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**DISCOURSES OF THE NON-VEILED:
EXPLORING DISCURSIVE IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTIONS AMONG MALAYSIAN MUSLIM
WOMEN WHO DO NOT VEIL**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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List of Abbreviations

FPDA	Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis
NVMW	Non-veiled Muslim woman/women
VMW	Veiled Muslim woman/women
GEMAR	<i>Gerakan Menutup Aurat</i>
ICF	Informed consent form
CfP	Call for participants
RO	Research objective
RQ	Research question

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

*This thesis is dedicated to my mother Juriah Oleh,
and all the brave women who defy the odds.*

*As well my father, Dr. Abdul Fatah Amir,
and all the men who are with them every step of the way.*

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Lastly, I extend my gratitude to God. We humans plan and map our way in life, but “...God is the best of planners” (The Holy Quran, Surah al-Anfal: Chapter 8, Verse 30). I had dreamt, envisioned, planned and worked my way to be on this journey since I was a young girl, and with Your blessings and guidance, I thank You for letting me see the end of the way.

Alhamdulillah.

DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted elsewhere for another degree or other qualification.

Farhana Binti Abdul Fatah

ABSTRACT

The veil – most commonly known as *hijab* – is considered as the primary visible marker of a Muslim woman's religious identity and symbol of piety. Thus, its absence not only brings about feelings of conflict for the non-wearer (Izharuddin, 2018), but moreover invites unfair characterisation of their morals and values, as well as discrimination (Fadil, 2011; Othman, 2006; Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli, & Howarth, 2012). In light of this, this study seeks to examine the ways Muslim women construct their identities (with particular focus on religious identity) as women who do not wear the veil. It also investigates the challenges these women face as consequence of their non-veiling.

Adopting a social constructionist paradigm, this study draws on almost 20 hours of in-depth interviews with non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia as its primary data. It brings together interdisciplinary perspectives to analyse identity, by drawing upon Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles for identity, Baxter's (2003) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA), and intersectionality. To supplement the analysis of the interview data, this study scrutinises a range of selected materials from contemporary media in Malaysia to explore Muslim women's representation with regards to the veil and non-veiling.

Findings reveal that in the absence of the hijab, the women who participated in this study constructed themselves as being in alignment, or in contrast with, and/or in ambivalence to their respective ideal of a Muslim woman. In talking about their lives and experiences as non-veiled Muslim women, they 'talk into being' their religious and gender identities, which include (but are not limited to) ethnic and institutional identities. As the women live in Muslim-majority Malaysia that has been experiencing Islamisation since the past four decades, they also divulge stories of personal struggle and challenges they face in various domains of life such as in the family, institutions, and communities.

Keywords: *language, discourse, identity, religion, gender, Muslim women, hijab*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale

No other form of dress has attracted so much attention, criticism, and contestation as the veil (Hochel, 2013). As a practice of covering most commonly associated with the Islamic faith, the veil has been regarded as an important signifier of a Muslim woman's identity (Ahmed, 1992; Barlas, 2002; Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012). The poster below (Figure 1.1), adopted as part of a pro-veiling campaign in Malaysia launched in 2012 by the non-governmental organisation GEMAR (*Gerakan Menutup Aurat*¹) attests to this notion:

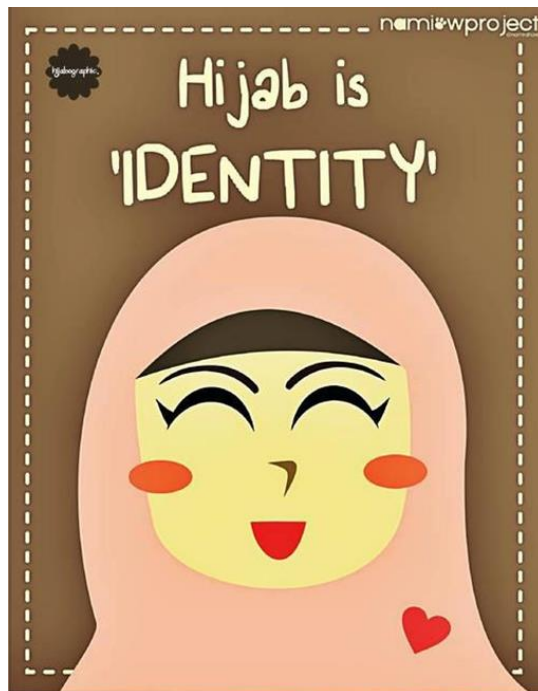


Figure 1.1: Hijab is 'identity' poster (GEMAR Malaysia, 2013)

Although it has been criticised by some as a symbol of women's oppression and subordination, to others, the veil is considered an important symbol of the rejection of western imperialism and influence (Abu-Lughod, 2002; El Guindi, 1999; Mernissi, 1991). However, just as different communities in varying socio-political and historical contexts regard the veil in multifarious and competing ways, the word 'veil' itself

¹ *Gerakan Menutup Aurat*: Translated into English as 'Movement to cover the *aurat*', this campaign encourages Muslim women to wear the hijab. 'Aurat' is from an Arabic word which is used in Islam to denote the parts of the body that women and men are supposed to cover with clothing. For men, their *aurat* is from the belly-button to their knees, and for women, it is from the top of the head all the way down to the feet (basically, only hands and face are allowed to be shown).

denotes numerous forms of dress associated with the Islamic faith. It is imperative, therefore, to clarify that in this research, the term ‘veil’ is used to refer to the Islamic headscarf that covers the entirety of the woman’s head, and hair, and which can extend down to cover her bosom. It does not refer to the more politically-contested, and religiously-debated *burqa*, *niqab*, and *chador*. In this regard, this definition of the veil applied in this research also corresponds to the *hijab*. As such, the terms veil, hijab, as well as the more generic headscarf are used interchangeably. The terminological repertoire also include *tudung* (cover), the Malay word that is used to refer to the Islamic headscarf. The reason for this variety in terminology is simply to acknowledge the diversity of terms that have been used in the literature. Note that I also use ‘non-veiled’ throughout this thesis instead of the phrases ‘unveiled’ (see Izharuddin, 2018) or ‘dehijabbed’ (see AR, 2019; Ellis-Petersen, 2019) as the latter two denote women who have previously veiled but have chosen to stop veiling. However, when discussing the respective works, I employ these two terms accordingly.

A large body of research on the veil has predominantly focused on areas that allude to the veil’s oppressive and repressive nature, as well as its political, cultural, religious, and social significance (Hammami, 1990; Khalid & O’Connor, 2011; Othman, 2006; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Winter, 2006). Though arguably painted with the conventionally dominant discourses from the West and feminists who portray the veil as a symbol of female oppression and a marker of the backward nature of Muslim societies (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Droogsmma, 2007; El Guindi, 1999; Hoodfar, 1992), an increasing number of scholarly works have been conducted to challenge these established thoughts by exploring the meanings ascribed to the veil by Muslim women who wear and do not wear it (see Fadil, 2011; Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018; Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

This research aims to contribute to this latter burgeoning field. As iterated in the beginning of this chapter, the practice of veiling has become synonymous with Muslim women. However, this study goes beyond examining the veil and its connection to a Muslim woman’s identity. If the hijab is commonly considered as the primary visible marker of a Muslim woman’s identity, what does this mean for Muslim women who have chosen not to veil?

1.2 Problem statement

A Muslim woman's action of refusing to veil can be regarded by other Muslims as being an act against God (Izharuddin, 2018; Marshall, 2005; Othman, 2006). This is because most Muslims believe that the hijab is religiously ordained by God, typically referring to two particular *ayah/ayat* (verses) in two separate *surah* (chapters) in the Quran, namely Surah *al-Nur* (verses 30-31) and Surah *al-Ahzab* (verse 59) (Hoodfar, 1992):

i. *Surah An-Nur* – ‘The Light’ (Verses 30-31)

Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do (30). And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed (31).

(Translation taken from *Sahih International*)

ii. *Surah Al-Azhab* – ‘The Combined Forces’ (Verse 59)

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful (59).

(Translation taken from *Sahih International*)

Therefore, following the verses above, the consensus among orthodox Muslim communities is that Muslim women are commanded by God to wear the hijab to guard their modesty. The act of ‘hypocrisy’ is thus insinuated in this regard: how does one call oneself Muslim – someone who believes in God – when one is actually disobeying God by not wearing the hijab? Moreover, some Muslim communities view women

who do not veil as Westernised secularists who bluntly refuse affiliation with Islam (Fadil, 2011; Hammami, 1990).

This pejorative perception that shrouds non-veiled Muslim women is even commonly regurgitated and redistributed in the form of popular sayings and imagery. One of the most well-known is the ‘unwrapped candy analogy,’ (Figure 1.2 is one example) in which veiled women are likened to confectionery that will not become dirty when thrown onto the ground, unlike non-veiled women who would surely become so, as they are ‘unwrapped’ (AR, 2014; Rahall, 2018). Muslim women on the internet, both veiled and non-veiled, have spoken out against such an analogy as it objectifies and disrespects women, and such a derogatory saying is something that cannot be traced back to the Quran (see Eltahawy, 2009; Sara, 2013). Other variations of similar pejorative sentiments can also be found, for instance, involving the likening of veiled women to ‘sealed letters’ and ‘precious pearls’ (see Khalife, 2019 for an overview of several of these sayings). Most recently, a social media posting on the Facebook group FITNA (Feminist Islamic Troublemakers of North America) alerted members of its online community to a new analogy that depicts non-veiled women as a turtle that has been left vulnerable and unprotected without its shell (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.2: An example of the ‘unwrapped vs. wrapped candy’ analogy (Nikolai, 2014)



Figure 1.3: The latest in demeaning analogies directed at non-veiled Muslim women (FITNA, 2019)

In Malaysia, Muslim women who do not veil are not exempted from such negative perceptions. On 13th April 2019, a forum titled *Malay Women & Dehijabbing* took place in conjunction with the launch of *Unveiling Choice*, a book written by women's rights activist Maryam Lee (Figure 1.4). The focus of the book and the discussion revolved around the experiences of the author and the guest speakers Dian Sofia and Mohani Niza (both of whom are involved in activism and media) as women who made to journey from being veiled to eventually removing the headscarf. Although the forum and book were lauded for opening the door to a very-much needed conversation in Malaysia, their controversial and dissenting nature resulted in backlash by some members of the public who expressed concern that providing a space for women to articulate their experiences of removing the hijab could arguably be detrimental to women's faith (AR, 2019). Unsurprisingly, religious authorities were informed and the three women involved were subsequently investigated (AR, 2019; Choong, 2019; Ellis-Petersen, 2019).



Figure 1.4: Poster for Malay Women & Dehijabbing forum and book launch (Niza, 2019)

Non-veiled women in Malaysia are also colloquially known as ‘free hair’ women (AR, 2014; Izharuddin, 2016, 2018). The label is considered derogatory, and brings with it various misconceptions about non-veiled Muslim women, which essentially paint them as morally-deprived and ‘easy’ targets for men (AR, 2014). In 2019, politician Dyana Sofya condemned a Muslim preacher who claimed, in front of an audience in a lecture, that Muslim women who do not cover deserve to be sexually violated (Cheah, 2019).

Therefore, in this research, I attempt to explore how non-veiled Muslim women discursively construct and negotiate their identities (with a particular focus on religion) that are seen to be contradictory and conflicting with their beliefs in Islam and God (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Although religion is emphasised, I do not undermine the presence and relevance of gender and other identities. Indeed, the analyses demonstrate that in talking about themselves as Muslim women, the participants also simultaneously ‘talk into being’ their gender and ethnic identities, among others. Considering the prevalent mischaracterisation of non-veiled Muslim women among Muslim communities, I also attempt to investigate the challenges that these women face and the ways they make sense of and navigate through them. These are the primary research objectives of this study.

1.3 Significance of study

By conducting this research, I intend to contribute to the existing literature on the veil and Muslim women, but also to the presently dearth body of research on non-veiled

Muslim women. It was previously stated that an increasing number of research studies – particularly those which challenge conventional Western wisdom on the topic – have examined the phenomenon of Islamic veiling. However, the spotlight has mostly been on the lived experiences of veiled women and their motivations to veil (Fadil, 2011; Izharuddin, 2016, 2018). Thus, research that focuses on non-veiled Muslim women remain scarce. Izharuddin (2018) attributed this scarcity to the importance that has been placed on research that addresses the rise of Islamisation in global contexts, and the significance of the practice of veiling and the women who veil under such circumstances. Furthermore, in those cases where the voices of the non-veiled have been documented, they are usually related to the choice of not wearing the veil and very little on actual identity negotiation and/or construction (see Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Hochel, 2013).

In the field of language and identity research, religion has been an aspect that has been largely ignored (Sunderland, 2007). Indeed, according to Darquennes and Vandebussche (2011), analysing ‘language and religion’ is a relatively new field in sociolinguistics. However, in recent years, research that focuses on religion, language, and identity is increasingly receiving much-needed academic interest (see Chew, 2014; Skerrett, 2017), though it arguably has yet to achieve the level of robustness experienced in other areas, for instance, research on language and gender, as well as on ethnicity. Presently, there are two compilations on language and religious identity research, both edited by Allyson Jule (2005, 2007). Therefore, equally importantly, this study answers the call to enrich the currently scant offerings (Jule, 2007a; Sunderland, 2007).

Specifically, I examine non-veiled Muslim women in the context of Malaysia. I have selected Malaysia as a research context not only because I am Malaysian, but because the country is an under-researched site for issues regarding the Islamic veil (Hochel, 2013), as most studies on the (non)veiled have taken place in Western and Middle-Eastern countries (Alvi, Hoodfar, & McDonough, 2003; Droogsma, 2007; Haddad, 2007; Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

1.4 Research setting: Islamising Malaysia

Located in the heart of South-East Asia, Malaysia is a young nation initially established in 1963. It is the result of the union of four distinct and newly-independent

British colonies, namely Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo (now Sabah). However, a long history of racial conflict and unease aggravated by multiple factors, which include divisive colonial policies (A. B., 2001; Aziz & Shamsul, 2004) that led to economic and social disparities among the races (particularly between the ethnic Malays and the Chinese), eventually culminated in Singapore's secession from the union in 1965 (Singapore Government, 2014) and to the bloody racial riots tragedy of May 13, 1969 between the Malays and the Chinese (Vengadesan, 2008).

Since 1965, modern-day Malaysia now comprises of two regions: West Malaysia (also known as the Peninsular) and East Malaysia (also known as Malaysian Borneo):



Figure 1.5: Map of Malaysia (Mat Noor, 2016)

The country is ethnically diverse as it is home to over 100 ethnicities. However, according to the latest census provided by the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2011), the *Bumiputera* (literally ‘princes of the soil’), which comprises the Malays and the *Orang Asli* (indigenous persons) of Peninsular Malaysia, and the indigenous peoples of the Malaysian Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, constitute the majority at 67.4% of the population. According to the same census, Chinese and Indians make up 24.6% and 7.3%, respectively, and *lain-lain* (others) make up the remaining 0.7%. Islam is the majority religion at 61.3%, but there are sizeable adherents of Buddhism,

Christianity, Hinduism, and other religions as well (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). Malaysia's diversity is embodied by its catchy tourism tagline, *Malaysia Truly Asia*, and the country for many years have been lauded for being an exemplary model of religious moderation and ethnic harmony (Ong, 2017).

However, Malaysia's ongoing Islamisation and nationalisation have threatened to destroy this reputation for moderation (Abdul Hamid & Ismail, 2014). Islamisation rigorously began with the Mahathir era in the 1980s, and over the years it has gained more footing and more visibility in the public context, not only in terms of increased Islamic-oriented policies, but also in the adoption of the Islamic dress by Malay Muslim women (Hochel, 2013; Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006). Indeed, non-veiled women make up a significant portion of the minority among Muslim communities within Malaysia and many other predominantly Muslim societies (Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018; Mouser, 2007).

In Malaysia, the issue of the Islamic head dress is multi-faceted. Not only is donning the hijab considered an assertion of a woman's religious identity, but it is also considered as her reclamation of her cultural and ethnic (usually Malay) identity, which was arguably 'lost' during the colonisation era (Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Othman, 2006). Furthermore, the issue of ethnicity, which is so closely intertwined with religion in Malaysia, comes into play. According to Nagata (2011) and Hochel (2013), as defined in the country's Federal Constitution, being Malay is equivalent to being Muslim. Indeed, Anne Larsen noted that "virtually all Malays are Muslims, and in local speech being a Malay and becoming a Malay are synonymous with being a Muslim and converting to Islam" (Larsen, 1996, as cited in Mouser, 2007, p. 166). Such a legal definition creates intricacies that are of interest to this study, and is again, closely related to the themes of 'Islamising Malaysia,' and reclaiming national identity.

Thus, against such a backdrop, the decision to don a veil or not can signify a woman's (non)identification with not only Islam, but also with a Malay identity, which can in turn possibly create ethnic identity friction if she does not come from a Malay ethnic background. And to make matters more complicated, as Malays are given constitutional privileges over other ethnicities (Kua, 2012), identifying oneself as

Malay can bring various social, economic and political advantages (Nagata, 2011) such as receiving government-funded scholarships and housing loans.

1.5 Research objectives and research questions

1.5.1 Research Objectives (RO)

This study has two main objectives:

RO1: To examine the ways non-veiled Muslim women construct their religious and gender identities (vis-à-vis other emergent identities)

RO2: To explore the challenges and struggles that these women face due to their non-veiling.

1.5.2 Research Questions (RQ)

In order to address these research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: In what ways do selected contemporary print and broadcast media in Malaysia portray and present Malaysian Muslim women with regards to the tudung?

RQ2: What kind(s) of identities emerge from the discourses of non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women?

RQ2a: How do these women construct and/or negotiate their religious identities vis-à-vis other emergent identities?

RQ3: What kinds of challenges do these women face as a result of their decisions not to wear the veil?

RQ3a: How do they construct and negotiate their identities as they make sense of these challenges and struggles in their discourse?

1.6 Personal research motivation

The primary motivation that drives this research comes from my own wealth of personal experience as a Malaysian Muslim woman who does not veil. I have a complicated history with veiling. For one, I grew up in a Muslim family that stressed the importance of good deeds and modesty in all corners of life, not just in appearance. Having been raised in Malaysian Borneo, a region well-known and admired by Malaysians for its respect and tolerance of religious and racial diversity, meant that I was never in an environment that pressured me to veil. However, this all changed when my family moved to Peninsular Malaysia, where issues regarding religion and race are often in contestation. It was within the walls of my high school classroom that I learned that the social norm is to veil, and to do otherwise would invite

unnecessary calls of moral judgment on my character. Eager to please my religiously-inclined peers (and to avoid formal reprimand from the school²), I began wearing the hijab. However, upon returning to my own hometown, I stopped wearing it. Years later, as an undergraduate student in the Peninsular, I attempted to wear the hijab again, convinced that I had received the ‘call’ to do so. I was showered with praises, and even complimented with gifts, with some saying that I had been bestowed with *nur* – God’s guiding light. However, throughout the following months, I experienced various little incidences that culminated in a powerful and moving epiphany. As a result, I made the difficult decision to stop wearing the hijab. Though my parents and brothers respected my decision, others in my family, as well as some of my friends and acquaintances, offered me nothing but snide remarks laced with hurtful criticism.

Thus, the experience of suffering reproach for not wearing the veil, as well as witnessing the emergence of pro-veiling public campaigns in recent years, have resulted in my personal interest to investigate how my sisters in faith deal with not veiling in a majority Islamic setting. Nonetheless, I stress that this study is not intended as a polemic against veiling and veiled Muslim women. As I condemn the institutionalised compulsion of veiling and conversely, I also object to forced non-veiling that are enforced in certain nation states. It is also not the intention of this thesis to encourage divisiveness between veiled and non-veiled Muslim women, sisters of the same faith who have been subject to discrimination in their respective contexts. Rather, through this research, I hope to be able to offer a safe space in which non-veiled women can share their experiences and feelings. Thus, the findings of this research will hopefully become a catalyst to problematise some of the dominant misperceptions that affect non-veiled Muslim women. Indeed, in light of increasingly critical and dissenting voices that advocate for a woman’s right to choose whether to wear the hijab or not (attested by the dehijabbing forum), my research comes at a timely moment.

² In 2006, the then Minister of Education in Malaysia Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, issued a statement clarifying that schools could not force female Muslim students to wear the hijab. His statement came as a response to the expulsion of two female students from their netball squad as a result of their not veiling (Malaysia Kini, 2006). However, it is arguable whether schools actually heeded his statement.

1.7 Thesis outline

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter is Chapter 2, wherein I discuss relevant literature and theories that have informed identity scholarship, describe the identity types selected for analytical focus, and introduce the Islamic veil before introducing pertinent issues that make up the focus of this thesis.

Chapter 3 describes and explains in detail, the research paradigm, the conceptual framework devised to guide the direction of this study, as well as the selected research methods and procedures undertaken to collect and examine the primary and supplementary data.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constitute the analytical chapters. Here, I present the findings collected from media data and the interviews, and I examine them to answer the respective research questions.

The analytical chapters are followed by Chapter 7, in which I critically discuss the findings further in consideration with the literature and link their implications to wider debates concerning language, identity, religion, (non)veiling, and Muslim women in Malaysia.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I summarise this thesis, highlighting the contributions this study makes to academia and practice, and also address the limitations of the research. Moreover, I recommend several avenues for future research, and conclude the thesis with some final remarks.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses several interrelated themes. Section 2.2 explains the complex matter of identity through a discussion of theoretical perspectives. This is followed by Section 2.3, which describes the identity types that are focused on in this study, and reviews the literature on language and religious identity construction. Section 2.4 then examines the Islamic veil in relation to its origins in scripture, culture, history, and following this, its appearance in contemporary debates surrounding Muslim women is explored. Section 2.5 introduces and describes the context of Islamising Malaysia with regards to issues of veiling and non-veiling. Here, the link between the veil and identity particularly as it relates to the Malaysian context, is established. Section 2.6 concludes the chapter.

2.2 Making a case for identity

Identity originates from the Latin word *idem*, meaning ‘same’ (Gleason, 1983), and the concept itself typically refers to the notion of sameness (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a; Fearon, 1999). Sameness refers to an integral component to the essentialist understanding of identity, which is unpacked in the subsection that follows.

Erik Erikson’s works in the 1950s and 1960s (see Erikson, 1968) have been credited with popularising the usage of the term *identity* in academic and public discourses (Fearon, 1999; Gleason, 1983). However, the permeation and infiltration of the term in specialised and vernacular vocabulary has arguably led to it being laden with a multiplicity of meanings that consequently make it problematic. Gleason (1983) and Brubaker and Cooper (2000) are two of the most widely-cited works that problematise the concept of identity. For instance, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) lamented that ‘identity’ has reifying implications that have not been adequately addressed through the constructivist (soft) understanding of identity; thus, the authors proposed alternative terms such as identification, self-understanding, and commonality, which they deemed to be more suited for analytical pursuits than the ambiguous identity (see Brubaker & Cooper (2000) for detailed explanations).

It is not the intention of this thesis to offer a full-fledged semantic, historical, and philosophical account of identity and the scholarship surrounding it. Indeed, unpacking the concept of identity is a gargantuan endeavour. Instead, the task here

focuses on discussing identity through the lenses of two of the most influential perspectives that have informed identity scholarship – essentialism and social constructionism. Following from the arguments presented, the conceptualisation of identity that this research subscribes too is stated.

Before proceeding, I acknowledge that much of the prevailing contemporary scholarship on selfhood and identity is entrenched in the Western, i.e., European, particularly Judeo-Christian, tradition. Since this research examines non-Western and non-Judeo-Christian subject and context, specifically, one that investigates the subject of (non)veiling in a Muslim-majority context, it may seem that applying ideas from such a tradition is unjustified. However, utilising contemporary identity scholarship to inform this research is necessary, in part due to the lack of identity scholarship developed from Islamic perspectives.

2.2.1 The self in the Holy Quran

The causes for such paucity are unclear since the notion of the self can be found outlined in the Holy Quran. The concept of the self therein is referred to as *nafs* (Ahmed, 2010; Aydin, 2010; Dastagir, 1999; Smith, 1979), which is derived etymologically from the word *nafas* (breathing) (Dastagir, 1999). Ahmed (2010) argued that *nafs* in the Holy Quran also refers to the part in the human self that has lusts, desires, passions, and anger akin to the carnal soul.

There are three types of *nafs*: *nafs-ul-ammarah*, *nafs-ul-lawammah*, and *nafs-ul-mutmainnah* (Ahmed, 2010; Aydin, 2010; Dastagir, 1999). The first refers to the *nafs* that ‘command evil’, that describes the person desiring and committing sin without any sense of remorse. However, once the person experiences remorse and performs self-reproach for committing sins, it is then referred to as the *nafs-ul-lawammah* (blaming soul). In this state, the person struggles between fighting off their desires and submitting to them. However, a person reaches the third *nafs* (contented soul) once he/she has successfully fought off these desires and are in a state of contentment, as well as seeking to strive to perform only those deeds that please God (Ahmed, 2010; Dastagir, 1999).

As indicated, much of the discussion revolving around the Quranic perspective of the self is philosophical (and theological) in nature, which does not provide this project with the substantial theoretical, methodological, and analytical scaffolding needed to

conduct identity research. Thus, I turn to two broad perspectives of identity that emerged from the Western tradition: essentialism, and social constructionism.

2.2.2 Essentialism and identity

The essentialist perspective informed much of the earlier scholarship on identity. However, the purpose of this section is not to offer a detailed account of essentialist theories on identity. Instead, it focuses on providing a broad overview of essentialism as it applies to identity.

As a philosophy, essentialism expresses the idea that things or people are what they are due to the nature and essence that they possess (Fuchs, 2009). In the context of identity, essentialism argues that individuals possess certain traits that are inherent, and thus discoverable, within them or “properties that are essential” (Fearon, 1999, p. 12) to their being (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Fuchs, 2009). The latter is a view mirrored by Lock and Strong (2010), who argued that the essentialist claim of inherent and discoverable traits constitutes one of the primary goals of psychology, which is to “uncover the essential characteristics of people” (p. 7). Moreover, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) posited that the essentialist viewpoint on identity concerns ‘hard’ and ‘strong’ conceptions of identity that place emphasis on “sameness over time across persons” (p.10). All these claims therefore point to the overarching essentialist argument that the identity of a person is not only intrinsic but that it is fixed, unchanging and able to stand the flow and test of time, which consequently affords the belief that identity is thus discoverable.

