 April 2014).

> Watching Islamic programmes is important for the purpose of guiding our kids. As parents, we must become a good role model, associate, and friends with our kids. We also learn (Islamic teachings) to appreciate our neighbours, spouse and siblings so that we can get along with them very well (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

Thirdly, they reflect on their ageing years in which they feel the need to prepare "provision" for the hereafter. For these women, the knowledge gained from watching

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religious programmes is important for their lives after death.

> We learn Islam so that we have enough values of good deeds to bring to the hereafter. Everything pertains to our religion will be questioned in the hereafter. Therefore, we should learn as much Islamic knowledge as possible (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 31 March 2014).

> Islamic knowledge is important for our life in the hereafter. Therefore, I watch *rancangan agama* (Islamic programmes) to gain that knowledge (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

For some women in Parit Tujuh Baroh, television Islamic programmes can serve as a substitute for a religious congregation. The majority of the respondents routinely attends the Koranic congregation which is held in a *surau* (the small praying hall) weekly. Since every *kariah* (neighbourhood) in the *kampung* has its own *surau*, the respondents join the congregation in their particular *kariah*. Some of them attend the congregations and watch television but some of them prefer to watch television only.

> I would love to join the congregations, but it is more convenient to learn (Islamic knowledge) on TV (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

> I am busy taking care of children, so I do not have time to attend congregations. Therefore, I watch TV (*Wak* Jah, 55, interview, 22 April 2014).

> Those who live near the TV studio can attend and ask the questions directly (to the *ustaz* in *Tanyalah Ustaz*/*Tanyalah Ustazah*). Sometimes their problems are similar to mine and we can get the answer from listening to them on TV (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

It is obvious that television plays a pivotal role in the respondents' everyday life in regard to the reinforcement of Islamic identity. Islamic programmes become the main



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source of divine guidance for dealing with everyday problems in their lives. Moreover, they perceive that the consumption of Islamic content is one of the convenient ways to learn religious knowledge apart from attending congregation in a *surau* or mosque. As previous studies reveal, watching religious programmes is equal to attending the Mass in a church for some members of Christian communities in Western society (Ardizzoni, 2005; Gaddy and Pritchard, 1985; Taylor and Chatters, 2010). However, it should be noted that watching Islamic programmes for Muslim viewers in the Malaysian Javanese community does not replace religious compulsory practices such as five-time prayers.

Apart from viewing religiously-themed television realities, the women of Javanese descent in this study also derive the ideas about Islamic morality in Indonesian and Malay dramas alternately. They use their own social cognitive capabilities (Bandura, 2001) to evaluate the messages and produce meaning accordingly. They enjoy the narratives of Indonesian dramas in terms of the delivery as well as the moral stories.

> What I love about *cerita* Indonesia is the strong characters. The antagonists look so wicked while the protagonists are unbelievably nice. But, the good people always win over the bad ones. That is a lesson to learn (*Ibu* Mon, 51, interview, 26 April 2013).

> *Cerita* Indonesia is better due to its characters. The acting seems real. For example, the actor can deliver (the acting of Islamic) prayers very well. That is enjoyable to watch. Also, I want to know the ending; how the oppressed (protagonists) end up with her life (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

In contrast, they favour Malay dramas due to the representation of ideal Muslim women in the television productions.

> The storyline in the local dramas is mainly similar to the one in Indonesian dramas, but the local dramas seem to be better because the actresses mostly dress in modesty. For

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> example, (the female lead's outfit in) *Aku Istrinya* is not too revealing. The storyline appears to be educative, depicting man-woman close relationships which do not break Islamic laws (*Ibu* Mon, 51, interview, 29 April 2014).

> *Cerita Indonesia* mostly depict women wearing minis. Local dramas rarely do that. The local dramas with a religious theme are entertaining, but I do not like the depictions of violence in the dramas (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

*Ibu* Mon is a full-time housewife, but she earns some money from teaching recitation of the Koran to her neighbours' kids. She also performs *marhaban* at weddings where she gets extra money from. In her spare time, *Ibu* Mon usually watches television. She regularly watches an Indonesian drama in the afternoon, a local drama in the late afternoon, and a primetime newscast in the evening. She derives pleasure from the storyline and the characters in the Indonesian drama and reflects her religious knowledge on the cultural representations in the local drama. However, she prefers watching Malay dramas to Indonesian dramas due to the appropriate depiction of Muslim women.

In contrast, *Mbah* Man favours Indonesian dramas more than the local ones due to the format of the story and the typical storyline. She identifies the element of Islamic teachings in Indonesian dramas in terms of the performance of Islamic compulsory practices, and appreciates the local dramas for the depictions of Islamic modesty. Even though *Mbah* Man does not really bother to remember the title of the shows, she is an avid follower of Indonesian dramas. When I interviewed her in the preliminary fieldwork, she was watching an Indonesian soap *Binar Bening Berlian* on TV9. In the second interview, she enjoyed watching *Cintaku* on TV3 while answering the interview questions. She also mentions that she follows *Taxi* on TV9 from Monday to Thursday.

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Being asked about the Malay dramas that she watches, *Mbah* Man cannot remember the titles either and tends to talk about Indonesian dramas most of the time. Clearly, she prefers Indonesian dramas as her daily entertainment to the local dramas.

For most of the respondents in this study, Indonesian dramas serve not only as the source of entertainment, but also the source of moral guidance for their everyday lives. They identify Islamic moral values in the dramas and actively reflect the values on their personal experiences in family and society.

> I love watching Indonesian dramas because I can identify religious values in the storyline. The story is just about everyday life around family. I know that the casts are sometimes non-Muslims, but we have to think wisely. We take the good messages and ignore the bad ones (*Akak* Ain, 44, interview, 29 April 2013).

> I watch the Indonesian drama in the afternoon on TV AlHijrah, *Islam KTP*. It tells a story about an arrogant rich man. (In an episode) there is one guy who wants to send his mother for Haj (a pilgrimage to Mecca) but he does not have enough money. So, he goes to the rich guy to borrow money. But, this rich guy arrogantly asks the poor guy to work harder like he does. The drama also shows scenes where men perform prayers in the *surau* congregation. Many scenes show a *kampung* life, like ours. From the scenes, I know that Indonesia is indeed a way better in producing religious programmes (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

While they negotiate the moral stories in Indonesian dramas in relation to their personal life in family and community, they locate religious teachings about compulsory practice in local dramas.

> The local drama that I watch is *Tanah Kubur* on ASTRO Oasis at six o'clock. But usually I watch the re-run because it is near the *Maghrib* time. I need to prepare for the (*Magribh*) prayers and recite the Koran with the kids Otherwise, we will get bizarre punishment like (the story) in *Tanah Kubur* (*Akak* Ain, 44, interview, 29 April 2013).



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> I watch (an episode of) *Tanah Kubur* that depicts a negligent person. This kind of person will surely get punished (by God). For example, his ears suffer severe burns when facing his death because he always missed (compulsory) prayers (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

*Akak* Ain is a full-time housewife who spends plenty of time at home to do household work. While she is doing the work, she lets the television switched on as background noise. In her spare time, she would sit in front of the screen to have some entertainment and gain knowledge from the content that she pays attention to. Particularly, she likes watching Indonesian dramas, especially *Hidayah Mu* (Your Enlightenment) which is aired on the local channel TV3 every Friday at 3.30 in the afternoon. *Hidayah Mu* is a religiously-themed television serial which delivers a different story in each episode, bearing a typical narrative about someone's life journey from hard life to well-off one. She also follows *Tanah Kubur* (The Grave), a locally-produced drama series that has the similar format as *Hidayah Mu*, but the main storyline focuses on the portrayal of someone suffering from bizarre ways of death for the bad things he/she does during his/her life. Interestingly, *Akak* Ain derives the ideas of Islamic morality from both local and Indonesian religiously-themed dramas and practises the lessons in her family as she constantly supervises her children's religious learning at home.

Similarly, *Wak* Ati, who also likes religiously-themed dramas routinely follows *Tanah Kubur* and an Indonesian drama, *Islam KTP*. Apparently, she is an avid follower of the latter. When I visited her house for an interview in a late afternoon, she was waiting for the programme to start. I even had to stop the interview after it ran around fifteen minutes to give her time watching the drama. From both dramas, she vicariously learns about the real consequences of improper moral conducts for Muslims.

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Islamic viewing is the main mode of television consumption among the female Javanese descendants in this study. They learn about Islamic knowledge pertaining to compulsory practices as well as religious morality from religious-themed and popular content in both local and Indonesian dramas. In regard to seeking Islamic morality in the popular genre, they identify the ideas of modesty in the local dramas and negotiate the portrayal of social attitudes in the Indonesian dramas. It is understood that the Malay women of Javanese descent in this particular study conceive of Islamic morality as one of their essential aspects of identity.

Previous studies (Faizul and Nor, 2013; Saodah et al., 2012; Zulkiple, 1998) show that Malay audience watch Islamic programmes to enhance knowledge and retain motivations to become a better person. However, I would like to contend that engaging in Islamic viewing has an extensive cultural meaning for Javanese women because it relates to their negotiation of cultural identity. As they are exposed to both Malaysian and Indonesian styles of Islamic practices on television, it is possible for them to acquire multiple ideas about Islamic moral conducts. In this way, seeking an ideal type of Islamic morality in the televisual representations of social and cultural realities between the two countries serve as a self-regulatory negotiation of hybrid identity for the female members of the Javanese diaspora in Malaysia. Gillespie (1995) points out that "devotional viewing" is part of the process of the construction of cultural identity among Punjabi youth in Southall who have to deal with the oppositional contexts of culture between India and Britain. In the case of Javanese diaspora in my study, the consumption of Islamic content derived from Malaysian and Indonesian dramas assists in bridging the gap between Malay and Javanese culture (Rofil et al., 2015, 2016).

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### 5.2.2. Collective-regulatory engagement

Media users are social agents who proceed from the interpretive communities in which they acquire their communal values and social understanding (Fish, 1980). Their interpretation of the world is influenced by the constitutional normality or prompted by prior legitimate expectations that are collectively shared with their cultural communions. In this way, the audience can engage in collective-regulatory viewing in order to make sense of their cultural world and identity.

In the context of this study, collective-regulatory engagement refers to television viewing in which the viewers are motivated by the social structures that constitute them as a member of their cultural society. It is argued that television programmes such as newscasts provide the narratives that construct the viewer as a member of a nation (Anderson, 2006; Ardizzoni, 2005; Blondheim and Liebes, 2009; Scannel, 1996). Furthermore, the everyday representations of a nation are available on television, offering banal nationalism to the viewers (Billig, 1995). However, as a nation is an imagined community (Anderson, 2006), the ideas that construct a nation are not necessarily the aspects of nationalism. In certain cases, the notion of a nation as an imagined community extends across the borders of geopolitics. For example, religious transnationalism which emerges from the engagement in transnational religious issues significantly constructs transnational subjectivity and replaces the national identity among the Arabs in Europe (Georgiou, 2013a). In this way, I argue that the collective imagery which prevails at the time of news viewing can be derived from the spirit of religious and national comradeship.

The Malaysian Javanese women in this particular study exercise collective-regulatory engagement in two ways. Firstly, as the members of *the ummah* (Islamic religious

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communities), they exercise Islamic solidarity to show their sense of belonging to the dominant religious society in Malaysia and Indonesia. They are motivated by the collective responsibilities to show sympathy for Muslim communities, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia who appear in the news. Secondly, they exhibit the feelings of national allegiance by bordering nationalism in responding to the news about the conflicts between Malaysia and Indonesia. As Malaysian citizens, they certainly retain the loyalty to the state as one of their practices of citizenship.

#### *5.2.2.1. Exercising Muslim brotherhood between Malaysia and Indonesia*

Muslims constitute the largest community in Malaysia and Indonesia. Generally, the Muslim society in both countries shares the same principle of religious nationalism for the purpose to maintain dominance (Arakaki, 2004). In the discourses of Malay world, it is argued that the two nation-states share overlapping experiences of colonisation and culturalism (Tirtosudarmo, 2005, 2011). The idea of "*bangsa serumpun*" (race-bounded nations) illustrates how ethnicity and culture connect the dominant ethnic group in the respective countries. Apart from culture, I would argue that Islam as the religion of the dominant also contributes to the racial bounding between the two nations. It is manifested through the sense of Islamic brotherhood that my Malaysian Javanese respondents have in mind when recalling news pertaining to Indonesia.

When being asked about news regarding Indonesia (see the Appendix C), most of the respondents mentioned the tsunami that struck Aceh in 2004. Recalling the disaster, they expressed sympathy for the victims in particular and Indonesia in general. Even though their relatives were not affected, the cultural and religious bond between them and the people of Indonesia stirred up their emotion.

> The news about Indonesia that I remember is such as

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(2004 Indian Ocean) tsunami, mount eruption and so forth. I am so sad to hear about such news because I like Indonesia. It is my father's land. People said that it was the punishment from Allah for the people of Indonesia. Eh, we could not say that. They were Muslims too (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 17 April 2013).

When the tsunami hit Aceh years ago, I felt so devastated. I felt sorry for those who were killed. I pray to Allah to forgive their sin. If it happens to us, I think Indonesians would pray for us too (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 17 April 2013).

News about Indonesia? I remember watching (news about) tsunami. Yes, at that time I watched it on TV. I felt sorry about the victims. Many of them were Muslims. It happened in Indonesia. It could also happen to us here. Who knows? (*Ibu* Nal, 49, interview, 5 May 2014).

When the tsunami struck Aceh, I thought of my relatives in Indonesia. We watched TV to see the rescue process. It was because I also had relatives in Sumatera. But when we checked with the family members who had moved here, they said, no one was affected. They all no longer lived there (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

The 2004 tsunami hit fourteen countries near Indian Ocean but Indonesia received the most impact because the epicentre of the earthquake which triggered the tsunami was near the west coast of Sumatera. More than 200,000 people were killed with the majority was those who lived in Indonesia's province of Aceh. The deadly tragedy made news headlines throughout the world, including Malaysia. The continuous coverage of the disaster on the national television probably cultivated a memory in the mind of my Javanese respondents. Therefore, it came out as their first remembered news about Indonesia. Interestingly, they exercise collective consciousness as a Muslim to extend their sympathy and prayers to their Muslim brothers and sisters who were affected in Indonesia. Even though they are not related by blood, the sense of Muslim brotherhood triggers their feeling to share the unpleasant emotion with the affected Indonesians.

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Another story in the news that the Malay-Javanese women have in mind when talking about Malaysia-Indonesia Muslim brotherhood is the news about the missing of Malaysia Airlines flight 370 (MH370) on 8 March 2014. The national jetliner that was bound for Beijing from Kuala Lumpur disappeared with its twelve crews and 227 passengers in the airspace between Malaysia and Vietnam. Even though the majority of the passengers on board the airplane was Chinese nationals, the women only cared about Indonesians and Malaysians passengers and crews. Interestingly, they perceived that the Indonesians and the Malaysians in the missing plane were Muslims. For this reason, they expressed their sympathy for both Malaysia and Indonesia.

> How many Indonesians are on board the MH370? I am sorry for the loss. They were fated to be on the plane. As Muslims, we have to accept it as Allah's will (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 1 April 2014).

> There are Indonesians too on board MH370, right? I felt so sad to hear about the news. I cried. I prayed to Allah and recited *Yaseen* (a Surah in the Koran) for the victims. I mean to the Muslims. I knew that most of the victims were Chinese, but there were Malaysians and Indonesians too (*Ibu Ara*, 51, interview, 7 April 2014).

> Too many bad news on TV, especially about conflicts between the government and the oppositions. The latest one when our plane (MH370) has gone missing, they (the oppositions) try to stir things up in order to make (Mainland) Chinese angry with us. It is not nice. Indonesians are among the victims too, but they are not angry. The Chinese are not Muslims. Therefore, they cannot accept it (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

> The news I watched currently was about (the missing of the flight) MH370. I hope there is a miracle from God. I know that most of the victims are foreigners, but the plane belongs to Malaysia. They blame Malaysia. The (non-Muslim) Chinese do not understand *qada* and *qadar* (the concept of fate and destiny in Islam). Even Muslims like

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> (the affected) Malaysians and Indonesians cannot accept the fate either. I can understand that. But they (the family of the Chinese victims) think that they are the only victims. In fact, Malaysians and Indonesians were the victims too (*Bik* Rus, 51, interview, 23 April 2014).

According to the plane manifest that was made available in the Malaysia Airlines's website (http://www.malaysiaairlines.com/), it was confirmed that fifty Malaysians and seven Indonesians were among the victims. However, their religion was not mentioned in the document. I could confirm that some of the Malaysian crews and passengers were Muslims based on their Islamic names. Nevertheless, I could not say that all the Indonesian passengers were Muslims because their names were not marked with Islamic patronym "*bin/binti*" and did not sound Islamic either. From a television interview with the family and relatives of the Indonesian victims, I knew that most of them were of Chinese descent, which I assumed as non-Muslims. Interestingly, my respondents had thought for the Muslims passengers from Malaysia and Indonesia. They identified Chinese nationals in the manifest as non-Muslims and conceived of the Malaysian and Indonesian passengers as Muslims. It was understood that they had such interpretation because they identified with the largest religious group in both countries. They read between the contexts in the news using their collective imagery as a member of transnational Islamic communities.

The MH370 incident was first reported missing on 8 March 2014 right on the first day of my primary fieldwork. The news about the incident was all over the mainstream media, especially television. I even watched the news with some of my respondents. They followed the news for quite some time and talked about it when they met their fellow community members in Friday congregations or other occasions. On a Friday afternoon, I joined a small group of the *kampung* women who talked about the incident while waiting for the Koranic congregation to start. *Ibu* Ara and *Mbah* Ngat were

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among those who were present. Both respondents and the rest of them exchanged information and enlighten each other about the subject matter.

Members of diaspora communities remain attached to the images of their religion in their country of origin. The Arabs in European capitals are associated with the news about Islamic radicalism in the Middle East (Georgiou, 2013a), while the young Turks in Europe are expected to relate to Islamic festivals depicted on transnational Turkish television (Aksoy and Robins, 2008). It is obvious that religious transnationalism through television contributes to the negotiation of identity in diaporic locations. As for the members of the Javanese diaspora in my study, certain narratives in the news involving Muslims in their country of birth, Malaysia, and the country of their cultural origin, Indonesia, can generate Muslim brotherhood which brings both countries closer.

#### *5.2.2.2. Bordering nationalism in between Malaysia and Indonesia*

As described in the literature review, members of civic nations such as minorities and diaspora who are granted citizenship due to the territorial factors in the course of birth mainly adopt national identity in ascribing manners (Bakke, 2000). Javanese descendants who were born in Malaya were considered as Malaysians of Malay ethnic group (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Hirschman, 1987). In this way, they subscribe to the ideas of Malaysian national identity from the perspectives of Malay nationalism. In practice, they regard Malaysia as "*tanah tumpah darah*" (literally translated as the land of blood, contextually understood as homeland).

> I was born here, my soul belongs to Malaysia. … I have become a Malaysian since birth and this country is my homeland (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 1 April 2014).

> It does not matter where our ancestors were from, we must defend what we have now. That is our love for

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> Malaysia. Even though it was regarded as *Tanah Melayu* prior to the independence, it is now our land, our *tanah tumpah darah* (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

> This country has become my (*tanah) tumpah darah* even though my mother and father are Indonesians (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

> I never leave this *kampung*. This (*kampung*) is my *tanah tumpah darah*. I am originated from here (*Mbah* Min, 63, interview, 20 May 2014).

It is obvious that these particular Malaysian Javanese women are more likely to express their sense of belonging to Malaysia and regard the country as their homeland. They belong to second and third generation of Javanese migrants from pre-independence Indonesia but they do not consider this country as their homeland. The term "homeland" in diaspora studies is often referred to as the place of origin where the first generation of migrants that constitutes the diaspora community come from (Axel, 2004; Carter, 2005; Clifford, 1994; Patterson, 2006). For the Javanese diaspora in this study, homeland is where they were born. This recognition of "new homeland" by migrant offspring debunks the idea of "sacred homeland" that is always associated with migrants and their descendants (Hall, 1990). The Malaysian Javanese women recognise Indonesia as the place of origin of their migrant ancestors, but they identify more with Malaysia as it is their place of birth. It is understood that they create a clear boundary between the two countries.

Being born in Malaysia and having a sense of homeliness towards the country serve as a valid reason for the members of the Javanese diaspora in this particular study to claim membership in the nation. Apart from that, their engagement in social and political structures in family, society, and educational institutions provide them the experiences



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and ideas of Malaysian nationhood. Social institutions which serve as a source of national imagery are important for the construction of national identity among citizens. However, media texts, including television content, can connect members of a nation and build ideas of imagined communities among them (Anderson, 2006, 1983). In the context of this study, the respondents produce the meanings of nationalism from the representations of their fellow countrymen in television news.

> I am grateful (to be in Malaysia) because the country experiences less (civil) disturbance compared to the other countries that deal with wars every day. There was one (incident) recently in Sabah, but it was well-handled. I watched the news about it because it was (related to) our land. That is (the spirit of) 1Malaysia (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 17 April 2013).

> I love this country very much. I swear I do. I hate those who like creating havoc, those who are involved in (military) intrusion (into Lahad Datu). I watched it on television. The bodies (of the deceased policemen) were brought home. I could not say anything. I could only cry (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 16 June 2013).

> Malaysia is a safe country, but some (security) threats still occur, such as the one (that happened) in Lahad Datu. Other countries still have to deal with war, hunger. That is so saddening (*Mbah* Yan, 72, interview, 17 June 2013).

> I follow the news (about Lahad Datu) every day. I feel so furious with the intruders. Why would they intrude on our land? This country is already peaceful, isn't it? Why would they do such a thing? It is not fair for our country. That land has been given to Malaysia, why would they intrude in like that? (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 19 June 2013).