The pursuit to uncover identity can be seen in the work of psychoanalysts such as Freud and Lacan, which attempted to explore the inner workings of the mind in the construction of selfhood by doing so against the backdrop of socialisation and social identity. The former highlights the prominence of the psyche in the pursuit to understand people’s acquisition of normative behaviour, whereas the latter is interested in the ways subjects recognise, identify, and integrate themselves into social life through the acquisition of the *Symbolic Order* (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

According to Willett, Anderson, and Meyers (2016), essentialism informed earlier feminist perspectives of the self by emphasising the biological binaries between men and women that endow each with certain inherent characters and traits. Alcoff (1988) argued, “where man's behaviour is underdetermined, free to construct its own future

along the course of its rational choice, woman's nature has overdetermined her behaviours, the limits of her intellectual endeavours, and the inevitabilities of her emotional journey through life” (p. 406). Thus, men and masculinity are endowed with the mind, rationality and reason, whereas women and femininity are endowed with the body, and emotion” (Irigaray, 1985; Lloyd, 1992, as cited in Willett, et al., 2016).

The notion of sameness and difference therefore permeates much of essentialist understandings of identity. Vanheule and Verhaeghe (2009) posited that there is a “fundamental assumption that identity implies a categorical membership of a group” (p. 391), which points to the pertinence of social categories – such as gender, ethnicity, and religion, among others – as the groups to which individuals identify. Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2005) argued that social grouping occurs through processes that not only invent and accentuate similarities between members but also downplay the differences between them. This allusion to the collective, therefore, is what makes the understanding of identity through the lenses of sameness and difference helpful in mobilising political projects and social movements (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Although influential in the foundational years of identity scholarship, the essentialist idea has been challenged in more contemporary identity research in the social sciences (Berg-Sørensen, Holtug, & Lippert-Rasmussen, 2010; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Willett et al., 2016). Instead of a fixed, whole, seamless, and readily discoverable entity, the idea that identity is fluid, fragmented, multiple, and constructed through discourse has gained traction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This particular notion of identity can be subsumed under the larger umbrella of social constructionism, which underscores the importance of discourse and interaction in the construction of the self.

2.2.3 Social constructionism and identity

Social constructionism views knowledge as constructed rather than reproduced (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991; Burr, 2003). Although the terms ‘constructionism’ and ‘constructivism’ have been used interchangeably (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2003; Charmaz, 2008; Potter, 1996), I use the former term, with the reasoning that this research places emphasis on the subjective and socially-constructed knowledge, which is contingent on the individual and the social world they engage in. Moreover, Young and Collin (2004) argued the following regarding

constructivism and constructionism, “The former focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes while the latter emphasises that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction” (p. 375).

Language, discourse and interaction are central elements in social constructionism because they provide the resources through which experiences and knowledge can be constructed (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2003; Young & Collin, 2004). As was asserted previously, discourse is a central element to the understanding of identity, as theorists believe that it is through language – and by the sharing of cultural and historical symbols – that identities are shaped (Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Lawler, 2014). Narrative identity (Lawler, 2014; Mishler, 2009) is one such approach with which discursively-constructed identities can be examined.

According to Lawler (2014), identities are constructed through narratives with the help of memory, history, and shared cultural symbols. Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) posited that identity is a product of both linguistic and other semiotic practices, which are social and cultural and not innate. Those who view identity in this manner place stronger emphasis on identity as being produced through discourse and whose production is influenced by the roles that the interlocutors play. Indeed, the construction of narrative identity is reliant upon both the social world and social relations because it involves the inevitable borrowing of elements from stories and experiences of others in order to tell stories about oneself.

As there can be multiple and varying versions of the stories we tell, multiple variations of our selves can also be created. Lawler (2014) attributed this to a continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of our stories and that of others, which do not allow for a fixed or a concrete version of a particular story (or identity). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) put it more bluntly stating that “narration involves the ‘doing’ of identity, and because we can tell different stories, we can construct different versions of the self” (p. 138). This construction of multiple versions of the self ties in to Butler's (1990, 1999) theory of performativity, which also underscores the ‘doing’ of identity, in particular gender (see Section 2.3.2 for further explanation).

Thus far, two contrasting conceptualisations of identity have been presented. Simply put, the essentialist notion of identity considers identity to be an innate, fixed, coherent and discoverable entity whereas the social constructionist notion views identity as fluid, fragmented, multiple, and produced through discourse. The next section elaborates on the selection and justification of the notion of identity to which this research subscribes.

2.2.4 Identity: the essential or the constructed?

Considering the arguments presented in the preceding sections, this research thus subscribes to a social constructionist approach to identity. Thus, identity is considered as multiple, fluid, and fragmented, and is constructed in and through discourses. However, this study does not disregard that certain identities can be considered as important to an individual's sense of self. This is an especially pertinent point to highlight as this thesis places emphasis on religious identity, especially that of Muslims.

To some, their religious identity is a core part of their sense of selfhood. A study by Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) on essentialist beliefs of social categorisation formed two dimensions that represented the degrees to which participants understood the categories as natural kinds, and as entities that are not only coherent but also as possessing inhering cores. Utilising these dimensions in their study of the essentialism of religious identities, Toosi and Ambady (2011) found that Islam, alongside Judaism and Hinduism, were “considered to be more deeply held, natural, and unchangeable than other religious identities but also to be more cohesive, more important to members, more united by common goals and a common fate, and so on” (p. 22). Therefore, when I assert that I view (religious) identity as ‘essential’, it is not that I view it as something innate, fixed, unchangeable, and discoverable, but that I consider it to be “an aspect of ourselves that is in some way important to us” (Fearon, 1999, p. 20).

Toosi and Ambady's (2011) study not only highlights the perceived core and fixity of the Muslim identity by Muslims but it also underscores the notion that religion and the making of a religious identity is inescapably linked to the social (Flanagan, 2004). More precisely, the beliefs, lives and experiences of people of faith cannot be explored without taking into account their interactions with others within their historical and

culturally situated contexts, and how these are shaped (or manipulated) and represented through the use of language.

This is the reason a social constructionist approach that underscores the importance of language and discourses as the cultural resources that package our concepts of knowledge and understanding of the world (Burr, 2003), is an exceptionally relevant one in the exploration of identity. Additionally, I consider that the grounding of this research in a social constructionist approach helps address the perceived limitation of this study caused by the lack of theoretical work based on Islamic scholarship.

Further justification as well as issues concerning social constructionism are provided and addressed in Chapter 3. Complementary notions including Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) principles for the study of identity, Baxter's (2003) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA), and intersectionality, which together constitute the conceptual framework used here, are also introduced in the next chapter.

The varying conceptualisations of identity have been introduced and I now proceed to describe the different types of identity deemed as most relevant to inform this research – religious, gender, and ethnicity.

2.3 Types of identity

In this research, I have selected particular identity types as analytical anchor points that help to direct the focus of analysis (Christensen & Jensen, 2012; Staunæs, 2003; Phoenix, 2006). These anchor points include religious, gender, and ethnic identities. In discussing the pertinence of religion in studies of gender, language, and identity, Sunderland (2007) underscored the salience of the intersections of religious, gender, and ethnic identities. Although the veil is regarded as an important signifier of affiliation with the Islamic faith (Othman, 2006; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Wagner et al., 2012), discussions concerning the veil cannot exclude other types of identities such as gender and ethnicity. The issue of gender is inevitable because the wearing of the headscarf concerns the identification and affiliation with a religious faith, as applicable to female adherents of Islam. Moreover, cultures and communities imbue the headscarf with values and moralities that inevitably imply associations with certain gendered roles and assumptions for women who wear or do not wear it. Additionally, as the research context is set in Malaysia, ethnic identity is a pertinent matter that cannot be ignored, as issues concerning Islam are almost always related to

the Malay people, the majority-Muslim populace of the country. However, since this research also includes participants of varying ethnic backgrounds, it will be interesting to see the ways articulations of their ethnic selves become tied to (non)veiling. Nonetheless, I am not claiming that other social categories are insignificant or devoid of any analytical value (Crenshaw, 1991).

For instance, in contemporary discussions of the veil and Muslim women in Malaysia, class identity has been a notable feature (alongside gender and ethnic identities) (see Hassim, Nayan, & Ishak, 2015; Izharuddin, 2018; Ong, 1990). Ong (1990) argued that at the start of Malaysia's Islamisation in the 1970s and 1980s, "whereas working-class women tended to operate as agents in their own self-interests, middle-class women were significantly swayed by the spirit of Islamic resurgence" (p. 269). As such, the veil became a symbol that demarcated educated and enlightened middle-class women from their working-class factory counterparts (Ong, 1990). In more recent years and in light of the commodification of the veil as a fashion item among Muslims worldwide (Nistor, 2017) and in Malaysia (Khalid & O'Connor, 2011), the veil has also been seen as a marker of social mobility and class (Hassim, 2014a; Hassim et al., 2015). A 2019 Vice article titled *Forget Supreme, Hijab Is the New Symbol of Wealth and Status in Malaysia* highlights the emergence of the hijab as a valuable item for the fashion-forward cosmopolitan Muslim woman (Lee, 2019). However, such developments have been criticised by some, such as prominent social commentator Dian Sofia who argued that not only are premium hijabs scams, but the industry itself is classist and sexist (Lee, 2019.).

Nonetheless, as 'class difference' is not a distinguishing feature among the women I recruited, (at least as indicated by their demographic attributes), I made the conscious decision not to include class as an analytical focus (see Chapter 3: Section 3.4b for more details on research participants).

2.3.1 Religious identity

One of the primary contributions this study offers is in addressing and redressing the paucity of scholarship involving religion in the areas of language, gender, and identity (Jule, 2005, 2007b; Sunderland, 2007). The emergence of religious identity in sociological scholarship can be traced back to Mol (1976), who was the first to introduce the term *religious identity* to refer "to the identification of an individual with

a religious tradition” (Moulin, 2013, p. 4). Whereas Mol defined it in more individualistic terms, Fox (2013) pointed to religious identity as more of a shared entity, referring to it as “belonging based on beliefs held in common” (p. 36). Roberts and Yamane (2012) viewed religion along the same lines, describing an individual’s religious identity “as the religious group with which a person identifies (including behaviourally and in terms of attitudes)” (p. 112).

Seul (1999), who later expanded on Mol’s work claimed that religion provides a very strong and secure anchor to an individual’s identity as “religions answer the individual’s need for a sense of locatedness – socially, sometimes geographically, cosmologically, temporally, and metaphysically” (p. 558). That is why individuals (especially those with religious convictions) often turn to divinity, as they may see it as a stabilising agent to counter constantly changing social meanings, which could disrupt their sense of self-reference (Mol, 1976).

The study of the influence of religion on identity formation has its roots in psychology, where Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychological development contends that religion plays a pivotal role in the development of identity (Moulin, 2013; Visser-Vogel, Westerink, De Kock, Barnard, & Bakker, 2012). Marcia (as cited by Moulin, 2013) operationalised Erikson’s theory into testable frameworks, however his model has been criticised for not taking into account Erikson’s own view that cultural and contextual factors are integral in the development of identity (Schachter, 2005; Faircloth, 2012; Flum & Kaplan, 2012, as cited in Moulin, 2013).

Consequently, this research also forgoes the Eriksonian-Marcian framework of identity which views religion as inherent (although, as asserted earlier, I do not deny that religion can be considered important to a person’s sense of self). In conducting this research, I also refrain from offering substantive or functional definitions of religion, as suggested by scholars of religion such as Melford Spiro (n.d., as cited in Schilbrack, 2012). This is because a) I am not studying religion per se; and since b) I am examining how my participants discursively construct their ‘religion’, or particularly, their ‘religious identity’ (vis-à-vis other emergent identities).

Indeed, as Roberts and Yamane (2012) claimed, dynamics of change and development in the socio-economy and politics as well as in the social institutions of family and religion have centralised individuality in religious expressions by decentralising the

communal and collective sense of religious communities. Consequently, “religious identity went from being something ‘ascribed’ – a characteristic someone is born with – to being ‘achieved’ – something a person earns or chooses” (Roberts & Yamane, 2012, p. 115). Although this research does not have the ambitious aim to explore how religious identity is ‘achieved,’ (this denotes a state of finality that I believe identities cannot be), it focuses on how it is ‘constructed’, looking at how the women of my research make sense of and articulate their religiosity through their discourses (Jule, 2007a). Thus, to define what ‘religion’ is for them would be counterproductive to the purposes of this research.

In support of this, Meer (2010) also argued for a sociological perspective of a Muslim identity, distanced from a theological perspective that is bounded in scripture. The author claimed this to be “a less exclusive, and more valid way of operationalising Muslim identity because it includes opportunities for self-definition” (Meer, 2010, p. 63) across various media and in both public and private contexts.

Employing such an understanding of religious identity is thus in alignment with the social constructionist and discursive approaches applied in this study. Previous studies on religious identity construction of Muslim women (see Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Zine, 2001) have also employed similar approaches, ones in which women were given the space to articulate what being Muslim women mean for themselves.

2.3.2 Gender identity

This research rejects the essentialist notions of gender that endow men and women with particular traits and characters, in favour of a social constructionist understanding of how gender is articulated. Butler's (1990, 1999) notion of performativity is one approach helpful for exploring how gender is socially constructed, and how this construction takes place through discourse and performance.

In one of her most influential theoretical works, Butler challenged the ontological presumptions of gender as internal and having essence, thus theorising gender as an ‘act’, the dramatisation of the body through ritualised public performance that constitutes the doing of identity (Butler, 1990; Loxley, 2010). Butler (1999) argued that the notion of a coherent and unified category of ‘women’ is unjustified, and the insistence to perceive ‘women’ as such had “effectively refused the multiplicity of

cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed” (p. 19).

In light of the call to acknowledge the constructions of multiple intersecting selves, Bell (1999) argued that the eminence placed upon performativity means that analysts must become more prudent and critical in their assumption of identities as fluid and constantly changing. The author argued, “Indeed, taking the temporal performative nature of identities as a theoretical premise means that more than ever, one needs to question how identities continue to be produced, embodied, and performed, effectively, passionately and with social and political consequence” (Bell, 1999, p. 2).

This ‘temporality’ underscores the notion that performances of gender do not crystallise over time, that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time” and “gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time” (Butler, 1999, p. 191; p. 22). Although performances of gender can and do appear to be unified and seamless, this is because hegemonic regulatory practices that govern what constitutes gender bring forth an internalisation of stylised acts, which, when continuously repeated, sustained and practised in individuals’ performances of gender, help to create an illusion of what is often mistakenly perceived as an “internal essence of gender” (Butler, 1999, p. xv).

But beyond biological characteristics, this research specifically challenges essentialist notions of gender as it pertains to the deeply-entrenched beliefs in majority Muslim communities that arguably equate a Muslim woman with one who wears the hijab. Or more radically put, I wish to challenge the belief that to be a (good) Muslim woman, the woman must wear the hijab. I argue that the *doing* of gender (and indeed religion) by Muslim women cannot be unfairly reduced to just the wearing of the hijab. Muslim communities worldwide are diverse, and so are the Muslim women in them. As such, there are a multiplicity of ways in which the gender identities of these women can be articulated or performed in their daily lives – with or without the hijab. Note that my positioning and self-reflexivity as a researcher is addressed in Chapter 3.

According to Jule (2005), language and discourse are important vessels through which the knowledge, experiences, and meanings, as well as the intersections of religion and gender can be examined. And in this research, they are a medium through which participants can articulate what the veil, and the absence of it may mean to them and

how they may see these as linked to their religious and/or gender identities. For instance, Read and Bartkowski (2001) revealed that women not only afford various meanings to the hijab, which either lead them to wear or not wear it, but that they also do so by considering gendered implications such as (un)equal treatment by men in their workplaces. Zwick and Chelariu (2006) on the other hand, illustrated how the hijab is mobilised in the processes of identity construction of Muslim men and women participating in an online matchmaking service. Specifically, some women mobilised the hijab's various symbolisms to *perform* certain identities which they utilised to promote their eligibility as spouses.

Thus far, it is evident that academic inquiry concerning the veil, gender, and religious identity need to be conducted with the understanding that the meanings afforded and the constructions of each are multiple and contested, and which can be examined through the use of language and discourse. The same considerations need to be taken when examining another type of identity pertinent to discussions concerning the veil – ethnic identity.

2.3.3 Ethnic identity

Race and ethnicity are two closely entangled concepts that often appear alongside one another in the literature. Nevertheless, the two concepts are generally delineated along claims of phenotypically (hence, biologically) visible differences, and a sense of belonging due to perceived common origins and shared cultural practices, respectively (Ansell, 2013; Bhopal, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003).

Although primordialist and essentialist thinking championed the conceptualisation of race through physical biological differences (skin colour and eye-shape, among others) to not only create racial hierarchies but to also locate specific groups along the inferiority-superiority spectrum, “a new anti-essentialist consensus emerged around the claim that race has no intrinsic biological reality, but represents instead a complex set of social meanings that social groups have historically placed on selected differences in human physical traits” (Ansell, 2013, p. 63). Therefore, these social meanings and values attached to race make it an important concept to be utilised and politicised as institutionalised markers, more so than ethnic identities in the creation of a hierarchy and used for the sustenance of policies and social action (Ansell, 2013).

Thus, whereas race can be considered as more of an externally imposed construct, ethnicity can be regarded as internally or self-assigned. However, this demarcation can be blurred because ethnicity is a “multi-faceted quality that refers to the group to which people belong, and/or [are] perceived to belong, as a result of certain shared characteristics...particularly cultural traditions and languages” (Bhopal, 2004, p. 441). Ethnicity used to be closely-affiliated with religious tradition, but this has been replaced with a more prominent emphasis on commonality of descent and the sharing of cultural practices (Ansell, 2013).

The demarcations between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ have been and continue to be challenged and blurred. According to Gunaratnam (2003), both concepts are neither objective nor stable, and are far from being homogenous categories. Rather, they are “produced and animated by changing, complicated and uneven interactions between social processes and individual experience” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 8). However, such debates are not the focus of this thesis.

As indicated previously I chose ethnicity (ethnic identity, in particular) over racial identity to refer to my participants’ processes of construction of their Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous (among others) identities. The existing literature on race and ethnicity in Malaysia applies the two terms interchangeably (see Hirschman, 1986; Nair, 1999), and in Malaysia, race is understood to be synonymous with ethnicity (Hoffstaedter, 2011; Nakamura, 2012). In Section 2.5 I illustrate and discuss more clearly, religion, gender, and ethnicity in Malaysia, in particular as they pertain to the issue of Islam, women, and the issues surrounding the veil and non-veiling.

2.3.4 Overview of research on language and religious identity construction

In this section, I review several works on language and religious identity featured in a compilation as well as those published elsewhere. Allyson Jule’s (2007) *Language and Religious Identity* (see also Jule, 2005) compiles works from scholars whose research focused on various religious communities, and the role language has in shaping not only the religious, but the ethnic and gender identities of their respective members. Most of the works featured in the book adopted an ethnographic approach, with researchers employing diverse methodologies. Sharp (2007) and Nieves and Rosati (2007) conducted research in Hispanic churches in different parts of the USA respectively, with each focusing on distinct aspects. Sharp (2007) examined linguistic

features apparent in the performances of personal testimonies of female church leaders to see how language not only helps them perform their identities, but also how it is used by these women to exercise power and influence over their audience. On the other hand, through participant observation, note-taking, and interviews with church leaders and members, Nieves and Rosati (2007) examined closely the roles English and Spanish have on the language choice of the churches and their respective members. The authors found that Spanish serves as an important symbolic and referential code that marks social and religious identities, whereas English remains a valuable language for immigrant integration into society outside of the church.

The findings from Sharp (2007), in particular showing how language can be employed to demonstrate power, authority, and legitimacy are also observed in Graham's (2007) study on the construction of digital identities by members on an online Christian forum. Accessing an extensive e-mail corpus of over ten years, the author focused on how one prominent member of the forum 'Sister Goldenrod' constructed a good Christian, nun-like identity through her posts and interactions with fellow members. The study found that Sister Goldenrod established legitimacy, authority, and power through several strategies that included demonstrating superior knowledge about the Bible, detailing her spiritual journey and 'calling' towards a higher purpose, as well as including religious quotes from Mother Theresa as part of her personal identity. However, what is also most striking in Graham's study are the ways through which Sister Goldenrod's authority, legitimacy, and identity were undermined by herself and the other members during heated moments of conflict. By reacting with snide, sarcastic, and proud comments, Sister Goldenrod undermined the calm, collected, humble, and forgiving persona she had carefully crafted, a fact that was not left ignored by other members who also questioned her apparent Christian-like identity that did not mirror her unfavourable actions.

Nieves and Rosati (2007) found that the choice between English and Spanish resulted in the gaining of different social capitals for different members of the Hispanic churches. Han (2007) found that for an immigrant Chinese couple in Canada, the instrumental need to acquire English proficiency, as well as the desire to locate themselves in a community to help address the disorienting and stressful experience of immigration, eventually brought them to Christianity. The couple's conversion to Christianity as part of a coping mechanism is corroborated by the earlier claim posited

by Mol (1976) and Seul (1999) that religion is a powerful stabilising influence. From a three-year study of observations, interviews, and analysis of collected materials, as well as a micro-analysis of the couples' turn-taking, the author found that the couple constructed their religious and gender identities distinctly for different settings, namely for the church and for the home, respectively.

The works reviewed above are only samples from Jule's (2007) book. Nonetheless, besides highlighting the methodologies linguists can take to examine identity construction, and the myriad of approaches and strategies subjects can use to construct their identities, the studies have also pointed to a glaring paucity. Most of the featured works take place in Western and/or European settings, with much of the focus on Christianity. Several works are exceptions, such as that on the indigenous religion of Candomblé in Brazil (see López & Edfeldt, 2007). Indeed, according to Jaspal and Coyle (2010), "contemporary thought on language and religion has largely been anglocentric" (p. 18), an imbalance which the authors sought to address.

By adopting a social psychologist approach through the analysis of semi-structured interviews, Jaspal and Coyle (2010) explored the role of language in the construction of religious identity among a group of second generation South Asian Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Britain's East Midlands. Specifically, their aim was to investigate how "a group of young British-born South Asians understood and defined their religious and linguistic identities, focusing upon the role played by heritage languages and liturgical languages and by religious socialisation" (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010, p. 17). Echoing similar findings found in the research reviewed above, the authors found that the use of certain languages signify affiliation to or alienation from their respective religious or ethnic groups. For instance, as Arabic is sanctified among Muslims as the 'holy language of Islam and the Quran' some Muslim participants claimed that acquiring competency in Arabic is an important marker of affiliation to their religious communities (that comprised of Muslims who speak different languages), whereas the use of their ethnic vernaculars (such as Urdu) serves to mark identification with other members from the same ethnic group.

Considering the paucity of scholarly work that explores the role of language in the religious identity construction among Muslims, I consider this as my professional and personal obligation as a researcher and Muslim woman respectively to contribute to

discussions concerning religious identity construction among Muslims (women, in particular), in an under-researched context such as Malaysia (Hochel, 2013). Nevertheless, the findings of the works cited above have proven insightful and helpful to inform the conceptualisation and operationalisation of this study.

This chapter thus far has discussed identity, beginning with a review of broader theoretical perspectives that have informed this research, then continuing on to specification of the particular identity types that are selected as analytical anchor points in this thesis, and finally to an overview of the literature on language and religious identity research. In the following section, the veil in Islamic theological and cultural traditions is introduced, followed by local and global debates surrounding the veil, non-veiling and women.

2.4 The Islamic veil

This section examines various issues concerning the veil. So readers can better understand the weight of the arguments to be presented concerning non-veiling, I consider it necessary to provide the background for understanding the veil and its significance in Islamic theology and tradition. This begins with a discussion on the debates concerning the legitimacy of the religious mandate commanding Muslim women to wear the headscarf. This is done by presenting religious verses that are believed to warrant the wearing of the hijab and deliberating these with arguments that point to the hijab as being a manifestation of tradition and culture. Finally, the significance of the veil as a political and cultural symbol in varying socio-historical contexts is discussed.

2.4.1 The veil in the Al-Quran and religious texts

The verses that regard the veil as mandated by God were presented earlier in Section 1.2. Although the topics of modesty and veiling have often been linked with Muslim women, the Quran also instructs men to lower their gaze and to practice modesty. In fact, this commandment even appears before the command that addresses women in *Surah An-Nur*. Yet, the preoccupation with the hijab among Muslim communities is unfairly directed at women only, though contemporary writings have sought to address this blatant discrepancy in opinion articles such as *Muslim men need to understand that the Quran says they should observe hijab first, not women* (Rashid, 2017).

In light of such debates, there are growing numbers of scholars and writers, including those who take a feminist approach, who argue that the hijab for hair is not religiously mandated, claiming that the Quranic injunction of covering never specifically mentions hair, and that veiling is a practice that originated from pre-Islamic Arabia, which stressed patriarchal control (El Guindi, 1999; Hoodfar, 1992; Mernissi, 1991; Othman, 2006).

2.4.2 Veiling practices in pre-Islamic Arabia

Although the focus of this thesis is not to undertake Quranic exegesis on the topic of veiling, several issues relating to it are considered pertinent enough to be discussed – even if only briefly. This is done to provide readers with a background that includes alternative interpretations of the verses in question and how such interpretations have helped inform women in their struggles against patriarchal interpretations of Islamic theology (Barlas, 2002). In examining the religious ordination of the veil, two issues are explored. The first concerns the claim that veiling is a practice that pre-dates the emergence of Islam, and the second concerns the reevaluation of what the hijab refers to in the Quran.

The practice of veiling for both men and women have been documented in various cultures throughout the Mesopotamian, Mediterranean, and Middle-Eastern regions (Ahmed, 1992; Davary, 2009; El Guindi, 1999; Mernissi, 1991). Veiling can be both a tool for social status and class differentiation and a means of control to symbolically reinforce women as men's property, as evident from the ancient codes of Hammurabi and Assyria (Davary, 2009; Lerner, 1986). For instance, according to Davary (2009), the ancient Assyrian code dating back from as far as 1075 BCE outlined an explicit ruling regarding veiling. Lerner (1986) provided the relevant legal text:

Neither [wives] of [seigniors] nor [widows] nor [Assyrian women] who go out on the street may have their heads uncovered. The daughters of a seignior...whether it is a shawl or a robe or [a mantle], must veil themselves...when they go out on the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street with her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute whom a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street; she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered...

(p. 134)

From the above, it can thus be argued that a woman who covers herself is protected by men, which implies that “the unveiled woman was clearly marked off as unprotected and therefore fair game for any man” (Lerner, 1986, p. 139). Note that such a sentiment is also inherent in the derogatory ‘free hair’ label attached to non-veiled Muslim women (see Chapter 1). Despite history presenting evidence that veiling was a common practice in ancient times, in the contemporary world, it is oft-linked to Islam. However, Islam is not the only religion in which the concept of veiling and modesty of dress can be found, as concepts of modesty are also found in the Christian and Jewish traditions (Ternikar, 2009). Davary (2009) argued that certain legal-ethical decrees in all three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – bear a strong resemblance to these Hammurabi and Assyrian codes regarding veiling. Although veiling may be directly or indirectly referred to, the author cited 1 Timothy 2:9-14, and 1 Corinthians 11:5-7 in the New Testament in Christianity and the *halachah* (laws sources from the Torah) in Judaism to be sources in which women’s modesty and dress are discussed (Davary, 2009).

Ahmed (1992, as cited in Ternikar, 2009) argued that the “concept of women covering hair is actually a pre-Islamic tradition that was appropriated by Islam” (p. 755). Mernissi (1991), among others, concurred with this view. She posed a question, “is it possible that the hijab, the attempt to veil women, that is claimed today to be basic to Muslim identity, is nothing but the expression of the persistence of the pre-Islamic mentality, the *jahiliyya*³ mentality that Islam was supposed to annihilate?” (Mernissi, 1991, p. 81).

Mernissi extended her argument by taking a more critical reexamination of the concept of ‘hijab’ in the Quran and other religious texts. According to her, the hijab (whose literal meaning is ‘curtain’) refers to a barrier of physical space, not between a man and a woman – like what is often practiced in certain Muslim societies – but between two men. This meaning of the hijab then, is disparate from the meaning normally attached to it, which is the female head covering. I return to this point later in this section.

³ *Jahiliyya* = refers to the pre-Islamic period, or “ignorance” of monotheism and divine law (Esposito, 2017)

Specifically, Mernissi (1991) referred to verse 53 of *Surah Al-Ahzab*⁴, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) on the night of his wedding, amidst his difficulty in dismissing guests who had overstayed at his home. The “veil was to be God’s answer to a community with boorish manners whose lack of delicacy offended a Prophet whose politeness bordered on timidity” (Mernissi, 1991, p. 86). This argument is further elaborated, with lengthy and detailed explanations that drew upon classical and authoritative sources to interpret this particular verse. I will not discuss this any further since it is not the purpose of this thesis to prove or refute any religious injunctions concerning the veil. I am merely presenting two sides of the veiling argument so that the reader may be provided with the context with which to better comprehend the analysis and discussion to be presented in this thesis.

Returning to the point made earlier about the disparity between the meaning of the hijab as used in the Quran and its contemporary meaning and usage to refer to the female headscarf, the word hijab (also *hijaban*) appears in the Quran a total of seven times. However, in none of these instances does the word refer to women’s covering (Ruby, 2006). Even the two verses, *Surah An-Nur* and *Surah al-Ahzab*, that supposedly refer to veiling use the word *khumur*, and *jalabib*, respectively (Badr, 2004; Ruby, 2006). The former means ‘conceal’, or ‘cover’ whereas the latter refers to a long gown that covers the whole body or a cloak that covers the neck and bosom (Ruby, 2006).

The covering of hair is not explicitly mentioned, and this, along with the disparity between the use of the hijab in the Quran and its more contemporary usage have sparked numerous debates among scholars, religious figures, and lay people, most of which can be found on contemporary media such as YouTube: *Does the Quran command us to wear the Hijab?* (Al-Alawi, 2015), and *Q&A: Should Hijab be enforced?* (Ally, 2013); online forums, such as *Where does it say that women must cover themselves from head to toe, in the Quran?* (Kaur, 2017) and numerous websites

⁴ O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behavior] was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity. (*The Holy Quran*, 33:53)

that agree on the concept of modesty but disagree as to whether or not in Islam this refers to covering the hair.

The array of competing perspectives outlined in the arguments above reflect my own personal and spiritual trajectory concerning the veil. Although I believe the Quran mandates some form of covering, I am less convinced that this encompasses the covering of hair. Regardless of my stance on veiling (a matter that I still contend with), it (or any religious acts) should not be forced upon anyone, as God says in *Surah Al-Baqarah* Chapter 2, verse 256, “there shall be no compulsion in religion” (The Holy Quran, 2016b) and in *Surah Al-A’raf* Chapter 7, verse 26, that the best garment is the “garment of righteousness” (The Holy Quran, 2016a).

Nevertheless, regardless of where current debates stand on the issue of veiling, it cannot be denied that the landscapes of many countries across the world have seen a resurgence in the Islamic veil.

2.4.3 The veil across the world

The veil has been mobilised not only as an important religious and cultural symbol but also a political one. In the 1970s, various countries in the Middle-Eastern and North African regions utilised the veil in their struggle against imperialism. The religious movements of Egypt saw men and women shift into the state of *mitdayyinin*, or ‘the state of being religious’, during a turbulent period wreaked with wars and political instability (El Guindi, 1999). In French-controlled Algeria, on the other hand, the French unveiling movement that was intended to uproot Algerian culture backfired as it strengthened the Algerians’ “attachment to the veil as a national and cultural symbol on the part of patriotic Algerian women, giving the veil a new vitality” (El Guindi, 1999, p. 170). The hijab in Palestine primarily served as a signifier of a class/group rather than gendered identity (Hammami, 1990). However, the rise of a new Islamic movement – the Intifada – saw the *Mujama’ al-Islami* bestow the hijab with a status of piety and political affiliation. The veil then became a symbol in a nationalist, political movement, “a movement developing in the context of occupation and resistance, subjugation and struggle, in which the hijab is ideologised and transformed into a symbol of resistance” (El-Guindi, 1999, p. 174). In post-colonial Malaysia, as noted by Othman, (2006), the hijab has also been imbued with nationalistic sentiments. Hammami (1990) however, criticised this mobilisation of the

hijab for political ends, calling it an “invented tradition” (p. 25) in form and meaning, and one which does not symbolise a supposed return to Islam.

Some thirty to forty decades after the uprising of several Islamic movements in the Arab world, the influence of the hijab is still gaining momentum, especially for Muslim women living in diasporic communities in non-Muslim countries. In such contexts, the veil is mobilised for a variety of reasons that cover aspects such as the spiritual and the practical. Stirling, Shaw and Short's (2014) interviews of immigrant Turkish and Iranian women in Australia found that some of these women used the hijab as an important signifier of piety that filled the notion of completeness of the Muslim woman. Others, such as those featured in studies by Read and Bartkowski (2000), Ruby (2006), Droogsma (2007), and Wagner et al. (2012) echoed similar lines of reasoning, but they also claimed that the hijab is an important marker of the women's cultural and ethnic identities. This is because in contexts where such women make up religious and ethnic minorities, the veil is used to affirm cultural identity, as argued by Wagner et. al (2012), “religious minorities are forced into constructing cultural identity in ways that exaggerate their group belonging and difference from broader society” (p.17). The hijab is thus “closely connected with their overlapping religious-gender-ethnic identities and links them to the broader community (*ummah*) of Islamic believers and Muslim women” (Read & Bartkowski, 2000, p. 404).

If such is the case for minority Muslim women in non-Muslim majority contexts, what about Muslim women who live in majority Muslim contexts? In some Muslim-majority countries, the hijab has played a central role in politics, especially as its symbolism is mobilised by political groups to advance certain sets of beliefs, attitudes and values regarding women, the family, and society.

Iran and Turkey represent two polar sides in the contemporary debates on the veil that plague modern-day Muslim-majority societies. The Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s took the world by surprise as it marked the transition of the formerly secular state into a new age of Islamic revivalism (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993). Whereas the former Shah forced the unveiling of Iranian women prior to the revolution in the name of progress and civilisation, the immediate years witnessed coercive legislating of women's veiling. As Shirazi-Mahajan (1993) argued, “wearing the veil, according to [supreme leader] Ayatollah Khomeini, was necessary, since it would distinguish

revolutionary (Islamist) women from corrupt (Westernised) women of the previous regime” (p. 60). It is evident here, that the hijab – and fundamentally, the role of women’s bodies – was pushed to the fore of politics, identity, and nationalism, a trend observed in various other Islamic states, particularly those reeling from the effects of Western and European colonialism (Gould, 2014; Othman, 2006).

Whereas Iran’s Shiite religious leaders successfully ousted the Shah and his regime’s liberal, secularist policies and consequently enforced stricter Islamic laws, the context in Turkey paints a rather different picture. Whereas Iran’s hijab debates are arguably firmly-entrenched and propagated by fundamental Islamists (Gould, 2014), Turkey’s turban (as it is locally known) occupies the centre stage in debates between Turkey’s secularists and Islamists, wherein the former view the turban as a threat to Turkey’s secularity, and the latter view the turban prohibition as the secularists’ denial of the right of the citizen to express their identity and religiosity (Bayram, 2009). For over fifty years, the turban debates have been raging, from the late 1960s when women were banned from wearing it in public universities and as public servants (Bayram, 2009; Marshall, 2005; Toprak & Uslu, 2009).

Marshall (2005) argued that the turban debate has caused serious divides between feminist and Islamist women in the country. Echoing some of Toprak and Uslu’s (2009) observations, Marshall (2005) found that feminists are unsympathetic towards women who wear the turban as they reject the turban’s symbolism of backwardness and a regression to a time when women were confined to the domestic sphere. However, Islamists (in particular of reformist leanings) counter such views, claiming that wearing the turban legitimises their space and presence in public, and that in an increasingly morally-depraved society, “the turban makes women less vulnerable to assault” (Marshall, 2005, p. 111).

Much closer to Malaysia in region, culture, and language, Indonesia is a secular country that boasts the largest Muslim population. The meanings of the hijab in Indonesia have not been found to necessarily tie with anti-colonialist, nationalistic sentiments. For example, Wagner et. al (2012) found that in Indonesia, the veil is used more for reasons of convenience, modesty, and fashion, with scarce reference to religion. On the other hand, the *hijabers* of Indonesia in Beta’s (2014) study claim that

wearing the hijab in a stylish and fashionable way allows them to simultaneously be virtuous and pious.

As was remarked earlier, besides its potent religious, social, and political symbolisms, the hijab has emerged in recent years as a valuable fashion commodity. The rise of fashion consciousness among Muslim women globally paved the way for the emergence of the *Hijabista*, “Muslim women who wear fashionable outfits with matching fashionable headscarves” (Hassan & Harun, 2016, p. 476). According to the latest Global Islamic Economy Report (Thomson Reuters, 2017), the hijab fashion industry (also called modest fashion and Muslimah fashion) was worth \$254 billion in 2016, a number which is predicted to leap to \$373 billion by 2022. The hijab has had a presence on one of the fashion industry’s most influential stages, the New York Fashion Week (Ekall, 2017). The rise of the modest fashion industry has furthermore given birth to fashion shows that cater exclusively to fashion-conscious Muslim women, for example, the 2018 London Modest Fashion Week (Haidari, 2018) and the Asia Islamic Fashion Week that took place in Malaysia’s capital city, Kuala Lumpur, in 2018 (Fab UK, 2018).

However, the increasing prominence of the hijab as a fashion item and the collective influence of hijabistas (such as Dina Tokio) are causing debates and creating divides among Muslim communities; in particular, there are those who argue that the true meaning of modesty has been hijacked with the proliferation of wasteful and vain consumer culture (Sanghani, 2016), and others who claim that the normalisation of the hijab as part of popular culture in the West is ignoring the struggles of women against state institutions that force them to wear it (BBC, 2017).

After exploring the hijab’s presence and influence in the global context, in the following section, I proceed to examine the veil in the Malaysian landscape, which reveal an issue that is wrought with complexity as well as religious, ethnic, and gendered overtones.

2.5 Malaysia, identity, and the veil

This section begins with a brief introduction of the history of Islamisation in Malaysia, before it discusses existing literature on (non)veiling in Malaysia.

2.5.1 Islamising Malaysia

In the Introduction chapter, I used the term Islamisation to refer to the increasing influence of Islam on Malaysia's governance. However, this is not the only term that appears in literature discussing Malaysia. This is because the terms Islamisation and Arabisation appear either exclusively or alongside one another (see Aziz & Shamsul, 2004; Hart, 1991; Heng, 2017; Nagata, 1980; Saat, 2016; Tie, 2008). Although some authors apply the terms interchangeably, others distinguish between the two. Saat (2016) argued for the latter, claiming that Islam in Malaysia is driven partly by Arabisation, and is characterised by proclivity towards Middle Eastern cultures and norms. I acknowledge this variation in the use of terminology; I have selected 'Islamisation' in this thesis to refer to such processes because this term enables a wider net for capturing the influences of Islam into Malaysia's history and development. Moreover, I subscribe to a more extensive, yet neutral definition of Islamisation offered by Peletz (2013) as "heightened salience of Islamic symbols, norms, discursive traditions, and attendant practices across one or more domains of lived experience" (p. 159). In contrast, I consider the application of Arabisation to not only direct the focus solely (rather unfairly) towards the Arab world's role in promoting religious ideologies but there is also an inherent blame-game at play that paints Arab and Middle-Eastern culture in a negative light, thus completely disregarding the myriad of cultural expressions among its diverse communities.

Malaysia has been undergoing a process of Islamisation since the 1970s, one which became more rigorous beginning from the Mahathir era in the 1980s (Aziz & Shamsul, 2004; Lee, 2010; Othman, 2006). This Islamisation resulted from various reasons, but it has also been argued to be Malaysia's post-colonial response to British imperialism (Aziz & Shamsul, 2004; Barr & Govindasamy, 2010). Through Islamisation, the state became more involved in matters of religion (Lee, 2010), and the results of Islamisation policies are evident in the rise in Islamic architecture, Islamic religious institutions, and Islamic finance. Moreover, Islamisation also manifests itself in the lives of people, and this can be seen in the increasing number of women who wear the tudung (Izharuddin, 2018; Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Mouser, 2007; Tong & Turner, 2008).

2.5.2 The veil and identities in Islamising Malaysia

The tudung is an exceptionally intriguing object to examine in the context of Malaysia due to its intricate ties with religion, gender, and ethnicity. Echoing some of the reasons behind veiling practices that have been documented in other parts of the world (Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Stirling et al., 2014), in Malaysia, the tudung is an important marker of religious affiliation with Islam (Hochel, 2013; Mouser, 2007). However, this item of clothing goes beyond being an explicit marker of one's affiliation with a religion as it can also help signify a woman's ethnicity, in particular, the Malay ethnicity (Hoffstaedter, 2011).

In Malaysia, the Malay as an ethnic group is not merely defined according to shared ancestral origins, traditional customs, and language. In the first place, to do so would inevitably include a broad and diverse group constituted of the many Austronesian peoples who have for many years inhabited what is known as the Malay Archipelago, a geographical area reported to boast the largest group of islands in the world (Gorlinski, 2012). However, in Malaysia, Malay is defined in a narrower sense, courtesy of the imposed link with religion, in particular, Islam. This is evident in the following definition of Malay that is enshrined in the Federal Constitution:

“Orang Melayu” ertinya seseorang yang menganuti agama Islam, lazim bercakap bahasa Melayu, menurut adat Melayu dan—(a) yang lahir sebelum Hari Merdeka di Persekutuan atau Singapura atau yang lahir sebelum Hari Merdeka dan ibu atau bapanya telah lahir di Persekutuan atau di Singapura, atau yang pada Hari Merdeka berdomisil di Persekutuan atau di Singapura; atau (b) ialah zuriat seseorang yang sedemikian;

(Government of Malaysia, 2009, p. 174)

Translated into English as (my own translation):

A “Malay” is someone who adheres to Islam, whose common tongue is the Malay language, who follows the Malay customs and who – (a) was born before Independence Day in the Federation or in Singapore or who was before Independence Day and whose parents were born in the Federation or in Singapore, or on the Independence Day were domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the offspring of any such individual;

Thus, following this constitutional definition, any Muslim individual qualifies as a Malay if they speak Malay and observe Malay customs. Yet this is not always the case. According to the Constitution, I can be considered Malay since I am Muslim, speak Malay as my first language, and live my life according to the norms of Malay

customs. However, I resist identification as a Malay. This is because I am ethnically Dusun, one of minority Bumiputera ethnicities in Sabah that make up approximately 2% of the total Malaysian population (Nagaraj, Lee, Tey, Ng, & Pala, 2015). Indeed, it has been a personal struggle for me to maintain my identity as Dusun outside of my community (especially in Malay-majority Peninsular Malaysia) because the label ‘Malay’ is conveniently ‘imposed’ upon me by others. For instance, after revealing my Dusun heritage to a group of Malay Muslims, one of them dismissingly remarked, “Just say you’re Malay. It’s the same thing.” This anecdote brings to the fore the various socio-political, economic, and identity contestations that are played out in the realms of religion and ethnicity, especially pertaining to the special rights afforded to the Bumiputera.

As was explained in Chapter 1, Malaysia is home to diverse groups of peoples that comprise the indigenous Bumiputera populace and the non-indigenous populace (mainly made up of Chinese and Indians). And as a result of a convoluted history of racial, political, and economical legitimacy and representation usually credited as a result of British imperialism, the Bumiputera are granted special rights in various sectors such as education, business, and government positions (Lee, 2010). Therefore, the existence of constitutional special privileges according to race greatly affects how certain groups of Malaysians identify themselves, since identifying one’s self as Malay (or in broader terms Bumiputera) affords individual social, economic and political advantages (Ma, 2005; J. Nagata, 2011; Stark, 2006).

Islam is an important criterion in the constitutional definition of being Malay, and “being Muslim is generally assumed to be synonymous with being Malay” (Ma, 2005, p. 89), a claim also noted by Larsen (1996). However, this is not the reality, as not all Muslims in Malaysia are Malays (as attested by my personal anecdote). For instance, there are Chinese and Indian Malaysians who are Muslims (Saw Swee-Hock, 2006, as cited in Hoffstaedter, 2011; Stark, 2006). However, even if Chinese and Indian Muslims speak Malay and practise Malay customs and traditions (as some inevitably do), they cannot be considered as Malay, and consequently, are not eligible recipients of the affirmative action policies bestowed upon the Bumiputera. Stark (2006), for instance, reported on the dilemma of Indian Muslims in Malaysia: “neither being part of the Malay-Muslim automatism that governs all official discourses on Bumiputraism in the political and more importantly economic domain, nor belonging

to the Hindu Indian minority, they have sought shifting alliances both in trying to secure ‘majority status’ by becoming Malay or securing Indian Muslim identity for various reasons” (p.384). On the other hand, Ma (2005) claimed that Malays distrust their Chinese Muslims compatriots because they think that “they have ulterior motives, such as getting bumiputra benefits, securing special licenses or businesses, or scholarships allocated to bumiputras only” (p. 103).

Hoffstaedter (2011) recounted an incident in which a Malaysian member of audience probed a visiting speaker to guess his identity based on his name, ‘Fadli,’ to which the speaker replied, “Well, I don’t know. It sounds like an Arabic name. You’re probably, in Malaysia, legally a Malay” (p. 20). What this brief anecdote illustrates is that in Malaysia, external markers, such as an individual’s name, is an easily visible tool with which identity can be utilised (Hoffstaedter, 2011). Chinese Muslims in Malaysia are fighting to keep their Chinese names because they face pressure from the social convention for non-Muslims to change their names into Malay or Arabic ones upon conversion to Islam. Such is the case with Lim Jooi Soon, the president of a branch of the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association, “I will not change my ethnicity. I was born Chinese and I will die Chinese, I will not become Malay” (Malay Mail, 2015, para. 4).

However, the making of a Muslim *and* Malay identity is now increasingly reliant upon another external marker – form of dress. According to Othman (2006), the wearing of the tudung is considered an act to reclaim the Malay(sian) identity that arguably was lost during colonisation. The increase in the practice of veiling among Malaysian Muslim women is regarded as one of the most visible consequences of Islamisation (Khalid & O’Connor, 2011; Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006). Consequently, scholars have observed that amid this rise in the number of veiled Muslim women, non-veiled Muslim women have now become a minority (Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018), not only in terms of numbers, but also in the ways they have become a marginalised group. This is because, according to Izharuddin (2018), “it is the veiled and pious iteration of middle-class Malay womanhood that is taken as the normative standard and ideal to which all should aspire” (p. 162).

But the wearing of the tudung does not just symbolise ethnic or religious affiliation because virtue of wearing it, certain gendered constructs are made or revived. Mouser

(2007) argued that the popular perception of Malay Muslim women among outsiders is to view them as being “shrouded under a veil” (p. 164) of increasing religious conservatism. However, according to recent studies, common reasons cited by Malaysian women who veil include veiling as an act of piety to God and as a behavioural regulator, but there are also those who veil because it makes them feel included in the larger religious community, or for fashionable reasons (Nagata, 2011; Hochel, 2013). Thus, Muslim women in Malaysia don the tudung in order to accomplish particular goals; here, Butler’s notion of performativity is apparent, as Mouser (2007) argued, “women actively engage in the construction and performance of gender identities on a daily basis, and the use of the tudong, or headscarf, is one stage upon which that performance takes place” (p.164).

In their study on acts of piety among Malaysian Muslim women, Tong and Turner (2008) argued that gender relations are a critical side to acts of piety due to potential dangers the female body and sexuality constitute in the everyday world. According to Weibel (as cited in Killian, 2003) a woman who does not veil can possibly rouse the sexual interest of men, which consequently has the potential to damage the order of the Muslim society. Indeed, according to Anwar (2001, as cited in Tong & Turner, 2008), in Malaysia there exists a belief that “Islamic dress protects society from moral decadence as well as protecting women from harassment in public spaces” (p. 46), an observation also made in the Turkish context (Marshall, 2005). The “moral regulation of female sexuality is thus an important dimension of religious activity as such” (Turner, 1991, as cited in Tong & Turner, 2008, p. 44). It can then be argued that one way regulation of female sexuality takes place in the context of Muslim women in Malaysia is through the act of veiling.

Furthermore, in the Malaysian context, a woman who veils not only denotes her religious identification with Islam and her ethnic affiliation as Malay (Hoffstaedter, 2011), but it also connotes various shifts in gender roles, expectations, and judgments of character. A Muslim woman who veils is considered to be good, pious, modest and chaste, which increases her prospect of being chosen as a wife (Tong & Turner, 2008). This corroborates Zwick and Chelariu’s (2006) finding that Muslim women on an online matchmaking service utilise hijab in order to improve their eligibility as spouses. In their studies, Mouser (2007) and Izharuddin (2018) also claimed that women who do not veil find themselves under greater scrutiny under the public eye

because they are considered to be less morally-upstanding than their veiled sisters. Their claims therefore lend support to the prevalence of pejorative rhetoric targeted at non-veiled Muslim women in the form of the ‘unwrapped candy vs. wrapped candy’ analogy. This analogy, though far from being the only pejorative one, is one of the most well-known and familiar analogies among Muslim communities. Moreover, another well-known saying in Malay is evident in the following Twitter screenshot (Figure 2.1) that has also been used to condescend to non-veiled Muslim women. The saying basically translates as follows: “a woman who veils is not necessarily good, but a good woman is one who veils.”

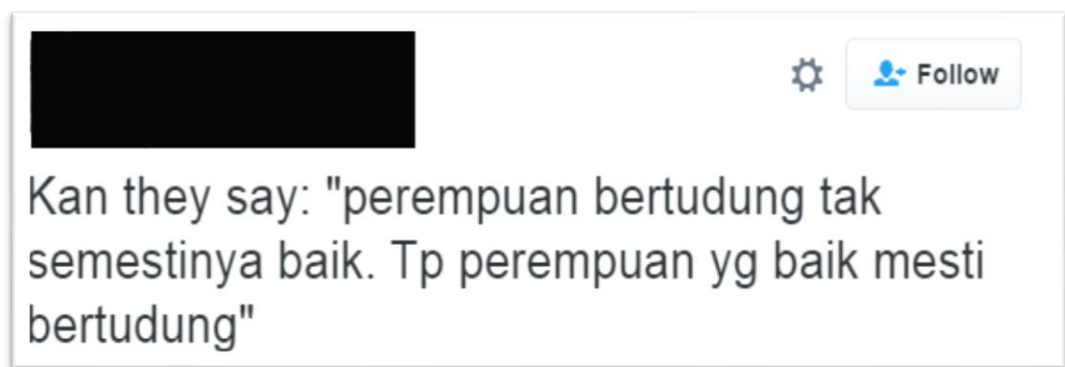


Figure 2.1: Screenshot of a tweet in Malay denigrating non-veiled Muslim women (tyrafendy, 2014)

There is scarce research on non-veiled Muslim women in Muslim-majority contexts, and some of the existing literature that discuss non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia include studies by Hochel (2013), Izharuddin (2018), Mouser (2007), Sunesti (2016), and Tong and Turner (2008). Indeed, according to Izharuddin (2018), “women who choose not to veil in Malaysia, with the exception of those belonging to the elite class, are invisible in scholarly literature and in the discursive landscape concerning women and Islam” (p. 157). In her 2018 article, Izharuddin is the first academic to have featured ‘free hair’ in reference to non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia, which – as was introduced in the previous chapter – is a popular colloquial term used to refer to these women. Though this appearance marks the debut of this expression in academic literature, ‘free hair’ has been used widely in non-academic sources (for instance in AR, 2014; Cek Mek Molek, 2015). The origin of the term is as yet unknown. To Izharuddin (2018), free hair “implies a liberation of one’s body from hegemonic pressure and conformity” (p. 171). I consider this an emancipatory reading of the term (and the act of non-veiling), but I acknowledge that in popular usage, the term serves

to associate non-veiled Muslim women with the often scoffed at perception of being ‘free’ – or, as liberal, Westernised secularists that are ‘easy’ targets for men.

Literature on non-veiled Muslim women cited earlier reveal insights that conform to previous research as well as present new ones. For instance, Hochel (2013) found that there are those who choose not to veil because they do not see it as an important reflection of their Islamic beliefs (Fadil, 2011; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Wagner et al., 2012), whereas others simply state that they are currently unprepared to shoulder the heavy religious responsibilities, connotations and expectations that inevitably come with veiling (Hochel, 2013). Izharuddin (2018) found that women unveil for a multitude of reasons including health and personal well-being, familial concerns, as well as personal politics and views on gendered issues.