As regular viewers of television news, the respondents are aware of the public issues pertaining to national security, including the Lahad Datu standoff that occurred between 11 February and 24 March 2013. They were badly shaken up by the news about the incident which they found unusual as they hardly experienced such occurrence



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throughout their life. The Lahad Datu incident certainly shocked and terrified the whole nation, especially those who were exposed to the reports from the mainstream news. News media in three months constantly report the on-going circumstances of the occupation of the small district in the eastern Sabah by a group of armed troops from the Sulu archipelago of southern Philippines. One of the issues stressed in the news was the government's decision to deploy armed police instead of military forces to fight the intruders (*Astro Awani*, 2013). This resulted in the death of several police officers who were on duty defending the conflicted area. Mentioning the case, some of the rural women in this study expressed their concern for public and national security in the affected areas and the whole Malaysia. Their concern for the nation appears to be the sense of nationalism, which is arisen by the images of their ill-fated countrymen in the news. This is one of the indications that television news assists them to exercise their national identity.

Television also provides banal images of a nation which is significant in reinforcing national identity (Billig, 1995). Billig (1995) argues that visual and contextual appearance of the national flag, language, and representations of the everyday realities in a country can serve as a source of national identity too. Apparently, *Jalur Gemilang* (Malaysian flag) serves as a material of nationhood that the Malaysian Javanese can identify with in negotiating news pertaining to conflicts between Malaysia and Indonesia.

In the interviews, I asked the respondents if they still remembered or had a clue about cultural and territorial disputes between the two countries which occurred from 2007 to 2012 (see the Appendix B and the Appendix C). Unfortunately, they did not remember the details and the particularity of the conflicts. However, they recalled the news about a

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group of Indonesians who stamped on Malaysian flags in front of the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta. The offensive attitudes of the Indonesians who protested against the arrests of Indonesian local officers by Malaysian marine police in the 2010 news triggered strong disagreement and anger among the Malaysian Javanese women in this study.

> I was so offended because they (Indonesians) stomped on the Malaysian flag. What is it to do with the flag? Seriously, I was so angry at those who step on the flag (*Mbah* Uki, 67, interview, 2 June 2014).

> I did (watch the news). They (Indonesians) stepped on the flag. I don't know what to say. I can only ask, "why would they do such a thing?" It is so wrong. Aren't we *serumpun*? (*Ibu* Mon, 51, interview, 29 April 2014).

> The (Indonesian) government there should be more sensitive. We are the same (race), (and) should not fight each other. There are Malaysians living there. Many Indonesians live here too. So, Indonesians should be more considerate towards Malaysia. They should not do things as they please, protesting against us by stepping on Malaysia's flag. Many Indonesians live here. Please don't be so arrogant. I feel so angry at Indonesia. Plenty of Indonesians earn a living here. Don't do such things (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 19 June 2013).

> As a Malaysian, of course I am angry to see the flag is burnt. For example, you as an Indonesian, obviously you will support your country, right? Even though I have relatives there, I support Malaysia. It does not mean that I hate Indonesia. I just do not like if they (Indonesians) get on our nerves (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

> Yes, I did watch that news. I was so pissed off. It was because they did not think that a bunch of their fellow countrymen earn money in Malaysia to be sent there. They work here and send the money home to buy a house, garden. But why did they hate us so much till they had to stamp and burn our flag? (*Bik* Rus, 51, interview, 23 April 2014).

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As Malaysian citizens and Indonesian descendants who have no current bond with any Indonesians, they definitely show a tendency to border their nationalism in cases relating to conflicts between the two countries. It is obvious that their submission to Malaysian nationalism is initially ascribed by the course of being born in the country. However, their lifelong experiences with the local social structures and their emotional identifications with the national identity in television narratives represent collective understanding of being a Malaysian citizen. As a sense of nationalism represents mutual recognition instead of individual choice (Bakke, 2000), I believe that the interpretation of national identity through television news among the Malaysian Javanese women in this particular study represents the collective-regulatory engagement in locating essential aspects of identity.

### 5.3. Negotiating cultural hybridity

Cultural hybridity, as I explain in the chapter two, refers to the discourses of mixed cultures (Burke, 2011; Kompridid, 2005; Marotta, 2008; Pieterse, 2006; Shimoni, 2006), cultural "in-betweeness" (Pieterse, 2006; Bhabha, 1996, 1994), or identifications with multiple cultures (Bakhtin, 1981; Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, 2009; Kraidy, 2005; 1999). As I have previously argued, hybridity in media culture represents nomadic engagement in various locations of culture (Kraidy, 1999). In this matter, the audience in diaspora communities usually exercise shifting identity positions between their personal and collective identities (see Adriaens, 2014; Barker, 1997; Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b; Gillespie, 1995). Generally, the process of hybridization requires normativization (Kompridis, 2009), homogenization (Marotta, 2008) and appropriation or adaptation (Burke, 2011) of two or more different elements of culture to be mixed into one new form. In the context of this study, I argue that the hybridization in the course of television consumption describes how audience appreciate desirable elements

and distance from undesirable elements in the local and foreign content.

Basically, the audience uses a cultural competence which is derived from the regulation of self and collective experiences and knowledge to critically understand media texts (Fiske, 2011, 1987). Such cultural competence also relies on their personal experiences with family and social institutions (Ang, 1996; Fiske, 2011, Morley, 2005). In this sense, it is understood that cultural competence in the interpretation of television texts is a matter of negotiation of agency and the social structures that regulate the audience. In his study of the consumption of Asian soap operas among Malay women, Md Azalanshah (2011) argues that the female viewers exercise "watching competencies" by operating moral capability, cultural proficiency, cognitive capability, and adult capacity when contacting with foreign cultural texts. However, my study proposes two kinds of watching competency that represent the negotiation of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia.

In negotiating desirable and undesirable aspects of identity in television content, the Malaysian Javanese women exercise "cultural appreciation" and "cultural distanciation." The former refers to a watching competency in which the audience accept or appreciate the cultural elements depicted in television narratives as a means of identifications with self and collective identities. Meanwhile, the latter is a way of content engagement in which the audience use their cultural capital to negate or reject inappropriate presentations of identities. I will discuss these two modes of content interpretation in relation to my respondents' consumption of Indonesian dramas, foreign news, and realities on the local television.

### 5.3.1. Cultural appreciation



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Malaysia and Indonesia have similarities in language, dominant religious values, cultural customs, and other aspects of culture. Due to the similarities, Malaysia import Indonesian dramas as the alternative entertainment for the local audience, especially the Malays (Juliana et al, 2013; Md Azalanshah, 2011, Md Azalanshah and Mohammad Nazri, 2012). According to Md Azalanshah (2011), the Malay women in his study can relate to the folkloric narratives depicted in the dramas as they have experience with the shared folklore. The acceptance of the narratives represents an appreciation of cultural similarities.

Stuart Hall (2001, 1980) argues that audience tend to accept the meaning of media messages when they read the texts in a dominant-hegemonic position. Certainly, the shared culture as depicted in the Indonesian dramas consists of hegemonic values which audience in Malaysia and Indonesia can associate with. If Malay women in Md Azalanshah's (2011) study can locate the cultural similarities between both countries in the transnational dramas, the Malay women of Javanese descent in my study can do the same. After all, the Malays and the Malaysian Javanese are practically the same ethnic group who share cultural experiences within the same geo-spatial boundaries. However, I would elaborate the elements of the shared culture that my respondents situate from their consumption of Indonesian and Malaysian television programmes. Based on the empirical data from the fieldwork, I argue that the Malaysian Javanese women appreciate the linguistic and religious commonalities between the two countries when interpreting the content in Indonesian dramas as well as local television realities and news. In this way, their hybrid subjectivity revolves around the significance of shared language and religion, mediated by television images and texts.

#### *5.3.1.1. Appreciating language commonalities between Malaysia and Indonesia*

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As discussed above, a linguistic aspect is one of the factors for self-regulatory engagement in Indonesian dramas and P Ramlee's movies among Malay women of Javanese descent. The identification with the speech style in the drama and movie dialogues derives a pleasure for them. Furthermore, the style of the language significantly serves as an imaginary platform for the women to imagine their cultural communities in both Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Malaysian Javanese speak two languages: Malay and Javanese. The former represents their national language and the language of their state-defined ethnic group. Meanwhile, the latter is the language of their cultural community as well as the medium of communication in their everyday lives (Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001). As Malay is the lingua franca of Malaysia and Indonesia, they share the structural significance of the language with both Malaysians and Indonesians. On the other hand, Javanese links them to a particular ethnic group in Java, a place where their ancestors originated from. Interestingly, television brings them closer to their imagined communities through the speech in Indonesian and local programming.

It is expected that my respondents like watching Indonesian dramas and understand the speech in the dramas due to the linguistic similarity between *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Malaysia*. Surprisingly, they also claim to have proficiency in *Bahasa Indonesia* because of their Javanese language skills. Asked if they completely understand the dialogues spoken in the Indonesian dramas that they watch, they gave a legitimate reason.

> I do because I read the subtitle. Moreover, *Bahasa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Indonesia* are almost the same. But when I don't understand certain words, I read the subtitle (*Ibu* Nal, 49, interview, 5 May 2014).

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> I always watch *cerita* Indonesia on TV9 because I can understand the language. It sounds like Malay (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 17 April 2013).

> The dialogues in *cerita* Indonesia sound like Malay but sometimes Javanese is spoken to (*Mbah* Yan, 72, interview, 18 April 2013).

> I understand because it is mixed with Javanese. So, I know what they say (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

> I do because I am a Javanese. They speak *Bahasa Indonesia,* which sounds like Malay (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 31 March 2014).

> Of course I understand the language because I am a Javanese. I can even speak *bahasa halus* (polite Javanese), but in a moderate manner (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

> I don't remember (in which drama), but sometimes I find *bahasa halus* (spoken) in *cerita* Indonesia. I understand (what they say), but I cannot articulate it myself. My late father used to teach me (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 24 April 2013).

*Bahasa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Indonesia* are completely different from Javanese. Nevertheless, numerous Javanese words are adopted in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Moreover, common Javanese words such as *nggak* (no), *ngomong* (speak), *kapan* (when), *goblok* (stupid), and many more are normally used by Indonesians in their everyday communication, including the conversational language in dramas. Such words are not found in *Bahasa Malaysia* either in written or spoken expressions. Therefore, some of my respondents equate the spoken language in Indonesian dramas with their everyday cultural language, Javanese. They even identify another variant of Javanese in the imported dramas which they regard as *bahasa halus*.

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As far as I am concerned, *bahasa halus* is a *Bahasa Malaysia* translation of the Javanese term *Basa Alus* which refers to the group of Javanese polite speech that is technically known as *Basa Madya* (the medium level of Javanese in terms of the politeness) and *Basa Krama*/*Krama Inggil* (the highest level of Javanese). As I described in the methodological chapter, the Javanese in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, generally converse in *Basa Ngoko*, the lowest in the rank and the everyday language of Javanese community. However, some of my respondents, including *Mbah* Ngat, *Mbah* Sar and *Mbah* Yan, can comprehend the meaning and the significance of the polite speech of *Basa Alus*. *Mbah* Yan who can fluently deliver the speech, challenged me to interview her using *Basa Alus* and criticised me for not having the same skill as hers.

Apart from identifying Javanese in the imported Indonesian dramas, the Javanese women in this study also recognise their cultural language in the local programming. They use the language to recognise their fellow ethnic communion on television.

> I like *Selawat Perdana* on TV. The *ustaz* (Islamic religious teacher) is from Java, isn't he? (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

> That last song in *Selawat Perdana* was delivered in Javanese. Therefore, I wanted to watch it so much, but I missed it because I fell asleep. The invited *ulama* (Islamic scholar) in Putrajaya is from Indonesia. No wonder if his Javanese is very good (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

> That Shaikh Abdul Qadir (Assegaf) delivered a *selawat* in Javanese. I watched it last night. Some ministers were present. (Prime Minister) Najib was there too. I did not expect that he (the Shaikh) would speak Javanese. But he did. It was entertaining. His Javanese is very good (*Mbah* Uki, 67, interview, 2 June 2014)

> I watched (*Selawat Perdana* by) Habib Shaikh (Abdul Qadir) Assegaf. At first I did not know that he is from

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> Indonesia. I know it when he delivered the *salawat* in Javanese (*Ibu* Ara, 51, interview, 7 April 2014).

*Selawat Perdana* refers to a live programme on TV AlHijrah and an ASTRO channel showing performances of *nasyid* (Islamic songs) and *selawat* (hymns to Prophet Muhammad). The central figure of the programme is Habib Shaikh Abdul Qodir Asseggaf, an Islamic scholar from Indonesia who provided and led the *selawat* performance. He actually is a Javanese and a leader of a *pesantren* (an Islamic boarding school) in a Javanese city of Solo (www.zafroon.com). One of his hymns is written in Javanese and collaboratively sung with the attendees of the programme. Although I did not watch the programme live on television, I could confirm the presence of the Javanese hymn as I experienced it myself when I attended such event in Kuala Lumpur after the fieldwork completed. Based on the lyrics, the particular hymn entitled *Padang Bulan* (The Moon Light) would be considered as a religious song rather than a *selawat* as it concerns moral messages about the roles of parents in teaching the observance of Islam to their children. Apparently, the Javanese song attracts the attention of the Javanese women in my study. Hence, they regard the Shaikh as an Indonesian by recognising the Javanese language in his performance. In this case, the textual aspect of *Selawat Perdana* enables the Malaysian Javanese women to imagine their religious identity that they share with the Indonesian/Javanese Muslim scholar. In addition, it is the Javanese language that activates such identification of identity.

In the past few years, *Selawat Perdana* became a phenomenon among Malaysian Muslim society and in the television industry. The national event which attracted hundreds of thousands of Muslims and was attended by government leaders, including the Prime Minister Najib Razak and several of his cabinet ministers, was live broadcast on TV AlHijrah. The event that was conducted in conjunction with Islamic memorial



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days such as the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, signified the prominence of Islam as the official religion of the Federal Government. Apart from the attendance of the government leaders, it was even held in the government administration centre Putrajaya (Astro Awani, 2014). Another similar event which took place in the capital city in New Year's Eve 2015 was fully supported by the Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL) and the Federal Territory Islamic Religious Council (MAIWP) (Diyana, 2014). The programme itself received a critique from a popular Muslim missionary, Dr. Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, who regarded the singing as an act of overly idolising the Prophet, which could potentially undermine the faith of the Muslims in the country (Ridhuan, 2014). However, his critique was debunked by a Member of Parliament from PAS, Mohamed Hanipa Maidin, who opined that the act of delivering *selawat* to the Prophet is indeed encouraged in the religion as Allah and His angels do the same (Hasbullah, 2014).

Despite the controversy, the songs and hymns popularised by *Selawat Perdana* seem to be well received by the Muslims in the country, including my respondents. For example, *Ibu* Nan had the songs, including the Arabic lyrical song *Ya Hanana* (How lucky are we) and the mixed Arabic-Indonesian lyrical hymn *Kisah Sang Rasul* (The story of The Prophet), played on her car audio device while driving me to the nearest town to buy essential supplies for my fieldwork. On a Friday afternoon in April 2014, *Mbah* Uki asked me to download the song *Padang Bulan* (The Moon Light) and played it on my smartphone for her. During our casual conversations in that afternoon, we exchanged stories about our childhood in which a song with the same title and similar lyrics was popular among Javanese children. I am surprised that despite the distant generation gap between us, and the geopolitical boundaries that separate our countries, we share the same cultural contact with the song that literally encourages children to play outside at the time of the full moon. Certainly, this song carries symbolic and cultural meanings

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that the members of Javanese communities, regardless their location of culture, collectively experienced. In this context, the song *Padang Bulan* popularized by a television programme *Selawat Perdana* triggers the reminiscence of the respondent's early life with their Javanese migrant parents. Most importantly, the presence of the language provides a site for the Javanese women in this study to construct an idea of interpretive identity practices in which the linguistic aspect of the shared cultural source enables them to identify with the Javanese identity.

Revisiting the function of language in culture and identity, I would like to refer to Hall's (1996a) notion of identity which concerns the questions of operating language in the process of identity construction. Definitely, Javanese language serves as one of the cultural elements to be identified in the consumption of television, which relates to the articulation of identity among the female Javanese descendants in my study. Most importantly, the language, which is mediated by television programming, connects them to the Javanese communities in Indonesia, in which they recognise the use of the language by Indonesian nationals in popular Indonesian and local programming. This indicates that they appreciate the commonality of Javanese language between the two nations and accept it as part of their situated hybrid cultural identity. It is hybrid because as the members of Malay society, they can claim the materials of culture in a different location from where they are based on. It is also argued that television significantly provides these women with a space for nomadic engagement in two languages (Javanese and Malay/Bahasa Malaysia) and two locations of culture (Malaysia and Indonesia). These particular findings correspond to the previous studies which concern media consumption of diaspora communities as nomadic engagement in multiple transnational locations (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Georgiou, 2013a).

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#### *5.3.1.2. Appreciating religious commonalities between Malaysia and Indonesia*

In the discussion about essential aspects of identity earlier in this chapter, I argue that seeking ideal Islamic morality is one of the means for self-regulatory engagement in Malaysian and Indonesian cultural productions among Malay women of Javanese descent in this study. They engage in both Indonesian and Malaysian cultural content for a purpose of seeking ideal representations of being a Muslim woman. It is also argued earlier in the discussion of collective-regulatory engagement that the members of Javanese diaspora exercise Muslim brotherhood between Malaysia and Indonesia at the time of viewing news pertaining to Indonesia. Certainly, religious identity is an important aspect to be focused on in their negotiation of Malay-Javanese identity. It is obvious because Islam is one of the determinants that define Malay identity (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Kahn, 2006; Milner, 2002; Vickers, 2004). In this way, their negotiation of Malay identity involves dealing with social and cultural expectations of being a Muslim.

Members of a diaspora community substantially locate the discourses of religion on transnational television in negotiating their ethnic identities (Aksoy and Robins, 2008; Georgiou, 2013a; Gillespie, 1995). Similarly, the Malaysian Javanese women in this study identify religious commonalities between their situated ethnic community and Indonesian cultural life depicted on television. Islam is the religion of the dominant society in Malaysia and Indonesia. As the Malays and Javanese make up the majority of the population in the respective countries (Tirtosudarmo, 2005), it is correct to assume that both ethnic groups share the same religion. Hence, the Malaysian Javanese are more likely to locate religious similarities between Malaysia and Indonesia in their consumption of cultural productions from the two countries.



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In interpreting the content of Malay and Indonesian dramas/movies, Malaysian Javanese women firstly identify the similarities in religious aspects. They watch both kinds of dramas due to the typical storyline, which concerns religious messages. Being asked to compare between the local and the foreign content, they name religious messages as the shared meanings that they identify from the two kinds of programmes.

> The storyline is similar. It is about how the good overcomes the evil. Both have religious stories (*Bik* Rus, 51, interview, 23 April 2014).

> The storyline is typical. Both local and Indonesians show female characters wearing revealing clothes. But nowadays they also use actresses wearing *tudung*, covering the *aurat* (body parts that must be covered according to Islamic system of laws). That is a way better (*Mbah* Min, 63, interview, 20 May 2014).

> Indonesian dramas deliver more religious messages compared to the current local dramas. They remind me of P Ramlee's movies that would usually have some elements of comedy and romance but at the same time portray Islamic morality (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 17 April 2013).

The storyline of soap operas usually revolves around domestic culture which represents domestic life and realities in the domestic sphere (Silverstone, 1994). Similarly, Indonesian and Malay dramas also depict issues surrounding a household which women have to deal with (Ida, 2006; Md Azalanshah, 2011; Nilan, 2001). Md Azalanshah (2011) argues that Malay women discern the images of consumerism, romance, and family conflicts in the content of soap operas from non-Western countries, including Indonesia, and distance from the potential hazards of such elements of modernism. In contrast, my respondents can derive positive messages from the depictions of interpersonal and social conflicts in the dramas and relate the messages to religious teachings about morality.

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Despite locating the same religious elements in both Indonesian and local dramas, Malaysian Javanese women favour the former due to the dramatic delivery. Apparently, the fierce character and acting of antagonists in the dramas are strongly embedded in their minds through routine exposure to the television content. However, it is argued that they appreciate the commonalities of religious messages from both productions, even though they incline to engage more with Indonesian television content.

> Both local and Indonesian dramas have a typical storyline, but the latter is more entertaining. The storyline is typically about family conflicts and love relationship. We can derive positive lessons from that kind of story. The Indonesian dramas are better especially when they do (scenes of) praying. As Muslims, we should always remember Allah, if something bad happens (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

> Both local and Indonesian dramas have good lessons to take. The Indonesian dramas have more religious messages. The acting of the protagonists looks so real (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

> It is practically the same. The local dramas also have that typical storyline. It is always related to the religion. But Indonesians are more entertaining. The protagonists act very well, look like really bad persons (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

Indonesian *sinetron* attract viewers with stories that concern "sensationalism, do not make sense, simple conflict, and strong characters" that can be entertaining for *kampung* women (Ida, 2006: 116). The *kampung* women in my study are certainly attached to the strong characters and the acting plays in Indonesian dramas. As they enjoy the acting plays, they retrieve the moral stories and relate it to religious teachings. Religiously-themed Indonesian drama series such as *Hidayah Mu* (Your Enlightenment, TV3) and *Islam KTP* (Non-Practicing Muslims, TV Alhijrah) are among their

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favourites. These dramas obviously deliver religious messages. However, they also derive religious messages from non-religious dramas such as *Cintaku* (My Love, TV3), *Heart Series* (Heart Series, Astro Ria), and *Taxi* (Taxi, TV9). Among local dramas that the Javanese women watch include *Aku Istrinya* (I am His Wife, TV3), *Tentang Dhia* (About Dhia, TV3), and *Adam dan Hawa* (Adam and Eve, Astro Ria). The storyline of these dramas revolves around complex marriage life which focuses on the relationships and conflicts between husband and wife. Even though the actresses are depicted as modest Muslim women who wear headscarves, and the dialogues contain Islamic expressions, the dramas are not labelled as religious programmes. Despite that, the Javanese women are capable of producing religious meaning from the plots.