Furthermore, though ordinarily non-veiled, some women veil at certain times during work as they believe the veil affords them more mobility and respect from co-workers (Hochel, 2013; Mouser, 2007), and also during family visits as “the veil reinforces their identities as dutiful daughters who cover out of respect for parental wishes” (Hochel, 2013, p. 52). Similar findings have been reported in existing literature (see Fadil, 2011; Ong, 1990), and echo Marshall’s (2005) assertion in the Turkish context that “a woman’s opportunity to do paid work in Turkey is contingent on her decision to cover or not to cover her head in the public space” (p. 105).

Hochel’s findings mirror those found in Tong and Turner’s (2008) study. The adoption of the veil marks a shift towards particular gender roles. Tong and Turner (2008) discovered that some women reject the idea of veiling not only for professional purposes (as in the case of an air hostess who does not find veiling compatible with her job) but also because of the shifts in roles and tasks they perceive they would have to assume once they wear the veil. These include assuming the roles of a good and obedient wife to her husband, a committed member of the community, and an obedient servant of God.

As was remarked earlier, Malaysian women also cite fashion (besides piety) as a reason to wear the tudung, which echoes Beta’s (2014) findings on Muslim women in Indonesia. Muslim-majority nations are adopting an Islamic cosmopolitanism that sees Muslims embracing their faith and expressing their individuality through their fashion choices whilst still observing the norms of modesty (Hassan & Harun, 2016;

Nistor, 2017). In line with this global trend, Malaysia is experiencing a flourishing market for the tudung (Badaruddin, 2017; Boo, 2015; Rodzi, 2018), and also a rise in media publications that cater to the hijab-wearing market, such as the popular *Hijabista* (Hassim, 2014a, 2017; Hassim & Khalid, 2015; Hassim et al., 2015). The demand for the hijab as a fashion item is evidenced by the success of several local Malaysian brands, most notably *Naelofar Hijab*. Owned by Malaysian celebrity Neelofa, the brand registered RM50 million (approximately 10 million Pound Sterling) in sales in 2016, which was only a few years after the brand was established (Badaruddin, 2017).

Malaysian researcher Nurzihan Hassim in collaboration with other researchers have published numerous articles that examine the hijabista and Muslimah fashion phenomenon in Malaysia (see Hassim, 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Hassim, Ishak, & Mat Nayan, 2016; Hassim et al., 2015; Hassim & Khalid, 2015). They found that the hijab has become a commodified and commercialised item in Malaysia, and although this consciousness and effort to find a happy medium between faith and individuality is acknowledged as a form of empowerment, the authors nevertheless argue that turning the hijab into a fashion symbol stands contrary to its religious purpose to espouse modesty and humility (Hassim et al., 2016). Furthermore, the contradiction between consumerism and religious conservatism,

transforms the hijab as a socially desirable experience where elements of cosmopolitanism increase the acceptance of Muslim women into the modernised Islamic global community. The consumption culture highlights incoherence of religiosity where a veiled woman sees herself as privileged rather than closer to God as they belong to a special community of Muslimahs

(Hassim, 2014a, p. 84).

Thus, the insights garnered from these studies spotlight several identity issues that this research inevitably touch on. For instance, the responses from women who sometimes veil and their reasons for doing so can be seen as their strategy to negotiate their identities in settings such as the professional and the familial. And as was alluded to previously, not only can a Muslim woman's decision to veil or not have social consequences but it can also result in political ones as well, due to Malaysia's increasing climate of Islamisation and the special privileges secured for the Muslim-Malay population.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explained notions of identity, and discussed the Islamic veil, in particular, concerning its ties to identities. In addition to the reasons stated in the introductory chapter, the examination of Malaysia as the research context will prove insightful. This is because Malaysia has been widely regarded as an exemplary model of a moderate Islamic nation (Ong, 2017). In recent years, however, there have been increasing reports of rising religious conservatism that is threatening the country's moderation (Hookway, 2016; Rawther, 2017; Saat, 2016).

It is reiterated here that this research aims to contribute to the burgeoning field of scholarship in language, religion, gender, and identity by exploring the ways Muslim women, who are living in an increasingly Islamising environment such as Malaysia, discursively construct their identities in the absence of a highly-contested artefact, which is the hijab. This is because, based on the literature reviewed, research has scarcely focused on non-veiling Muslim women, and even less so on the connection between non-veiling and identity construction in the Malaysian context, especially from a sociolinguistic and discursive aspect. Furthermore, as was indicated in Section 2.5, the majority of existing literature on Islam and the tudung in Malaysia focuses on Malay Muslims, which this thesis addresses and redresses by including the voices of minority ethnicities in Malaysia. In tandem with these goals, this research also explores the ways Malaysia's heightened religious conservatism have influenced or affected the lives of Muslim women who choose not to wear the hijab.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised into four sections. Section 3.2 introduces the research paradigm as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin this study of identity construction among Malaysian Muslim women who do not veil. Here, my position as the researcher is also discussed. Section 3.3 explains the research methods employed to gather data, followed by Section 3.4 that provides details about data collection procedures. Additionally, ethical issues as well as challenges and limitations that arose from the data collection process are discussed. Finally, Section 3.5 illustrates in more detail the approaches taken to prepare the data gathered for analysis, with particular emphasis on the interview data.

3.2 The research paradigm

In line with the anti-essentialist ontology and the epistemological stance that knowledge is constructed by social actors in specific historical and cultural locations, this research subscribed to social constructionism in its study of identity construction and negotiation. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argued that discourse-based approaches to the study of identity critically evaluate the essentialist notion of identity as fixed and innate while simultaneously considering the contingency of identity upon the social world and social relations. Discursive approaches, therefore, can illuminate the processes that allow for the consistencies in people's accounts of themselves and others, by also taking into consideration the influences of interlocutors and interactional contexts on the processes of identity formation.

As was remarked in Chapter 2, a study by Toosi and Ambady (2011) found that the religious identity of Muslims is considered to be more deeply-embedded and unchangeable. Thus, it is best to employ a discourse-based approach in order to examine how this duality between the perceived core and the social component of the Muslim identity is constructed and negotiated.

Moreover, by adopting a social constructionist approach, this thesis seeks to further contribute to the burgeoning contemporary debates among Muslim communities that question the centrality and almost inseverable grip of the veil to a Muslim woman's identity and her level of piety (see for instance, Izharuddin, 2018). As Weinberg (2008) argued, "social constructionist studies are those that seek, at least in part, to replace fixed, universalistic, and sociohistorically invariant conceptions of things with

more fluid, particularistic, and sociohistorically embedded conceptions of them” (p.14). Therefore, a social constructionist approach allows for a space in which Muslim women can articulate their own meanings and knowledge concerning the Islamic veil. More pertinently, by highlighting the voices of women who choose not to wear the veil – despite living in an increasingly hostile Islamising environment – it will allow these women the freedom to articulate for themselves what being a Muslim woman means even without it.

3.2.1 Reliability and validity of social constructionist research

Potter (1996) and Burr (2003) both argued that issues of reliability and validity that plague much of quantitative and science-based research are irrelevant to studies that employ a social constructionist approach. Nevertheless, Potter (1996) outlined four considerations for social constructionist research, each of which can help analysts better evaluate their data, especially those employing discourse-based methods. Therefore, this work serves as reference to address these considerations as they apply to this study.

(i) Deviant case analysis

A deviant case analysis concerns an instant that disconfirms the regularity of an established and identified pattern in the data. Potter (1996) argued that a deviant occurrence can prove to be useful and insightful for analytical purposes, because it can help further illuminate, among other things, the causes of the establishment of such a pattern in the first place. Regardless, in this research, I am not concerned with seeking or establishing patterns in exploring the processes of identity construction among Malaysian Muslim women who do not veil. In fact, as to be shown particularly in Chapters 5 and 6, the wide-ranging answers given by these women underscore the complex layers of the topic being researched, and these cannot simply be reduced to fixed categories and patterns.

(ii) Participants’ understanding

Potter (1996) claimed that one of the criticisms that can be directed at discourse analytic research concerns the absence of a form of validation or the lack of a checking mechanism to assist the researcher’s interpretation of a participant’s understanding. However, this shortcoming can be addressed by carefully examining the ways participants respond to and treat the question and answering acts in the interview or

interaction. Specifically, a researcher who shares an ingroup identity with participants can carefully apply their own cultural understanding to assist the interpretation of data (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I consider myself as sharing an ingroup identity with my participants, and this notion of ‘insider benefit’ is expanded upon in Section 3.1.4 whereby my position as a researcher investigating this topic is discussed.

(iii) Coherence

One of the ways through which social constructionist research can achieve further rigour is to use current findings to build on the findings of previous research. They have been invaluable resources that have helped shed some light on the congruences and incongruences between the lived experiences of the Muslim women in my work and others in Malaysian and international contexts. In addition, to corroborate the arguments presented in the analyses of interview data, media data was collected from selected contemporary sources. This data, of representations of Muslim women in Malaysia with regards to the veil, served to provide a more comprehensive picture of the socio-political and historical context in which the women interviewed live. Both sources assisted in producing more insightful contextualisations of the grievances that emerged in the interviews and hence, resulted in more in-depth analyses of the ways the experiences of participants impact their ways of ‘doing identity’ in talk.

(iv) Reader evaluation of the research

According to Potter (1996), readers of research should not be treated as unskilled interactants as they possess the skills needed to judge the adequacy and relevancy of the claims made. Therefore, the researcher should be mindful that readers must be presented with adequate and authentic materials sourced from the data so that researcher interpretations and relevancy of claims can be assessed. In this work, researcher arguments are structured clearly with adequate pointers such as the use of participant quotes to guide reader understanding. Where deemed necessary, sufficient explanations of terms that are deeply-rooted in Malaysian culture and Islamic religious tradition are supplied.

Thus far, this section has presented the justifications for this research to be aligned with the paradigm of social constructionism as well as addressed several

considerations regarding validity and reliability. In the following section, I introduce and explain the selected theoretical frameworks.

3.2.2 Theoretical frameworks

To help inform and guide this research, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles for the study of identity were employed as the primary theoretical framework. However, this framework alone was deemed insufficient for addressing other important variables implicated in the research subject and context. Thus, Baxter's (2003) FPDA and intersectionality were employed as supplementary theoretical frameworks. These are explained further below (see Section 3.2.3 for a more detailed explication).

(a) Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles for the study of identity

Corresponding with the social constructionist approach to researching identity in talk, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five sociolinguistic principles were considered relevant to be applied in this research because they outline broad yet comprehensive principles with which the construction of identity can be examined in discourse. Specifically, the authors disagreed with the notion that identity is embedded in the mind or is determined by fixed social classifications; they argued instead that identity is a sociocultural phenomenon that not only emerges in interaction but is also highly intersubjective or dependent on other factors. However, instead of fully disregarding the inner psyche, the authors attempted to reconcile both the internal self and the external world through this framework. This addresses the claim in Toosi and Ambady's (2011) study, that Islam is considered as not only a deeply-held religious identity compared to other religions but also as a faith realised largely contingent upon its tight social cohesion. However, of the five principles, I have selected only three to be applied in the analyses. I justify this decision and explain the principles in more detail below.

(i) The Emergence Principle

Drawing inspiration from the concept of emergence found in linguistic anthropology and interactional linguistics, the emergence principle proposes a view of identity as "an emergent product, rather than the pre-existing source of linguistics and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). However, this principle does not discredit the idea

that interlocutors can draw on ‘structure’ derived from past interactions such as ideology and the linguistic system, as well as the link between the two, in conducting their identity work.

This principle is easiest to identify in discourse when people do not speak in a way they are normatively (as indicated by their social categories) expected to speak. When people do not conform to speaking in ways society expects, they are challenging the “essentialist preconceptions of linguistic ownership” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). Such cases are evident in transgender identity work and cross-gender performance (see, for example, Barrett, 1999; Besnier, 2003; Gaudio, 1997) as well as the crossing of ethnic, racial, and national boundaries (see Bucholtz, 1995; Chun, 2001; Cutler, 1999).

This notion that identities can be determined or indexed through a recognition of ‘code-matching’ or a disruption in the use of codes associated with certain identities or social categories has led to criticisms of Bucholtz and Hall. Cameron and Kulick (2003), for instance, problematised Hall's (1995) identification of the identities assumed by ‘fantasy makers’ (a term used by sex phone workers in California) based on the codes they employed in their profession (for instance, a feminine lilt or language variants normatively associated with Asians or Blacks).

Although the authors have addressed these claims in an article (see Bucholtz & Hall, 2004b), Pablé and Haas (2010) and Pablé, Haas, and Christe (2010) continued to view ‘emergence’ as understood and employed by Bucholtz and Hall to be problematic. This is because they consider it as ultimately a deterministic principle, one which goes against the idea that identity does not precede language. As they summarised:

...it is simply humanly impossible to objectively observe the emergence of ‘an identity’ by means of analysing language use; the firm belief that this is feasible is an illusion triggered by the linguist’s adherence to ‘fixed codes’ and a simplistic view of how language and ‘reality’ interconnect.

(Pablé & Haas, 2010, p.8)

Such criticisms are acknowledged here. Although Ishak (2011) have noted that non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women are portrayed in popular Malaysian media as speaking English (as opposed to their largely Malay-speaking veiled counterparts), it is not the interest and concern of this study to identify instances of code-matching. Following this reasoning, the emergence principle was not employed in my analysis of identity constructions in the interview data.

(ii) The Positionality Principle

The positionality principle states that identity is constructed by the individual depending on the context in which they are situated and may be contingent on and thus operate at three different levels. These are “a) macro level demographic categories; b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 592). It can be expected therefore that in conducting the interviews, interplay among these three levels can potentially influence my interaction with these women. For instance, depending on our relative ages (whether I am younger, older or the same generational age as the interviewee) as well as our respective regions of origin (whether they are from Malaysian Borneo or the Peninsular), I needed to use certain personal pronouns and make adjustments to my dialect and speech to accommodate, and ultimately, to achieve a more conducive interaction between us.

Positionality, together with the following principle, indexicality, concerns stance and the act of evaluation interactants take to position themselves and others in particular ways. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) further argued that “the interactional positions that social actors briefly occupy and then abandon as they respond to the contingencies of unfolding discourse may accumulate ideological associations with both large-scale and local categories of identity” (p. 591).

In my research, the above is an especially pertinent point. While it would be interesting to see how large-scale and local categories of identities interact in the women’s discourses, the concern here is more with exploring how dominant and widespread conceptions of religious identity (particularly those that are deeply-tied to the veil) interplay with the women’s localised (or self-conceptualised) identities as Muslim women. Moghaddam and Harré (2008) in their study of positioning theory’s application for studies of intrapersonal conflict highlighted this notion of ‘internal struggle,’ arguing that “involving a battle fought against religious, clinical or other value systems and languages, an individual can change and become ‘renewed’ or ‘born again’” (p. 65). Although it is not the aim of this research to arrive at such an ambitious resolution, the authors’ argument underscores the conflict that religious and other values systems can wreak upon an individual. Thus, considering that religious

identity is perceived to be one of the more deeply-embedded identities (Toosi & Ambady, 2011), I attempted to explore how these women navigate between widely-held beliefs about religiosity and their own selves, as well as examine the ways they position and hence, evaluate others in doing so.

(iii) The Indexicality Principle

Indexicality refers to the indexical mechanism by which identity is constituted (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Ochs, 1992). According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005):

identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels, (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position, (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles, and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups

(p. 594).

Indexicality displays how linguistic forms are employed to build identity positions, as it is a “creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings” (Ochs, 1992; Silverstein, 1985, as cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594). In an earlier article, Bucholtz and Hall (2004b) put forth their understanding of indexicality to address some of the criticisms directed at their application of the emergence principle. The authors argued that “specific linguistic forms can come to be ideologically associated with particular social identities indirectly...” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004b, p. 475), and that speakers can manipulate the use of these forms to index certain identities; however, this does not mean that any specific linguistic form needs to be assigned to any particular identity group.

As was asserted earlier, the indexicality principle is closely-linked to positionality as both concern stance, and thus, evaluation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Du Bois, 2007). Stance is closely-related to these principles because the linguistic forms employed by the speaker can convey particular evaluative claims about themselves and others, which can thus influence how these actors are positioned in the on-going talk (Du Bois, 2007, Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

As particular linguistic forms may index particular identities (Ochs, 1992), and cultural beliefs and values govern the associations between language and identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), it was intriguing to explore how the women in my research orient to and position themselves in relation to, for instance, the term ‘Muslim.’

(iv) The Relationality Principle

Relationality is concerned heavily with the notion of intersubjectivity, arguing that an individual's identity is constructed in relation to others who are involved in the interaction. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) presented two aims that underpin their view of relationality: (a) to emphasise that identities always attain social meaning in relation to other available positions of identity and social actors; and (b) to question the idea that identities revolve around the notion of sameness/difference. Thus, they argue that relationality is constructed via "several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 598).

Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2005) provided a more detailed explanation of these relations, which they term *tactics of intersubjectivity*, and which include the following identity relations:

a) Adequation and Distinction:

To embody adequation, people do not have to be, and cannot be, identical, but they need to sufficiently possess similarities among themselves to constitute them as part of the same whole in the localised interactional identity work. Adequation, therefore, compels differences that disrupt coherence to be downplayed, whereas the actions that are supportive of this coherence are elevated. Distinction, on the other hand, aims to suppress similarities and highlight differences. The veil is not only regarded as an important marker of distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim women, as it also serves to distinguish between Muslim women themselves, especially with regards to their level of piety. It was thus interesting to explore the ways the women in my interviews strive for and/or resist adequating or distinguishing themselves in relation to other veiled and non-veiled Muslim women.

b) Authentication and Denaturalisation:

This pair of identity relations concerns realness and artifice. Authentication deals with how identity can be discursively verified, whereas denaturalisation refers to the ways by which identities can be falsified, problematised, and fragmented. Dominant discourses establish a strong link between the wearing of the veil and a Muslim woman's identity. Therefore, it was interesting to see

how the non-veiled women interviewees problematise this strongly-established link (or accept it), thus in the process make claims about the realness and artificialness of their identities as Muslim women.

c) Authorisation and Illegitimation:

This pair relates to both the structural and institutional aspects of identity formation. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), authorisation is the “affirmation or imposition of an identity through structures of institutionalised power and ideology, whether local or translocal” (p.603). In contrast, illegitimation concerns the dismissal, censorship, and ignorance of identities by the same authoritative structures. The authors argued that the pair can materialise themselves implicitly in the absence of a visible authority, such as under the influence of hegemonic institutions and policies. As this research is located in the context of an Islamising Malaysia that has become increasingly critical towards Muslim women who do not veil, investigating the ways these ideological structures emerge in the women’s discourses and the challenges and constraints these pose to their lives, as well as how these women navigate through them, has proven insightful.

(v) **The Partialness Principle**

The idea of partialness echoes that of intersubjectivity and relationality, because Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argued that the process of identity making will always be partial, as identity is “produced through contextually and ideologically informed configurations of self and other” (p. 605). Simply put, identity is constructed not merely from the self, but that its construction needs to take into account the varying ways by which external factors can be of influence. Thus, the partialness principle problematises the role of agency in identity making. Although the authors posited that identity is one type of social action that can be accomplished through agency, they also argued that the partialness principle de-emphasises the notion of full agency, choosing instead to advance the notion that power constraints and social structures are influential factors in discursive identity construction. Therefore, agency may also be attributed depending on the perceptions and representations of others assigned via ideologies and structures (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The partialness principle was also not readily-operationalised in this study because this principle is already addressed or embedded conceptually in other principles such as relationality. As noted by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) with regards to relationality, “...identities are never autonomous or independent, but always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and social actors” (p. 598). As such, I argue that this principle does not need to be operationalised explicitly as it already addresses an underlying belief about how identity operates through a discourse and social constructionist lens.

Following the arguments presented above, I reiterate here that the principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality were utilised in the analyses of discursive identity constructions in the interviews. However, they are also supplemented with theories informed by Baxter’s (2003) FPDA, as well as intersectionality.

(b) Baxter’s (2003) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

In her seminal work, Baxter (2003) defined FPDA as a “feminist approach to analysing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in the world according to the ways they are located by competing yet interwoven discourses” (p. 1).

Poststructuralism and feminism are two distinct dimensions that make up FPDA. Weedon (1987) defined feminist postructuralism as “a mode of knowledge production which uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes, and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change” (p. 40). According to Baxter (2003), the poststructuralist dimension is greatly influenced by the Foucauldian model that outlines the operation of power in discourse, which brings an understanding that if an individual's identity is already inscribed or assigned in available discourses (which are regulated by those in power), then these “processes may operate to reproduce social inequalities” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.31).

Baxter (2003) further argued that the post-structuralist dimension of FPDA requires analysts to examine the ways different discourses operate intertextually to position speakers as powerful and powerless, as they shift from one position to another in a matter of moments. Thus, these fleeting ‘shifts’ that speakers undertake underscore the point that the presence of power and power relations in discourses are not merely

constrained to its oppressive forms. As Litosseliti (2006) contended, “discourse is a potential site of struggle...moreover, positions are created, and social power relations are acted out, as well as challenged, through discourses” (p. 49). Therefore, as much as speakers can be constrained by and through discourses, they have the space to reconfigure power relations in their processes of subjectification (Staunæs, 2003).

Furthermore, the feminist dimension of FPDA invites researchers to challenge the social category of gender as a determinant and predictor of male dominance and female subservience, especially in the context of spoken discourse. Although Baxter employed FPDA to analyse girls’ and boys’ oral talk in classrooms, I believe that the usage of FPDA brings forth recognition of the binary between women who do not veil and women who wear the veil. Subsequently, a critique of power relations will result, in which the dominant discourses that traditionally favour veiled women over their ‘less pious’ non-veiled sisters as the ‘embodiment of who and what a Muslim woman is’(see Izharuddin, 2018) are problematised.

This study is informed by many of Baxter’s works (2002, 2003, 2008) and those of other researchers who applied FPDA in their own works (see Kamada, 2009; Linaker, 2012). Ideas found therein were specifically applied in this study to explore how the participants construct their identities within mobilised discourses in talk that serve to simultaneously position them as powerful and powerless, and how they negotiate these power relations in the interviews. Moreover, by using FPDA, I wish to show that non-veiled Muslim women too can construct their own powerful discourses in explaining the reasons for not veiling and asserting their religious identity as Muslim women despite dominant discourses criticising and denying them the right to do so. Following Baxter’s convention in her works that were also adopted by other studies (see Kamada, 2009; Linaker, 2012), I applied FPDA primarily following a synchronic analysis that combined a denotative approach of descriptive micro-analysis of text and a connotative approach of interpreting speakers’ positions within discourses.

(c) Intersectionality

In contemporary feminist scholarship, intersectionality has provided significant contributions to the feminist project (Lykke, 2010; McCall, 2005). Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality was initially developed to explore the varying ways race and gender interact to construct Black women’s experiences of

subordination in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Developments in gender and feminist research, however, have contributed to intersectionality's relevance as a useful analytical tool (Staunæs, 2003) to explore "how people are simultaneously positioned – and position themselves – in multiple categories" (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 110) that can include gender, class, and sexuality. Not only does this argument reflect the principles espoused in FPDA (Baxter, 2003), but it also resembles those espoused in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) own work, in particular concerning positionality, indexicality, and relationality.

In her seminal paper on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) problematised the dominant single-axis framework to which much of feminist politics and antiracist laws and discourses subscribe. In this framework, the experiences of the most privileged members of society – such as white females – are taken as the locus from which discrimination is understood. Crenshaw (1989) therefore contended that "this focus on the most privileged group members marginalises those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination" (p. 140).

Because literature on Muslim women's experiences in Islamising Malaysia has been largely focused on the lives of the majority Malay-Muslims, this reasoning is also why intersectionality is deemed as an important consideration in this research. Here a space is offered in which the experiences of minority Muslim women – such as Chinese, Indians, and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak – are recorded and considered, to contribute to a much broader understanding of how the politicisation of religious tenets influence the lives of Malaysia's multi-ethnic populace.

In light of the research context, this study did not apply intersectionality as an analytical lens exclusively directed at minority members of society. Therefore, this study took note of the majority-inclusive approach proposed by Staunæs (2003) that includes majority as well as minority experiences in intersectional analyses. This is because "social categories condition the lives not only of those who are positioned as others but also of the more powerful and privileged" (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 112). Thus, against a backdrop of an increasingly conservative and Islamising Malaysian climate that has also historically been fraught with problematic race-relations, this study explored how these categories mutually constitute and interact

with each other to locate these women in particular subject positions as they construct themselves as non-veiled Muslim women in the interviews. As was remarked in Chapter 2, the categories (or, identity types) selected as anchor points include religious, gender, and ethnic identities. However, this study does not disregard and deny that other categories emerge in the women's discourses.

Just as this research subscribes to social-constructionist and discursive approaches to the construction of identity in talk (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; De Fina, 2011) it also underscores the 'doing of intersectionality' (Staunæs, 2003). This refers to "the doing of the relation between categories, the outcome of this doing and how this doing results in either troubled or untroubled subject positions" (Staunæs, 2003, p. 105). This 'doing of intersectionality' undercuts the essentialist presumption that social categories are fixed, and the predetermined hierarchies that certain categories might possess over others in an individual's experiences. Thus, the site in which 'doing' can be located is in accounts of lived experiences, such as ethnographic data and interviews (Staunæs, 2003; Christian & Jensen, 2012). To relate this to the topic at hand, this study is interested to explore how the intersecting of categories can be seen to be "compensating, overshadowing, saturating, and drowning one another" (Staunæs, 2003, p. 109) in these women's accounts of their constructions as Muslims. The multiplicity of identities means that identities can contradict and juxtapose against one another in an individual's processes of articulating their sense of self (Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002); yet this contradiction and indeed, entanglements with interrelated identities "constitute the richness and the dilemmas of their sense of self" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 11).

Thus, intersectionality is deemed a useful analytical lens that can supplement the linguistic principles of Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework as well as help to further expound upon arguments foregrounding Baxter's (2003) FPDA, in particular those concerning the discursive acts in which speakers can position themselves as powerful and/or powerless by taking up or resisting particular subject positions made available to them in dominant discourses.

To establish more clearly the links between the above frameworks, I propose a conceptual framework to describe the ways the more implicit concerns implicated in this research can be addressed. This framework is outlined in the following section.

3.2.3 Conceptual framework

Figure 3.1 is a visualisation of the framework, which links the three interwoven aspects of this research – identity, power, and the socio-political and historical context. What are specifically represented are the connections the research topic (discourse and identity) has with the subject and object (Muslim women, the veil and non-veiling), and the context (Malaysia).

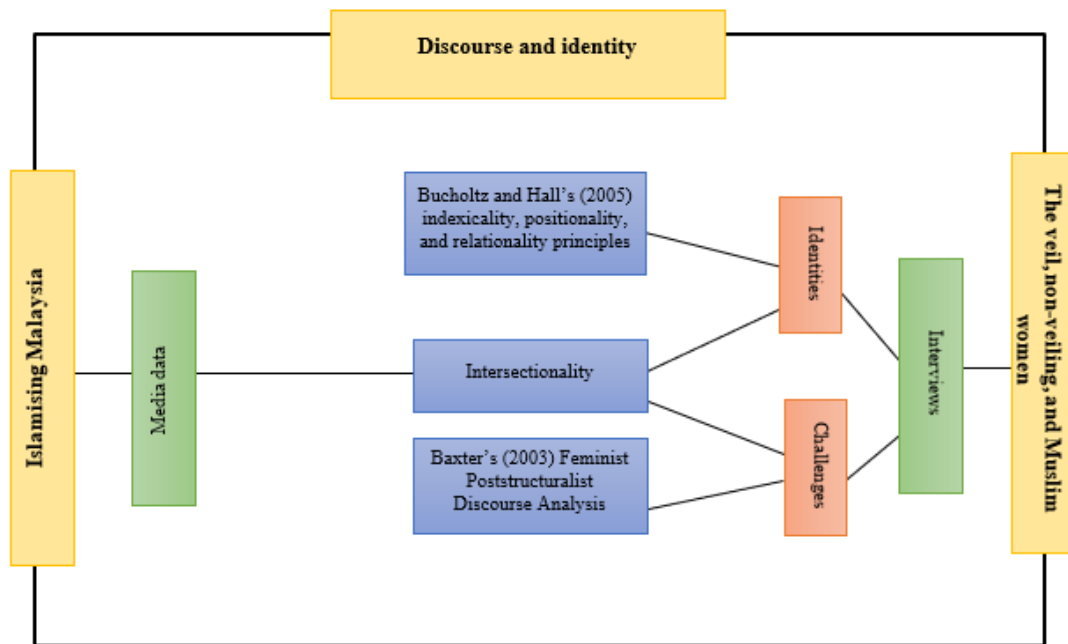


Figure 3.1: Proposed conceptual framework

It is important for the context in which Muslim women's relationship with the veil is highlighted because the veil has acquired such highly-charged, contested, and multiply-layered meanings due partly to the influences of Islamisation (Barr & Govindasamy, 2010; Othman, 2006). To provide an explorative background of this context, selected materials from several identified contemporary media sources in Malaysia were examined to explore the ways Malaysian Muslim women have been portrayed and presented with regards to the tudung. Crenshaw's (1991) 'representational intersectionality' served as the primary framework here. These media sources reflect certain discourses and beliefs about Muslim women and the veil in Malaysia, and including them provides readers with the context to better comprehend the claims made and the positions assumed by the participants in the ensuing analyses. This is the focus of the first analytical chapter in Chapter 4, and more details are forthcoming in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.4.2.

Situated within Islamising Malaysia are the interactions between the subject (Muslim women) and the object (the veil), through which the processes of identity constructions can be explored. This is the focus of the second analytical chapter (Chapter 5), in which Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles are of most relevance and utilised. Here, the workings of power are also explored, in particular when these women speak about the challenges they face as non-veiled Muslims. Specifically, an investigation of power between the (present and non-present) actors involved in the multiple conversations and narratives that take place within the women's discourses highlights the complex power dynamics among these multiple voices. By employing the lens of FPDA, this study explored how these women negotiated between occupying positions of the powerful and/or powerless by mobilising certain discourses revolving Muslim women and the veil.

Thus, FPDA concerns dynamics played out within the interview discourse. However, an intersectional feminist approach concerns the dynamics that shape the women's lives outside of discourse (which in turn play out within the interviews too). Thus, in talking about the challenges they face, these women also inevitably talk into being their other identities, and this aspect of 'doing of intersectionality' stresses the importance of exploring how these women construct multiple identities in their discourses and how they interplay to show how these women position themselves in particular ways within the spaces and constraints offered by dominant ideological structures. This is the focus of the third and final analytical chapter (Chapter 6).

3.2.4 Position as a researcher

In conducting this social constructionist research, I acknowledge that my position as a researcher had influence over the processes of meaning-making and knowledge construction with my participants. As I consider myself as sharing a similar background with my participants, namely that I am also a non-veiled Malaysian Muslim woman, I discuss the implications this 'identity' that I present have on my rapport with participants and my interpretation of the interviews.

As a non-veiled Muslim woman, I share similar experiences with my participants particularly when it comes to experiences of prejudice and discrimination encountered from certain members of some of our religious communities. This leads to a heightened sense of empathy with and for my participants, and a more informed

understanding of their narratives that can be enlisted to help me produce more nuanced interpretations of their interviews (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

However, although my participants and I come from a broadly similar context, the particular details of our backgrounds differ. Specifically, I acknowledge that my upbringing as a Muslim woman from an indigenous Bornean (specifically, Dusun) background, who was raised in Malaysian Borneo (and not the Peninsular) in the 1990s and 2000s, can in different ways influence the co-construction of knowledge between myself and my participants (Mann, 2016).

This is because the diversity of our respective life experiences, and our interpretations of them, can colour our perspectives in multifarious ways (Banks, 1998), and this in turn can influence the interpretation of the interview. For instance, ethnic differences can be influential. As I am ethnically Dusun, I bring along different perspectives that may or may not correspond with those of my Malay, Chinese, or Indian participants. In summary, I believe I am positioned somewhere in between, as an insider-outsider researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The sharing of schema also has its own setbacks. Because my participants and I can relate to one another when speaking about our lived experiences as non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia, we used less explicit words, phrases and expressions. In my interview transcripts, instances of acknowledgment of shared experiences and knowledge between myself and my participants are signalled with linguistic markers and gestures such as ‘you know’ and ‘*kan(?)*’ (right[?]). Consequently, this leads to the construction of implicit and obscure meanings, which can render a reading superficial and/or problematic, especially if done by readers who are unfamiliar with the subject, object, and context of research. As Dwyer and Burke (2009) lamented on the difficulties of being an insider researcher:

It is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is also possible that the researcher’s perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants.

(p. 58).

However, in order to address this issue of participants not fully articulating their experience – perhaps because of a tacit assumption that I would nonetheless understand, I tried probing them to be more descriptive in their answers. To illustrate

this point, the following is an extract from my interview with Nadia. I was asking her to elaborate further the claim she made earlier in the interview that there were those who would condemn women who do not wear the hijab (my attempt at eliciting further description is highlighted in bold):

Extract 3.1 Nadia:

- 152 Farhana ((giggles)) Have you ever met those who you mentioned
condemn [others]?
- 153 Nadia Mmm!...I won't say they condemn me directly, but *ah*, if there
[in the Peninsular], usually during [university] orientation *lah* -
- 154 Farhana Okay
- 155 Nadia There will be that one, that week of orientation
- 156 Farhana Mmm yup
- 157 Nadia They'll get you to wear tudung. And, there's a time *lah* during
the beginning of the orientation I was like "I don't wanna wear
it why do you wanna force me to wear it?"
- 158 Farhana Aa
- 159 Nadia And that group of – what do they call, that one?
- 160 Farhana Faci[litators]?
- 161 Nadia Ah! Faci, they always like you know, give you the looks
- 162 Farhana What kind of look is that? Can you describe?**
- 163 Nadia ((squeals)) You know, that disgusted look –
- 164 Farhana Aa
- 165 Nadia Nnot really disgusted, just like...*ah*, how *ah*? You look at them
and you know they're not one of your cliques
- 166 Farhana Ohhh

My relationship with my participants also had implications for the interview process. The participants recruited belong to one of the following: a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger. I have some degree of familiarity with the first two groups, and in some instances, I also have knowledge of their individual histories with veiling and related personal incidences. Having such prior knowledge and established rapport with the women in these groups meant more insights into the kinds of further questions that could be asked in order to engage them and elicit more nuanced responses. Moreover, the established rapport helped in conducting more conducive interview exchanges. Interestingly however, I also noted difficulties with the familiar group of women. For instance, one kept asking me for reassurance that she was doing well and whether she was helpful to my research. As such, the interview was peppered with my reassurances and my encouragements for her to speak without worrying over my thoughts and opinions. The following is an extract from my interview with Saleha, with whom I

had gone to school. I had earlier asked her to describe her definition of a Muslim woman:

Extract 3.2 Saleha:

- 440 Saleha How...[[stutters]] who is a Muslim woman?
441 Farhana Ya...your personal description of a Muslim woman
442 Saleha (.)
443 Farhana How would you describe?
444 Saleha Oh! She – des- describe? Not like (.) particular someone?
445 Farhana Ya...
446 Saleha **[[Saleha asks for many prompts and reassurances]]** not (.)
uh...for me, a Muslim person (.) uh of course like (.) even (.) oh
[[stutters]] a Muslim name only *lah*. Not like (.) like what is a
perfect Muslim. **Is it (.) like that?**
447 Farhana Any...oh yeah
448 Saleha Ohhh for me like (.) uh uh a Muslim is like...if you...(.) it's
already stated – stated Muslim [on an official document,
perhaps] so of course you are Muslim. But, despite of how you
look, despite of like, how you act and stuff, all of that doesn't
define like (.) even if you wear tudung
449 Farhana Mmm
450 Saleha **But you (.) how to say ah? [[laughs]] uhhh what was it?**
[[peeks over my paper]]
451 Farhana [[laughs]] eh! Don't you peek!
452 Saleha Okay uhhh what was it...uhh how a Muslim person is? Okay.
Even if you don't wear tudung, doesn't matter like...kau (.) you
don't wear tudung anyway, but (.) even on your birth certificate
you already [stated] Muslim right, or like if you convert, you are
Muslim. So that's Muslim. But how they look, and how they act
and stuff all that, doesn't define like oh they are not Muslim
because they don't wear tudung.

Notice that even in a short extract, Saleha requested various prompts and reassurances (not all of which I transcribed, because of their tediousness), which I believe was partly her effort to ensure that she was responding properly to my questions, because, as she stated before our interview started, she wanted to be able to help me with my research. However, despite the various stops and stutters, Saleha was nevertheless able to articulate a response to my question.

However, this does not imply that interactions with the third group, those who were strangers, were any less insightful or more problematic. My position as an insider — a non-veiled Muslim woman — helped to significantly ease the building of interviewer-interviewee rapport which led to interviewees speaking more easily and openly.

It is acknowledged that all the variables mentioned have implications for researcher interpretation of the interview data. Court and Abbas (2013) outlined several questions to help researchers address reflexivity in interviews. These include matters such as the cultural relationship between interviewer and participant, the influence of cultural norms, the issues of status, age, gender, as well as some analytical considerations concerning interpretation, and presentation of interview data, all of which are relevant to this research.

However, these biases can be mitigated. My interpretations are informed and corroborated with literature on Muslim women in Malaysian and international contexts. I also used crucial feedback received from presenting at numerous Malaysian and international conferences on language, gender, and identity. My supervisors – both of whom do not come from the same background and community as the participants and me – also provided comments that added a more critical lens to my insider perspective, which allowed me to interpret the interviews with multiple, alternative readings.

Now that theoretical underpinnings of this research, and the position of the researcher have been explained, the following section describes the methods chosen to collect the data.

3.3 Research methods

This research employed a qualitative-oriented approach, specifically, a discourse analysis-based approach reflective of constructionist views (Lock & Strong, 2010; Nikander, 2008; Potter, 1996). Moreover, in line with De Fina (2011) who advocated a social constructionist and interactionist approach to the study of identity that stresses the ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ of identity, the one-on-one interview was chosen as the primary source of data. The interviews were also supplemented by selected sources from contemporary Malaysian media, the reasons for are explained in Sections 3.3.2.

3.3.1 One-on-One interviews

Existing research on Muslim women and the veil have employed the use of interviews, with participant numbers ranging from as low as 14 to as high as 127 (see Hochel, 2013; Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Ruby, 2006). Therefore, in-depth one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were selected as primary data sources for this investigation. In keeping with the purposes of this research – an explorative study

aimed at understanding an under-researched phenomenon – 20 women were recruited as research participants.

This method of gathering data was used because it allowed the researcher and interviewer some degree of control over the range of themes to be raised with participants (Potter, 1996), and also provided the flexibility to address other themes that are unique to respective participants. In addition, by engaging in conversation with these women as an empathetic non-veiled Malaysian Muslim woman, the interview offered a much safer space, one in which the latter could divulge intimate details about their experiences, emotions, and thoughts with regards to themselves and their non-veiling.

Drawing on naturally-occurring talk was considered impractical for the purposes of this research. This is because the topic of veiling may not readily enter normal conversations, unless some viral incident or news relating to the veil (and the women who wear/do not wear them) circulate in popular media. Examples of such cases took place in 2016 involving Malaysian actress Uqasha Senrose, and most recently in 2019 involving Emma Maembong. Both women stopped wearing the hijab, which caused a stir and public outcry (Awang Chik, 2016; Mohamad, 2019; Mohd Tahir, 2016a)

Focus group interviews were also ruled out after considering these reasons. Furthermore, the attention here is on individual not collective identity construction (see Edley & Litosseliti, 2018; Litosseliti, 2003; Munday, 2006 for discussions on a focus group approach).

To guide the broad themes of inquiry from which interview questions were formulated, this study referred to Read and Bartkowski's (2000) research on veiled and non-veiled Muslim women in Austin, USA. I adapted questions relating to the women's experiences with veiling (on practical, emotional, and spiritual levels), the reasons that led them to veil and/or later stopped veiling, as well as the impact such decisions have had on their existing relationships. However, the veil's significance in their lives and the importance of Islamic beliefs and devotional activities were topics that were not asked because of the very real possibility that it would lead to judgments of religiosity on my part. It was also more interesting to see if both topics would appear organically during the course of the interviews.

The following lists some of the questions that were asked in each interview:

- i. The meaning of the veil to them
- ii. Their conception of a Muslim woman
- iii. Their experiences with the veil – whether or not they have worn the veil for a significant portion of their lives
- iv. The challenges they faced from not veiling

Further details on participant recruitment and the interviewing process are explained in Section 3.4.

3.3.2 Media data

To assist in gaining a more comprehensive and yet nuanced understanding of Muslim women's lives in Islamising Malaysia, media data were collected and examined to provide a background picture of the ways Muslim women have been represented and portrayed in selected contemporary Malaysian media, especially with regards to the tudung. These included data from broadcast and print media such as television, film, talk shows, newspapers, and magazines.

Feldshuh's (2018) work on the construction of the *shengnu* – what China calls its 'leftover women' – in Chinese media sought to "explore how myths in Chinese media of an ideal woman, and her 'leftover' counterpart, are created and perpetuated, with the goal of understanding how these myths transform into tools of social policing and enforcement" (p. 40). Similarly, through examination of Muslim women's portrayals in selected contemporary Malaysian media, this study explored the ways the 'ideal Muslim woman' image are perpetuated, and the ways non-veiled Muslim women are portrayed to conform to or deviate from this perpetuated ideal. Consequently, in what ways this image can potentially be used as means of social policing and enforcement by state establishments at an institutional level, but also by members of the public at a societal level. Thus, I identified prominent gendered and religious discourses that permeate through the media data, and linking them with the interviews, examined how some of these discourses were reflected in participants' discourses.

The type of media materials collected were identified and selected based on the literature on women, media, and discourse. The selection criteria include popularity (Feldshuh, 2018; Ibrahim, Yunus, Shah, Ilias, & Mokhtar, 2017; Mahadeen, 2015; Zubair, 2016), wide-circulation (Yan & Bissell, 2014), and longest-running (Minic, 2008). Indeed, because the aim of the chapter is to provide a descriptive context to aid

the understanding of participant answers, I therefore chose the most popular and longest-running media sources.

Thus, the selected media data comprised of the television show *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (Jalil, 2016); the film *Ombak Rindu* (Sharan & Ali, 2011); women's talk show *Wanita Hari Ini* (Yusof, 2016); the women's magazine *Mingguan Wanita* (Mohd Alias, 2016); as well as newspaper publications *Harian Metro* (Tuan Hussein, 2016) and *The Star* (Goh, 2016). Furthermore, all the data sources identified and collected discussed topics that were deemed relevant. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all data sources fulfilled each criterion listed. For instance, although *Wanita Hari Ini* is reportedly the longest-running women's talk show in Malaysia (it first-aired in 1997), there presently exists no data to gauge its actual popularity among viewers.

To ensure the media data coincided with the interview data, I collected and examined selected materials from these media sources that were aired or published in 2016, which is the year I conducted my interviews. However, in certain instances, there was a need to look further back several years to ensure the best possible data sources were used, a point I revisit in subsequent pages.

The following are the identified media sources:

(i) **Television: *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (7 Days Loving Me) (7HM)**



Figure 3.2: Poster for *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (2016)

Synopsis

A love story between Mia, a lawyer raised in a privileged, urban upbringing, and Khuzairi, a doctor-cum-goat farmer raised in a modest, kampung lifestyle. Mia (who is non-veiled for three quarters of the 28-episode show) is an arrogant and proud young woman who thinks lowly of those she considers below her social stature. Khuzairi, on the other hand, is Mia's complete opposite in character and temperament – he is kind, humble, and does his best to see good in everybody. Mia's comfortable life is turned upside down when she finds herself unexpectedly married to Khuzairi; in dire financial straits, she is forced to accept married life in the humble kampung setting, resisting with all her might the gentle care and affection of her husband. However, despite the trials and tribulations that test their relationship, the death of a beloved supporting character ultimately compels Mia to undergo a change in character and temperament. Most visibly striking is her change in appearance as she dons the hijab for the remaining quarter of the show.

This was the most-watched drama of 2016, with a reported 12 million viewers (Malaysia has an approximate population of 31 million). It also won multiple awards at the 2017 Kuala Lumpur Drama Festival Awards (Ramli, 2017). For this research, the lead character's (Mia) change from a loathsome woman to a compassionate one, with an accompanying transformation that sees her wearing the hijab, is of relevance.

(ii) **Film: *Ombak Rindu* (Wave of Longing) (OR)**



Figure 3.3: *Ombak Rindu* theatrical poster (2011)

Synopsis

Izzah, a veiled young woman from an impoverished kampung background, has her peaceful life turned upside down when she is sold by her uncle to a nightclub in the city. Intoxicated and taken advantage of by the wealthy and arrogant Hariz, Izzah

gains consciousness and begs him to take her away, with the hopes of her living a lawful life as his wife. The two strike a compromise – Hariz will wed Izzah provided she does not claim her rights as a wife. The two gradually find affection for one another, but the arrival of Mila, a non-veiled woman and childhood friend of Hariz to whom the latter is betrothed, threatens to rock their relationship.

Released in 2011, this film was the only media material collected that was not aired or published in 2016, the year identified for data collection. It was selected because at the time of its release, it was immensely popular, and arguably, had a cultural impact that led to an academic study (see Jayasainan, Hassim, & Khalid, 2014). As of 2018, it remains one of the highest-grossing films of all-time in Malaysia, and the highest for its genre – romance (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia, 2011, 2018). This rank is all the more significant given that films that are ranked higher than *Ombak Rindu* are action and horror films, and hence, not relevant to my research focus. More importantly, the representations of the two female leads in this film are telling. The demure Izzah who comes from modest means wears the tudung, whereas the wealthy, assertive, and modern Mila does not.

(iii) Women’s talk show: *Wanita Hari Ini* (Today’s Women) (WHI)

First aired in 1997, WHI is reportedly the longest-running women’s talk show that discusses women’s issues, family, health awareness, and fashion in Malaysia. WHI airs on TV3, Malaysia’s most-watched free TV channel with an estimated audience share of 21.4% on both free-to-air and pay-TV networks (based on the January-June 2016 Nielson Audience Measurement report, as cited in Content Asia, 2017). TV3’s primary audience are Malay-speaking, although the content they offer cater to women of all ages, races, and professions, and guests from diverse backgrounds are invited to be on the show. More importantly, WHI features two main hosts, Fiza Sabjahan and Hazrena (Rena) Kassim. Because the former does not wear tudung, but the latter does, it is of interest to this study to examine the ways in which they portrayed themselves (and are portrayed) on camera.



Figure 3.4: WHI hosts Rena (L) and Fiza (R) (Wanita Hari Ini, 2016)

(iv) **Women's magazine: *Mingguan Wanita* (Women's Weekly) (MW)**

As of 2018, *Mingguan Wanita* is reportedly Malaysia's most popular women's magazine that focuses on topics such as wellbeing, home and family, as well as featuring in-depth coverage of life stories of real-life Malaysian women (Adqrte, 2018).

(v) **Newspapers: *Harian Metro* and *The Star***

According to reports by the Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia (2016b, 2016a) compiled twice, between January to June, and July to December, *Mingguan Malaysia* was the most widely-read Malay-language publication in 2016 with a total of 596,457 copies circulated, followed by *Kosmo! Ahad* (380,713); *Kosmo!* (345,169); *Metro Ahad* (316,639); and *Harian Metro* (291,515). Despite its fifth-place ranking (out of a total of ten Malay-language publications included in the report) *Harian Metro*, a daily publication was selected as the main Malay newspaper publication for analysis. This was because *Mingguan Malaysia* is a weekly publication, and it has no dedicated online archives from which articles could easily be accessed. On the other hand, the two editions of *Kosmo!* are popular, but as they are not published in the Malaysian Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak, I chose not to include them. *Metro Ahad* is the weekend edition of *Harian Metro*, but similar to *Mingguan Malaysia*, has no dedicated online archives. According to the same report published in 2016, *The Star* was Malaysia's most widely-read daily English-language newspaper with a total publication of 469,531 copies.

More details on the data collection procedure of the interview and the media sources are described in Section 3.4. The following section discusses the pilot study undertaken before one-on-one interviews with participants were conducted.

3.3.3 Pilot study

The relevance and viability of the interview questions and research procedure were tested through a pilot study conducted with two individuals, Nora and Melissa (pseudonyms). These women were recruited because they were both non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women and were acquaintances with whom I shared an easy rapport, thus contributing to a comfortable and conducive interactional environment. Moreover, this atmosphere enabled more comfortable testing of various aspects of the interviewing process and questions for improvement purposes. As I was in the UK at the time of the pilot study and both women were in Malaysia, the interviews were conducted via Skype.

The pilot study led to improvements for the actual data collection. These included re-arranging the order of the interview questions, and the need for me to sharpen my listening skills, as well as improve my ability to read between the lines and gauge more sensitive and subtle details from the participants' responses.

These shortcomings that were encountered during the pilot sessions were mostly addressed successfully during the interviews for the data collection. Yet, there were still issues that emerged during the interviews, such as difficulties with time and location, and these are addressed in Section 3.4.3.

3.3.4 Ethics and consent

In accordance with departmental Centre for Applied Linguistics and University of Warwick's ethics regulations, I submitted an ethics approval form detailing amongst other things the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality of participant identities and information proffered are safeguarded (Appendix A; Appendix B). As per requirement, I also devised an Informed Consent Form (ICF) (Appendix C) that was reviewed and approved by my supervisor. Both documents outlined important information about the research undertaken, and addressed the issues of confidentiality, and offered participants the option to withdraw from the study at any point without putting themselves at risk. As the research deals with sensitive material, the

participants have been given pseudonyms and any detail or information divulged in the interviews that can identify them were kept confidential.

The ICF was prepared in English, and it was only in very few instances that I explained to some participants what each section of the ICF entailed (though not necessarily due to language issues). The form was prepared in English because based on the participant pool, I expected the participants to have command of the language. Nevertheless, the participants were given the option to be provided with a consent form in Malay, although none accepted as they understood the one in English. However, time was still taken before each interview to ask the participant whether they understood what was required in the consent form. The participants were only allowed to sign the consent form once I had received confirmation of understanding.

3.4 Research procedure

This section explains the procedures undertaken to conduct the interviews and collect the media data.

3.4.1 Interview procedure

The interview procedure can be divided into stages reflecting the processes that took place before, during, and after the interviews.

(a) Recruitment

The participants were recruited following the ‘snowball’ method, which is a preferred method of participant sampling in similar research (Droogsma, 2007; Fadil, 2011; Hochel, 2013; Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Ruby, 2006). However, this method was also supplemented with the ‘purposive’ sampling method. The purposive element largely addressed the regional and ethnic variation amongst the participants. Although the overarching purpose of this research was to understand the process of identity construction/negotiation among non-veiled Muslim women, it was also relevant to examine whether the participants’ region of origin (Peninsular Malaysia or East Malaysia) and their ethnicity (for instance Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous Sabahan, Indigenous Sarawakian) hold any influence on their experiences. It has been noted that the political and religious climate in Peninsular Malaysia is more dominated by ethnic Malay Muslims and the tensions between the minority Chinese and Indians (Hirschman, 1986) than is the case in East Malaysia. Following from this, my posited

argument is that women in Peninsular Malaysia who do not veil possibly have experienced heightened prejudice and marginalisation from the Muslim community.

To recruit my participants, a ‘Call for Participant’ (CfP) advertisement prepared in English and Malay was designed and disseminated through the social media site, Facebook, in June 2016 (Appendix D). The CfP generated favourable responses, and several participants from my own social network were recruited. Further potential participants were introduced through my Facebook friends. In selecting Facebook to disseminate the CfP, the intention was not to target participants who are social media users. Rather, it was to utilise my existing social media network as I am an active user of Facebook. Moreover, Facebook is also widely-used among Malaysian users (Mohamad Nasir & Ahmad, 2013), with 97.3% of 21.9 million Malaysian Internet users claiming they owned a Facebook account in 2016 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions, 2017). Apart from this recruitment method, potential participants were also personally approached through the medium of either a mutual friend or acquaintance. Over the data collection stage that spanned from June to September 2016, 20 participants were successfully recruited and interviewed.

The only requisite conditions for recruitment were that the woman considers herself a Muslim who is either a non-hijab wearer or considers herself to be a non-hijab wearer (as some wear the hijab occasionally for business and personal reasons). With regards to the label ‘Muslim’, no labels of religiosity and piety were specified or imposed onto each participant as conditions for her to be considered as a ‘practising’ and/or ‘religious’ Muslim. This is in alignment with a social constructionist approach. More specifically, it provided participants with the space to articulate their own personal meaning of their religious identity and to challenge and contest dominant descriptions and labels that are commonly associated with being Muslim women. Similar approaches were adopted by Read and Bartkowski (2000) and Peek (2005). The latter’s additional referencing strategy of considering her own observations to measure participants’ level of religiosity was not adopted in this research.