It appears that both Indonesian and Malay dramas, either religiously-themed or not, become a source of religious messages for *kampung* women in my study. In addition, they appreciate the similarities in the messages which are related to Islamic morality. In this way, it can be argued that they negotiate the content in popular programmes from Malaysia and Indonesia and appreciate the religious commonalities depicted in the dramas to be dealt with in the process of identity construction.

### 5.3.2. Cultural distanciation

Television audience sometimes watch television at a distance if they cannot find the connection between their lived experiences and the representations on the screen. This distance refers to a cultural gap that separates their realities and the representations of the realities which seem irrelevant to theirs (Aksoy and Robins; 2008; Barker, 1997; Hesse-Swain, 2006; La Pastina, 2004; Menon, 2009). Such cultural gap can be in the form of dissimilarity in religious practices (see Aksoy and Robin, 2008; Gillespie, 1995), the difference of social class, (see Hesse-Swain, 2006; La Pastina, 2004), and

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disinclination to the images of dominant culture (Creeber, 2004; Postill, 2008). In the context of diaspora television culture, such distance exists between the discourses of "there and then" and "here and now" most probably due to their negotiation of cultural images from the location of their cultural origin and the place where they currently live (Aksoy and Robins, 2008).

Basically, cultural distanciation appears in the interpretation of images of identity among female Javanese descendants in this study. They create a clear dividing line between the cultures of their migrant ancestors in the past and their situated lives in present days. They also distance from the representations of social realities in Indonesia, the place of origin of their ancestors. For them, some images of Javanese culture and the social realities of people in Indonesia depicted on television programmes would rather match their ancestors' lives and represent the narratives of "there and then." At present, they claim a sense of belonging to the social realities in Malaysia which signify their discourses of "here and now."

#### *5.3.2.1. Distancing from images of the past*

The first mode of cultural distanciation which appears from the interpretation of television in relation to subjectivity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia is distancing from the images of the past. In the context of this study, I refer the images of the past to television images that depict the cultural elements which used to exist among Javanese communities in Malaysia. Apparently, such images are still existent in the narratives of certain Indonesian and local programming.

The Malaysian Javanese women in this study establish a distance between their current culture and the culture of their migrant parents or grandparents. It is obvious from their

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oppositional engagement in the narratives of old Javanese practices depicted on an Indonesian television series. As Javanese descendants who have experience with old Javanese practices and folklore, they are capable to identify such cultural elements in television content and evaluate it based on their present subjectivity.

> I like watching *Dongeng* on TV3. I can relate to the story of *Nyai Roro Kidul*, because it reminds me of a Javanese legend that my grandmother told me. She said that Javanese used to seek *pesugihan*, asking help from jinn, *Roro Kidul* to get rich instantly. That was then. The story was passed down from our grandparents, (and) parents my brothers and me. Despite that, I watch that Indonesian series just for entertainment, for a lesson. It serves as a reminder about the existence of evil spirit. We don't practice such things here (*Mbah Ngat*, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

This particular respondent particularly refers to an Indonesian series entitled *Dongeng* (Fairy tales) that was aired on the local channel TV3 between 2008 and 2013. The series, which delivers a different tale in each episode, adopts Indonesian and western folklore that is remade into modern settings. Apparently, in an episode of *Dongeng* that she watched, *Mbah* Ngat caught the Javanese legend of *Nyai Roro Kidul* (The Queen of the South Sea) and recalled her past experience with her migrant grandparents. Her father and his parents migrated from *Ponorogo*, a small regency in East Java, while her mother was a daughter of Javanese migrants who was born in Johor and became a Malaysian. Speaking from the perspective of a Javanese native, I can confirm that the legend is very popular among Javanese as it is usually told as a bedtime story by parents to their children. The legend concerns the majesty of *Nyai Roro Kidul* as the queen who rules southern territories of Java Island. She is believed to be a mystical spirit who has divine power to bring fortune. Javanese who still believe in paganism usually seek *pesugihan* (help in getting wealth or fortune) by delivering prayers and offerings to her.



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Despite her identification with the story, *Mbah* Ngat exercises oppositional reading in which she clearly rejects the practice of seeking *pesugihan* depicted in the televisual narrative of *Nyai Roro Kidul* due to her observance of Islam. She takes the story as entertainment and a reminiscence of her childhood, but she refrains from believing in the significance of the mystical figure because she perceives that it belongs to the old Javanese culture. Her reference of "then" illustrates that such cultural narrative used to be part of her childhood in which her parents' origin and cultures were considerably dominant. In addition, she also marks her sense of belonging to "here" which signifies her current location of culture that is completely disconnected from the Javanese culture in the past.

Apart from the folklore, images of the past for the Javanese women in this study also refer to a Javanese-typical fashion style that used to be popular among the diaspora communities. Particularly, they identify a woman in television images as Javanese by recognising her clothing and hair style. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the respondents derives a pleasure of watching an Indonesian drama as she can locate the representation of Javanese culture in *batik* sarong that is worn by a female character in the drama. In this context, *batik* along with other traditional fashion items serve as materials of culture from the past that they no longer use to manifest their identity.

> I watched (the documentary about) *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints) on TV last time. It showed the souvenir vendors along the street leading towards the graveyard. They were mostly women, (who) looked so old and wore a hair bun. I wonder if it was footage from the past. Do they still use those things today? (*Mbah* Uki, 67, television-time conversation, 10 March 2014).

The hair bun that *Mbah* Uki talks about is a big-shaped bun, which is made of hairlike materials, that is attached to the back of a woman's head. It is commonly known as *sanggul* in Java. She added that her mother made her wear that kind of bun, along with



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a pair of *kebaya* and batik thigh skirt. She even dressed her daughter with the similar traditional attire. Speaking about the top, a typical Javanese *kebaya* is a kind of body-hugging blouse which falls just below waist. It is observed that the Javanese women in my study no longer retain such style of traditional clothing, nor do the rest of women in the *kampung*. They are regularly seen wearing *baju kurung*, a Malay traditional attire which consists of a matching pair of loose top and bottom that covers the entire body from neck to ankle. They also cover their hair with *tudung* (head scarf) that goes well with the Islam-compliant clothing. It is argued that the traditional fashion style which the particular respondent saw on television symbolises the old Javanese culture which she distances from in her process of becoming Malay. On the other hand, *baju kurung* that is commonly worn by the Javanese women in this study, including *Mbah* Uki, signifies the observance of Islam in their negotiation of Malay identity.

Another aspect of culture that contributes to the images of the past which my respondents reject in their subjectivity is the subject of shamanism. In the past, Malaysian Javanese preserved the practices of traditional healing and their identity was associated with the prominence of *bomoh* (shaman) in the society who have skill in sorcery and folk medicine (Miyazaki, 2000). The rejection of the subject of shamanism is expressed through their opposing views about the presence of a *bomoh* in the news about MH370.

> What that *bomoh* did is pointless. That is because the government still has no information about the plane's whereabouts. What he says is just a false prediction; it cannot be proven. The religion does not allow that kind of thing. The Javanese in the past might do that, but not all of us accept such practice. The current Javanese are submitting to God. We learn about Islam, finding a guru to teach us (the religion). We don't want to deal with *bomoh* anymore (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

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The *bomoh* that this particular respondent refers to is a man who claimed to have the power to locate the missing airplane, sparking outrage and embarrassment among Malaysians in social media (BBC Trending, 2014). He demonstrated his power by using coconuts and bamboo binoculars assisted by his assistants in the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). His presence attracted media reporters and appeared on national television. Hence, my respondent was aware of his appearance and strongly condemned him for such un-Islamic practice. Relating it to the same practice that used to be done by Javanese communities, and her knowledge about present Malaysian Javanese, this particular respondent draws a clear distance between the images of the past and her current situated identity.

Certainly, audience have the capacity to decode media texts in an oppositional mode (Hall, 2001, 1980). A previous study points out that Malay women exercise oppositional viewing to restrain from contra-culture messages in foreign dramas (Md Azalanshah, 2011). Oppositional viewing in the context of this study represents a mode of cultural distanciation in the matter of negotiating a hybrid identity. The Javanese women in my study disassociate from some elements of culture that used to be popular among the Javanese diaspora community in Malaysia in the process of becoming Malay. Indeed, the earlier generation of Malaysian Javanese withdraws mystical aspects of their culture and adopt Malay-Islamic tenets in their maintenance of cultural practices and traditions (Miyazaki, 2000; Noriah, 2001). However, in the context of this study, television content triggers the present Javanese community to express such disassociation. Particularly, television assists them in articulating their observance of Islam, which is embedded in Malay cultural norms and their withdrawal from the old Javanese images of identity. In this sense, they essentially deal with the identity construction which turns them to be a hybrid member of Malay society by associating with Malay-Javanese

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society in the situated present and disassociating from Javanese communities in the distant past.

#### *5.3.2.2. Distancing from social representations of Indonesia*

The second mode of oppositional viewing for the negotiation of cultural hybridity among Malaysian Javanese women in this study is the articulation of alienation from the representations of social life in Indonesia. The members of the Javanese diaspora have lived their entire lives as Malaysian citizens and observing Malaysian ways of living. Their parents or grandparents migrated to Malaysia and worked as labours in agricultural sectors to make a better living. The land that they are living on now is partially from the fruits of their parents' labour. It is understood that their parents' legacy and their own hard work to deal with the social changes in the country put their current family as part of the modern well-off society of Malaysia.

In a matter of fact, half of the respondents, especially the senior ones, used to manage paddies in inherited or leased land before spending their retired life by cultivating coconut or palm trees in the garden beside their house. Five of them worked in other sectors such as food manufacturing industry, self-employed child care, and cleaning service before deciding to become a full-time housewife. The rest of the respondents still work as a high school teacher, a self-employed dressmaker, a shop owner, and a street food vendor. The husbands of these women work in various sectors, mainly in agriculture. Despite the hard life in the early years of their life, their own family and extended families now live in pleasant houses, own paddy lots, and afford cars or other modes of transportations. It is not surprising that they perceive their lives as better compared to Indonesians depicted in Indonesian dramas or local news.

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The cultural distance that they draw from the interpretation of social life in the foreign and local programming is derived from their vicarious experiences with the financial hardship that they migrant ancestor went through before leaving Indonesia and their self-association with the Malaysian well-of society. They disassociate from the hard life of a second-class community which usually appears as the typical storyline in Indonesian dramas. In negotiating the social representations in the television content, some of the respondents compare the depiction of such unfortunate life with their better living in Malaysia.

> I like watching *Islam KTP* but I couldn't bear the character of Madit. He likes to despise other people just because they are poor. I also don't understand why are the people there so poor? Why didn't the (Indonesian) government help the poor like the government here? (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 24 April 2013).

> Indonesian dramas are entertaining, but I don't like it when the poor are depicted so desperately poor. They always lack money to pay for school, healthcare and so on. Is that common there? Here, we don't have to pay to get medical treatment in government hospitals (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

> The poor look so hopeless on TV, but I do not believe that people there (in Indonesia) are so poor. Is that the real picture? When I visited Indonesia, I only saw developed, vibrant places. I did not encounter any slum areas. I asked my son, "where are the poor that they always show (on TV)? What I see here are all luxurious. … In Ponorogo, many people lived in poverty. They had to sell everything to live. They were so destitute. But what I saw (during the visit), Indonesians are very wealthy. The people here (in Malaysia) are relatively moderate. The rich are not extremely wealthy compared to (the rich in) Indonesia. Take my house for an example, the roof is not as splendid as the roof there, but at least my house is not as bad as the house of the poor people I saw (in Indonesian dramas) (*Mbah* Min, 63, interview, 20 May 2014).

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Most Indonesian soaps portray the disparity between the rich and the poor in which the former are depicted as very wealthy, but rather unpleasant persons, while the latter are represented as unlucky nice individuals who come from poor families and are always in need. The religious-comedy drama *Islam KTP* (Non-practicing Muslims) that is aired on the local TV AlHijrah depicts a social life around the wealthy Madid's family who always look down on his poor neighbours (www.tvalhijrah.com). From the constant exposure to the lower class families in the soap, and their experience with social life in Malaysia, the Malaysian Javanese women tend to perceive that Indonesia is a poor country.

Such interpretation is not only built by routine television consumption but also a memory about the hardship of living in the country which is vicariously experienced through the narratives of past life, that they receive from their Javanese migrant parents. However, an actual experience with the infrastructure and social landscape in present Indonesia can change such perception. It is projected by *Mbah* Min's own experience with the vibrant and luxurious urban life in Indonesian cities when she visited Jakarta and Bandung for vacation. While the narratives about poor Indonesians in Indonesian dramas and her father's struggle back in Ponorogo (Java) reinforces her interpretation about unpleasant social life in Indonesia, her visit to the country's urban centres gives her a different picture about modern Indonesia. Despite that, she concludes that the social life in Indonesia and Malaysia are significantly different in terms of the disparities between the poor and the rich. It is clear that the narratives of television dramas can influence the Malay Javanese women to draw a cultural distance between their situated society and the society in the foreign location where their migrant ancestors originated from.

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Apart from the narratives in the popular genre, the Malaysian Javanese women's perception about unpleasant Indonesia is also cultivated by the images of present Indonesian migrant workers and the social crisis surrounding them in local television news. In interpreting the narratives, they express a strong disassociation from the group, albeit their ancestors share the same origin. They keep a distance from the representations of Indonesian migrants on television not only due to unrelated social and national relationship but also their inappropriate moral conducts. Commenting on plentiful news about the criminal cases associated with illegal migrants, especially Indonesians, they conceive that the current Indonesian migrants do not necessarily represent Javanese entity.

> The old Javanese migrants came here to establish a new life, a new home. The current Indonesian (migrants) also make a living here but not in a good way. They are mostly involved in criminal cases such as robberies. Because of this, I feel more affiliated with Malaysia (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 02 April 2014).

> The ones who live in this *kampung* seem good. They help the *kampung* people in their gardens or houses. They can speak Javanese. But the Indonesians on television are different. They take advantage from the local people, marrying the local girls and leaving them not long afterwards (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

> I am so fed up when watching the news about robberies that involve Indonesians. If they come here to earn a living, why do they do such bad things? Why can't they behave appropriately? If they are serious in changing their lives to be better, they should earn it in a good way like people in the past. They should not be involved in robberies just to get wealth instantly (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 24 April 2013).

> The bulk of (migrant) Indonesians comes here without legal documents and stay illegally. If they come here using legitimate channels like people in the past, it should not be a problem. The problem is they live here illegally for years and when we send them back to their country,

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> there will be new groups coming here. Yet, they (Indonesia) do not appreciate us. When a small issue breaks out (between Indonesia and Malaysia), they burn our flag (*Bik* Rus, 51, interview, 23 April 2014).

By mentioning "people in the past," they refer to the migrant groups from Java in which their ancestors belonged to. They do not deny the fact that their parents or grandparents were migrants who came to Malaysia to make a better living like the current Indonesian migrants do. Therefore, they still associate their subjectivity with the narratives of the migration.

Transnational migration from Indonesia to Malaysia prevails since the pre-colonial era and continues till today. The Javanese made up the majority of labours imported from the Indonesian archipelago to Malaya during the colonial era (Khazin, 1984; Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Spaan, 1994; Tunku, 1967a), and still dominate the figures of migrant workers in present days (Hamzah et al., 2012; Kaur, 2008, 2004). Previous studies mention that colonial migrant groups of Indonesian origin, including Javanese, were eventually accepted into Malay society after a long process of localisation (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Tan, 2000). However, Indonesian migrants who arrive in post-colonial Malaysia do not belong to the existing diaspora and they are socially excluded from the community (Umi, 2010). Ever since the 1980's they were regarded as "aliens" due to their involvement in crimes which sparked public outrage from the local communities (Azizah, 1997, 1987). Similarly, the Javanese descendants in this study express strong opposition against illegal activities that are associated with current Indonesian migrants. This illustrates that they clearly create a distance between their cultural society and the subject of Indonesian migrants in the news. It is understood that they do not belong to present Indonesia; hence they are not morally responsible to identify themselves with the presence of Indonesian migrants in Malaysia. However,

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such cultural distanciation represents their negotiation of hybrid identity which is mediated by the television discourses from two different locations of culture.

### 5.4. Summary

From the discussion of the findings in this chapter, it can be concluded that the Malaysian Javanese descendants actively interact with the content structures in Malaysian and Indonesian cultural productions. Their viewing patterns illustrate that they engage in the cultural, religious, and political content in dramas, reality shows, and news from the two countries with modes of self-regulatory and collective-regulatory viewing. On the one hand, they exercise self-regulatory engagement by locating preferred cultural representations and seeking ideal Islamic morality in Malaysian and Indonesian television content. On the other hand, they operate collective-regulatory engagement by exercising Muslim brotherhood and building national boundaries when confronting unpleasant and conflicted issues between Malaysia and Indonesia in the news.

In interpreting the television content, they also negotiate the cultural elements of the content to produce meanings about their hybrid Malay-Javanese identity. They appreciate language and religious commonalities between Malaysia and Indonesia. Firstly, they recognise the language similarities between the two countries through identifications of similar dramatic speech and expressions in *Bahasa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Indonesia*, and in *Bahasa Indonesia* and Javanese. Secondly, they appreciate the commonalities in religious values depicted in both Indonesian and local dramas. The appreciation of commonalities in cultural elements represents the subject of cultural appreciation for the construction of hybrid identity. Apart from appreciating the cultural commonalities, the Javanese women in my study also exercise cultural distanciation

from undesirable television images to construct "what they have become." They find a niche for the matter of subjectivity in the cultural and social landscape of contemporary Malaysia and restrain from identifying with Javanese old culture and current Indonesian migrants in Malaysia as depicted on television. In this way, I argue that the members of Javanese diaspora create a clear dividing line between their current-situated culture and the past culture that belongs to their Javanese ancestors as well as the social life in the country where their ancestors originated from.

In the theory of agency and social structures (Giddens, 1984), it is argued that humans have capabilities to decide what they like and what they want to do, and also comply with the social norms and values that define them as a member of a society. On the one hand, they have the personal capacity to symbolise, self-regulate, self-reflect, and vicariously observe their surroundings to produce cultural meanings relevant to their subjectivity (Bandura, 2001). On the other hand, they share mutual knowledge with the members of their community which enables them to imagine their world in the same way their fellow communions do (Fish, 1980). They may learn about their social world from the social constitution in family and community, but the ideas about their imagined communities exist within the representations of cultural realities in media texts (Anderson, 2006, 1983). Media such as television provide symbolic social structures which ultimately meet the social agents within the cognitive system in the audience's mind (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003). In this way, the audience can derive pleasure or identification with materials of identity which construct them as a personal or cultural subject (Barker, 2012; Hall, 2000).

The negotiation of agency and social structures in the context of this study can be illustrated by audience's use of self-regulatory and collective-regulatory reasoning in

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the process of interpreting materials of identity in television content. The self-regulatory engagement among Malaysian Javanese women viewers refers to their preferred identifications with the representations of Javanese cultural community, while their collective-regulatory engagement represents their sense of belonging to Malaysian civil society and transnational Islamic communities in Malaysia and Indonesia. Even though they are exposed to the symbolic structures of Malay culture in Malay dramas, they activate their human agency by maintaining positive emotions about their cultural origin in both local and Indonesian dramas. At the same time, their collective responsibility as a Malaysian citizen and a member of *the ummah* (Muslim community) motivate them to enunciate loyalty to the state and express sympathy for unfortunate Muslims across the sea respectively, when interpreting news content pertaining to Indonesia and Malaysia. The identifications with multiple identities illustrate the audience's negotiation of hybrid identity (Adriaens, 2014; Bakhtin, 1981; Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, 2009; Kraidy, 2005; 1999).

As previous studies reveal, transnational and local media serve as engaging cultural platforms for diaspora communities to exercise hybrid identity or nomadic engagement in different locations of culture (Adriaens, 2014; Aksoy and Robin, 2008; Barker, 1997; Georgiou, 2013a, 2013b; Gillespie, 1995). Cultural nomadism in television content among Javanese women viewers exist in two forms: cultural appreciation and cultural distanciation. Firstly, they appreciate the cultural commonalities in the expressions of language and religious morality depicted in Malaysian and Indonesian cultural productions. In terms of the language expressions, they identify the similarities of everyday speech between *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Malaysia* as well as between *Bahasa Indonesia* and Javanese. For the religious commonalities, they discern the subject of "the good overcomes the bad" as religious values that both cultural

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productions typically promote. Secondly, they distance from irrelevant images of Javanese culture and Indonesian migrants in television narratives due to their deal with situated social structures. The social constitution in their family and community substantially influences them to create spatial space between their current culture and the culture that their ancestors practiced in the past. At the same time, they also distance from the representations of poor Indonesians depicted in Indonesian dramas and of amoral Indonesian migrants in the local news. It is understood that they are not constitutionally related to present Indonesia, but their tendency to compare such representations to the past experiences of their Indonesian ancestors illustrates that they maintain indirect links to their ancestral home country.

Finally, I would argue that desirable and undesirable images of identity on local and transnational television prompt the female Javanese descendants in Malaysia to produce meanings about interpretive identity practices. From the interpretation of cultural and social representations on Malaysian and Indonesian television, they construct the ideas of identity practices which define "who they are" and "who they have become." As I mention in the chapter three, the notion of interpretive identity practices illustrates how audience discern communal actions and shared values in media content and articulate identifications with several collective identities. Precisely, the Javanese women viewers in my study are capable of identifying the essential elements of their communal culture and imagined communities on television content and negotiating the relevant and irrelevant materials of identity in the content based on their sense of belonging to Javanese, Malay, and Malaysian cultural entities.