(b) Participants

A total of 20 participants were interviewed. Table 3.1 lists the demographic details for each participant.

No	Name	Age (years-old)	Ethnicity	Hometown	Education level	Occupation	Civil status
01	Kartika	41	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Postgraduate	Education (English lecturer)	Single
02	Dayana	26	Indonesian Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Tertiary	Sales and marketing	Single
03	Nadia	25	Indigenous Sabahan	Sabah	Undergraduate	Unemployed	Single
04	Suzana	46	Indigenous Sabahan/Chinese	Sabah	Postgraduate	Education (Head of Dept.)	Single
05	Liza	59	Chinese	Sabah	Tertiary	Healthcare (Dietitian)	Married
06	Fatma	42	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Management and marketing	Married
07	Rose	24	Indian	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Education (Research Assistant)	Single
08	Thalia	27	Indigenous Sabahan	Sabah	Undergraduate	Media (Journalist)	Single
09	Erma	35	Chinese	Sabah	Postgraduate	Education (tutor)	Married
10	Juliana	25	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Media (Writer)	Single
11	Huda	24	Indigenous Sarawakian/Malay	Sarawak	Undergraduate	Media (Journalist)	Single
12	Munirah	20	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Student	Single
13	Amirah	29	Mixed-Asian	Sabah	Postgraduate	Education (Lecturer)	Single
14	Hayati	45	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Postgraduate	Education (Lecturer)	Divorced
15	Zureen	58	Malay	Sarawak	Postgraduate	Education (Lecturer)	Single
16	Syakira	22	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Student	Single
17	Siti	22	Malay	Peninsular Malaysia	Undergraduate	Student	Single
18	Azreen	19	Indigenous Sabahan	Sabah	Tertiary	Student	Single
19	Yasmin	34	Indigenous Sabahan	Sabah	Tertiary	Administration	Single
20	Saleha	25	Indigenous Sabahan/Indian	Sabah	Postgraduate	Student	Single

Table 3.1 Demographic details of interview participants

Participants were mainly from middle-class and educated backgrounds. I had wanted to explore the differences in the perspectives of women from different class groups. However, although there were repeated attempts to recruit participants from less

advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (such as those who had not attended tertiary education, and work in low-waged menial jobs), they ultimately failed. I do not consider this as a limitation, because as the analyses demonstrate, I was still able to garner rich insights into the lived experiences of the women I interviewed. Nevertheless, future research should aim to investigate women from different socio-economic classes, as well as women from urban and rural areas.

(c) Interview context

A summary of the overall interview context (revised from Mann, 2016) addresses several points as follows:

(i) Setting

15 of the 20 interviews took place in various public locations, i.e., cafés, and restaurants, as well as private spaces such as the interviewees' offices. The location of each interview was jointly discussed and agreed upon by both the interviewer and the interviewee. The other five interviews were conducted via Skype, mostly due to distance between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviews typically lasted between 40 to 90 minutes.

(ii) Participants

In most cases, the typical interview session involved only two participants – the researcher and the participant. There were two exceptions. One interviewee had her husband and two children present at the interview location (as they had just finished a family matter) and another insisted that her two best friends remained in the interview room, which was inside a deserted meeting room of a library (she was a college student). I believe the interviews with these women were not negatively impacted as they were comfortable with having the respective individuals in close vicinity.

(iii) Equipment

A small recording device placed at a suitable distance away from the interviewer and interviewee was used. As the interviewer, I also used a pen and several sheets of paper to access the interview questions. Before the interview began, participants were asked whether they were comfortable with the recording of the interview and placement of a recording device.

(iv) Objects

As part of the interview questions, participants were shown several images and a quote containing negative rhetoric on non-veiled Muslim women (see Appendix E). These prompts were used to elicit comments, and opinions on what these illustrate about contemporary society and whether they have any influence over them as non-veiled Muslim women. One of these depicts the popular rhetoric of the ‘unwrapped vs. wrapped candy’ analogy against non-veiled Muslim women. Participants were also presented with a screenshot of a Tweet in Malay conveying a well-known sentiment against non-veiled women. Both materials were introduced in the Introduction and Literature Review chapters. Several issues rose from this, which I address in Section 3.4.3.

(v) Language choice

As was stated on the CfP, participants were offered the options of conducting interviews in Malay and/or English. These two languages were selected not only because they are the two lingua francas among Malaysians (Malay is the national language and English is an officially-recognised second language), but also because I am a native speaker of Malay and a fluent speaker of English. Language issues that arose, especially during the translation phase are discussed in Section 3.5.2.

(d) Interview process

A typical interview procedure involved the researcher making initial contact with the interested individual to establish rapport and to briefly introduce the research study. Care was taken to explain the research so as not to reveal any details that could potentially influence the interviewee’s responses. For instance, it was not stated that this research was to explore their religious identity constructions. Instead, it was stressed that the focus was on understanding the experiences and the challenges they as Muslim women in Malaysia who do not wear the tudung face. Participants were then asked for demographic details such as age, ethnicity, hometown, level of education, and occupation. The ‘civil status’ attribute was added to this list of information at a later stage in the process after consultation with my supervisors.

Participants were asked to read and sign the ICF before each interview commenced. As was stated, a typical interview session lasted between 40 to 90 minutes. Although for the most part the interviews were completed successfully, there were several

obstacles that made the process challenging. These problems, together with the approaches taken to overcome them are addressed in Section 3.4.3.

3.4.2 Collecting media data

The media sources to be examined were identified and collected sometime after the interview period had ended, which was sometime around early 2017 and took just about a month. The materials were all readily available and easily accessed online on YouTube, various streaming portals, and their respective dedicated websites. The only exception to this was *Mingguan Wanita*. Its website does not provide easy access to previously-published editions, and even after repeated contacts with the magazine's publisher, Karangraf, I was unable to procure the materials needed. However, the desired materials were finally procured by signing-up for a one-week trial period on an online paid publication portal called Magzter.

(a) Examining media materials

The media data collected from the five identified sources were meant to help explore and illustrate a background picture of the ways Muslim women in Malaysia have been portrayed in selected media with regards to the tudung. As was stated earlier, discourses (particularly, gendered and religious) were identified and examined, and the analysis followed Crenshaw's (1991) 'representational intersectionality' to describe and explore how these discourses help shape and highlight the 'ideal Muslim woman' image in Malaysia.

(b) Summary of media materials

Below is a summary of the elements selected and examined for each respective media data:

(i) *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (television) and *Ombak Rindu* (film):

I watched all of the 28 episodes of *7 Hari Mencintaiku*, all of which were made available on YouTube (TV3 Malaysia Official, 2017). I also watched the full 125 minutes of the film *Ombak Rindu*, which was made available on a streaming website, Adudu Network (2011).

(ii) *Wanita Hari Ini* (women's talk show)

A random sampling calculation on Excel generated a list of ten random episodes of the 254 that were available on the show's YouTube channel (TV3 Malaysia Official, 2018). However, only four of these ten episodes were selected for investigation

because they featured the main hosts Fiza (non-veiled) and Rena (veiled) presenting the show together.

(iii) *Mingguan Wanita* (women's weekly magazine)

I collected and examined 21 editions published between the months of May 2016 to December 2016 from Magzter, an online magazine portal. Examination of each magazine issue was confined to the cover pages and the cover models. The models that graced the cover of each edition were examined because “cover models usually represent the ideals of appearance and beauty in fashion magazines,” (Yan & Bissell, 2014, p. 200). However, following this research focus, I argue for the examination of appearance and beauty as part of a broader consideration of womanhood and femininity as the latter are bound up closely to ideals of the Malay woman and religion.

(iv) *Harian Metro* and *The Star* (Malay and English language newspapers)

The keywords ‘tudung’ and ‘hijab’ were both used to filter for articles published throughout 2016 on the online archives of both news publications. More details of the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

3.4.3 Limitations and challenges

In the following, I address the limitations and challenges encountered throughout the interviewing and media data collection processes. The overall limitations of this research are addressed towards the end of this thesis in Chapter 8: Section 8.5.

(i) Limitations and challenges in the interviews

Numerous challenges presented themselves throughout the interview period. Below are those that are relevant to be addressed:

(a) Location and setting

Participants were recruited from various parts of Malaysia - the Peninsular and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo – which posed logistical difficulty as I was based in Sabah. This was easily overcome by using Skype as the interviewing medium.

(b) Time constraints

As some participants were constrained for time due to work and personal commitments, permission was asked for me to contact them if further questions were

necessary. Besides one short phone call with one participant to clarify a small point, no other further contact was needed as the interview data gathered was deemed sufficient to address the research objectives.

(c) Sensitive information

This particular issue challenged my skill and ability as an interviewer, especially when it came to handling sensitive information dealing with personal trauma divulged by the participants. At times, I found myself struggling to progress with the interview, especially when the participant had a change in demeanour after they had recounted a particularly painful anecdote. During such instances, I asked them if they needed to pause, to gather their thoughts and collect themselves, to which they responded positively, and the interviews would proceed. As I had hoped for and anticipated, the interview sessions offered some form of confessional and counselling elements to the participants. Thus, although it was clear that it was difficult for them to express themselves at certain points, several participants admitted to me that it had helped them to release some repressed emotions and thoughts.

(d) Diminished interest

This concerns participant recruitment. Interest in participation diminished after the first round of CfP distribution among my Facebook network. To overcome this, a friend with an extensive and well-connected Twitter network was asked to distribute the CfP. From mid-September to early October, the CfP had been re-tweeted more than 700 times, and as a result I was contacted by multiple individuals interested to participate in the study.

(e) Interview materials

The most challenging aspect of including the interview materials on anti-non-veiling images and tweets was apparent during interviews that were conducted via Skype. As I did not wish for interviewees to have any preconceived notions by accessing the materials before the interview, I did not include them in our email exchanges prior to the interview. Instead, I emailed the materials at the point in the interview where they were asked for their opinions on their materials. In cases where interviewees were unable to open or download the material, I held them up in front of the screen and read aloud any accompanying wording.

(ii) Limitations and challenges in collecting media data

The specified media materials were easily accessible, except for *Mingguan Wanita*. Despite examining only a select few materials, these were deemed to be sufficient for fulfilling the purposes of this research.

I have addressed the limitations concerning the interviews and media data collection. Next, I discuss the approaches taken to prepare and analyse the interview data.

3.5 Approaches to analysing interview data

This section explains the approaches taken to prepare the interview data for analysis.

3.5.1 Transcribing

Participant interviews were transcribed using a browser-based application called Transcribe, which offered an intuitive and user-friendly interface (see Figure 3.6 in Section 3.5.3).

The transcribing process used a mix of naturalistic and denaturalistic approaches to transcription (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). Although transcriptions do not need to subscribe fully to a Jeffersonian approach (Mann, 2016), I nevertheless utilised some of the outlined notations (Jefferson, 2004) alongside my own personal convention (Appendix F). The transcription notations that I employed allowed the most salient features of the interviews, which included elements such as laughter, emphasis, stutters and pauses, as well as incomprehensible words and phrases to be made readable to readers. By making these features salient in the transcribed text, certain nuances regarding my participants' processes of identity constructions can be made apparent, and can assist in a more informed reading of the interpretations and arguments that are made.

The process of transcribing allowed researcher engagement in a preliminary stage of analysis and interpretation of the data (Roulston, 2013). As a result, specific excerpts to be used for detailed examination in the analytical chapters were identified. However, as the majority of the interviews were conducted in a mix of two languages, Malay, and English, this resulted in challenges in translating the interviews.

3.5.2 Translating

Instances of code-switching and code-mixing between Malay and English frequently occurred in the interviews, and are common practice in the colloquial Malaysian

English (or ‘Manglish’) style of speaking (Ahmad Bukhari, Anuar, Mohd Khazin, & Tengku Abdul Aziz, 2015; Koh, 1990). Consequently, most issues concerned the translating of Malay words and expressions into English.

For instance, it is difficult to translate certain Malay expressions and idioms into their English counterparts. Moreover, there are certain Malay words that have religious and cultural connotations not translatable to English equivalents. In certain cases, such words and phrases were translated literally or word-by-word to English. The translations were also not necessarily edited for grammatical accuracy. These were done so as to preserve the meanings and effects as I interpreted to be intended by the speaker. The examples of such words and expressions are highlighted and explained in subsequent analytical chapters, particularly Chapters 5 and 6.

To overcome such issues, guidance and advice from other Malaysian native speakers were sought. This allowed for the cross-checking of my interpretations of these words and expressions as they occurred in the contexts in which they were spoken and subsequently, for the initial translations. Also, reputable Malay language resources such as *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, the official authority on and the most distinguished repository of Malay language in Malaysia were referred to.

Certain choices were also made with regards to terminology. This study used the term ‘convert’ instead of ‘revert’ to refer to participants who were not born as Muslims but became Muslims later in life. The former was adopted because it has a more neutral denotation in signifying the change of an individual’s religious belief to another while the latter suggests a return of the individual to a previous state. In an Islamic context, the term ‘revert’ carries a religious connotation as it has been used by some to denote the return of non-Muslims to Islam. This is an assumption or belief that this study did not wish to impose upon participants. Besides ‘convert’, the more precise term ‘*muallaf*’, which in the Islamic context simply denotes a person who has become a Muslim, is used. The decision to employ this term was also influenced by the fact that participants who are converts also used it to refer to themselves.

3.5.3 Thematic analytical approach

In this section, I explicate clearly the processes involved in the coding procedure of the interview data, and make clearer how a thematic analysis helped in the structuring of the analytical chapters of this thesis, in particular for Chapter 6. Towards the end

of this section, I also succinctly describe the challenges that emerged throughout the coding procedure.

(a) Coding processes

Determination of broader themes that encapsulate and reflect the content from the interviews largely followed Saldana's (2009) guide on coding. This involved identifying the types of coding labels suitable for the transcripts, preparing a coding template and an accompanying codebook (see Appendices G-H), and manually coding the data using Microsoft Word (for further details, see Saldana, 2009). Initial experimentation using a qualitative software, i.e., NVivo 11 failed to produce a coding schema with adequate degree of nuance and abstraction required for this study.

Figure 3.5 illustrates the processes taken to identify the dominant themes that emerged from the interview data:

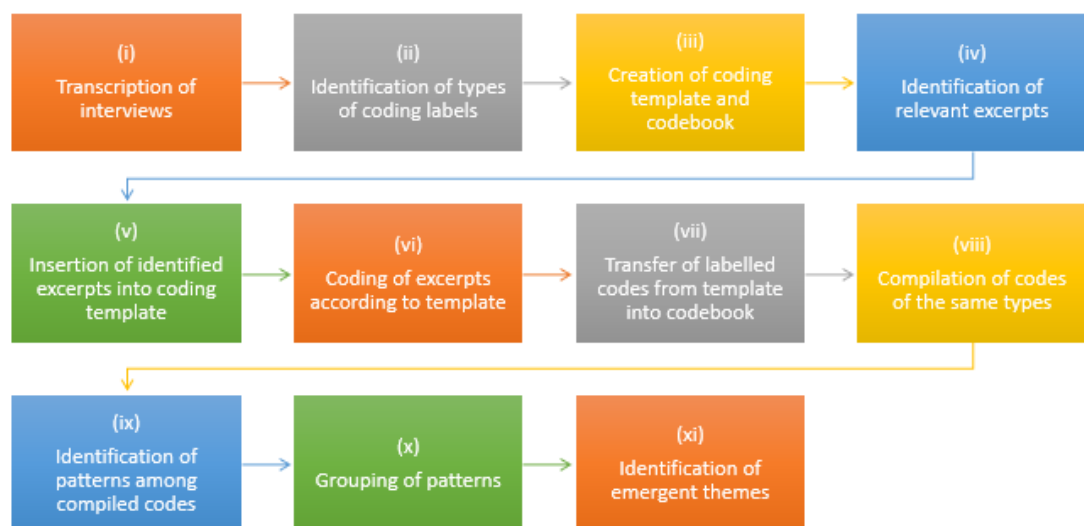


Figure 3.5: Processes taken to identify emergent themes from the interviews

(i) The coding procedure began with the transcription of the interviews on the browser-based transcription software, Transcribe.

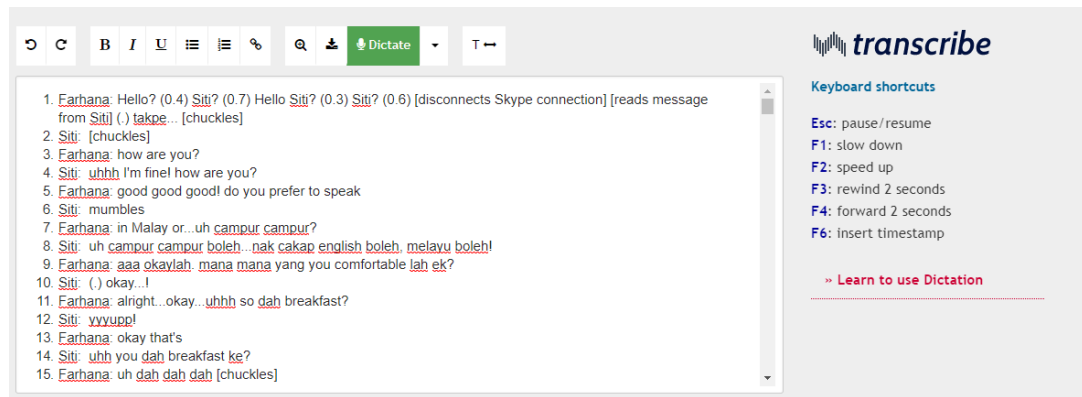


Figure 3.6: A screenshot of the user interface of Transcribe

(ii) Once all 20 of the participant interviews were transcribed, I consulted Saldana’s (2009) book to identify certain coding labels that would help me to better distinguish between the materials coded from the interviews. These types included descriptive, structural, versus, emotive, and in vivo and were distinguished from one another by different colours, such as the following (for more detailed explanation of each code types, see Saldana, 2009):

Descriptive **Structural** **Versus** **Emotive** **In Vivo**

(iii) A coding template and accompanying codebook were then created (see Appendix G and H). As I had already identified the excerpts deemed interesting and relevant to the research inquiry from the transcription process (iv), these were then inserted into the coding template (v), and the excerpts were coded and labelled with either one or more of the identified code types (vi) (see Appendix G). The codes were named following largely an arbitrary approach. More specifically, I named them to best describe and reflect the content of what was said by the participant. For instance, in Appendix G, I named one of the descriptive codes as ‘open-mindedness’ because the participant, Syakira, was talking about how her family was “very open to new ideas.”

(vii) The labelled codes from the excerpts of each interview were transferred from the coding template onto the codebook as I coded each excerpt (see Appendix H). This was done to help me identify redundancies in coding labels and to preliminarily gauge for patterns among participant responses, as well as to aid in the refining of the names of codes.

(viii) Once all the excerpts from each participant had been coded and labelled, I compiled them together manually (see Figure 3.7 below). Descriptive and versus

codes emerged as the two most prominent coding types, so they were given more focus (though I did not discard the codes labelled under the other types as they were useful for me to extract examples to corroborate claims in the analysis).



Figure 3.7: A shot of various descriptive type codes that were manually sorted

(ix) Patterns among the identified codes were then identified and then grouped together (x). For instance, the versus type codes of ‘veiled women vs. non-veiled women,’ (n=16) ‘participant vs. family,’ (n=12) and ‘good vs. bad Muslims’ (n=11) were grouped together with other codes that described instances in the excerpt when participants spoke about being distinguished or distinguishing themselves from other Muslims (most times, in hostile ways). This grouping of codes with similar patterns ultimately led to the identification of emergent themes (xi). For instance, the versus codes listed were grouped together under the emergent theme that was named “Being ‘Othered’ and Doing ‘Othering,’” which is also the most dominant emergent theme from the interviews (see Appendix I for the list of emergent themes ordered from the most dominant to the least).

By employing a thematic approach to sift through the rich interview data, I was able to (a) identify the excerpts that would be selected for further examination, and (b) identify the issues and topics that generally permeated my conversations with the women. As the literature had already pointed out the two main foci with which to guide the direction of this study (identity and challenges), the emergent themes did

not serve as the foundation upon which analysis took place. Nevertheless, the emergent themes helped provide stronger justification for the focus on the challenges and struggles the participants faced due to their non-veiling, which is explored in Chapter 6. This is because 'Being Othered and Doing Othering' was coded as the most dominant theme (n=20). Moreover, as will be shown in Chapter 6, other dominant themes such as 'Family, filial piety, and femininity' (n=19); 'Muslim communities and societies' (n=19); and 'Workplaces and institutions' (n=18) represented contexts wherein the women faced the bulk of the tensions and conflicts due to their (non)veiling. The justification for the structure of Chapter 5 is presented in Section 5.1.

Next, I elaborate briefly on some of the challenges I experienced during the coding exercise.

(b) Challenges in the coding exercise

Several of the most noteworthy challenges revolved around i) the difficulty in gauging more illustrative and nuanced details from the coding of interview excerpts, ii) the sorting and organisation of the codes; and iii) the naming and labelling of the codes.

The first of these challenges I addressed by switching from NVivo10 to a 'manual' yet still computer-assisted approach on Microsoft Word following Saldana's (2009) guide. The switch was by no means prompted by a lack of support and features on NVivo10, but rather I found that the coding interface afforded by the coding template and codebook made it easier to approach the coding exercise in a more systematic manner due to the visual compartmentalisation of information.

The way in which I structured my codebook also helped me to better organise the codes generated from the excerpts, which addressed the second challenge mentioned above. More specifically, the columns I included in the codebook layout helped me to sift through the information and utilise them more practically for analytical purposes. The columns contained information regarding labelled codes, which included their descriptions, as well as rules of inclusion and exclusion to help me decide whether a specific portion from participants' excerpts should be labelled with particular codes. For instance, the code labelled as 'Conversion' (see Appendix H) was briefly defined as participants' conversion story (only applicable to certain participants). This was also the rule of inclusion for participant excerpts to be coded with this label. However,

the broader definition of the code also included conversion stories of participants' relatives if these anecdotes were deemed pertinent for the analysis of participants' identity constructions respectively. This was the case with Huda; although she was born Muslim, her father's conversion to Islam from Christianity was the cause of various religious and cultural tensions with her paternal family, which consequently affected Huda's sense of self. Nevertheless, if participants spoke about conversion stories of other parties, such as relatives or friends that were not deemed to be relevant for the analytical concerns of this research, the excerpts would be excluded from being labelled with the code of 'Conversion'. I also included a column in which I listed the names of participants to which the labelled codes were attributed. This helped me to quickly find the relevant excerpts that could be included in the analytical chapters.

Unlike the previous two, the third challenge was addressed in a less defined and operational manner. As I noted earlier, I labelled the excerpts with words and phrases based on those actually used by the participants in their respective excerpts, or using those that best described and reflected the essence of the content of what was said. For instance, the codes 'Schooling' and 'Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity' were assigned to a portion of Syakira's excerpt (see Appendix G), because she was not only talking about her past experience of attending schools with a diverse student population, but she also compared her past experience with her current experience of attending university with a more homogenous student population. This largely interpretive exercise required subjectivity on my part as an analyst. However, my position as an insider and my knowledge of relevant literature substantially aided me in making more informed interpretations of the labelling and naming of these codes.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described in detail the paradigmatic approach to which this study subscribed, as well as explained and justified the methods and procedures taken to collect, examine and analyse the two sources of data, comprised of interviews as the primary source and media materials as the supplementary source. The following three chapters make up the analytical chapters, in which I begin to unpack the findings in order to address the outlined research questions.

CHAPTER 4:

REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIAN MEDIA

4.1 Introduction

Before I proceed to examine how the 20 selected non-veiled women in Islamising Malaysia construct and negotiate their identities in research interviews, I attempt to paint a descriptive background picture of how women are portrayed and represented in selected contemporary Malaysian media. This is accomplished by using data gathered from selected broadcast and print media such as television, film, talk shows, newspapers, and magazines. These media sources were chosen because research on (Muslim) women and the media have also examined such sources (see, for instance, Feldshuh, 2018; Hill & Ly, 2004; Minic, 2008). The prevalence of certain gendered and religious discourses in these media materials can help inform readers of the broader societal context in which the women who participated in my research live. This background information will, in turn, help readers to better contextualise and make sense of not only the narratives told by the women in the interviews, but also provide further evidence to substantiate the arguments and claims set forth in my analysis of these narratives in succeeding chapters.

Because the analysis presented here is necessarily limited in scope and sample size, this is not meant to be representative of contemporary Malaysia, but will rather provide a snapshot capturing some prominent ways in which Muslim women – veiled and non-veiled – are portrayed in selected Malaysian media. This is important and beneficial for making sense of the women's interviews in the subsequent chapters as it may provide useful insights into the social, political, and ideological context in which these interviews were located. Thus, although it is contentious that media representations reflect reality (Luo & Hao, 2007), it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that cultural representations of marginalised groups (such as non-veiled women and other minorities) can contribute to their devaluation and the erasure of their voices and experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

Thus, this chapter aims to address the following research question:

RQ1:

In what ways do the selected contemporary print and broadcast media in Malaysia portray and present Malaysian Muslim women with regards to the tudung?

I iterate here that I do not engage in a full-fledged discourse analysis of the selected media data. This reflects the focus of RQ1 and is in line with the objectives of this chapter as essentially providing context to the analysis of the interview data. Although I do not engage in a comprehensive discourse analytical approach here, I nonetheless believe that by methodically examining these media sources following a thematic structure (to be subsequently explained) equips the reader with useful illustrative background information which may in turn facilitate the analysis of the participants' interviews in the subsequent chapters. Approaching Chapter 4 in this way also helped me as a researcher to conduct a more informed analysis of the participant interviews. More precisely speaking, I was able to capture a broader and comprehensive picture of the ways Muslim women have been portrayed in the selected media, which consequently allowed me to better compare and contrast these portrayals to the ways the women in the interviews construct their identities as non-veiled Muslim women. Nonetheless, as will be discussed at the end of the chapter in Section 4.5, I bring together and deliberate the findings based on a 'representational intersectionality' approach that is largely informed by Crenshaw's (1991) writing.

Media plays a pervasive role in disseminating certain ideals, values, and norms that help shape expectations and images of women (Durham, 1999; Litosseliti, 2006; McGannon & Spence, 2012). The prevalence of the tudung in Malaysian contemporary media suggests that veiled Muslim women (henceforth, VMW in this chapter) have become the majority and a norm in the Malaysian landscape. This is attested in scholarly observations (Hassim, 2017; Hassim & Khalid, 2015; Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018; Othman, 2006; Tong & Turner, 2008). Izharuddin (2018) further argued that although there are various competing modes of femininity that Muslim women (specifically, Malay) are subject to, "it is the veiled and pious iteration of middle-class Malay womanhood that is taken as the normative and standard and ideal to which all should aspire" (p. 162). Therefore, as the practice of veiling has become the standard ideal for the social construction of Malay-Muslim womanhood,

non-veiled Muslim women (henceforth, NVMW in this chapter) are seen as deviants who have failed in their moral capacity to espouse Islamic teachings (Izharuddin, 2018).

Increasing practice and visibility of veiling has been noted as a trend among the Malaysian Muslim populace (Hassim, 2017; Hassim & Khalid, 2015; Izharuddin, 2018) since Malaysia's Islamisation process began nearly four decades ago (Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Othman, 2006). I have already elaborated in more detail this phenomenon in Chapter 2. As this chapter demonstrates, the tudung and the various issues tied to it have a compelling presence in the selected media examined.

The arguments presented in this chapter follow a thematic structure. Notable observations that emerged from the selected media data are clustered and grouped under three broad themes – Section 4.2 discusses dress and appearance; Section 4.3 character and conduct; and Section 4.4 morality and values. Due to limitations of space and the specific focus of this chapter, each of these themes is examined and further dissected by using only the relevant and most illustrative examples to substantiate the claims made with regards to the veil, non-veiling, and women in Malaysia. The media data examined here comprise of the popular television show *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (Jalil, 2016), the film *Ombak Rindu* (Sharan & Ali, 2011), the women's talk show *Wanita Hari Ini* (Yusof, 2016), the women's magazine *Mingguan Wanita* (Mohd Alias, 2016), as well as the widely read newspaper publications *Harian Metro* (Tuan Hussein, 2016) and *The Star* (Goh, 2016). The chapter concludes in Section 4.5 with a brief discussion of the findings following a 'representational intersectionality' approach (Crenshaw, 1991) that addresses the research question, and establishes more cogently links and relevance of the media data with regards to questions of the identity, the tudung, and Malaysian Muslim women.

4.2 Dress and appearance

Dress and appearance is the most striking and readily observed theme across the media data. The umbrella of dress and appearance covers clothes, accessories and make-up worn by NVMW and VMW.

Variations in the ways NVMW and VMW are portrayed in terms of their dress and appearance exist across the media data. The two fictional works examined – *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* – portray NVMW and VMW in starkly binary terms.

For instance, NVMW are often depicted wearing modern, tight-fitting and provocative clothing, brandishing statement jewellery with a face slathered with heavy make-up, as shown in Figure 4.1:

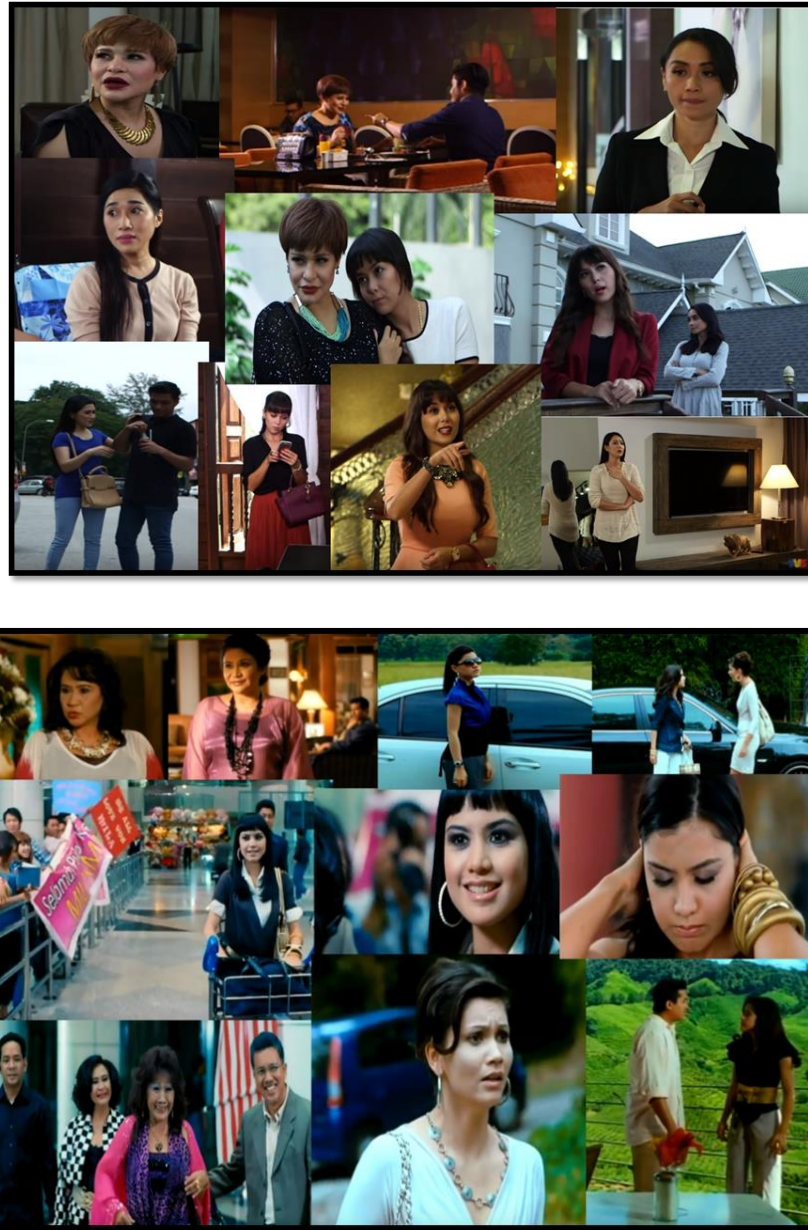


Figure 4.1: Dress and appearance of NVMW in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (top) and *Ombak Rindu* (bottom)

On the other hand, their VMW counterparts are often depicted wearing modest, loose-fitting, skin-covering clothing, and which are most of the time traditional, such as the *baju kurung*. The jewellery or accessories they sport are understated if at all present and their faces are only covered in muted colours and natural shades. These are reflected in Figure 4.2:



Figure 4.2: Dress and appearance of VMW in 7 Hari Mencintaiku (top) and Ombak Rindu (bottom)

The blatant portrayal of NVMW as women who wear revealing clothes versus the VMW who wear modest ones is also reflected in the interview data. For instance, several of the women I interviewed, such as Saleha, Siti, and Rose, defended their dress choices as a NVMW, arguing that although they do not wear the veil, they do not consider themselves as sexy nor as normally wearing sexy clothes:

Extract 4.1 Siti:

392. Siti: outside I don't wear anything too revealing. I'm not a sexy person. I just (.) wear (unintelligible) hair - whatever the heck I want
393. Farhana: hmhm
394. Siti: but I'm not a very... (.) sexy [person] anyway, I'm not sexy anyway.

Extract 4.2 Rose:

But seriously so far, because I'm not the kind of person who, [I] don't *lah* wear sexy [clothes] right, I really don't wear [clothes] like that [because] I'm not used to wearing [them]. (Line 476).

Furthermore, such visual representations of NVMW and VMW are arguably also used to frame and present their respective socio-economic status. Befitting their urban, cosmopolitan, wealthy lifestyles, NVMW are charismatic and highly-educated. For instance, Mia (the protagonist in *7 Hari Mencintaiku*) is a lawyer, and Mila (the lead NVMW character in *Ombak Rindu*), is a successful actress who received her education in the United States. On the other hand, most of the VMW characters have received very little to no education, and are employed in clerical jobs or are unemployed.

Nevertheless, despite the striking visual contrast in the portrayal of NVMW and VMW as illustrated in the two fictional works, the talk show, magazines, and newspaper articles examined reveal more diverse and fluid portrayals. For instance, the dress and appearance of the hosts of *Wanita Hari Ini*, Fiza Sabjahan (Fiza) who is a NVMW, and Hazrena Kassim (Rena) who is a VMW, cannot simply be confined to strict binaries as those presented in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*. Figure 4.3 below shows a compilation of screenshots focusing on the dress and appearance of the hosts taken from the four episodes examined:



Figure 4.3: Dress and appearance of *Wanita Hari Ini* hosts, Fiza and Rena

Rena is mostly wearing long skirts as shown in Figure 4.3 (a). On the other hand, Fiza can be seen wearing pantsuits and a button-up shirt in Episodes 44 and 98, as shown in Figure 4.3(a) and Figure 4.3 (b) respectively. Their make-up are respectively either more muted (skin-toned or light pink-coloured lips) or more defined (red lips and smoky, heavily-lined eyes). Jewellery and accessories are not prominently featured, with the exception of Fiza's statement stud earrings in Episode 102, as shown in Figure 4.3 (c). The most discernible variance in Fiza's attire is evident in Episode 122, which aired during the fasting month of Ramadhan. She dons a black ensemble with a loose black scarf that shows a part of her head, as shown in Figure 4.3 (d). Nevertheless, in this episode, both hosts are wearing two variants of the traditional Malay dress for women; Rena wears the more traditional and looser *kebarung* (whose bright blue colour and pink hijab are in conspicuous contrast with her co-host's more sombre attire), whereas Fiza wears the contemporary and body-hugging version of *baju kurung*. The dress choices for this episode are most likely made to show respect for the sacred fasting month.

The images in *Wanita Hari Ini* show that the portrayals of NVMW and VMW are not necessarily confined to strict binaries. Popular and widely-read print publications such as *Mingguan Wanita*, as well as newspapers such as *Harian Metro* and *The Star*, continue to stretch this claim further, and in the process, challenge the image of the

VWM framed by 7 *Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* as *kampung* women with a humble fashion sense.

As shown in Figure 4.4, the women featured on the glossy pages of Malaysia's most popular women's magazine (Adqrate, 2018) are portrayed as modern and fashion-forward (see Appendix J for a full compilation of these covers). Based on the examination of 21 issues of *Mingguan Wanita* published between May 2016 to December 2016, NVMW and VMW were exclusively featured as cover models almost an equal number of times, namely eight for the former and nine for the latter. The remaining four editions featured both NVMW and VMW as cover page models. Note that a majority of these cover pages – 14 to be exact – feature these women with either their own children or husbands (see Appendices K – M for a compilation to illustrate these points).



Figure 4.4: NVMW and VMW on the covers of *Mingguan Wanita*

The repeated use of models with a certain look is employed by the editorial team to promote not only the magazine's ideals about beauty but also to appeal to their target readership (Yan & Bissell, 2014). I argue that in the case of *Mingguan Wanita*, the almost equal number of representations of NVMW and VMW as cover models show the magazine's effort to continue to appeal to their readership of Muslim women,

regardless of their choice of dress. An argument concerning diversity in Malay-Muslim femininities can also be made here, which I explicate further at the end of this chapter.

Although visuals in *Harian Metro* and *The Star* were not examined, the articles published by these respective newspapers in 2016 further strengthened the arguments made thus far. The 80 articles from *Harian Metro* and the 195 from *The Star*, found by filtering the online archives with the keywords ‘tudung’ and ‘hijab’, were coded and the findings thematically organised (see Appendices N – O). The data reveal interesting correlations and contradictions on topics revolving the hijab. The top three most dominant themes in *The Star* newspaper relate to the commercialisation of the hijab (15), the individuals who have established businesses selling tudung (15), and the tudung as a fashion item (14). The themes of stories in the Malay-language newspaper, *Harian Metro*, also reflect a similar trend, especially in that the top three most dominant themes also revolve around the hijab’s commercialisation (89), tudung empires (65), and fashion (62).

I do not make the claim that the tudung is the most written about topic in these two newspapers, however, the fact that the most widely-read Malay and English language newspapers discuss the tudung most notably in terms of fashion, commercialisation, and entrepreneurship give credence to the fact of the tudung’s increasing visibility in contemporary Malaysian society and also to its evolution from being merely a symbol of religious affiliation to a staple fashion item. As was remarked earlier in the chapter, the tudung market and sales have boomed in recent years (Badaruddin, 2017; Boo, 2015; Rodzi, 2018), accompanied by a proliferation of various tudung-related magazine publications (Hassim, 2014a; Hassim & Khalid, 2015; Hassim et al., 2015). As was indicated in the Literature Review chapter, this is also a trend noted in other Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia (Beta, 2014).

The overwhelming abundance of fashion articles featuring the tudung and hijab, along with the entrepreneurs (mostly women) who have established successful businesses and empires out of selling the tudung contradict the images of the VMW portrayed in fictional works that confine them largely to poor, rural areas. Instead, what is highlighted in these articles is that the tudung is a powerful commodity that helps the women who wear and sell them to be seen as modern and financially resourceful. As

was mentioned in a previous chapter, the success of Malaysian company, Naelofar Hijab, is notable evidence of the demand for the hijab as a fashion item (Badaruddin, 2017). Indeed, wearing the veil in the socio-political climate of Islamisation in Malaysia not only signals increased piety, but it is also a marker of social mobility and class (Hassim, 2014a; Hassim et al., 2015).

4.3 Character and conduct

This section explores the ways the dress and appearance of NVMW and VMW as portrayed in the selected media sources serve as a visible signpost to draw attention to the character and conduct of these women.

Character refers to personality traits of NVMW and VMW that are portrayed in the selected media, whereas conduct refers to the portrayals of these women's interactions with each other and other people. Examination of the data reveals compelling insights into the portrayals of the characters and conducts of NVMW and VMW. These are reinforced in certain media genres but are challenged in others. The focus here is on *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* as both offer the most cogent examples. Claims made, however, are corroborated with findings garnered from newspaper articles.

Both *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* position NVMW and VMW at opposite ends of two extremes. Not only are NVMW portrayed as sexy, attractive women living lavish and glamorous lifestyles, but they are also depicted as arrogant, proud, and mean-spirited towards those they deem to be from a lower socio-economic status. Figure 4.5 supports this argument clearly. It shows a scene from Episode 6, in which Mia (the protagonist of *7 Hari Mencintaiku*) scolds Buntat, a young mentally-challenged boy who adores her:

M: ((clicks tongue in agitation)) tepi lah, ish! ((swatting Buntat away)) Eee, pergi boleh tak?! Aku benci lah tengok muka engkau!

M: ((clicks tongue in agitation)) move away lah, ish! ((swatting Buntat away)) Eee, can you go?! I hate lah looking at your face!

Buntat proceeds to invite Mia for a meal, but the latter loses her cool and begins physically assaulting the boy:

M: Kau ni memang sengaja nak cari nahas kan? Hah? Budak gemuk! Hah! Tak reti bahasa! Kau ingat aku suka sangat ke kau dekat sini hah?! Aku jijik lah tengok muka kau ni. Aku jijik ko tau tak! Dah lah lembap, busuk!

M: You really do want to find trouble, right? Hah? Fat boy! Hah! You don't get it! Do you think I like having you around here hah?! I'm disgusted *lah* looking at your face. I'm disgusted you know! And you're slow, smelly!



Figure 4.5: Mia insults and assaults a defenseless boy in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (2016)

On the other hand, VMW are typically depicted as kind and loving individuals, as well as protectors of the defenceless and needy. The scene that immediately follows Mia's assault clearly corroborates this claim. As Mia's angered shrieks and Buntat's desperate cries of hurt become louder, Nadia, Mia's sister-in-law who is a VMW, comes rushing out to save the boy, as shown in Figure 4.6:



Figure 4.6: Nadia saves Buntat from Mia's wrath in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (2016)

A similar portrayal of NVW as unkind can also be made in *Ombak Rindu*. In the film, the female protagonist Izzah is a VMW. She becomes the target of the NVMW Madam Sufiah, the mother of Hariz, the male protagonist. Figure 4.7 below is a compilation showing Madam Sufiah confronting Izzah several times throughout the

film, and the former eventually evicting the latter from her shared home with Hariz into the rainy, stormy night:



Figure 4.7: Izzah becomes a constant target of Madam Sufiah in *Ombak Rindu*

Dichotomic ‘good versus bad’ portrayals of women in popular Malaysian media have been noted by Ibrahim et al. (2017). Although the authors did not explicitly make claims that the character and conduct of the fictionalised characters are necessarily reflected by their clothing, Martin (2014) nonetheless noted that in popular Malaysian fiction, VMW are portrayed as good and soft-spoken, distinguished from the more sexualised and outspoken NVMW. I expound on this point further in Chapter 7.2.

Thus far, NVMW are depicted to possess unfavourable character traits (as illustrated in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*), but VMW are portrayed to embody virtuous traits. These include, but are not limited to, being kind, respectable, and being measured in their interactions with members of the opposite sex. Such an interpersonal communication dynamic among NVMW, VMW, and others is evident in episode 122 of the women’s talk show *Wanita Hari Ini*, which was aired during the fasting month of Ramadhan. In Figure 4.8 below, Fiza – seen here wearing a loose black scarf and modern baju kurung – stands furthest away from the male guests, who are members of a *nasyeed* group that specialises in singing religious songs.



Figure 4.8: Fiza atypically stands furthest from guests in Episode 122 of *Wanita Hari Ini* (2016)

Based on the episodes examined, Fiza's position here is unusual, as she would be typically positioned closest to the guests (see Appendix P), and Rena, the furthest away. However, this is not the case in this episode (though it is also interesting to note that both women are also positioned at a discernibly farther distance away from the guests than in the other examined episodes). Later in the same episode when seated during the panel session, Fiza then takes her usual place closest to the guest; however, present is the addition of a female *ustazah* (female religious teacher) who sits between her and the male guests (Figure 4.9):



Figure 4.9: Fiza and Rena assume their usual positioning during a segment

Their positioning is particularly intriguing. I argue that it relates to a norm practiced by Malaysian Muslims, namely that wearing a tudung (or not) potentially influences interpersonal communication between members of the opposite sex, an observation noted in existing research (Hassim et al., 2015; Izharuddin, 2018). Therefore, in this episode, Fiza – being a NVMW – is atypically positioned furthest away from the

(visibly religious) male guests with Rena taking her place because the latter – as a VMW – acts as the ‘divider’ or perhaps, a ‘buffer’ between Fiza and the male guests. In the same way, the *ustazah*’s seating position is strategic, serving as a buffer between the host and guests in the panel. Furthermore, it is supported by remarks made by some interview participants, that within professional environments, they believe wearing the hijab can hinder workplace communications and interactions. Dayana, who works in the financial and business sector claims that when she used to wear the hijab, she found that her clients were less willing to conduct business dealings with her. However, once she stopped wearing the hijab, this was no longer the case, hence resulting in better job performance (see Chapter 6: Section 6.5). Traditional beliefs and practice among more conservative Muslim communities prescribe gender-based segregation between men and women to avoid incurring *fitna*, loosely meaning ‘to cause temptation and distress’ (Baki, 2004; Metcalfe, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). Interestingly, the hijab also serves as a symbolism for this separation of physical space between men and women (see Chapter 2: Section 2.4).

Although the degree to which self-regulation of interpersonal interaction is practiced differs greatly among Muslim societies, there is a prevalent belief that Muslim men and women who are not the *mahram* (unwedded kin) of the other must not engage in physical contact, even in something as common as a handshake (see BBC News, 2018; The Guardian, 2018). Therefore, if VMW were to transgress any of these society-mandated boundaries, criticisms would be expected, such as in the case of the VMW Malaysian singer, Yuna, who in 2016 caused an uproar when she embraced US singer Usher at a concert (Berita Harian, 2016; Astro Gempak, 2016).

So far, this chapter has illustrated how the dress and appearance of NVMW and VMW as portrayed in the selected media signpost certain character traits and interpersonal conduct. The following section explores the representations of morality and values associated with these respective women.

4.4 Morality and values

Morality and values refer to the principles concerning ways of life and the distinction between good and bad actions. This aspect adds another complex layer to the overall discussion, by highlighting conflicting notions of femininity with regards to religiosity and secularity, tradition and modernity.

In certain genres, NVMW are portrayed as materialistic, selfish, and morally corrupt deviants who are dismissive or ignorant of religious duties. These claims are clearly illustrated in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*, though selected articles published in *Harian Metro* and *The Star* also provide corroborating evidence.

In *7 Hari Mencintaiku*, most of the prominent NVMW characters, namely the protagonist Mia, and supporting characters such as Puan Hayati (Mia's mother), Rita (a wealthy heiress), and Athirah (a money-hungry *kampung* girl), are all portrayed as being morally corrupt.



Figure 4.10: NVMW characters in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* are often portrayed as immoral

In Figure 4.10 (a), Rita has come home from partying too hard and until the early hours of dawn, which elicits anger from her husband; in (b), Athirah is selling her body for money; and in (c), Puan Hayati lavishes affection and wealth upon her much younger toy boy, for whom she is willing to 'sell' her own daughter to a wealthy older businessman in order to procure more money, which she then uses to spoil her lover.

However, *7 Hari Mencintaiku* has one of the most striking examples of NVMW who are portrayed as being ignorant or dismissive of religious duties in contrast with the religiously observant and pious VMW. This is mentioned explicitly in Episode 6, when Mia complains about having to wear the tudung (albeit a very loose one) in a ceremony to celebrate her union with her husband in the *kampung* (Figure 4.11):

M: Eee! Tudung ni pun satu lah! Asyik jatuh je! Orang tua tu lah! Sound aku depan orang ramai. Hah? Dia ingat apa? Ya lah...mentang-mentang kaum kerabat dia ramai kat situ...suka hati pulak nak ARAH aku pakai...TUDUNG! ((sighs frustratedly))

M: Eee! This tudung! Always falling off! This is all because of that old woman! Chastising me in front of everyone. Hah? What does she think? Of course, *lah*...just because many of her relatives are there...so she can easily ORDER me to wear...TUDUNG! ((sighs frustratedly))



Figure 4.11: Mia begrudgingly wears tudung

In the film *Ombak Rindu*, the female protagonist Izzah is shown to be a pious VMW several times, even when she is first introduced in the film. She is shown to perform religious acts such as praying and reciting the Quran, as well as teaching young children Quranic recitation, earning her the title of *ustazah*, or female religious teacher (Figure 4.12):



Figure 4.12: Izzah is portrayed as a pious VMW in Ombak Rindu

NVMW is also portrayed as being morally corrupt in Episode 13 of 7 *Hari Mencintaiku*, when a tear-stricken Mak Leha (Mia's mother-in-law), tells her son Khuzairi that Mia was allegedly no longer chaste before she married him:

ML: Ri, Mia tu bukan perempuan yang baik Ri. Dia dah rosak!

ML: Ri, Mia isn't a good woman. She's damaged!

Mak Leha then proceeds to accuse Mia of being as promiscuous as her mother, a claim she brings forth in one of the many tension-filled confrontation scenes involving the two of them (Figure 4.13):

ML: Kurang ajar punya manusia. Kau memang dasar perempuan murah kan. Engkau dengan mak engkau sama gatal. Maruah kau pun letak kat tapak kaki aku je sebenarnya!

ML: You insufferable person. You are indeed a cheap woman. You are just the same as your promiscuous mother. Your dignity is just under my feet anyway!

ML: Tak sedar diri! Diri tu dah rosak, nak berlagak lagi dengan aku! Eh, kalau ikutkan aku lebih rela anak aku tu kahwin dengan janda anak lima dari kahwin dengan kau yang dah ditebuk tupai! Aku doakan kau mandul dan kalau kau mengandung sekalipun dah tentu anak tu bukan cucu aku!

ML: How ignorant! You're damaged, yet you still want to act haughty with me! Eh, I'd rather my son marry a widow with five children than marry you who has been *ditebuk tupai*⁵. I pray that you are infertile and if you get pregnant surely that child is not my grandchild!

⁵ A colloquial expression that literally translates to 'poked by a squirrel', it is a denigrating euphemism used for and to refer to women who engage in pre-marital relations and thus are considered no longer chaste.



Figure 4.13: Mia and Mak Leha confront each other

Although there are no explicit references to Mia's state of non-veiling by Mak Leha, the fact that both Mia and her mother are NVMW sends a compelling visual cue that underscores the suggestion that NVMW are moral deviants.

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that NVMW and VMW are located at opposite ends of the religiosity spectrum, with the former portrayed as ignorant and dismissive, as well as morally corrupt, and the latter as devout believers. Though these portrayals occur in fictional settings, they are arguably grounded in society's values, as attested by particular real-life incidents that are reported in newspapers.

As was stated earlier, the three most dominant themes for both *Harian Metro* and *The Star* on the tudung revolve around fashion, commercialisation, and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the two newspapers exhibit quite a divergence in regard to their respective focuses concerning the tudung (refer to Appendices N and O). Of most pertinence here is the variance in reporting on state-sanctioned policing of women's body and dress, specifically incidences that occurred in the ultra-conservative state of Kelantan on the Malaysian mainland's east coast. Named 'Ops Aurat' by state authorities, the operation reprimanded Muslim women who were not wearing the tudung, or whom the authorities considered to be indecently dressed. However, several local businesses were also affected, as the authorities fined enterprises found to be using posters of models who were not covering their *aurat*. Curiously, *Harian*

Metro did not report on these incidences. However, articles that revolve around this topic made it the fourth most dominant theme for *The Star*'s articles on the tudung published in 2016. Several article titles that reported on these incidents include – *31 nabbed in Kelantan Ops Aurat* (Beh, 2016); *Kelantan's hauling up of Muslim women raising public worry* (Azhar & Zulkiflee, 2016); and *Take part in sessions or face charges, those caught under Ops Aurat warned* (Habibu, 2016).

As can be inferred from the distinctions in portrayals of dress and appearance between NVWM and VMW, in particular in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*, the former are also portrayed to be Western-centric, who shun tradition and the traditional way of life among Muslims in Malaysia. In contrast, VMW are the embodiment of the Malay *kampung* girl who rejoices in the simple pleasures of *kampung* life. In Episode 2 of *7 Hari Mencintaiku*, this is blatantly stated during a scene at the dinner table, when Mia refuses rice (a staple in Malaysian households), and when she insists on using a fork and spoon to eat the side dishes instead of her right hand, which is the traditional custom. A remark by Mia's father-in-law upon witnessing this is telling: "Amboi Mia! Macam omputeh, makan dengan sudu dengan garpu!" (Look at you Mia! Like a Westerner, eating with fork and spoon!) This is then underscored by a comment from Mia's stepmother (a VMW), explaining that Mia is different than them, the *kampung* folk.