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# CHAPTER 6: PROJECTING HYBRID IDENTITY IN BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

## 6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the final part of the findings concerning self-definition of religion, culture, and nationality among Malaysian Javanese women. Basically, the discussion in this chapter illustrates the ways the Javanese diaspora express and project hybrid identity in their everyday lives, including in television viewing. I may focus more on the everyday culture instead of the television culture in the discussion. This is due to my intention to achieve the second and the last objectives of the research, which are to explore Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of self and collective identities, and to analyse the correlations between Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content and their construction of hybrid identity. The projection of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia exists as the results of constructing hybrid ethnicity and living banal biculturalism. As the members of a cultural community that constitutes a dominant ethnic society, the Javanese diaspora women have preferred ideas about their ethnicity which are constructed based on their cultural understanding. At the same time, they also observe the state-guided definition of ethnicity, which constructs them as the Malays. Even though Javanese and Malay culture are quite similar, I argue that the Javanese women in my study deal with two different cultural milieus in their everyday lives. They shift between Javanese and Malay cultural space in a banal way, manifesting their sense of belonging to both cultures.

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## 6.2. Constructing hybrid ethnicity

Hybrid ethnicity in the context of this study refers to situations in which members of a society deal with two or more different contexts of the construction of ethnic identity. Ethnicity, as I mention in the chapter one, is defined as a social construction of human grouping in which the members share the same collectiveness in physical appearance, culture, language, ancestry and even religion (Fenton, 2003; Nagel, 1994; Jenkins, 1998; Olzak, 2006). In Malaysian contexts, the term race is commonly used instead of ethnicity that basically signifies the situations in which various racial groups substantially differ from each other due to the difference mainly in religion and cultural customs (Kahn, 2006; Milner, 2002; PuruShotam, 1998). Scholars in Malaysian Studies (see Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Kahn, 2006; Milner, 2002; Nagata, 1974; PuruShotam, 1998; Vickers, 2004) usually discuss the concept of race in relation to the definition of Malay identity because it is obviously enshrined in the country's constitution.

According to the constitutional definition of Malay identity, religion, language and cultural customs serve as the key determinants of a Malaysian kind of race or ethnic group. Technically, Malaysian Javanese become the Malays due to these three state-defined factors. Firstly, as colonial migrants from Java were practically all Muslims (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Spaan, 1994), their descendants in Malaysia become members of the Muslim faith, and thus they are eligible for ethnic membership in Malay society. Secondly, Javanese in Malaysia have observed Malay as the national language of the country and had a proficiency in the language in spite of maintaining their cultural Javanese language (Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994). Lastly, as current Javanese diaspora belong to the Malay society, they definitely comply with Malay *adat*, even their culture is adapted to the cultural milieus of the Malays (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000; Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1994,

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1988). These three situations represent state-guided construct of ethnic identity which have to be dealt with by the Javanese diaspora in Malaysia because they submit to the state in order to be accepted in the country.

Notwithstanding the ascribed construction of ethnicity, I argue that Malaysian Javanese, particularly the Javanese women in this study, also have their own construct of ethnic identity which is derived from their preferred understanding of culture. Apart from observing Malay culture, they retain some features of Javanese culture. Previous studies highlight that Javanese language is the salient feature of Javanese communities in Malaysia (Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1988). Javanese language is completely different from Malay and the fact that the Javanese diaspora still preserve the former, while observing the latter indicates that they have a cultural preference for construct of ethnic identity. I will discuss this culture-preferred construct of ethnicity further in the following sub-section.

### 6.2.1. Culture-preferred construct

One of the two means of constructing hybrid ethnicity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia is culture-preferred construct. This construction of ethnicity refers to the ways the members of a diaspora community maintain their culture of origin in everyday lives in order to manifest a distinct form of ethnic identity in parallel with the dominant identity ascribed to them. In the contexts of the Javanese community in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, the culture-preferred construct of ethnicity represents their interpretive identity practices in which the identifications with Javanese culture go along with observance of Malay hegemony. They retain some semblance of Javanese cultural customs and traditions while practicing Islamic teachings and values which have become part of Malay cultural milieus.



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Such construct of ethnic identity allows them to distinguish themselves from other cultural communities within the Malay society, especially the Banjarese whom they share the *kampung* with. In fact, the discourses of "othering" exist in the contexts of ethnic relations between both communities. Similar to them, the Banjarese are the Malays of Indonesian origin which constitute Banjarese and Indonesian diaspora in Malaysia. In the interviews, the female Javanese descendants claimed that they had nothing against the Banjarese, but based on the observation in the *kampung*, both cultural communities do not really merge each other. They sometimes attend social and religious gatherings together, but they live separately. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the Javanese community concentrates in the neighbourhoods adjacent to the coastal line of the Malacca Straits while the Banjarese live around the areas of paddy field. Apart from the preference of the place of living, both ethnic communities differ in some ways which I will discuss in details throughout this chapter.

Basically, the culture-preferred construct of ethnicity in the case of Javanese community in Malaysia illustrates two situations. Firstly, they regard Javanese as their cultural origin. Secondly, they construe Javanese as an imagined community, a nation which is connected by the significance of language as a cultural symbol. These two situations prevail in their process of maintaining the cultural origin and in their meaning making of television content.

***6.2.1.1. Javanese as the cultural origin***

Despite their acceptance of the status of being Malay and their observance of the Malay culture, the Javanese descendants in Malaysia still believe that Javanese is their cultural origin and Java is their place of origin. For them, Javanese is their cultural identity



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mainly due to the cultural and biological bond with their ancestry. Hall (1990) points out that cultural identity represents ideas about collectiveness in shared history and ancestry. It also describes situations in which people who have a history and ancestry in common express their sense of belonging to a particular ethnic, racial, linguistic, and national culture (Hall, 1992).

Linguistic culture is a prominent indicator of the cultural identity of Malaysian Javanese through which the members of society share collectiveness (Mohamed, 1996; Noriah, 2001). For the Malaysian Javanese women in this study, Javanese language serves as the primary cultural symbol which represents their community. They preserve their cultural origin mainly by maintaining the cultural language. Even though they observe *Bahasa Malaysia* as their national language, they use Javanese as a medium of communication within their own community on a daily basis. I shall clarify that the female Javanese descendants in this study are the second and third generation of Javanese migrants. The former speak Javanese practically all the time, while the latter switch between the cultural language and *Bahasa Malaysia* depending on the people whom they interact with. It is observed that they usually speak the national language to younger generations or to non-Javanese such as Banjarese, the "other Malays", Chinese and Indians. The other Malays here refer to the Malays who originate from outside of the *kampung* and particularly live in the village due to marriage. They are mainly from Kedah and Perak.

As language symbolises cultural identity (Kramsch, 1998), the Javanese women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh use their cultural language to indicate the presence of their distinct cultural community in comparison with the other cultural groups in the Malay society. In fact, they distinguish different cultural groups within the Malay society by

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the ethnic languages and dialects that they speak. It is understood that the dialects of *Bahasa Malaysia* are different across the states and they signify the cultural identity of the Malays in each state (Asmah, 2016, 1983). Despite being part of the Malay society in Selangor, the Javanese in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh use Javanese instead of the state dialect to differentiate between their community and the other Malay communities.

> I will continue to speak Javanese and I will never be embarrassed to use it in public. Even when I go to Kuala Lumpur or other states, I persist with speaking Javanese. I don't care about what people may think of me. If they want to think that I am an Indonesian, indeed I am (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

> The Kelantanese can freely speak their dialect in public. Why can't we speak Javanese? (*Ibu* Nan, 43, casual conversation, 22 June 2014).

> My children tend to become Malay because they are married to Kedahan (Malays), Banjarese. Nevertheless, when they come home, they speak Javanese. They don't want to lose their Javaneseness yet. I also prefer to be called *mbah* (grandmother in Javanese) instead of *nenek* (grandmother in Malay) because it sounds Javanese. I don't want to be called *nenek* because it sounds like *Banjarese*, *Kelanten* (Kelantanese). The Kedahan (Malays) use *tok wan*; Kelantanese use *opa*; I am a Javanese, I use *mbah*. When I become great grandmother, I want to be called *mbah buyut*. I don't want to lose my Javanese (identity). I am afraid that it will happen due to my children's mix marriage (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 29 April 2014).

It shows that these particular respondents express a strong emotion towards retaining the cultural language as the symbolic sign of their existence. It is pretty obvious that they operate the aspect of human agency to rule their identity practices. In *Mbah* Sar's case, she even relates the language to her parents' country of origin and, interestingly, conceives of herself as part of the nation. On the other hand, *Ibu* Nan who belongs to the third generation, and thus has a less direct connection to Javanese migrants and their

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original culture, still maintains her cultural origin through the positive emotion with the language. Such expressive emotion emerged when she encountered a group of Kelantanese Malays speaking the state dialect in Kuala Lumpur. On one fine day in June 2014, I happened to accompany her and her family on a trip to the capital city to register her oldest daughter in a private college, where she met the Kelantanese. In the state of rivalry, she told her children to proudly speak Javanese like the Kelantanese did with their dialect. This indicates that she tries to show her cultural identity which certainly differs from the other cultural groups of Malay origin. Similarly, *Mbah* Rin also retains a strong desire to preserve the cultural language in her family as a way of maintaining Javanese as the cultural origin. Comparing her situation with the practice of using particular speech in Banjarese, Kedahan and Kelantanese communities, she identifies the significance of the language or dialect in the construction of cultural identity in the respective cultural groups.

Apart from the expression of Javanese speech, the Malaysian Javanese women also impose the cultural language to younger generations as a way of maintaining the cultural origin. Despite their tolerance for their children and grandchildren speaking *Bahasa Malaysia*/Malay on a regular basis, Javanese remains as the language in the family. Javanese is not the medium of communication among the younger generations most probably due to generational factors and the degree of their integration into the current Malay society. However, based on my observation, they speak *Bahasa Malaysia* with a slightly Javanese accent. In addition, according to the respondents, they are aware that their children or grandchildren actually understand the cultural language but have difficulty in expressing the speech.

> I said to my children, "even though you are proficient in English, you must maintain your (proficiency in) Javanese. When you converse with your friends using

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> English, mix it with Javanese." I am not saying that they are not allowed to learn English. I don't want them to forget Javanese (*Bik* Rus, 51, interview, 23 April 2014).

> I want my children to speak Javanese at home. It is alright for them to speak Malay at school, but at home they must speak Javanese. Whatever happens, Javanese must be preserved. My children realise that the language is important for the community. Therefore, they want to speak Javanese while at home. They even ask me to use Javanese all the time, so they can learn (*Mak Cik* Gam, 57, interview, 5 May 2014).

> My family (members) still speak Javanese. It is easier to speak Javanese. My children cannot express it well, but they understand. I am sure that they will fully speak Javanese when they get older. Whenever I tell them off in Javanese, they understand. I know that Javanese in Malaysia understand Javanese but they cannot articulate it well (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

The imposition of Javanese language to the family members certainly serves as a means to maintain the cultural origin. In addition, it is also a matter of identity formation for the younger generations. Obviously, the women in this study have influence on their children's negotiation of cultural identity. This is due to a continuing process of the construction of identity which passes from a generation to another. They also experienced the imposition of the language when they were young. Most importantly, it appears that the language has become a significant part of the identity deal between Malay and Javanese culture for the Javanese women in this study, and the rest of the community members.

> I prefer my descendants to *become Javanese* but my grandchildren only know how to speak Malay. I still remember when my daughter attended a boarding school and her teacher asked if there were Javanese among the students. She told her friend off for not admitting to being Javanese. She could not accept that her friend forgot her origin. She did not want to lose the Javanese (language). Now, she speaks Malay because her husband is a Malay.

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> She used to speak Javanese all the time, especially when she was around her Javanese friends (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

> I speak Javanese, my kids speak Malay, but I want them to know Javanese as well. I am afraid that my kids will lose their Javanese (identity). They are stubborn, though. I don't know what to say. For me, *I am still Javanese* because my mother was mixed Javanese-Malay and got married to my (Javanese) father. She did not know Javanese before marrying my father. After getting married to my father, she only spoke Javanese till my father passed away. Javanese is the everyday language in our family (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

> I speak Javanese (because) I don't want to lose my "*bangsa Jawa*" (Javanese ethnicity). I tell my children, "don't lose Javanese." Even though they learn other languages, even though they continue a study till the highest degree, I don't want them to forget Javanese (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

Certainly, women of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh deal with the construction of hybrid identity between Malay and Javanese culture through the use of the cultural language. The language serves as one of the indicators of their cultural identity which they maintain well in the institution of family. For some particular respondents, Javanese language is instrumental to the "ways of becoming" the member of a cultural community. The existence of the language enables them to create self-discourses of cultural identity. It is apparent that the Javanese language paves the way for *Mbah* Man's preference of her descendants to become Javanese, *Ibu* Par's acknowledgement of her Javanese identity, and *Mbah* Ngat's articulation of "*bangsa Jawa.*" In a larger scale, the language is prominently recognised as one of the aspects of the Javanese cultural heritage in the community. From my observation, one of the ways that the community does to preserve and honour the language is by retaining a collection of

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Javanese proverbs along with *Banjarese* proverbs which are displayed on the ceilings of the JKKK hall.

**Figure 6.1:** One of displayed Javanese proverbs on the ceilings of the community hall in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. The proverb says "always learn (the Koran) for the sake of our lives. Do it before death arrives."

Grossberg (1996) argues that identification with cultural identity is a question of choice which recognises the significance of human agency. Collectively, individuals have the capability to determine which side of identity that they want to manifest and practice. Despite all the acceptance of the Malay status and culture, the Javanese community in this particular study indicates their preference of culture through the use of cultural language and traditional healthcare. Their recognition of the cultural elements as the cultural belonging of the Javanese indicates their sense of belonging to the Javanese community. In this case, their negotiation of identity between two cultures represents preferred construct of ethnicity.

#### *6.2.1.2. Javanese as the imagined community*

Javanese does not only refer to the traditional culture but also the imagined community for the female Javanese descendants in Malaysia. They continue to regard their

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community as Javanese albeit their status as the members of Malay ethnic group. It is interesting that they still have disposition to determine what ethnicity they want to be referred to through the use of the cultural language. In fact, the Javanese language serves as both the indicator of the existence of their distinct culture in the country as well as a sign to identify the other members of their community. Through the recognition of the language which is used by a Javanese public figure from Indonesia in a television program, they claim cultural membership in the Javanese community and cultural bond with their fellow communions in Indonesia.

The Javanese language appears to be the focal point in the discourses of identity among Javanese-Malay women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. In the previous chapter, I have discussed that the language serves as one of the determinants for appreciating the cultural commonalities between Malaysia and Indonesia. In this chapter, I talk about the role of the communication system in the process of constructing culture-preferred identity among the cultural community members. The previous sub-section has discussed the use of the language in the manifestation of ethnic identity. In addition to the discussion, this particular sub-section shall describe the significance of the linguistic aspect of culture in providing the imagery of an ethnic identity.

The notion of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) acknowledges the role of media as the agent of national unity through which the ideas of a nation prevail in the media texts for members of audience to imagine the commonalities of their nation. Anderson (2006: 13) argues that traditional communities such as religious societies are typically connected by “sacred languages” in the written script which unite all the members of the communities. In this way, language can be the media “through which the great global communities of the past were imagined” (Anderson, 2006: 14). Anderson himself

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uses Javanese as an example of an imagined community in which the members are tied by stretchable kinship (Anderson, 2006: 6). In the context of this study, it appears that the significance of Javanese language plays a pivotal role in bringing the community members together. In addition, the presence of the language on television represents the images of the culture in which the Javanese audience can imagine their community within and beyond geo-political boundaries.

> The ulama' in *Selawat Perdana* is from Indonesia, isn't he? I know it because he speaks Javanese (Mbah Uki, 67, casual conversation, 17 May 2014).

> I like *Selawat Perdana* on TV. The *ustaz* (Islamic religious teacher) is from Java, isn't he? (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 22 April 2014).

> I watched (*Selawat Perdana* by) Habib Shaikh (Abdul Qadir) Assegaf. At first I did not know that he is from Indonesia. I know it when he delivered the *salawat* in Javanese (*Ibu* Ara, 51, interview, 7 April 2014).

I have mentioned these passages in the discussion of the language commonalities between Malaysia and Indonesia in the previous chapter. In the discussion, I argue that the Javanese *selawat* (hymns/song about the Prophet Muhammad) delivered in the broadcasting programme *Selawat Perdana* attract Javanese audience due to their identification with their cultural language. In this chapter, I focus on how the language enables the Javanese to imagine their communities. It is obvious from the feedback that the audience members can easily recognise the Islamic figure in the television programme as an Indonesian Javanese simply owing to the language of the songs that he delivers. Most interestingly, they identify the figure as an "Indonesian" instead of a Javanese, but they use the Javanese language as the "identifier."

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It is interpreted that they generally regard Indonesia not only as the place of origin of the Javanese communities, but more importantly, as "the nation of the Javanese." It appears that the words Indonesia(n) and Java(nese) have the same meaning for the Javanese women in my study. Both words, which in realities represent different groups of cultural beings, are imagined as the reference to one nation united by the Javanese language. It is surprising to know that the Malaysian Javanese in the *kampung*, not only the respondents of this study, conceive of all Indonesians as Javanese who can speak the language. In reality, Indonesian nation is constituted by hundreds of ethnic communities and languages in which Javanese is the majority (Restikas, 2007; Tirtosudarmo, 2005). In contrast, the Malaysian Javanese, particularly in the context of this study, consider most Indonesians as of Javanese origin.

> Why can't they (the Indonesian journalists) speak Javanese? Aren't they from Indonesia? (*Ibu* Nan's husband, casual conversation, 20 May 2014).

> The people (migrants) from Indonesia are similar to us. They are also Javanese. But, the ones that are usually involved in crime are not Javanese. They are from Madura. They are scary. Rumours say that they are evil, willing to die to get what they want. I think this Madura ethnic group is the evillest among the migrants from Indonesia. The Acehnese are nice. The Javanese are nice except the Javanese from *Batak* (in Sumatera) (*Akak* Ain, 44, interview, 28 April 2014).

> I cannot accept foreign migrants from Bangladesh, Myanmar. The way they gaze at us is sharp and scary. Their speech is not understandable. Maybe that is just their style. They are rude. Compared to Javanese (migrants), Javanese are politer. Therefore, I can accept Javanese (migrants), but not Javanese from Madura because they are also rude (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).



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The first passage concerns the questions asked by *Ibu* Nan's husband to me when we joined a programme involving a group of journalists from Malaysia and Indonesia. The event which was collaboratively conducted by the Department of Information of Malaysia, RTM, and the *kampung* JKKK in May 2014 aimed to provide an opportunity for the journalists to learn and experience Malaysian rural life and culture. During the welcoming session, a representative from the JKKK casually introduced himself to the Indonesian journalists in Javanese language, but one of them responded that they did not speak Javanese. Witnessing the scene, *Ibu* Nan's husband curiously enquired. It was later clarified by a journalist for *Radar Makassar* who originates from Surabaya (in Java) that the rest of the invited Indonesian journalists who represented several news houses in Java, Sumatera, and Sulawesi were not Javanese.

The second and third passage are from the interviews with *Akak* Ain and *Ibu* Nan respectively. Both of the passages concern their responses to the question pertaining to their view about a news report on crimes involving foreign workers. They relate the narrative of the news to their unpleasant experience with stories about Indonesian workers. *Akak* Ain can differentiate between Javanese and other ethnic groups of Indonesian origin. Yet, she uses the word "Javanese" to refer to Indonesians from Sumatera, particularly the *Batak* which is culturally different from the Javanese. Similarly, *Ibu* Nan who is aware of the ill manners of certain groups of Indonesian labour regards Indonesians from the island of Madura as Javanese although both ethnic groups are considered as discrete cultural entities in their country of origin.

It is interpreted that the word "Javanese" for these particular members of the Javanese community refer to Indonesians. They perceive Indonesians as Javanese most probably because they reflect on the fact that Javanese originate from Indonesia. Furthermore, I

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argue that such perception emerges as the result of their own experience of being part of the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia. Malays make up the majority of the population and political power in Malaysia, so do Javanese in Indonesia (Tirtosudarmo, 2005). It is understood that the Malaysian Javanese in this study define their community the same way the state defines them. As they regard themselves as Javanese and part of the dominant Malay society, they tend to conceive of most Indonesians as Javanese because the ethnic group constitutes a majority in the country. It is the same way as how Malaysians refer a majority of Indonesians as Malay due to the similarity in the culture, religion, and the language practiced by the majority. In this context, I refer to the Malay customs, Islam, and *Bahasa Indonesia* (referred as Malay in Malaysia) which becomes part of the everyday culture of the dominant society in Indonesia.

Apart from the language, the Javanese women in this study also imagine their cultural community by recognising their cultural appearance. They identify the members of their community through an Indonesian style of clothing appeared on the local television. It should be noted that the images of Indonesia do not only appear in Indonesian programming but also in local programming. Along with imported *sinetron* (Indonesian soap operas) and televised movies, local produced documentaries also present the images of Indonesian people and culture.

> Are they Javanese? The (clothing) style looks like Javanese, (they are) wearing batik (*Mbah* Uki, 67, television-time conversation, 11 March 2014).

> Which part of Java is this? Bali? Oh, the Javanese still has a Sultan? Who is the governor? I see. The Sultan is also the governor (*Ibu* Nan, 43, television-time conversation, 2 June 2014).

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These particular respondents regard Indonesians on television as Javanese. *Mbah* Uki was referring to the *Sasak* tribe of Indonesia which appeared in a local documentary programme *Rasa Halal Antarabangsa* (International Halal Taste) on TV Alhijrah. In the particular episode, the documentary took place in the Indonesian resort island of Lombok where the tribal community makes up the majority of the island inhabitants. I accompanied *Mbah* Uki watching the documentary and she pointed me to several women in batik sarong shown in the television programme. She perceived that the women were Javanese as she recognised the similar traditional clothes. Similarly, *Ibu* Nan also recognised the Javanese traditional clothes in an American-Indonesian movie *Java Heat* which I co-watched on the Astro Box Office channel. The movie, which is about a combat against Islamic terrorism in the heart of Javanese culture, Yogyakarta, depicts family conflicts within the Sultan's palace. It is obvious that the particular respondent would most likely recognise the characters in the movie as Javanese. Interestingly, she asked me if Bali was part of Java (island). It is understood that she might be not familiar with the geography of Indonesia but it could be a sign that she referred Java to Indonesia. In her comment about Indonesian migrant labour stated previously above, she also regarded Indonesians from the island of Madura as Javanese.

From the discussion, I argue that cultural language particularly as well as traditional style of clothing that appear on television serve as cultural symbols which enable the Malaysian Javanese to imagine their fellow communions beyond geo-political boundaries. They reflect their ethnicity on the images of Indonesians in the media in two ways. Firstly, they imagine their ethnic group as the dominant society representing the whole Indonesian nation. It is apparent from their disposition to refer to Indonesians as Javanese. Secondly, they imagine the dominance of their ethnic culture in its country of origin through the significance of their cultural language. Evidently, they conceive of



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Javanese as the common speech spoken by average Indonesians. In this way, I contend that the appearance of elements of ethnic culture on local television plays a significant role in creating the ideas of imagined community for members of the community. In the context of this study, language and traditional attire pave the way for Malaysian Javanese to claim sense of belonging to the Javanese imagined community within and beyond their location of culture.

Precisely, Malaysian Javanese women have their own disposition to claim a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group. By recognising Javanese as their imagined community, I argue that these female members of Javanese diaspora deal with their own ideas of ethnic identity. They use elements of culture in language and traditional style to construct the images of their ethnic community. In this way, I argue that the Javanese culture serves as the agent for culture-preferred construct of ethnicity among the Malay women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh.

### 6.2.2. State-guided construct

Another means of hybrid identity constructs among Malaysian Javanese women is state-guided construct. This negotiation of ethnic identity illustrates that the female members of Javanese diaspora observe the discourses and realities which construct a dominant ethnic group in the country. It is argued that people deal with everyday-defined and authority-defined realities in the process of subjectivity (Shamsul, 1996). The everyday-defined realities in the contexts of Malay women of Javanese descent include the use of Javanese for everyday language in family and community and the identification with Javanese imagined communities on television which I just discussed in the previous section. The preference of the cultural language and the acknowledgment of Javanese communions in television images represent their culture-preferred construct of ethnicity.

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In contrast, the state-guided construct of ethnicity, which contributes to the formation of hybrid identity among the diaspora members are indicated by their tendency towards identifying an ethnic group by observing its religious affiliation and cultural customs. This appears in their interpretation of political discourses pertaining to religious issues in the news and beyond. In interpreting such issues, they tend to relate Malayness to the political power that defines it and the religion of Islam that has been constitutionally designated to their ethnic society.

#### *6.2.2.1. Malay as the political identity*

I argue earlier in this chapter that the Malays women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh regard themselves as Javanese in terms of the use of Javanese language as the medium of everyday communication in family and community. They acknowledge that Javanese is their cultural origin in spite of accepting the status and privilege of being the Malays. In fact, becoming Malay is a negotiation of identity which they perform as a kind of acts of citizenship. The notion of acts of citizenship as coined and defined by Engin Isin (2008) refers to any acts done by citizens and yet-to-be-citizens of a state to show that they are legitimate members of the state's nation. It gives a political status to the individuals to claim rights and responsibilities as a citizen (Isin, 2008: 39). In the context of this study, becoming Malay is part of the political responsibilities and civil obedience to the state among the Malaysian Javanese women as they are constitutionally defined as part of the Malay society. They talk about their Malay identity in relation to their political views and attitudes.

It is apparent from the interview feedback that the Malaysian Javanese women talk about their Javanese identity in regard to their everyday culture, but their ways of



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becoming Malay are clearly illustrated in their responses to the political issues in television news. The news reports pertaining to the political conflicts between *Barisan Nasional* and oppositional parties serve as political discourses that influence them to deal with their construction of identity. It is argued that they support UMNO, the prominent component party of *Barisan Nasional*, and conceive of the party as the "protector" of their race and religion. They acknowledge their ethnic status as Malay by submitting to UMNO hegemony.

In the interview, I asked the respondents to speak about their understanding of their status as the Malays (see the Appendix B and and the Appendix C). Most of them relate their "Malayness" to the political discourses concerning the opposition between UMNO and PAS, PKR as well as DAP. Interestingly, in discussing the discourses, they touch upon the stance of each party on the debates about ethnicity and religion. The Malaysian Javanese women in this study perceive that UMNO is the political guardian of the Malays, their ethnic group, and Islam—their religion.

> We try to accept each other. The Javanese here (*Parit* 7), and the Banjarese there (*Parit* 6) live side by side. We are the same under UMNO. Our goal is one, (which is) to uphold our *bangsa* (race). We are the same Malays. Among the Malays are brothers and sisters. It does not matter what your origin is. The Banjarese are *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) too. We can mix with each other. We are friends (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

> So far, UMNO is the one that sincerely protects Islam because the UMNO leaders are *Melayu* Islam (Malay Muslims), not *Melayu kafir* (infidel Malays) as they (PAS) accuses. We cannot rely on PAS because they only talk that about fighting for Islam but in reality they ally with the Chinese and Indians (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

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> I saw on TV that a bunch of Malays demonstrated on the street to support the oppositions. Isn't that funny? I don't understand those Malays who support DAP. Why do they not want to support UMNO? Aren't they Muslims? (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

> I can still follow the news about economy, but not politics. For me, as a follower of the Prophet, I better avoid to be involved in (talking about) politics because it can overcome our mind so that we forget to remember Allah. I am a supporter of *dacing* (balance scales, the symbol of *Barisan Nasional*), because PAS is not consistent. They say they are for Islam, but they ally with the *kafir* (the disbelievers), DAP (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 18 June 2013).

The Malay women of Javanese descent understand *Malayness* as submission to Islam and its prominent political umbrella, UMNO. They perceive that the members of Malay society, who are also Muslims, should support the party that fights for the religion. In their personal view, they are convinced that UMNO undoubtedly performs its role in defending Malay race and Islam. For example, *Mbah* Ngat believes that cultural groups in the Malay society unite under the leadership of UMNO, the political organisation that she conceives of as the defender of the society. In the same manner, *Ibu* Nan perceives that the party is the ideal political power which protects the religion compared to PAS due to the latter's alliance with the non-religious party DAP. It appears that the Malay women in this study incline to link DAP to non-religious subjects which they see as anti-Islam sentiments. Commenting on the news about a street demonstration involving multi-racial Malaysians and the oppositional party's representatives, *Mbah* Sar also views the support for DAP as an anti-Islam sentiment which should not be done by the Malays. Similarly, *Mbah* Rin disagrees with the alliance between the Islamic party PAS and the non-religious DAP. In fact, the Malay women consider that Muslims, who largely represented by the Malays, should not politically affiliate with non-Muslims, which obviously non-Malays—because all Malays are constitutionally Muslims.

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It appears that these women only see the presence of Malay ethnic politics in *Barisan Nasional* through the prominence of UMNO even though the party also consists of non-Malay component parties—MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). In the interview, I asked them if they were aware of the contribution of Chinese and Indians in the ruling party. The feedback indicates that they do not argue the coalition among Malays, Chinese, and Indians in the party, but they oppose the political alliance between PAS, which represent Muslims (mainly Malays), and DAP that they perceive as the political force of the Chinese ethnic group. This is due to their stance on the supreme rights of the Malays as the rulers of the country. During the 2013 General Election, they voted the Chinese candidate of *Barisan Nasional* for Sekinchan state assembly chair as their support for the incumbent regime which was dominated by the Malays. They even embraced the attendance of the Chinese representative along with the other *Barisan Nasional* candidates for Sungai Besar and Pasir Panjang constituencies in *leklekan*—the Javanese tradition to celebrate the achievement of members of the community—which was held in the campaign week. Apparently, both candidates of the Member of Parliament for Sungai Besar and the state assemblyman for Pasir Panjang are of Javanese descent. In this way, I argue that the female Javanese descendants in this study support *Barisan Nasional* in order to maintain Malay hegemony in the government and reject the possibilities for the non-Malays to lead the country.

As they support UMNO, they are apt to reflect on the cultural and religious milieus set by the political institution. They tend to follow the perception about Islam in accordance with UMNO-defined realities. In responding to the news about the statement of the PAS

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leader in regard to the different perspectives about Islam between UMNO and PAS, the subjects of this study are convinced that the former is more dependable.

> They (PAS) said that the prayers of UMNO (members) would not be accepted by God. I heard it on TV that Nik Aziz also asked Allah to punish the UMNO members. How can he utter such things live on TV? Aren't we Muslims too? (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

> I feel sorry for Najib because many people swear at him, especially (the leaders of) PAS and PKR. They said that the prayers of *Barisan Nasional* and UMNO members, including Najib would not be accepted by God. Who are we to judge other people's deeds? How can an *ulama* say such menacing words? Is he God? *Astagfirullah*, how can such a thing happen on television, in the news? What makes him say such thing? If I could phone-call the TV, I would have done it. Unfortunately, it is not possible (*Mbah* Yan, 72, interview, 18 April 2013).

> I want to watch more positive issues in the local news. I like it when Malaysia is depicted as a peaceful country. I don't like when they show political conflicts. I support Datuk (Seri) Najib, but some people do not like him. For instance, most of the people in this *kampung* support Datuk Najib (UMNO), the rest are (the supporters of) PAS. If I say I support PAS, they will angry with me. Last time when my son hoisted the PAS flag in front of the house, I was afraid that people would attack me because I lived alone. I have my own choice, so does my son. He supports PAS though. PAS is for Islam, so is Datuk Najib (UMNO). However, they who don't like him accused that UMNO (members) are *kafir* (disbeliever) (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 13 June 2013).

The issue which became the headlines in the mainstream media back in 2009 was cultivated in the mind of the Malay women of Javanese descent. Even though the years have passed, they still remember it quite well. According to the report, the late supreme leader of PAS, Nik Aziz Nik Mat said "PAS's style of Islam is different from UMNO's because their 'Islam' (UMNO) is going nowhere and does not bring a person to paradise" (Fazli et al., 2009). This politicised issue successfully influenced the UMNO

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supporters to self-regulate their understanding about Islam in the country. It appears that they view the religion based on their interpretation of religious issues in accord with UMNO's political standpoints. In this matter, I contend that the female Javanese descendants are inclined to embrace the religious realities authorised by the Malay political power as they associate themselves with the Malay entity.

Precisely, the findings of my study reveal that religion in Malaysia is simultaneously embedded not only in ethnic identity, but also in political identity due to the existence of ethnic politics and the close association of religion with ethnicity. The politics of identity among the citizens mostly revolve around the significance of religious and political interests of a certain ethnic group (Shamsul, 1994). The experiences of my respondents confirm that religious issues in the media serve as an engaging platform for negotiating political and ethnic identity. As they experience political discourses of Islamic and Malay identity in their everyday lives through television narratives, they are ultimately convinced to believe that Islam affiliates with particular ethnic and political ideology.

> We are not supposed to fight each other because we are Muslims. It is acceptable if Muslims have something against the Chinese. But, it should not be Muslims against Muslims like PAS and PKR against *Barisan* (*Barisan Nasional*), UMNO. We (Muslims) practice the same religion. It is not proper to accuse each other. If the news is all about this (party) criticises that (another party), I better switch off the TV and sleep (*Mbah* Yan, 72, interview, 17 June 2013).

> PAS is good. UMNO is good too. I don't know which one to choose, so I attend the meeting conducted by the two parties if I am invited. Despite that, I don't vote PAS. I wonder why PAS and UMNO always have arguments like what they show on TV. Aren't both (parties) for Islam? (*Mbah* Ton, 70, interview, 13 June 2013).



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> For me, PAS and UMNO are the same. They defend Islam. If we are Malay, we should support Islam. So, it does not matter if you vote PAS or UMNO (electoral candidates) as long as they profess Islam and protect the wellbeing of the Muslims (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 29 April 2014).

> The oppositions are also Muslims and they compete with other Muslims. If they compete with the *Cina kafir* (non-Muslim Chinese), I don't care. That is what I see in *Pilihan Raya* (General Election). During the *Pilihan Raya*, it is all over the news and it makes me want to switch off the TV (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

It is interpreted that the Malaysian Javanese women view Malay-led parties as the desirable political force for all Muslims, especially the Malays. They discern the similar patterns of ethnic configuration in UMNO, PAS, and PKR, and perceive that the parties in which Malay figures dominate the top leadership should serve the ethnic group and its affiliated religion, Islam. As they are constantly exposed to the television discourses of UMNO's ethnic politics, they believe that non-Malays, especially the Chinese, are not Muslims and, thus, they see them as the opponents of the Malays, the ethnic group that they claim sense of belonging.

UMNO and its political partners in *Barisan Nasional*—MCA and MIC—have been in power since the formative years of Malaysia and set the country's political landscape into several ethnic-based directions (Esman, 1994). The opposition alliance consisting of PAS, PKR, and DAP which claims to accommodate multi-ethnic and multi-religious citizens apparently fails to change the public sentiment about the ethnic politics (Weiss, 2009). While PAS and PKR remain to be associated with the Malay ethnic group due to the respective parties' Malay leaders, DAP is seen as the political stronghold of the Chinese owing to its Chinese dominant image in the party leaderships. This political scenario continues to prevail as the discourses of identity particularly, among the Malay

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women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. According to their cognitive reasoning, supporting Malay political ideology under the UMNO leadership is equal to defending Islam.

In matter of fact, my respondents are the former and current members of the *kampung*-branch *Wanita* UMNO. They have served the women wing party of UMNO since they were young. In the 2013 General Election, some of them performed a function as *jaga undi* in which they were appointed to promote and make sure the vote of the *kampung* people went to *Barisan Nasional'*s candidates. It is obvious that these women tend to support UMNO in any circumstances and set the party as their political base to project their existence. However, as I observe, the party also serves as the social and economic platform for *kampung* activities. The members of the party use the organisational system and structures in the party to arrange and manage the community's cultural traditions and communal enterprises. *Rewang* which becomes one of the cultural traditions of the community is controlled by the committee members of the political organisation. They also collectively manage and share the ownership of the *kampung* enterprises including a bakery shop and honey farm.

From the discussion in this sub-chapter, I believe that UMNO serves as the political base for the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study to manifest their ethnic and political identity. The political ideology and actions of the party also instrumentally set their understanding of ethnic and religious identity. It is understood that their participation in UMNO political and social activities significantly influences their ethnic-political stand and attitudes. However, the constant exposure of the issues pertaining to Islam and welfare for the Malays on television substantially reinforces their interpretation of Malay identity. In this way, I argue that the Malaysian Javanese

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women use their status as Malay to project a political and ethnic identity as the result of dealing with the state-guided construct of ethnicity.

#### *6.2.2.2. Islam as an ethnic identification*

Another indicator of the state-guided construct of identity among the Malay women of Javanese descent is their tendency to associate a certain religion to a particular ethnic group. It appears that their observance of the state-defined Malay identity convinces them to think of Islam as the sole religion of the members of Malay society. Furthermore, their experience with ethnic politics practiced by UMNO/*Barisan Nasional* has deeply influenced their ways of thinking about the pairing between religion and ethnicity. The extensive effect of the constant exposure to state ethnic politics is the inclination of the members of the Javanese diaspora to affiliate Islam to the Malays and other religion to non-Malays.

As Malaysia is the house of multi-ethnic citizens, it is important to know the respondents' perception about ethnic relations in the country. It would give an actual picture about how they define ethnicity based on their everyday experiences and television narratives. I asked them to describe the cultural characteristics of other ethnic groups including Chinese, Indians and East Malaysians. As expected, they associate an ethnic group with its presumably state-defined religious affiliation.

> What differentiates the Chinese from the Malays? The Chinese are not Muslims. They eat non-Halal food (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 29 April 2014)

> Of course the culture (between the Malays and non-Malays) is different. The Chinese culture is (the culture of) *kafir* (infidels/non-Muslims). The Indians are also *kafir*. The Muslims have Islamic culture. Banjarese are

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> also Muslims, so they are similar to us (*Mbah* Min, 63, interview, 20 May 2014).

> What differentiates between the Chinese, Indians and us is that we are Muslims and they are *kafir*. We are all different. What we eat is also different. The Chinese are disrespectful. They do not observe the (Islamic) laws. We Malays are more respectful (*Ibu* Nal, 49, interview, 5 May 2014).

> I do not want this country to be in the hands of the Indians or Chinese because they won't take care of Islam. Islam will disappear if they take over the government (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

It is clearly stated in the Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia that Malays refer to individuals who "profess the religion of Islam, habitually speak the Malay language, and conform to Malay customs" (Yeoh, 2006: 2). This act manifestly defines a Malaysian ethnicity by grouping the citizens according to their religious belief and cultural customs (Milner, 2002). This state definition of ethnic identity has been deeply embedded in the minds of Malaysians, especially the Malays. Consequently, the Javanese women who belong to the Malay ethnic group conceive of Islam as a prominent identification of Malay ethnicity and define non-Malays as non-Muslims. For example, *Mbah* Rin, *Mbah* Min, *Ibu* Nal, and *Ibu* Nan describe average Chinese and Indians in the country as the ethnic groups who have a different religion from them. They relate the non-Malays to their diet which is not necessarily compliant with Islamic standards and label them as *kafir* or the infidels.

I have to clarify that the Arabic term *kafir* in the contexts of Malaysian Javanese women has two meanings. First, it refers to individuals who profess other religions but Islam. The respondents' statements as quoted in this section clearly illustrate that the word is directed to members of the ethnic groups which they perceive as non-Muslims. Second,

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the term also means as an offensive word for a group of Muslims who practices different religious beliefs and political ideology from other Muslim groups in Malaysia. It appears in the respondents' responses to the news report pertaining to PAS leader's statement about the difference between the religious practices of the members of UMNO and PAS, as discussed in the previous section. Hence, I argue that the designation of *kafir* to certain religious and ethnic groups by the Malay women of Javanese descendant in this study indicates that religion significantly serves as a defining determinant of ethnicity in Malaysia. In the context of this study, the Malay women observe the state-defined ethnicity by using Islam as an ethnic identification of the Malay ethnic group.

Despite the state definition of ethnicity which designates Islam for the Malay society, the realities are different in the Chinese, Indian, and other ethnic communities. It is generally known that average Chinese practice Buddhism and most Indians are Hindus (Kumar, 2012). However, in realities, members of the Chinese and Indian society practice different religions including Islam, Christianity, and Sikh (Yeoh, 2006). In other words, only Malay ethnic group has a designated religion of Islam and it makes the members label non-Malays as the disbelievers of their religion.

There must be some factors that influence their perception about the religious ethnicity. As I observe in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, the homogeneous ethnic configuration in the community can contribute a factor. The Javanese descendants in the *kampung* only live and socialise with their own fellow communions and other cultural communities in the Malay society, particularly the Banjarese. Neither Chinese nor Indians live nearby. However, they can find a majority of Chinese and a small group of Indians in the nearest town, Sekinchan. In fact, Sekinchan which means "village suitable for

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plantation" in Mandarin is known as a fishing village and part of the rice-bowl area of Selangor in which 60 percent of its inhabitants is the Chinese (Sekinchan.org). Despite the harmonious ethnic relations in the town, the social contact among the different ethnic groups seems to be limited. This can be a factor that determines the state-guided interpretation of religious ethnicity and false perception about other ethnic groups among the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study.

It is observed that the Javanese women have such interpretation due to their ignorance about the actual religious faiths of the non-Malays. However, a few of them who have had first-hand experience (through transnational travelling) or vicarious experience (through relatives and television) with the cultural life in the country acquire a different idea about ethnicity. They observe that a religion and cultural language does not necessarily define an ethnic community. They find that Javanese society in Indonesia is comprised of people of different faiths and ethnic descent.

> In Java, there are Christian and Hindu Javanese. Here, all Javanese are Muslims. The Hindus also live in this country, such as the ones in Parit 4 (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

> My uncle who has visited a family in Indonesia says that the Christians in Indonesia can speak Malay. He describes that our relatives live close to each other. One of them has a dog in front of the house. They are Muslims and speak *bahasa halus* (high-levelled Javanese). The house is so big, like the house of a *datuk* (someone who is bestowed a honorary title, and usually wealthy). But, when I watch Indonesian dramas, the *kampung* setting usually takes place in a small village that has many narrow alleys. The houses stand side by side. Many kids play around. The area looks so small. I wonder if the *kampung* (in Indonesia) really looks like that (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, 1 April 2014).

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> It is difficult to tell whether an Indonesian is a Muslim, Hindu, or Christian because they look alike and they all speak Bahasa Indonesia. I have ever heard about Chinese speaking "Javanese" because they live in a *kampung*. I watched a (religious) talk show on TV and the preacher said that all of his Chinese friends in Indonesia can speak Javanese (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

It is interesting to know that the particular respondents are still framed by the state-defined ethnicity, which is determined by religion and culture. They discern an ethnic identity as a fixed package of subjectivity that includes identifications with a particular religious, linguistic as well as physical specifications. As they experience the ethnic polarisation in the Malaysian society, they are accustomed to imagining the realities in which the ethnic groups profess a different state-designated religion, speak a different ethnic language, and practice different cultural customs from each other. Therefore, knowing a member of an ethnic group with mixed religious and cultural characteristics is a new experience for them. For example, *Mbah* Ngat who spent a few years of her childhood in Indonesia identifies that Javanese society in Malaysia and Indonesia are different in terms of the religious composition of the society. Similarly, *Mak Cik* Dah and *Mbah* Man are astonished by the facts that non-Muslims can speak *Bahasa Indonesia* which is similar to *Bahasa Malaysia/*Malay.

It appears that these women conceive of non-Muslims as typical non-Malays who do not habitually speak Malay language based on their observance of the ethnic polarisation in Malaysia. Therefore, knowing that Indonesian Christians and Hindus as well as Chinese speaking Malay/Javanese from a relative and television serves as a different experience of negotiating ethnic identity which contradicts with the state-defined realities. In this way, I argue that the Malays of Javanese women are deeply influenced by the state-guided construct of religious ethnicity. They are used to the ways of thinking about ethnic identity which is defined by the identifications with a

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state-designated religion and cultural customs. This cognitive capacity is simultaneously reinforced by the discourses of ethnic politics in television news and their own experience of living separately from other ethnic groups.

## 6.3. Living banal biculturalism

The Malaysian Javanese women embrace and practice Malay and Javanese culture interchangeably in their everyday lives. Living with the two cultures, they have to attend to banal identity switching in their daily social interactions. They switch between being a Javanese and a Malay depending on which co-inhabitants they are dealing with. This switching identity positioning illustrates that bicultural interactions become part of their banal realities. Furthermore, this banality of being a Javanese and a Malay provides space for them to project their hybrid identity and culture.

In fact, the female members of the Javanese diaspora reflect on the multiculturalism in the Malay society and the multi-ethnic Malaysia to define their hybrid identity. In parallel with their bicultural lives, they regard themselves as Malay when comparing their religious and political identity to religious and political practices of Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. At the same time, they identify their cultural identity as Javanese when talking about the presence of "other Malays" in their *kampung*. The other Malays in this context include the native Banjarese and the Malays who originate from other states and are married to the locals. They usually designate each group of the other Malays as "*orang Banjar*," "*Melayu Kedah*" (the Malays from the state of Kedah), "*Melayu Kelantan*" (Kelantanese), or simply "*wong Melayu*" (Malay people). Such designation of "others" indicates that they construct "ethnic boundaries" as the signal of exclusive membership of their own ethnic community (Barth, 1998). Furthermore, the

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switching of ethnic identities between being Malay and Javanese signals how they express their self-image as a means for presenting cultural identity (Goffman, 2008).

Generally, the Javanese communities in Malaysia constantly maintain two cultures in their everyday lives. I believe that Malaysian Javanese undergo the process of integration into Malay society through the course of "cultural adaptation and adoption." John Berry (1997) suggests that integration is one of acculturation strategies that illustrate how a cultural group merges with another group by maintaining their original culture while observing the other group's culture. It is reported that Javanese migrants and their descendants in Johor (the southern state in Peninsular Malaysia) adapt their cultural traditions to local customs and adopt Islamic values in order to integrate into Malay society (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000). This context of "adapt and adopt culture" also prevails in the historical life of Javanese communities in Selangor, and become part of the lived experience of the Javanese women in my study.

Precisely, the Javanese women experience the process of the integration between Javanese and Malay culture and pleasantly live in their bicultural realities, which I regard as "conventional *Malayness*" and "situated *Javaneseness*." The former refers to their experience with observance of Islamic-Malay milieus, while the latter represents their effort to maintain their original culture. In reality, the elements of Malayness and Javaneseness appear to be part of the cultural characteristics of the Javanese communities in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. Furthermore, both forms of culturalism serve as shared traditional convention among the community members, including my respondents.

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It should be noted that the discussion in this sub-section may not have a close connection to the respondents' television culture. However, their experience with the cultural changes can represent the other subject of negotiation of cultural identity in their everyday lives. As Hall argues (1990), construction of identity is a continuous process in which discursive practices take place. Therefore, both mediated practices, through which television images are at play, and lived practices that individuals experience on first-hand account are equally important in their process of subjectivity (Barker, 2012). In this way, I present the lived experiences of identity positioning enunciation through the course of cultural adaptation and adoption as the supporting evidence of the identity deal among the female members of Javanese diaspora.

### 6.3.1. Conventional Malayness

The Malaysian Javanese in Kampung Parit Tujuh have lived their entire life as Malay. Therefore, they are accustomed to the conventional ways of living in the Malay society. Malaysian Javanese communities abandon their un-Islamic culture and maintain some traditions that have been adapted to Islamic-Malay culture due to their observance of Islam (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000). In fact, Islamic teachings and principles act as the guidance for them to construct Malay identity. Furthermore, following and upholding the religion serves as a prominent act of submission to conventional *Malayness*.

Conventional Malayness in this study refers to situations in which the significance of Islamic standards of values is taken into account in following the Malay cultural norms. It is argued that converting to Islam for non-Malays is considered as "*masuk Melayu*" (entering the Malay ethnic group) because the social expectations for becoming a Muslim in Malaysia are defined within the cultural milieus of Malay hegemony

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(Nagata, 1974; Nah, 2003; Tan, 2000). It is a quite different case for Malaysian Javanese. Even though they were born Muslim, they still have to adopt Malay-defined religious practices of Islam in order to become part of the Malay society. This is particularly due to the different practices of Islam between their original cultural community and the Malays. The rituals of Islamic practices in Java contained the elements of syncretism in a considerable degree (Geertz, 2000), and such practices of religion were brought along by the Javanese migrants into their community in Malaya. In contrast, Malay society follows fundamental principles of Islam in accordance with the universally-accepted doctrines as prescribed by Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the descendants of Javanese migrants in Malaysia have to deal with the conventional system of the religion practiced in their society of settlement.

In observing the conventional Malayness, the Malay women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh go through the process of cultural adaptation and adoption. They adapt their culture to fit the cultural norms of the Malay society and adopt Malay *adat* in order to construct their cultural identity. Once they are accustomed to the Malay customs, they follow and maintain the cultural norms of the society to manifest their sense of belonging to the society.

***6.3.1.1. Adopting Malay customs***

Malaysian Javanese adopt Malay customs through the process of Islamisation in order to negotiate their cultural identity. They "Islamise" their traditional practices in order to follow the Islamic rules that are embedded in Malay *adat* (customs). Vickers (2004) points out that Malay *adat* is a sort of mixed culture which accommodates Malay and Javanese traditional values. In fact, most of Javanese traditions and cultural elements are customised to fit the Malay customs during the process of integration between two

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cultures (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000; Noriah, 2001). This particular study presents how Javanese women experience the course of such cultural adaptation and adoption, which influences their negotiation of identity and leads to their interpretation of identity practices that appear on television.

The Malaysian Javanese women reflect on their experiences with the cultural adaptation in their projection of cultural identity. They have undergone multiple processes of acculturation into Malay cultural entity through which understanding of Islam bridges the gap between their migrant ancestors' culture and their situated culture. They acknowledge the existence of some old Javanese traditions which were practiced by their older generations and take it as part of their past. However, their observance of Islamic and Malay milieus influences them to adopt the new, hybrid conventional cultural system. Among the traditions that have been adapted to the local culture are the customs pertaining to wedding, pregnancy, and natural phenomena.

> There used to be a set of traditional costume to be worn in a typical Javanese wedding. That costume is no longer used. The (Javanese) wedding has become a semblance of Malay wedding. For example, it is the custom in a Malay wedding to have *majlis persandingan* (wedding reception), *majlis berinai* (the ceremony of henna painting), but not in Javanese wedding (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

> Then was different from now. People then followed Javanese custom such as *nguyen*. Nguyen was held when a baby was born. The days after, the family conducted *kenduri aqiqah*, *cukur jambul*. It was then. It no longer prevails because people nowadays follow Malay *adat*. The old Javanese also had *ngapati* in the fourth month and *tingkepan* in the seventh month of pregnancy. When the baby reached the first seven months, the parents would have *kenduri buceng*, *selametan*, *kenduri ambengan*. People eat rice, krabu (fried grated coconut), and egg served in a big tray. All of them are Javanese traditions. The Malays do not do those kinds of thing (*Mbah* Rin, 58, interview, 17 April 2013).



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As I observe, the present traditional wedding in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh is indeed a kind of Malay-styled wedding. I attended several wedding *kenduri* (communal feasts) in the *kampung* during my fieldwork and I can identify that the style is different from a typical Javanese wedding. In the Malay wedding, the bride usually wears Malay *baju kurung* or *kebaya* with a scarf fully covering the head (except the face), while the groom wears *baju Melayu* (a pair of long sleeved blouse and trouser) with a *sampin* (a kind of half sarong worn on top of the trouser), a *tengkolok* (the Malay-styled headwear), and a *keris* (Malay traditional dagger). Meanwhile, the Javanese have various kinds of pairs of wedding costumes depending on the province of origin of the couple. As *Ibu* Bari tells, the costume is different and the ceremonial events of a Malay wedding include *majlis persandingan* and *majlis berinai*. The former is a common custom in Javanese wedding too, but the latter is not. During the homestay programme which I participated in 2011—before I started my actual fieldwork—another respondent, *Mbah* Uki told me that the wedding in the *kampung*, which at that time was demonstrated to a group of foreign visitors, was not a kind of the Javanese wedding that she had when she married. To have a clear picture about the difference between traditional Malay and Javanese wedding, I provide the illustration of the wedding costumes in the Figure 6.2 on the next page.

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**Figure 6.2:** The difference between Javanese and Malay wedding costumes. a. Javanese wedding costumes from Central Java Province (source: severalfashion.com, taken with permission). b. Malay wedding costumes (source: busanatradisi1511.blogspot.my, taken with permission).

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Regarding to the customs around pregnancy, Malaysian Javanese in the past had several feasts for a pregnant woman from pregnancy to post-partum period. As experienced by *Mbah* Rin, the feasts included *ngapati,* derived from the Javanese word *papat* (four), which was held to express gratitude for the health of the pregnant mother and the baby in the fourth month of the pregnancy. It was followed by the ceremony of *tingkepan* three months after. In *ngapati* and *tingkepan*, the family of the pregnant lady usually had *buceng*, a yellow cone-shaped cake which is made of sticky rice, or *ambeng*, a popular Javanese dish that is composed of white rice, marinated fried chicken, fried shredded coconut, and the signature *sambal goreng* (a combination of fried angel hair noodle, *tempe* or soybean cake, tofu, layered-thin fishcake mixed with soybean sauce and Javanese tamarind juice). The *buceng* or *ambeng* was served on a large tray to enable a group of four or five persons to share and eat the dish together. The act of

eating the dish together in Javanese culture symbolises their cultural values of *guyub* (togetherness).

After the baby was delivered, the family would have *nguyen*, another thanksgiving ceremony for the birth of the baby. When the baby reached his or her first seven days, they conducted *kenduri aqiqah* and *cukur jambul*. This ceremony is still existent in the present Javanese and Malay communities because it follows the Islamic custom as prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad. The *aqiqah* is an Arabic term for a celebration of having a newborn by slaughtering a sheep (if the newborn is a girl) or two (if the newborn is a boy). In the celebration of *aqiqah*, the baby's hair is cut or shaved and this action is called *cukur jambul* (shaving head) in Malay and Javanese culture. The family also invites a group of *kampung* woman to sing *Dendang Fatimah* (Fatimah's rhymes) in the ceremony. *Dendang Fatimah* is believed as a practice inherited from the Prophet's time and contains hymns and rhymes about the Prophet and the struggle of a pregnant mother in having and taking care of her baby. This *Dendang Fatimah* is available in Arabic and Malay language and sung in the presence of the baby which is put asleep on a traditional swing. I was fortunate to experience this tradition during the preliminary fieldwork in the house of one of my respondents. From the experience, I understand that the tradition is adopted from the Malay culture because it is not a custom in Indonesian Javanese communities. The illustration of the *aqiqah* ceremony can be seen in the Figure 6.3 on the next page.

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**Figure 6.3:** A celebration of *aqiqah* in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh

As the Javanese community adopt Islamic Malay customs, they abandon their traditions which do not go along with the customs. In fact, some syncretic Javanese rituals had ever existed among Javanese communities in Malaysia. The practice of divination and the use of Javanese spells were reported to be among the kinds of cultural rituals that used to be existent in Malaysian Javanese society (Miyazaki, 2000; Noriah, 2001). The members of the Javanese community of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh also experienced un-Islamic rituals during their childhood, but no longer follow the customs due to their observance of Islam.

> My late grandfather told me that he used to live near a *kampung* of *abangan* community. If they conducted a *kenduri*, they played *ronggengan* for seven nights. The members of the community who completely converted to Islam had to move out from the *kampung* to my grandfather's *kampung*. The two *kampungs* were only separated by a road. When there was an eclipse, the *abangan* people would smear their face with charcoal. They would smear the charcoal on the belly of pregnant women too. My grandfather said that some of his fellow Javanese who already migrated to Malaysia still preserved that kind of practice. Even though he was a Javanese, he did not ask his descendants to carry on such practice. He

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> said, "That is an *abangan* practice. We Muslims go to a Mosque to offer two-*rakat* prayer." I remembered when I was young, I wondered why my neighbours smeared charcoal on their forehead (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

> My father did *pagar rumah* and *pagar badan,* (which refer to) the prayers for preventing illness. Old Javanese prayed using Javanese words. I did that too because it was for healthcare. My father did *puasa pati geni*. It was a practice of fast in which the *suhoor* was at 5 (a.m.) and the breakfast was at 6 (p.m.). He only had rice and plain water to break the fast. Other kinds of food should be eaten after *Isya* prayer. That fast was done for the purpose of healthcare. I used to practice that because I was ill. Now, I cannot do it anymore. I only fast on Monday and Thursday (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

The *abangan* refers to a cultural group in Javanese society who still maintain syncretism (accommodating the elements of Hindu-Buddhism, Islam, and animism in their culture) and it is the opposite of *santri*—the Javanese Muslims who follow the universal doctrines of Prophet Muhammad (Geertz, 2000: 149). It appeared that a party of *abangan* was among the Javanese who migrated to Malay Peninsula and brought along their religious creeds as they settled in the new place. According to *Ibu* Bari, the members of *abangan* in the *kampung* went through the ritual of smearing face and pregnant women's belly with charcoal at the time of eclipses. As her family associated with the imagined communities of Muslims, her grandfather ordered his descendants to exercise the Islamic practice of offering two-*rakat* prayers as a way of remembering Allah in the event of the natural phenomenon. Through her grandfather, she also knew the custom of having *ronggeng* dance performances in an *abangan* style of *kenduri* which she did not find in her community. It shows that this particular respondent had experience with the syncretic form of Javanese ritual but she could not relate to such form of culture due to her total submission to Islam as part of the negotiation of identity.

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Another respondent, *Mbah* Sar, also had experience with a kind of Javanese syncretic practice through her father. *Mbah* Sar reported that her father used to exercise *puasa pati geni*, a practice of fast which slightly differs from common Islamic fast. A typical Islamic fast does not allow a person to consume food and beverages, do sexual intercourses, and immoral conducts from dawn till sunset. In contrast, *puasa pati geni* restricts a person to do activities outside house and to have anything but plain rice and water to break the fast—apart from the main restrictions in the Islamic fast. The Javanese way of fast was believed to be able to clean body and soul and generate inner power. *Mbah* Sar also underwent the period of time when Javanese spells were used instead of Koranic verses in rituals for healthcare. However, as she embraces the true practices of Islam, she follows the custom of fasting which is done every Monday and Thursday as commanded by the Prophet. In addition, she is currently a regular attendee at Friday congregations in which she learns Koran and Islamic teachings. It is apparent that the particular respondent experiences an identity deal through the adaptation to the Islamic practices of fast which become part of the conventional Malay culture.

Another kind of rituals that became part of the life history of the Javanese women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh is a custom of performing *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet play) or *kuda kepang* (horse dance) before planting rice. Geertz (2000) points out that a ritual form of *slametan* (the Javanese term for *kenduri*) was also done at the particular stages of the crop cycle by *abangan* communities. It appeared that such syncretic practice existed in the Javanese communities of Selangor in the past.

> When it comes to planting rice, the Chinese usually play songs and sing along. The people in this *kampung* do not do that because we are now Malay. Other *kampungs* may have that. I mean the Javanese would do that. When I was a kid, the Javanese in this *kampung* had *kuda kepang*, *wayang kulit* performance before planting the seeds. My

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> father used to do that. That custom no longer exists (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

> People in this *kampung* used to have *wayang kulit* before seeding. The Javanese liked watching *wayang kulit*, so did I. That was the old custom. It disappeared when an *alim* (scholar), *pak kyai* (a Muslim scholar) came and teach us about Islam. The custom was changed. We now read *yaseen*, offer *hajat* prayer to get fortune (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

These particular respondents are aware of the ritual pertaining to crop cycle, which becomes their past. According to them, the Javanese farmers would hold a *kenduri* in which *wayang kulit* or *kuda kepang* was performed before planting rice for the purpose of seeking fortune. *Wayang kulit* is a Hindu-influenced art of shadow play which is popular in the Malay world while *kuda kepang* is a performing art of dance which depicts the performers as horsemen riding woven bamboo-made horses. The former is no longer existent as one of the cultural belongings of the Javanese community in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, but latter is customised to suit the cultural milieus of the Malays and presently used to promote the Javanese culture in the *kampung*. As I observe, *kuda kepang* is one of the cultural attractions of the *kampung* which is performed to entertain visitors from throughout Malaysia and foreign countries.

During the fieldwork, I was invited by the JKKK (the committee for the welfare and security of the *kampung*) to attend several occasions in which *kuda kepang* was served to entertain the participants of a homestay programme. The essentiality of *kuda kupang* in the Selangor Javanese community has been modified to remove the elements of mysticism which do not go along with Islamic teachings. I will explain further about this cultural adaptation of *kuda kepang* in the discussion of situated Javaneseness later in this chapter. What I want to highlight from the discussion of *wayang kulit* and *kuda kepang* in this part of the chapter is that the Javanese rituals involving both forms of

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performing art are gradually withdrawn from the Malaysian Javanese culture in the process of cultural integration into the Malay society. Most importantly, the Javanese women in this study experienced such cultural change as they grew up and acknowledged the role of Islam in the process of adapting the Javanese culture and of adopting Malay customs.

From this discussion, I contend that the significance of the Islamic religious system plays a significant role in the integration of the Javanese community into the Malay society. The adoption of Islamic-Malay customs might be a collective action but it is also part of the individual subjectivity of the community members. Evidently, the female Javanese descendants in this study had first-hand and vicarious experience with the elements of syncretic *Javanism* and went through the social change to become Malay. They have accepted Islamic values as the building blocks for the construction of Malay identity. Precisely, they embrace Islam as part of their course of conventional Malayness.

***6.3.1.2. Following Malay norms***

The Javanese communities in Malaysia are de facto members of Malay ethnic group. Consequently, they abide by the social and cultural expectations and norms defined for the entire society. It is part of the natural process of cultural acculturation that the members of an ethnocultural group have to deal with the social changes and cultural adaptation to the society in which they wish to integrate into (Berry, 1997). They also need to go through the process of behavioural adjustment in order to conform to the conventional standards of morality in the society. As the time passes, they are eventually accustomed to the behavioural norms of the dominant society and maintain such norms to manifest their sense of belonging.

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In the contexts of this study, the Malay women of Javanese descent have settled in the spatial culture of the Malay ethnic group and embraced the conventional ways of living practiced in the society. They share the same religious ideology and cultural norms with the entire society members. Being born Muslim and acquainting themselves with the rules of behaviours defined for the Malays, they claim ethnic membership in the society. Eventually, they are accustomed to following the Islamic moral standards which become part of the Malay conventional moral system.

In point of fact, the Malaysian Javanese women in this study stress the importance of Islamic moral building as a way to follow Malay cultural norms. They set their mind to ensure that the Islamic morality is maintained in their everyday culture. In addition, they apply the Islamic moral standards in their household matters, especially in raising their children. Interestingly, they learn some knowledge about the religious morality from television.

> I always concern about my children's social life. At home, I can supervise them. In school, the teachers take care of them. However, when they are outside the school, I am worried. For example, when they do assignments with their friends of the opposite gender, I am afraid that they might have physical contact. Therefore, when there was a talk show on TV, such as *Forum Perdana*, I wish I could ask about the Islamic ruling for such circumstance (Mak Cik Dah, 55, interview, 1 April 2014).

> I watch *Al Kulliyah* in the afternoon. The topic at that time was about educating children. That is my first concern. I want to learn how to encourage children to listen to us, especially when we tell them to never miss prayers and reciting the Koran (Ibu Mon, 51, interview, 29 April 2014).



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> (When watching television) I am interested in topics about the religion, the rules of reciting the Koran. I learn (the topics) for myself and later I pass down to my children and other members of the family. I can use the information (from television) in parent-children motivational programmes. I can use the information in the community programmes (Ibu Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

These particular respondents are aware of the importance of religion in their personal and family's life. As Islam is one of the prominent characteristics of Malay identity, following Islamic teachings, including the aspects of moral values and routinely performing acts of worship, becomes an important part of their "ways of becoming" Malay. As a housewife and mother, they also ensure their children practice the religion seriously and always exercise Islamic teachings in their everyday lives. Using television as their most important source of information, they seek knowledge regarding Islamic parenting. For example, Mak Cik Dah likes tuning to *Forum Perdana Ehwal Islam* (Prime Forum on Islamic Affairs) on TV1 which talks about current issues pertaining to Muslim society. The comprehensive discussion on Islamic teachings and rulings attracts her to routinely watch the Thursday show as she can relate to her parenting life. Similarly, Ibu Mon who prioritises knowledge on Islamic parenting prefers watching *al-Kulliyah* which is weekly aired on TV3 every Friday afternoon. Having a growing-up daughter, she is afraid that her daughter does not receive sufficient teachings about religious acts of worships, especially the compulsory prayers and the recitation of the Koran.

Reciting the Koran appears to be an important of Islamic practice that is highlighted by the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study. In fact, it becomes a regular practice in the households at the *kampung* Parit Tujuh Baroh. For example, Ibu Nan who routinely recites the Koran after Maghrib prayer (between 7.30 and 8.30 in the

evening) likes watching a television programme which teaches the audience to recite the Koran correctly. It is understood that she finds the need to improve her recitation and tuning to a television programme is one of her effort towards achieving her goal. Most importantly, she gains benefit from the programme because she can share the knowledge she learns with her children and her fellow community members.

Indeed, searching Islamic knowledge from television is very crucial for the women in this study especially for their family affairs. They seek knowledge that is related to matters about husband-wife and parent-children relationships. In doing so, they make sure that they follow the correct rulings and teachings of Islam on those matters.

> When my husband passed away, I was not really sure for how long I should stay at home. (I remember) He (the ustaz) says, if a married man dies, the prescribed period for the wife should be four months and ten days. If a wife is divorced by her husband, she has to wait for 40 days only. If our husband dies, we are not allowed to go out wearing jewellery, even a piece of gold. We should not adorn ourselves. That is what *Ustaz Khazim Ilyas* responds to a question by (one of his) audience. I knew that it was a month and ten days until I listen to the answer. We are not allowed to wear gold, eyeliner, and anything attractive. The *kampung* people will judge us too (*Mbah* Yan, 72, interview, 3 June 2014).

> The lessons (from religious programmes) are related to our concerns in life. For example, the ruling for everything we do, is that *makruh* (religiously acceptable), *haram* (religiously restricted)? What is the (Islamic) ruling for this and that? As a Malay, we should know (what is) *halal* (religiously allowed) and *haram*. I also want to know the rulings in marriage for a wife, husband, and children. Ustaz Khazim Ilyas always talks about problems in marriage. The topics in *Tiga Ustazah* usually related to parent-children relationships (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

As following Islamic teachings is part of Malay norms, seeking knowledge about Islam and following the religious rulings in every aspect of life are interpreted as means of

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living Malay culture by the women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. More interestingly, they tune to television and learn from Islamic preachers in their favourite religious programmes in order to verify their prior knowledge. For example, Mbah Yan who just lost her husband in early 2014 felt the need to learn more about Islamic rulings for a woman in mourning from a religious preacher she was following on television. From the Astro Oasis's *Kalau Dah Jodoh… Ustaz Kazim Ilyas*, she learnt that the appropriate prescribed period for Muslim women in mourning should be four months and ten days instead of 40 days as prescribed on just-divorced women. In addition, she self-regulated herself not to wear attractive attire or accessories in order to conform to the religious and the social expectations of the Malay society she lives in. Another respondent, *Ibu* Bari, also has need of acting in conformity with the religious and social expectation of being a Muslim and Malay. She perceives that as a member of Malay society, she must practice the teachings of Islam, including taking Islamic rulings into account for behaving and living a marriage life. Interestingly, she verifies her knowledge about such rulings by watching *Kalau Dah Jodoh… Ustaz Kazim Ilyas* and *Tiga Ustazah* on Astro Oasis.

Essentially, the women of Javanese descent in this study deal with the social expectations of becoming the Malays by improving their religious knowledge and lives. In achieving such goal, they make use of religious television programming in order to acquaint themselves with religious teachings and lessons. In fact, the consumption of Islamic content derived from Malaysian and Indonesian dramas as well as local religious programmes can assist in bridging the gap between Malay and Javanese culture (Rofil et al., 2015, 2016).

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### 6.3.2. Situated Javaneseness

Javanese in Malaysia situate their original culture in the contexts of local realities. In the early settlement of Javanese migrant in the Malay Peninsula, Javanese traditions which did not go with Islamic teachings due to the influence of Hinduism were customised to fit the local customs (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980). Such traditions include performances of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet show), *barongan* (Javanese big masked dance), *kuda kepang* (horse dance), *kompang* (tambourines), and *rewang* or the practice of mutual help which can be found in Javanese communities of Johor and Selangor (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Noriah, 2001).

I would argue that the Javanese in Selangor are not as strongly cultural as their counterparts in Johor because some traditions which still exist in the latter are no longer found in the former. For example, the *barongan* dance which was reportedly popular in both states (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988), is not existent in present Selangor Javanese communities, especially in the *kampung* that I study. At the very least, it is not mentioned as part of the cultural heritage of the Javanese communities in the state (Noriah, 2001; Sekimoto, 1988). In contrast, the communities of Javanese descendants in Johor still maintain the dance, which became an issue in the cultural dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia a few years ago due to its exact similarity with Indonesia's *Reog Ponorogo* (Sulaiman, 2007). Even though the pioneer settlers of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh were mostly from Ponorogo—a regency in East Java province—the cultural product is not part of the cultural memory of the Javanese women in this study.

The Javanese women in the *kampung* deal with the aspects of situated Javaneseness from childhood to adulthood. They go through the cultural changes of their community from "Javanese then" to "Javanese now." The current Javanese community that they

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claim a sense of belonging to constitutes part in Malay society in which Islamic rules and values underpin its customs. In fact, Islam serves as the key factor that influences the formation of the situated Javanese culture. I refer this idea of situated Javaneseness to circumstances in which Javanese cultural traditions and customs are experienced and maintained to follow Islam-Malay customary laws. Specifically, the Malay women of Javanese descent construct their situated Javaneseness by recollecting memories about their community in the past and maintaining Javanese traditions in the present.

#### *6.3.2.1. Recollecting memories of the past Javanese*

The Malaysian Javanese women construct their cultural identity from the materials of realities that they have dealt with since their early life. Experiencing the cultural life with their migrant parents or grandparents as well as their communion with their original culture gives them the ideas about what constitutes their Javaneseness. Such experience has become part of their cultural memory. Cultural memory has its proximate connection with the construction of identity because it provides cultural supply of knowledge and symbols for the members of a cultural group in the form of arts, crafts, language, and architectures (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995; Olick, 1999). In the context of this study, the Javanese women find the materials of their cultural identity in the recollections of the traditions and performing art which prevailed among Malaysian Javanese communities in the past.

The Javanese women share cultural memory mostly in the existence and solemnity of performing art. Javanese performing art that had ever lived in the memory of the women of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh includes *wayang kulit* and *kuda kepang*. The women acknowledge these forms of performing art as their Javanese cultural belongings which they experienced in the past.



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> My late father was from Ponorogo. He followed *adat* strongly. I have two children, one boy and one girl. According to the Javanese tradition, if we have a son as the first child, the family must have *wayang kulit* for *kenduri sunat* (celebration for having a kid circumcised). I did have (performance of) *wayang kulit* when celebrating my son's circumcision. It was then. Now, my children do not do that because *wayang kulit* no longer exists. All the puppeteers might be all dead. In the past, I paid RM500 to have them perform for my son (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2014).

> We used to have (performance of) *wayang kulit* in a *kenduri* in the past. It is no longer existent now. Now, we usually do karaoke (*Ibu* Nal, 49, interview, 5 May 2014).

> The old Javanese seek entertainment from the performance of *wayang kulit*, (and) *kuda kepang*. *Kuda kepang* is still existent, but it is different from it was in the past. The performers back then ate raw rice grains. When they finished, they lost a lot of energy. O Allah, it was ridiculous. The attendees who wore red clothes would be chased after. When I was still single, I liked watching it. It was in Pasir Panjang (a neighbouring village). Now school kids also perform *kuda kepang* but they do not use *bomoh* (a shaman). I think all the *bomohs* have died. Perhaps, people do not use *bomoh* anymore because it is *shirik* (*Mbah* Uki, 67, interview, 2 June 2014).

The Javanese women in my study had direct contact with the forms of the performing art in the past and stored such experience in their memory. *Mbah* Man used to pay a puppeteer to play a *wayang kulit* show in the *kenduri* that she had for celebrating her first son being circumcised. Having a show of the shadow play in a *kenduri* was a custom in her family that she inherited from her *adat*-abiding father. Similar to *Mbah* Man, *Ibu* Nal was also familiar with the custom of having a performance of *wayang kulit* in a *kenduri* in the old days. The custom of having a show of Javanese performing art in a tradition or ritual is a key characteristic of Javanese culture that eventually

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disappears due to the observance of Islamic-Malay customs among the Malaysian Javanese, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

In parallel with the existence of *wayang kulit*, *kuda kepang* was also present in the cultural memory of the Javanese women in the *kampung*. For example, growing up as a Javanese, *Mbah* Uki had experience with both *wayang kulit* and *kuda kepang*. She recalled how *kuda kepang* was played back in her teenage years and identified major changes in the performance as she compared it with the play of *wayang kulit* in the present time. One of the changes that she identified was the missing of the *bomoh*, a figure who was believed to have a connection to mystical spirit, from the performance. The role of the *bomoh* was central in the play of *kuda kepang* by which he provided a set of offerings to invite a spirit and transfer it into the body of the performers. *Mbah* Uki perceived that believing and using the service of a *bomoh* is contradicted to the practice of Islam as it is considered as a sin of *shirik* or equating the existence of Allah with His creatures. It indicates that this particular respondent is involved in the social changes in which the process of Islamisation plays a significant role in redefining her cultural identity.

The current Javanese community of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh continues to keep the new form of *kuda kepang* as one of its cultural belongings, but the community no longer uses *wayang kulit* as their regular art of entertainment. During the fieldwork, I had experience with the several performances of *kuda kepang*, but did not catch the presence of *wayang kulit* in the *kampung*. As I observe, the new form of *kuda kepang* play is performed by a group of youth, mostly school kids, and led by a leader who hold and crack a whip on the floor in order to direct and set the tempo of the dance movement. The elements of mysticism such as the use of a *bomoh* and possessed

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performers are not present in the performance. As I mention earlier, the present *kuda kepang* serves as a signature cultural product for the Javanese community in the *kampung* to promote their culture to outsiders.

Another Javanese cultural product that becomes a material of the cultural memory among the Javanese women of Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh is *kebaya* which used to be their traditional costume. The Javanese women in this study admitted that the presence of the traditional attire constructed their past cultural identity. They also acknowledged the influence of Indonesia in the style of their traditional costume.

> In the past, we wore *kebaya*. I used to wear *kebaya*. My mother made me wear it. It is a real piece of *kebaya* that looks like Indonesian-styled of *kebaya*. It was worn with the round *sanggul* (hair bun) (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

> I learn from TV that the traditional costumes in Sabah and Sarawak are quite revealing. The traditional costume here is *kebaya*. Sometimes, it is made of *songket* (hand-woven cloth). I think it is quite modest like (Malay) *baju kurung*. The *kebaya* has a piece of cloth that looks like a belt. It is called *stagen* (corset) in Indonesia. I used to wear that when I was young (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 18 June 2013).

> The Javanese are less Islamic compared to the *Banjarese* who strongly adhere to Islamic teachings. When we were young, we did not really wear *tudung* (head scarf) and we like to wear *kebaya*. I did not wear *tudung*. I just started wearing *tudung* some years ago. I only knew the importance of wearing *tudung* and *baju kurung* by watching television and decided to follow Islamic practices (*Mbah* Man, 62, interview, 23 April 2013).

In the previous chapter, I mention *kebaya* as a Javanese cultural symbol that a respondent identifies as one of the images of the past, which she distances from in the

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interpretation of culture on television. In fact, *kebaya* was part of the Malaysian Javanese culture in the past and constituted the cultural memory of the Javanese women in this study. The women recognise the significance of *kebaya* as a Javanese cultural symbol as compared to *baju kurung* in Malay society. As they integrate into the Malay society, they no longer wear *kebaya* and wear baju kurung instead. For example, Ibu Nan, *Mak Cik* Dah and *Mbah* Man admitted that they used to wear *kebaya* when they were young. In the present days*, Ibu* Nan is accustomed to wearing *baju kurung* to work; *Mak Cik* Dah specialises in making *baju kurung* in her dressmaking service; and *Mbah* Man is accustomed to wearing the Malay traditional clothes in her daily activities.

Interestingly, it appears that television plays significant role in guiding these women to learn about Malay culture and Islam. For example, *Mak Cik* Dah reflects on the cultural images of other ethnic groups of Malaysian origin to identify the traditional culture of her community. In a different case, *Mbah* Man observes the images of Malay women on television and identifies the importance of Islamic modesty through the wearing of *tudung* and *baju kurung*. Notwithstanding the presence of television and other cultural sources, it is apparent that *kebaya* is part of the Javanese women's past culture which contributes to the construction of their cultural memory, while *baju kurung* becomes part of their present-situated culture.

In brief, the discourse of situated culture among the female Javanese descendants in Kampung Parit tujuh Baroh explains how the members of diaspora use the materials of their past and present culture to construct their cultural identity. They recollect the memory about experiencing with the traditional culture in their early age and make it as a subject for comparison with what they go through in the present days. As discussed

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earlier, the experience with the Javanese performing art (*wayang kulit* and *kuda kepang*) and the traditional costume (*kebaya*) form their cultural memory, which leads to the realisation that they have become part of the Malay society for observing the Malay cultural and religious milieus. In this context, the course of their situated Javaneseness lies in the recollection of their cultural memory about past Javanese culture and the use of such individual and collective memory for building awareness of present Javanese-Malay identity.

#### *6.3.2.2. Maintaining Javanese traditions*

Despite disassociating themselves with the elements of old Javanese culture, the members of the Javanese community in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh still maintain some Javanese cultural customs and values. As I argue earlier, Javanese traditions and performing art that are adapted to the Malay culture remain as the cultural belongings of the community. In fact, some Javanese cultural customs and products continue to become the cultural symbols that represent the existence of the community within the Malay society particularly and Malaysia generally. Furthermore, the presence of such cultural products serves as a cultural platform for the Malaysian Javanese women in this study to exercise their social engagement.

In the earlier part of this chapter, I argue that Malaysian Javanese women reflect their cultural identity on the significance of the Javanese language which they conceive of as the identifier of the community. Apart from the language, the women also identify some other cultural symbols which represent their situated Javaneseness. Such cultural symbols include the practice of mutual help which is called *rewang*. *Rewang* which literally means “to help” in Javanese is the central tradition of the present Malaysian

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Javanese community. It specifically refers to a custom of doing work together in preparing the necessities for any kind of *kenduri*, especially a wedding reception.

The term *rewang* is popular among the Malay society and it has the exact meaning as the Malay word *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). Some of the Javanese women in this study perceive that the *rewang* culture does not only exist among Javanese communities in Malaysia. For these women, *rewang* is simply a word referring to acts of helping each other which are also practiced in other cultural and ethnic communities for any cause.

> *Rewang* exists in any culture. Chinese, Malays and Indians also do *rewang*. *Rewang* means helping each other (Ibu Ara, 51, interview, 7 April 2014).

> *Rewang* exists anywhere. It is generally called *gotong royong*. There is *gotong royong* in schools too. When we help friends, we do *gotong royong*. When we plan to call a parent-teacher meeting, *gotong royong* is needed. *Rewang* is in everything. It is not only for (the preparation of) *kenduri*. Everything requires *rewang* (*Mak Cik* Dah, 55, interview, 1 April 2014).

> The Banjarese also have (the custom of) *rewang*. Their *rewang* is almost the same as our *rewang*. *Rewang* is *gotong royong* (*Mbah* Ngat, 62, interview, 31 March 2014).

Despite the general use of the term in multi-cultural Malaysia, the Javanese women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh recognise the significance of *rewang* tradition in their community. The cultural tradition that they inherit from their migrant ancestors has been sustained from generation to generation. It has become part of their original culture which they adequately maintain till the present days.

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> *Rewang* remains as a Javanese custom and it is still maintained. The Malays also have *rewang,* but it is called *gotong-royong*. *Rewang* is the Javanese term. The other terms are *kejobo*s and *sinoman*. The term *rewang*, *kejobos*, and *sinoman* are used in East Java, Central Java, and West Java respectively. So, it depends on the place (province) of origin (of the Javanese). The Malays use (the term) *gotong royong*, which is practically the same (as Javanese *rewang*) (*Ibu* Bari, 47, interview, 2 April 2014).

> The Javanese like to do *kenduri*, *rewang*. "*Bangsa asing*" (alien races) do not really. These "*bangsa asing*" are such as the Banjarese, the Malays. Their *rewang* is not as lively as ours. In a Javanese *rewang*, various desserts such as *kuih-kuih* are served (for the helpers) along with the main dishes. The Banjarese and Malays usually do not serve desserts; (they serve) only a rice dish. The Javanese always share food. They are easy to be gathered. (Therefore) the togetherness among us is strong (*Mbah* Man, 63, interview, 23 April 2014).

> *Rewang* is maintained to unite the community members. We in the Javanese community believe in a mutual help system. We like doing something together. We prepare a feast together, even though people nowadays have the choice to use catering service. Apart from that, we want to teach our young generation to take care of the community (*Ibu* Nan, 43, interview, 3 June 2014).

According to these particular women, the term *rewang* is synonymous with Javanese communities and it symbolically represents the value of togetherness. *Ibu* Bari identifies that *rewang* is a common tradition in Malay society, especially among the Javanese communities who popularise the term and its two other synonyms: *kejobos* and *sinoman*. She further explains that each term is used by different groups of Javanese descendants whose respective ancestors originated from different provinces in Java. Similarly, *Mbah* Man is also aware about the tradition of *rewang* in other cultural groups within the Malay society, particularly the Banjarese and the other Malays, which she refers to as "*bangsa asing*" (alien races). She identifies that the style of *rewang* among the different groups is different in terms of the variety and the quantity of the

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food served for the helpers—the participants of *rewang*. Furthermore, she perceives that her community upholds the virtue of generosity which enables the unity and togetherness among the community members to be maintained. In fact, the main virtue of the Javanese *rewang* is to promote togetherness and affection among the members of the community across generations, as reported by *Ibu* Nan.

In Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, Javanese share the same cultural traditions, including *rewang*, not only among the members of their cultural community, but also with the other cultural groups of Malay society, especially the Banjarese. Both Javanese and the non-Javanese live harmoniously and appreciate each other's culture. Consequently, there exists cultural exchanges and influences between both cultural groups. However, it appears that the Javanese culture has more influence on the Malays as the former make up the 90 percent of the population in the *kampung*, according to the village headman. The subjects of this study confirm that the Banjarese and the other Malays are accustomed to practicing some of Javanese traditions, especially *rewang*.

> In Malaysia, the Javanese live harmoniously with the Banjarase in this *kampung*. When there is a *rewang* event, we invite them. They are accustomed to following our Javanese customs (*Wak* Ati, 58, interview, 16 June 2013).

> In this *kampung*, the Malays follow the Javanese. They used to hold *rewang* in the morning on the event day. The Javanese conduct *rewang* a day before the event. Now the Malays follow us to have their *rewang* a day before. Once they follow us, they (seem to) lose their Malayness (*Mbah* Sar, 66, interview, 4 April 2014).

> The Malays are becoming Javanese. They follow our style in terms of (the practice of) *rewang* (*Ibu* Par, 47, interview, 28 May 2014).

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The feedback from these particular respondents shows that they differentiate between their cultural community and the other cultural groups within the Malay society which they share the rural life with. Precisely, these women perceive that the other cultural groups of Banjarese and Malay origin adapt to their culture especially in practicing the custom of *rewang*. *Wak* Ati confirms the adaptation of Javanese culture among the members of the Banjarese community in the *kampung*. *Mbah* Sar who has a strong sense of belonging to the Javanese community, by which she refuses to speak Malay in public places, discerns that the Malays who have adopted the Javanese customs could have lost their cultural identity. In the same manner, *Ibu* Par conceives that the Malays in the *kampung* have become part of her cultural community through the process of the cultural adaptation. Despite the cultural adaptation, these Javanese women only compare the style of practicing *rewang* across the different cultural communities without denying the claim of each community over the shared cultural tradition.

As I argue somewhere in this chapter, the Javanese adopt Islam-influenced Malay culture in the process of integrating into the Malay society. It turns out that the Malays whom they share the cultural life with adapt some semblance of Javanese culture as part of the cultural exchanges between the two cultural groups. Apart from following the Javanese tradition, they also abide by the local expectation of using Javanese as the medium of everyday communication. Many Malays or Banjarese whom I encountered in the field could speak fluent Javanese. I almost recruited two Malay women as my respondents as I could not distinguish them from the average Javanese women in the *kampung* due to their good proficiency in Javanese language. Mohammed (1996) categorises a group of Malays who observe and practice Javanese culture, especially those who can converse in Javanese language very well, as "Javanized Malays."

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In the context of my study, both Javanese and Malay women experience the course of situated Javaneseness, involving cultural adaptation and adoption which enables a negotiation of hybrid identity. Furthermore, the cultural contact and exchanges between the two cultural communities pave the way for constructing a hybrid cultural tradition. Apparently, the practice of *rewang* in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh is hybrid, accommodating the influences and the elements of Javanese and Malay culture. The cultural tradition which is believed to be originated from Java (Khazin and Bohari, 1980) is considerably different from its counterpart in Indonesia. *Rewang* in Indonesian Javanese society is a typical gender practice in which women's role is more dominant because it involves domestic work such as cooking and preparing food (Widayati and Aswandi, 2006; Asmussen, 2004; Martin, 2004).

In contrast, *rewang* in the Malaysian Javanese community appears to be an egalitarian practice that encourages men and women, regardless of their age and familial relations, to share the workload. Both male and female participants of the *rewang* exchange their responsibilities in preparing the food and beverages, washing the dishes, arranging the chairs and tables for the attendees, setting the tents and any kinds of the preparation work for a communal feast. Interestingly, the *rewang* in the Malaysian Javanese community is more structural with the assistance of a committee which functions to coordinate the participants and to distribute the workload as well as to be responsible for the maintenance of the equipment used for *rewang*. Furthermore, the Islamic values and local norms play a significant role in the operationalization and the maintenance of the tradition (Noriah, 2001). The illustration of workload distribution between the male and female helpers in a rewang event is presented in the Figure 6.4 and Figure 6.5 on the next page.

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**Figure 6.4:** Female helpers cutting vegetables in a *rewang* event

**Figure 6.5:** Male helpers cutting beef in a rewang event

My first experience in a Malaysian Javanese *rewang* gave me a clear picture that Islamic and Malay milieus influenced the cultural tradition. As I thought that *rewang* would include some activities which needed a lot of movements, I wore a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt. When I arrived at the location of the *rewang*, I was told to go back home and change my clothes. I decided to change my jeans with a long, wide skirt

and kept wearing the t-shirt (which I perceived as adequately sharia compliant), but one of my respondents told me to wear a pair of *baju kurung* instead. As I did not have one, they eventually allowed me to join the *rewang* wearing the available clothes. In fact, the women in the *kampung* must maintain their modesty, by covering their *aurat* (parts of human body that must be covered according to the Islamic sharia) properly, throughout their participation in a *rewang* activity. It is the custom for the female helpers to wear *baju kurung* or Islamic-styled robes and *tudung* when being involved in the *rewang*.

In brief, the custom of mutual cooperation through the practice of *rewang* and the maintenance of the cultural tradition provide a symbolic space for the Malay women of Javanese descent in this study to manifest their hybrid identity. They identify with the tradition which symbolises the existence of their situated culture. It is situated because the significance of the cultural tradition is located in the local milieus which encompass the elements of Javanese, Islamic, and Malay cultural values. In other words, their experience with *rewang* and the maintenance of the cultural tradition indicates that they participate in the course of situated Javaneseness. Along with *rewang*, the Malaysian Javanese community in the *kampung* still maintains other cultural traditions such as *leklekan*. However, the occurrence of *leklekan* only takes place once in a blue moon. Moreover, *rewang* is more salient for the community as it has become part of their regular culture.

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### 6.4. Summary

The experience of "becoming Malay" that has been undergone by the women of Javanese descent in this study represents the course of "cultural adaptation and adoption." They maintain their cultural embedding and belongings by adapting to the dominant culture that they observe. Such process of integration can be considered as

one of acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997). From historical perspectives, the Javanese migrants and their descendants in the Malay Peninsula went through the process of localisation by adapting their cultural traditions to local customs and adopting Islamic values (Khazin and Sukiman, 1980; Miyazaki, 2000). Javanese community in Kampung parit Tujuh baroh, including the women in this study, share the same experience.

The Malaysian Javanese women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh manifest their hybrid identity using the cultural, political, and religious materials of their bicultural everyday lives. They identify the materials for the construction of hybrid ethnicity in the culture-preferred and state-guided realities. On the one hand, they perceive Javanese as their cultural origin and the imagined community. On the other hand, they conceive of themselves as part of the Malay ethnic group in the contexts of religious and political discourses which are defined by UMNO/*Barisan Nasional* ethnic politics. As they live with two cultures they exercise their negotiation of identity in the course of conventional Malayness and situated Javaneseness. The former illustrates their experience with the adoption of Malay customs, while the latter represents their experience with the Javanese past culture and present traditions in the process of integrating into the Malay society. Conclusively, the Malay women of Javanese descent deal with Malay and Javanese cultural milieus in order to construct and manifest their hybrid Javanese-Malay identity.

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# CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

## 7.1. Introduction

Finally, I arrive to the last chapter of this thesis. This chapter serves to conclude the discussions in the entire thesis and propose further thoughts on studies pertaining to television and identity. Firstly, I should revisit the research questions and objectives and discuss how these fundamental enquiries of the thesis have been addressed both empirically and conceptually. Secondly, it is important for me to express my insights about the findings of this study and draw the implication for further thoughts on the subjects of interpretive identity practices, television, and hybrid identity. Thirdly, limitation of the study will be discussed afterwards. Last but not least, I wish to propose several directions for further researches, particularly in the ethnography of media audience.

## 7.2. Revisiting the research questions

Based on the findings, I now offer responses to the research questions and objectives that I stated in the first chapter. Basically, this study mainly aims to examine the consumption of television among female Javanese descendants in a selected Malaysian village and their interpretation of the content in relation to their hybrid identities. The findings conclude that television plays a substantial role in providing discourses of identity for the Malay-Javanese women to derive the definition of preferred and guided identities. Their understanding of cultural, religious, and political discourses in television dramas, realities, and news illustrates their identifications with Javanese diaspora and Malay society. Now, I shall break the findings down into answering each of the research questions.

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### 7.2.1. What are the television patterns of Malaysian Javanese women in relation to their cultural, religious, and national identity?

Conclusively, television has become the everyday culture of the Malaysian Javanese women in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. They regularly watch religious programming in the morning, dramas in the afternoon, and news primarily in the evening. It appears that television serves as their daily companion as majority of them stay at home most of the time. Even though they watch television mainly for the purpose of entertainment and learning, they cognitively interpret the content of programmes that they watch and relate to their identity practices. Most importantly, they describe their understanding of television content in relation to their awareness of "being and becoming" a member of Javanese cultural community, Malay ethnic group, the *ummah* (Islamic religious communities), Indonesian/Javanese diaspora, and the Malaysian nation.

The patterns of television viewing among the female Javanese descendants in this study illustrate that they engage in self-regulatory and collective regulatory viewing to define their hybrid identity. They regularly watch television mainly to learn about Islamic teachings and to collect the materials of identity which represent their culture, religion, ethnicity, and nation. In the interpretation of television content, they locate the essential aspects of their identity practices in the narratives and images of television across genres. Specifically, they use their self-regulatory capacities to situate the ideas of their cultural identity in Indonesian soap operas mainly and televised P-Ramlee's movies alternately. In dealing with their religious identity, they seek the ideas about ideal Islamic morality in both Malaysian and Indonesian programming. As the members of the Javanese/Indonesian diaspora and the Malaysian nation, they consider their collective-regulatory realities to create meaning about their sense of belonging to the nation. In this case, they create the national border between Malaysia and Indonesia in

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responding to the news pertaining to the relationships between the two countries. However, they remain neutral by exercising "Muslim Brotherhood" in responding to the news about Indonesia.

### 7.2.2. How do Malaysian Javanese women define their sense of Islamic, Javanese, Malay and national identities?

The Malay women of Javanese descent in this study practice two cultures, Malay and Javanese and deal with banal identity switching in their everyday lives. They switch between being a Javanese and a Malay depending on the contexts of cultural realities that they attend. They pleasantly live in bicultural realities in which the aspects of Malay and Javanese cultural milieus influence their life experiences. Precisely, they experience the process of the integration between Malay and Javanese culture through the course of "conventional Malayness" and "situated Javaneseness."

The notion of conventional Malayness and situated Javaneseness illustrates the circumstances in which cultural adaptation and adoption influence the construction of hybrid identity among the Malay women of Javanese descent in Malaysia. The former refers to the experience of the Malaysian Javanese women with observance of Islam-influenced Malay cultural customs and norms. Meanwhile, the latter represents their experience with the adaptation of Javanese culture to local realities through remembrance of cultural memories and involvement in cultural activities. The meeting point between the two forms of culturalism prevails in the cultural realities that illustrate their observance of Islamic teachings and values in practicing both cultures. In this case, I argue that the course of conventional Malayness and situated Javaneseness enables the Malaysian Javanese women to manifest their sense of belonging to Malay-Javanese communities particularly and Muslim society generally.

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Precisely, the Malaysian Javanese women embrace bicultural identities. They regard themselves as Malay in relation to their understanding of political and religious discourses on television and in their civic lives. In contrast, they identify themselves as Javanese when they talk about their everyday culture. On the one hand, they perceive themselves as the members of the Malay ethnic group Malay when comparing their religious and political identity to the religious and political practices of Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. On the other hand, they conceive of their cultural identity as Javanese when referring to the presence of "other Malays" in their *kampung*. The other Malays in this context include the native Banjarese and the Malays who originate from other states and are married to the locals. They usually designate each group of the other Malays as "*orang Banjar*," "*Melayu Kedah*" (the Malays from the state of Kedah), "*Melayu Kelantan*" (Kelantanese), or simply "*wong Melayu*" (Malay people). In terms of their political identity, the Javanese

In terms of the national identity, all of them claim the sense of belonging to Malaysia through the banal realities of the nation which appear on television. The news about the burning of *Jalur Gemilang* (Malaysian flag) by a group of Indonesians in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta sparks their anger as they relate to the significance of the flag in their ideas of nationalism. However, some of them locate the ideas of their imagined communities in the origin of Javanese culture and the narratives about the migration of their ancestors. For this reason, this particular group of Malaysian Javanese women also regards themselves as part of the imagined Indonesian communities.

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### 7.2.3. How do Malaysian Javanese women understand and relate television narratives to their cultural and religious identity?

The Malaysian Javanese women in this study interpret television content according to their self-understanding about religious teachings and cultural norms. They use self-regulatory capability to locate desirable and undesirable aspects of identity in the television content. In negotiating the wanted and unwanted depictions of their identity practices, they exercise "cultural appreciation" and "cultural distanciation." I define this cultural appreciation as a watching competency in which the audience accept or appreciate the cultural elements depicted in television narratives as a means of identifications with self and collective identities. In contrast, the notion of cultural distanciation refers to a way of content engagement in which the audience use their cultural capital to negate or reject inappropriate presentations of identities. On the one hand, they appreciate the linguistic and religious commonalities between the two countries when interpreting the content in Indonesian dramas as well as local television realities and news. On the other hand, they create a clear cultural distance from the images of their ancestors' old culture as well as the images of present Indonesian migrants in television news.

The matters of cultural appreciation and cultural distanciation among the Malays of Javanese descent in this study signify how the religious principles of Islam and the prominence of Javanese language are used to juxtapose Malay/Malaysian culture and Javanese/Indonesian ways of life. Consequently, they come up with a "third space" of culture which accommodates some semblance of Javanese and Malay culture as well as the other cultural characteristics of the people in the two countries which represent the images of Malaysian-Javanese Muslim community. They imagine their community as part of the contemporary Malaysian Muslim society in which economic prosperity

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underlies their ways of life. At the same time, they retain their cultural language along with the national language as part of their community's language treasure which distinguishes the community from the other cultural communities within the Malay society. Interestingly, such identifications with religious and cultural identity emerge from their interpretation about the social and cultural life in Malaysia and Indonesia as depicted by television programming. Conclusively, television images and narratives stimulate their identifications with religious and cultural practices which symbolise their Malaysian-Javanese Muslim identity.

### 7.2.4. How does Malaysian Javanese women's interpretation of television content represent their sense of Javanese-Malay identity?

As the results from exercising the watching competences through self-regulatory engagement and collective-regulatory engagement as well as cultural appreciation and cultural distanciation, the female members of Javanese diaspora in Malaysia deal with the construction of hybrid ethnicity. They create meaning about their Javanese-Malay identity in the contexts of culture-preferred and state-guided realities. The realities for culture-preferred construct of identity represent the ways the members of the Javanese diaspora community in maintaining their culture of origin. These realities exist in their everyday lives which enable them to manifest a distinct form of ethnic identity in parallel with the dominant identity ascribed to them. In the contexts of the Javanese community in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh, the culture-preferred construct of ethnicity represents their interpretive identity practices in which the identifications with Javanese culture go along with observance of Malay hegemony.

At the same time, the Malay women of Javanese descent also deal with the state-guided realities which define them as part of the Malay society. They are accustomed to the

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cultural and the political norms of the Malays which designate religion and cultural customs as the identifiers of an ethnic group in Malaysia. Such perception emerges from lifetime experience with the ethnic politics in the country and is cultivated by the political discourses pertaining to religious issues in television news. In interpreting such issues, they tend to relate Malayness to the political power which represents the ethnic group, particularly UMNO and PAS, and the religion of Islam that has been constitutionally designated to their ethnic society.

## 7.3. Implications of the study

This thesis is fundamentally based on the recognition that television is a source of identity discourses and audience are active interpreters of texts. Empirically, this study has revealed how Javanese descendants in Malaysia watch television and express their understanding of content in relation to their identities as Javanese descendants and members of Malay society. On the one hand, the results describing the hybrid cultural life of the community under study can serve as an academic contribution to the field of ethnic and racial studies in the South East Asian region. On the other hand, the findings pertaining to audience interpretation of television and the concept of interpretive identity practices would contribute to the body of knowledge in media and cultural studies.

The concept of interpretive identity practices which I discuss in the previous chapters explains how audience use their agency to deal with the symbolic structures in television texts and images, and eventually produce the meanings to improve and practice their hybrid identities. The framework of the interpretive identity practices describes that the audience's agency and stored memory of lived social structures encounter the symbolic social structures depicted on television in the process of their

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cognitive interpretation. Such cognitive interpretation of television content generates cultural competencies which lead to the meaning making of the interpretive identity practices. To understand the framework better, I provide the details of the framework in the Figure 7.1. on the next page. The framework speciafically illustrates the television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among the Malaysian Javanese women in this study

In the contexts of the Malaysian Javanese women, the cultural competencies include the capabilities to locate essential aspects of identity and to negotiate cultural hybridity. Precisely, the employment of self-regulatory engagement and collective-regulatory engagement as well as cultural appreciation and cultural distanciation in the process of interpreting television content activates their imagination about their identity practices. In other words, by exercising the four watching competences, they generate the images of their identity practices, which represent their hybrid ethnicity and banal biculturalism. In the context of this study, such hybrid ethnicity refers to their identifications with preferred and guided identities which emerge from their negotiation with culture-preferred and state-guided construct of realities. Consequently, the Malay women of Javanese descent in Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh embrace their preferred and guided identities to deal with their everyday culture in which the courses of situated Javaneseness and conventional Malayness simultaneously exist. In addition, the materials of both cultural milieus enable the women to construct and project Malay-Javanese hybrid identities.

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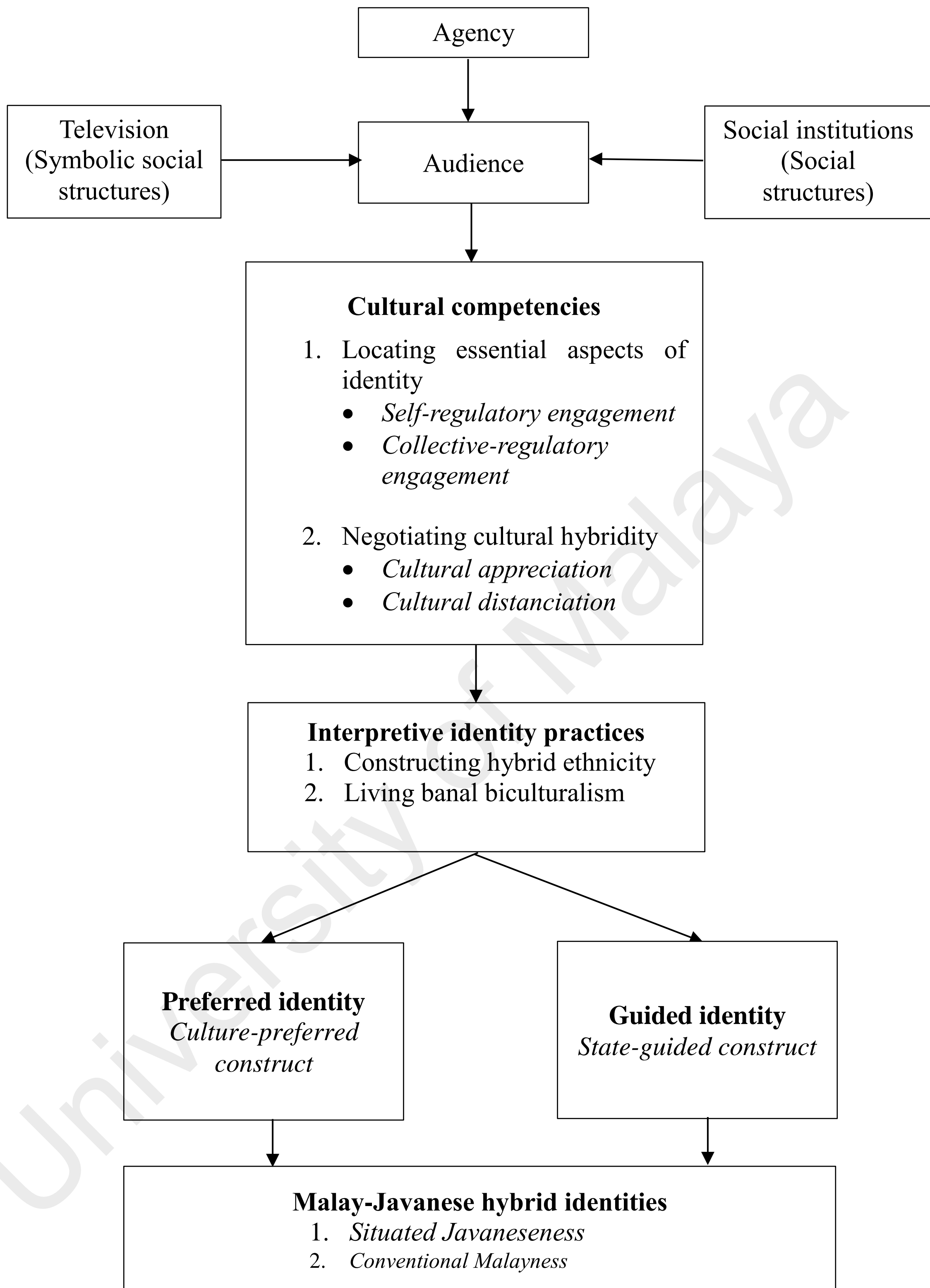


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**Figure 7.1:** Applied framework of the interpretive identity practices for the case of television consumption and the construction of hybrid identity among female Javanese descendants in Malaysia

As for the subject of hybrid identity, this study eventually deals with the concept of hybridity which addresses the multiplicity of identifications with various locations of culture and cultural entities among the audience. It also acknowledges the course of appreciation and distanciation as the means for negotiating multiple sources and materials of identities. Ultimately, this study focuses on ethnic and national identities which represent spatial dimensions of collective subjectivity. Such subjectivity concerns the audience's negotiation with preferred and guided construct of identities. In this way, I argue that the notion of preferred and guided identities, which constitutes the concept of interpretive identity practices, can be considered as the elements for construction of hybrid identities. Though the concept is derived from the interpretation of people's identifications with collective identities, it can also be used to explore an individual's negotiation of identity discourses which constitute his or her subjects of personality. However, further investigation on the applicability of this concept is required.

## 7.4. Limitations of the study

Before I completely end this thesis, I shall reflect on the whole process of this research to conceptualise some limitations of the study. First of all, as this is a qualitative study with only twenty respondents, the findings discussed throughout the thesis only represent the situation in the selected site of the study, Kampung Parit Tujuh Baroh. The discussion of the social and cultural life of the community in the *kampung* may illustrate a typical Javanese community. However, the interpretation of television content in relation to the construction of hybrid identities among the selected respondents solely depicts the lived experiences of these particular members of the Malaysian Javanese community. Therefore, I would like to argue that the concluding remarks of the findings are not necessarily the generalisation of Javanese society in Malaysia.

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Secondly, I should reconfirm that the study employed audience ethnography which is partially different from anthropological ethnography in terms of the practices. The fieldwork is not a typical of prolonged fieldwork that is common among anthropologists. It was a collection of site visits with a partial mode of immersion (Delamont, 2004), but the data were collected using two ethnographic techniques: interview and participant observation (Gray, 2003; Fetterman, 2010).

Lastly, the findings may be subjective as it is derived from self-reported data which represents the respondents' self-interpretation and experiences. However, the data were treated according to ethical standards and verified by follow-up conversations with the respondents and conceptual discussions with my supervisors. The respondents' responses quoted in the findings are the translation of a verbatim account of our conversations in *Bahasa Malaysia* and Javanese. Therefore, the structure of the sentences seems to be grammatically unorganised.

## 7.5. Directions for future research

Finally, this thesis arrives at the very end and I would like to conclude it with some suggestions for further researches in the topic of television consumption and the construction of identity. Despite the popularity of new media, television remains significant in today's world as it exists in the centre of family and serves as the main source of information especially for homemakers. As a credible source of news and an easily-reachable medium for entertainment, television is still relevant for identity learning and practices. The findings from this study illustrate that news, dramas, and realities can be the source of discourses in which audience can negotiate with to define and redefine their multiple identities. Therefore, studies on television and its audience

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should be continued to evaluate the role and the importance of the medium for social changes in society. As such, this research has produced a comprehensive argument about how mainstream television plays a significant role in the construction of hybrid identities among a cultural community within an ethnic society.

Compared to "Chinese being Chinese" or "Indians being Indians," the presence of Javanese communities in Malaysia and their negotiation with Javanese and Malay identity seems to form a small portion in the formation of Malaysian multicultural society. This is due to their status as Malays; and their identification with Malay entity is all that matters. Furthermore, television programmes that they watch are not the kinds of content of ethnic media which address their sense of ethnicity. They mostly watch Malay and Indonesian programmes that do not practically depict the life and culture of Javanese communities. In contrast, Chinese and Indians in the country have their own ethnic media that are produced to fit their respective cultural languages and preferences. Clearly, the negotiation of identity and television discourses among these two ethnic groups draws more attention and interests into research.

Despite that tendency, I would like to argue that Malay identity is complex and its conceptualisation produces "inclusive culture" as it uses Islam as one of the determinants for membership (Reid, 2001). Therefore, researchers (especially in the field of Malaysian studies) should consider the conceptualisation of Malay identity from the perspectives of various cultural or religious communities that make up today's Malay society. My study suggests that the sense of "othering" exists among the Javanese communities in which they compare their religious and political identity with other Malays of Indonesian origin. Further researches may need to focus on how Islamic programming and political discourses on Islam construct audience grouping. In

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this way, instead of examining the consumption of television in general as I did, future researchers can select specific genres or programmes to be discussed with the respondents and analyse their interpretation of the content from such genres or programmes in relation to their construction of identity. Last but not least, as this qualitative research findings only represent the television watching and the construction of hybrid identity in the Javanese community under study, future research may consider the objective perspective of the identity formation from wider populations of Malaysian Javanese.

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