Although such stark distinctions and commentaries are apparent in the film, television show, and several newspaper articles, they could not be explicitly identified in *Wanita Hari Ini* and the covers of *Mingguan Wanita*. What is easily identifiable in these two genres, however, is the portrayal of both NVMW and VMW as women who are experts in finding a balance between the modern and the traditional, that is juggling the pressures of career with the demands of homemaking. For instance, this can be seen in Figure 4.14, the opening scene of *Wanita Hari Ini*:



Figure 4.14: A screenshot of the opening scene of *Wanita Hari Ini*

Although some interview participants reinforce traditional iterations of pious womanhood (and how they perceive themselves to have failed or have fallen short as they do not veil), some others challenge them (whilst at the same time reinforcing them too). For instance, Fatma experiences constant pressure from her husband's family, especially from his mother and sister, to veil, even before they were married. Snide remarks about her appearance are also compounded by the fact that Fatma was born and raised in the heart of the capital city Kuala Lumpur, a fact exploited by her in-laws to assign Fatma the label of the city-girl who has no place in the countryside. However, through Fatma's resilience and her husband's unyielding support, she eventually proves to her mother-in-law that all the latter's previous assumptions are mistaken, as Fatma has proved her worth by demonstrating her ability to adapt to *kampung* life.

Thus far, this chapter has demonstrated that across media genres – television, film, women's talk show, magazine, newspapers – NVMW and VMW are portrayed as either rigidly distinct from one another or as fluid and diverse in terms of their dress and appearance, character and conduct, as well as morality and values. How can these observations from these selected media be useful to help better understand the question of the processes of identity constructions among NVMW?

4.5 Conclusion: Women, tudung, media, and identity in Malaysia

Crenshaw (1991) argued that race and gender influenced the calls for the obscenity judgment against members of the African-American hip-hop group 2 Live Crew, who were accused of propagating sex and violence against women in their music. The author wrote the following as part of the analysis of the controversy surrounding 2 Live Crew and their song *Nasty*:

Nasty is misogynist, and an intersectional analysis of the case against 2 Live Crew should not depart from a full acknowledgment of that misogyny. But such an analysis must also consider whether an exclusive focus on issues of gender risks overlooking aspects of the prosecution of 2 Live Crew that raises serious questions of racism.

(Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1285)

Following Crenshaw, I hereby argue that media portrayals of Muslim women with regards to the tudung advance particular gendered and religious discourses that are prejudiced against non-veiled Muslim women. Moreover, these prejudices feed discriminatory attitudes and actions against non-veiled women in socio-economic, political and cultural life. A representational intersectional approach has informed the analysis on the ways that religion and gender intersected to position NVMW and VMW in particular ways, evident in the traces of several prominent and widely-associated religious and gendered discourses concerning non-veiled and veiled Muslim women which were found in the media. As was remarked in Chapters 1 and 2, non-veiled Muslim women are often associated with being Westernised, liberal secularists, and they are often set in contrast to their more religiously-inclined, yet ostensibly oppressed veiled counterparts (see Hammami, 1990). Moreover, the former are often considered to be morally weaker compared to the latter (Fadil, 2011; Wagner et al., 2012). These discourses that were identified by previous research also appeared prominently in the portrayals of Muslim women in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*, where the NVMW characters Mia and Mila (among others) are depicted to be modernised, religiously disinclined women who bear ill-will towards others. This derogatory characterisation is in stark contrast to the kind, soft-spoken, modest, and religiously observant VMW characters, such as Izzah (*Ombak Rindu*) and Nadia (*7 Hari Mencintaiku*). Such observations come as no surprise, as Izharuddin (2018) has remarked that veiled and pious Malay-Muslim women have become the standard and

ideal to which women should aspire, thus rendering those who do not veil as deviating from this ideal.

Izharuddin's (2018) remark becomes more pertinent considering the role the media plays in disseminating such ideals within the context of Islamising Malaysia. This is because, Kandiyoti (1991) has argued that an Islamic cultural nationalism depends on the construction of a demonified 'other,' and that mass media is an important channel through which Malaysia's Islamising values and ambitions are propagated (Ishak, 2011; Martin, 2014). Such claims explain why certain media platforms choose to capitalise on such perceptions of certain Muslim women (veiled), at the expense of demeaning other Muslim women (non-veiled) (see Chapter 7: Section 7.2 for a more detailed discussion).

Given the popularity of these fictional works, it is likely that the ideologies underlying and informing such stereotypical portrayals of NVMW and VMW are circulated widely and eventually find their way into the everyday discourses of ordinary men and women (see Chapter 7), which in turn may be translated into discriminatory actions against NVMW in real life. Many examples of this assumed link exist, such as the many incidences where NVMW are facing increasing scrutiny from the eyes of the public, as well as the state, which are selectively reported in the newspapers. More specifically, while *The Star* reported how Kelantan's Ops Aurat views non-veiling as an act of immorality and crime worthy of counselling and punishment, it is interesting that these cases are not reported in *Harian Metro*. On the contrary, the negative stories that tarnish the character of NVMW in *Harian Metro* instead typically revolve around celebrities who previously had worn the hijab but then chose to stop wearing it. Highlighted is the case of Uqasha Senrose, who received widespread backlash for removing her hijab (Mohd Tahir, 2016a, 2016b). Criticism launched at Uqasha and women who choose a similar path is decidedly different from the praises bestowed upon celebrities who choose to begin veiling, such as Malaysia's rock queen, Ella (Jefri, 2016). These incidences serve to further corroborate the scholarly arguments noted above.

In summary, as the media portrayals have shown, the intersection and interaction between gender, religion, and an Islamic form of cultural nationalism contribute to shaping the mainstream discourses concerning Malay Muslim femininities and pieties,

which are demonstrably more prejudiced against non-veiled Muslim women. Thus, in addressing RQ1, Muslim women in the selected media are found to be portrayed with regards to the tudung in various ways. Specifically, the two highly-popular fictional works examined – *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* – portray NVMW and VMW as polar opposites in simple dichotomies, most prominent of which are ‘bad versus good’, ‘ignorant versus pious,’ and ‘modern versus traditional.’ However, *Wanita Hari Ini*, *Mingguan Wanita*, and the numerous articles in *The Star* and *Harian Metro* offer portrayals of Muslim women in more fluid, diverse, and less dichotomous ways. The discourse of ‘Muslim cosmopolitanism’ (Aljunied, 2016) found in these sources allows for more diverse portrayals of Muslim femininities among Malaysian women. However, this discourse arguably benefits veiled Muslim women more than it does non-veiled Muslim women, a point I more cogently expand in Chapter 7.

This chapter has provided a sufficiently explorative background picture of the portrayals of Muslim women – both veiled and non-veiled – in contemporary Malaysia. The analysis was based on an examination of selected media sources that included film and television, women’s talk shows, women’s magazines, and newspaper articles. It can be argued that NVMW and VMW are largely set in opposition to each other, more strikingly so in certain genres than others.

The subsequent chapters, namely Chapters 5 and 6, are dedicated to close examination of the interviews with non-veiled Muslim women. The media representations discussed in this chapter provide useful background information about the larger societal and ideological context of Islamising Malaysia in which the interviews analysed in the subsequent chapters took place. It is intended that such an understanding of the background proves valuable for the subsequent analyses of the complex processes of identity construction and negotiation displayed in the interviews, as the arguments and claims made by the women in the interviews can be linked or corroborated with some of the larger societal and ideological discourses outlined above. Equally importantly, this assists the readers’ comprehension of the complex intricacies of the challenges and struggles these women have to face as consequent of being non-veiled Muslim women in Islamising Malaysia.

CHAPTER 5:

CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES AS NON-VEILED MUSLIM WOMEN

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined media data that presented readers with the multifarious portrayals of Muslim women with regards to the veil and non-veiling. Following that, this chapter now explores the various identities that emerged in the discourses of the interview participants. Thus, this chapter addresses the following objective:

RO1: To examine the ways non-veiled Muslim women construct their religious and gender identities (vis-à-vis other emergent identities)

Although religious identity is of primary interest in this study, the analysis does not disregard the importance of other emergent identities, such as gender and ethnicity, among others. Therefore, the analysis in Chapter 5 examines in greater detail how these identities have been constructed, negotiated, and mobilised with the primary aim to address the stated research objective and to answer the following research question(s):

RQ2: What kind(s) of identities emerge from the discourses of non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women?

RQ2(a): How do these women construct and/or negotiate their religious identities vis-à-vis other emergent identities?

Although participants construct multiple identities across various dispersed instances in their respective interviews, I have chosen to focus the analysis by examining in further detail the answers the participants provided to these interview questions, which best addressed the focus of RQ2 (see Section 5.3 for further explanation):

(a) How would you define a Muslim woman?

(b) Having said that, how do you define yourself as a Muslim woman?

As such, the structure of Chapter 5 was not contingent upon the emergent themes identified from the coding process, unlike Chapter 6, as was explained previously and as will subsequently be explained. This chapter progresses as follows. Section 5.2 provides an overview of the emergent identities from the overall interview data. Section 5.3 provides a summary of participants' responses to the interview questions

outlined above. This is followed by Section 5.4, where the emergence of religious identity (vis-à-vis other emergent identities) as apparent in selected excerpts is described. The analysis of how these identities are constructed and mobilised in the discourses is largely informed by the selected Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles, as well as intersectionality. Finally, Section 5.5 addresses the outlined research questions.

5.2 Overview of emergent identities

An explanation of the coding process of the interviews and the generated codes was presented in Chapter 3. It is reiterated here that the codes and the broader, more abstract concepts they make up serve primarily as instruments to inform data analysis. The codes are helpful in highlighting the emergence of different identity types shown in Table 5.1, some of which are more prominent, whereas others are more embedded. The definitions below are created based on data from the interviews:

IDENTITY TYPE	DEFINITION
RELIGIOUS	Religious identities are constructed by participants when they explicitly state that they are Muslims, or through inference from participants mentioning certain practices, rituals, and beliefs most commonly associated with Islam and Muslims.
GENDER	Gender identities are commonly constructed when participants talk about themselves as non-veiled Muslim women who are navigating through the intricate webs of life involving perceived and accepted norms and beliefs regarding womanhood, femininity, and gender roles.
ETHNIC	Ethnic identities are constructed when participants either explicitly or implicitly talk about their ethnicity by stating them or bringing up practices, beliefs, and norms most commonly associated with a particular ethnicity. At a broader level, an ethnic identity can also be signposted when regional differences between Peninsular Malaysians and East Malaysians are talked about by participants.
INSTITUTIONAL	Institutional identities are constructed when participants talk about how being non-veiled Muslim women in the workplace or other professional and formal settings impact their day-to-day lives and interactions with others such as colleagues and authorities.
FILIAL	Filial identities are constructed when participants talk about subjects that revolve around more specific notions of being ‘women’ in family settings and roles, such as being good wives and daughters. Filial identities are closely associated with gender identities, and these may even intersect and overlap in participants’ discourses.

Table 5.1: Emergent identity types from the interviews

As the above definitions have been created based on interview data, they may not reflect established theoretical definitions of such forms of identities found in the literature. Institutional identity is one such example (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

The first three are normally regarded as broader identity types whereas the final two are more specific. The latter two, especially filial, can appear prominent on their own, yet they also can be subsumed under any one or more of the broader types. Nonetheless, the demarcation separating one identity type from another is not typically readily apparent. Indeed, when these identity types emerge in participants’ discourses, they overlap or rather, intersect, frequently with one another, so much so that the exact identity type is in some instances difficult to distinguish with precision.

Consequently, it was at times difficult to extricate one particular identity type from any singular participant excerpt for descriptive and illustrative purposes. To reiterate, this is because multiple identity types can be identified from a single excerpt, even short ones. Nevertheless, as this research focuses on women who identify as Muslims, the intersection of religion and gender identities are treated as omnipresent identity types with which others, particularly ethnic, institutional, and filial, also intersect. The comprehensive examination detailing the constructions of these multiple identity types is primarily guided by Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) selected principles for identity construction, as well as by intersectionality.

5.3 Overview of religious identity construction

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the analysis is based on examination of the answers participants provided to interview questions (a) and (b). Nonetheless, I acknowledge that participants can and do perform identity work that subscribe to or challenge the identity work apparent in the specified questions in various other parts of the interviews. By focusing on the answers to the specified questions to answer RQ2 and RQ2a, I am able to gauge patterns and incongruities as well as distinguish the similarities and differences between the participants' conceptions of a Muslim woman and their personal definitions of themselves as Muslim women. Simply put, I am able to explore how the women compare themselves to their idealised versions of a Muslim woman, which best addresses RQ2. Indeed, participants' answers provide insights that reveal not only compelling instances of conflict between the ideal and the lived self, but also highlight attempts to challenge and problematise notions of being women and Muslim with regards to (non)veiling.

Overall, the women position themselves in different ways, as demonstrated by their responses to interview questions (a) and (b). They exhibit a variety of positions that include (i) alignment, (ii) incongruence, and (iii) ambivalence.

(i) Alignment (n=6)

Although their responses may not match exactly word-for-word, some women consider their definitions of a Muslim woman as corresponding with their self-conceptions as Muslim women, for example, Dayana, Juliana, Liza, Rose, Siti and Suzana. Regarding religiosity, most of them cite more holistic notions such as believing that oneself is Muslim and trying to live by Quranic values and principles.

Only Juliana and Rose mention dress in their responses; the former problematises the notion of modesty, claiming it to be more about the way one carries oneself as well as the actions that one does, whereas the latter implies that modesty is already a part of her appearance, even if she does not necessarily relate it to donning the hijab. For instance, in the extract below, Juliana already sees herself as a Muslim woman because of her faith in God and that she claims she practices modesty through her charitable actions:

Extract 5.1 Juliana:

36. Juliana: ummm.... well... I think, that I am like a Muslim woman in the sense that, I **believe** in - I believe in God? so, well that already makes me a Muslim woman.
 37. Farhana: hmhm
 38. Juliana: and also like (.) ((clicks tongue)) I don't know like (.) maybe maybe being modest *lah* because I think the thing about me is that I'm always like, in a way, modest. (.) because since I believe that...a Muslim woman is
 39. Farhana: mmm
 40. Juliana: modest. so ummm like macam (.) like making sure that people are like (.) not making sure as in like, I care about (.02) seeing that people are not oppressed
 41. Farhana: mmm
 42. Juliana: And like, you know, that they (.) that they receive the help that they should.

(ii) Incongruence (n=3)

Nevertheless, there are others who demonstrate that they do not coincide with the ideal definition of a Muslim woman, such as Huda, Syakira and Yasmin. These women cite non-veiling as one of the reasons that justify their sentiments. They also include other reasons, for example, not practising or observing religious acts (such as performing the mandatory daily prayers), and also the ways they socialise with other people (such as freely mixing and interacting between men and women). For instance, after describing a Muslim woman as someone who covers her aurat and observes religious practices, Huda distances herself from that description as seen in the extract below:

Extract 5.2 Huda:

599. Huda: Oh I'm not a good Muslim!
 600. Farhana: ((snickers))
 601. Huda: that's it
 602. Farhana: okay why would you say that?
 603. Huda: (0.03) mmmm maybe because I don't (.) uh hh practice hundred percent (.) uh hh
 604. Farhana: mmm
 605. Huda: religion

606. Farhana: okay

607. Huda: I feel. That's why I say I'm not a good Muslim. That's all ((chuckles))

(iii) Ambivalence (n=11)

The majority of women, however, exhibit ambivalence or conflicting accounts between the ideal and the lived self, such as Amirah, Azreen, Erma, Fatma, Hayati, Kartika, Munirah, Nadia, Saleha, Thalia, and Zureen. Some expressed uncertainty as to whether or not they exhibit the qualities they consider a Muslim woman should possess, whereas others stress that they have much to improve on, for instance, in the area of performing religious rituals such as prayers. There are also women who define religiosity not through the lens of religious practice and veiling, but instead through highlighting the virtues of kindness and intelligence; however, they still highlight their non-veiling as flaws. For instance, although she described a Muslim woman as someone who extols virtues such as modesty, respect, and equality, Munirah believes she still has much to improve on, particularly in her own values and in the performing of religious acts:

Extract 5.3 Munirah:

564. Munirah: I can say that, I do need some work on my...ummm values ((snickering)) maybe?

565. Farhana: okay

566. Munirah: yeah. maybe ummm (.) like uhhh yeah I need some work on my values and I need to be (.) more...ummm (.) I need to be more ummm (.) I need to think about God more I can say

567. Farhana: hmhm

568. Munirah: because I know I can easily be swept up with all the - you know mis - uhhh with all these things that's happening in the world and whatnot.

569. Farhana: hmhm

570. Munirah: So I have to keep on reminding myself to at least uh (.) uhhh pray...properly...

571. Farhana: mmm

572. Munirah: and whatnot. because quite hard I can say that my challenge right now, is um remembering to do your (.) religious acts.

Overall, the women list various traits and characteristics of their perceived ideal of a Muslim as responses to (a) (see Appendix Q) It is possible to include the traits participants used to describe themselves as Muslim women in (b) in relation to (a), however, this analysis does not confine their answers as such. To merely do so would not only be superficial and simplistic, and rather static, but it would also ultimately

undermine participants' processes of identity construction, which are both complex and nuanced. To illustrate this, I now examine in more detail excerpts selected from the interviews of two participants, Kartika and Fatma.

5.4 Constructing religious identities (vis-à-vis other emergent identities)

As was stated in 5.3, Kartika and Fatma both display ambivalent responses for (b), following (a). I chose to focus on ambivalent responses, as not only were they the most frequent responses, but these responses also demonstrated more emphatically the complex struggles that non-veiled women face when articulating themselves as Muslim women. The excerpts from the responses of Kartika and Fatma were selected as the intricate and multifaceted nature of their responses are deemed to be more illustrative and offer richer insights into discursive identity work compared to those of other participants. More precisely, in talking about and comparing themselves to their idealised notions of a Muslim woman, Kartika and Fatma constructed the various identities that were identified in Table 5.1. Examining excerpts – specifically four excerpts in total – from the two participants also provide a workable quantity that ultimately allow in-depth analyses of the language and linguistic details apparent in the discourses yet simultaneously showcasing diversity. However, this narrow focus does not in any way discount the contributions provided, and insights garnered from the other interviews; in fact, the arguments derived from Kartika's and Fatma's respective analyses are corroborated and contrasted with extracts from other participants. After examining more closely participants' discursive identity constructions as demonstrated in the selected excerpts and recognising that articulating their faith as non-veiled Muslim women bring about contradictory feelings and tangible real-life repercussions, the findings in this chapter segue well to the following chapter that explores the discursive identity processes taking place as these women speak about the challenges and struggles they face due to their non-veiling.

In the analyses that follow, Kartika's and Fatma's responses to (a) are presented and discussed first, before these are compared with their responses to (b) respectively.

5.4.1 Kartika's construction of religious identity (vis-à-vis gender, institutional and ethnic identities)

Kartika is a Malay lecturer in her 40s who works at an institution in Malaysia well-known for its large numbers of Malay and Bumiputera students (referred to as UNI X in the transcription). Out of the 20 women I met during the data collection period, my interview with Kartika is one of the most vocal and emotional.

Our conversation was dominated by Kartika expressing her frustration at the perceptible changes in societal attitudes towards religion, especially those in the Malay community, to which she belonged. Particularly salient is the intensifying obsession with a Muslim woman's dress. As a non-veiled Muslim woman who grew up in the seventies and eighties, Kartika asserts that people used to not care whether a Muslim woman wears the hijab or not. She laments that this attitude changed, starting from the early 2000s. Notably, this is a sentiment expressed by most participants born before the 1980s (namely Zureen, Liza, and Fatma), and arguably references the effects of Malaysia's increasing Islamisation (see Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006). It is a significant point that is further discussed in Chapter 7.

As a consequence of these changes in societal attitudes and perceptions regarding religious dress, expectations of the Muslim woman have changed, and Kartika laments that because she chooses not to veil, she is fraught with what I understand as a sense of paranoia; specifically, Kartika believes that although she has never been explicitly discriminated against and mistreated for being a non-veiled Muslim woman (something which, unfortunately, cannot be said for other women in my research), she believes that:

And they [critical others] have this thing inside of them, even if they are nice to you, they have this thing reserved, you know just waiting to come out, to ask you why you're not wearing [the tudung] (Line 126)

Therefore, it is evident that Kartika believes she is being silently judged by others around her, and this persistent dread has in part resulted in Kartika shying away from unnecessary social interactions with her colleagues at work. Other participants also share similar feelings and anxieties, as well as their own experiences of discrimination, and these are explored further in Chapter 6.

Below is an excerpt of Kartika's description of a Muslim woman:

EXCERPT 5.1: Kartika describes a Muslim woman

Interlocutors	No.	Description of a Muslim woman
Farhana (F)	1a	Alright. Uh okay. Alright so now uh, I'd like you to tell me <i>lah</i> who and what you think a Muslim woman is? In your own words, describe who a Muslim woman is.
Kartika (K)	2a	A Muslim woman (.) ((clears throat)) is a person, who uh, is confident.
F	3a	Hmhm
K	4a	Yeah, who is confident, who is kind. Um (.) educated.
F	5a	Hmhm
K	6a	And I'm not talking about As in exams, because we've got grandmothers who are, probably they are not educated, but we need to be intelligent. Yes! Our grandmothers, <i>dorang tu</i> [[they are]] intelligent. So, they need to be confident, kind, and intelligent.
F	7a	Hmhm
K	8a	And um, they need to understand what modesty is. Because I see a lot of people who, may have materials covering their bodies but they are not modest.
F	9a	Hmhm
K	10a	Either in physical sense or, <i>perangai</i> [[behaviour]].
F	11a	Hm
K	12a	They are not. Yeah. So, Muslim women cannot be that. Uhhh yeah, that's it.

Based on Excerpt 5.1, Kartika assigns to her idea of a Muslim woman the qualities of confidence, kindness, and intelligence. Confidence is a trait mentioned exclusively by Kartika, however, the last two are mentioned by other participants:

Extract 5.4 Amirah:

she has to be someone who people will come to...to seek for...guidance and knowledge, okay, pertaining not only religion, but anything she's...she's...she's expert in.

Extract 5.5 Suzana:

She can be VERY successful um in whatever she does...Because to me, in Islam, they say education is number one...We are NOT uh a group of ladies who do not know what our rights are...We HAVE A LOT of rights.

Extract 5.6 Rose:

as long as she's kind...as long as she's kind, to me...((chuckles)) [she's] already Muslim *lah*.

Extract 5.7 Thalía:

someone who believes in God...believes in right and wrong...knows what is right and wrong...Regardless of whether you adhere to it, but you know...is strong...but kind...does not discriminate...very understanding...should be able to teach others, not in a way that (.) to, to look down on you, or to put you down.

In line 8a, Kartika then assigns the quality of modesty to her conception of a Muslim woman. Modesty is a highly-regarded notion in Islamic belief and tradition, and is often preached about among members of most Muslim communities. Muslims typically confine modesty to the realm of dress, with an intense focus on women's dress that is disproportionate to men's dress, although men are also assigned a dress code in Islam (see Chapter 2: Section 2.41). However, Kartika extends the notion of modesty beyond this myopic view – indeed, modesty in Islam is not merely about one's appearance – to include behavioural standards:

And um, they need to understand what modesty is. Because I see a lot of people who, may have materials covering their bodies but they are not modest...Either in physical sense or, *perangai* [[behaviour]]...They are not. Yeah. So, Muslim women cannot be that.

In the above quote, Kartika also expresses her disdain for women who wear the hijab – those who, by typical standards, are observing modesty because they are concealing their hair and body parts – but beyond this possess very little care about true modesty, which is embodied and reflected in one's character and behaviour. Throughout our conversation, Kartika often reiterates this 'modest-but-not-really-modest' sentiment, especially when she laments on how veiled Muslim women who dress ostentatiously such as local celebrities and hijabista, Rozita Che Wan (see Appendix R), are not true representations of modesty and Islam. Another participant, Juliana, also views modesty beyond dress:

Extract 5.8 Juliana:

I think the most important thing is like, a Muslim woman is a modest woman. (.)...but... I think people mis- mistake like, modesty for like, covering up. when it's more like (.) being (.) not being loud I guess in a way...I think being Muslim woman is most importantly like a modest woman. but that doesn't mean they're just covering up. I think it's more like like, being moderate *lah*...like (.) like you know like, even if you don't wear a *tudung*, then like like, like...not quiet you know, but it's like (.) like, relaxed *lah*.

Simply put, Kartika describes a Muslim woman as a confident, kind, and intelligent woman, and one who embodies a modesty that is reflected through her character and behaviour. The most intriguing and significant aspect of the description by Kartika, however, is the fact that she does not explicitly articulate her idea of a Muslim woman through the lens of religiosity, in particular, through the doing of religious rituals. Others also describe a Muslim woman through a similar lens. For example, Rose describe a Muslim woman as essentially being kind, and Suzana, as one who is empowered:

Extract 5.9 Suzana:

Okay to me a Muslim woman has a lot of freedom...Uh we are seen generally (.) as being forced to wear the hijab, we are not, actually. There is expectations, but we are not forced...It is a choice...Um a Muslim woman is very respected...She has—a lot of uh sh-she's handling a lot of things, she can be a business-minded woman...She can be VERY successful um in whatever she does...Because to me, in Islam, they say education is number one...We are NOT uh a group of ladies who do not know what our rights are...We HAVE A LOT of rights.

Kartika's omission of explicit mention of the doing of religious rituals may have been because she believes this to be information that is tacitly shared and understood between us, two Muslim women. Nonetheless, the absence of such a trait in relation to Kartika's ideal of a Muslim woman becomes interesting when examined against her description of herself as a Muslim woman:

EXCERPT 5.2: Kartika describes herself as a Muslim woman

Interlocutors	No.	Self as a Muslim woman
Farhana (F)	1b	Alright having said all of that right, how would you describe yourself as a Muslim woman?
Kartika (K)	2b	<i>Itu lah tadi</i> [[What [I said] <i>lah</i>]]. <i>Tapi</i> [[but]], I'm kind
F	3b	Okay
K	4b	I'm kind. I try to (.) collect as much brownie points as I can from God.
F	5b	Hmhm
K	6b	By doing um things that God tells me to.
F	7b	Mmm
K	8b	But there are things like this, which I cannot do, yet. But I need – until it happens, I must be (.) kinder, I must be, better than anyone else, so that um (.) people know that being a Muslim is not just the tudung.
F	9b	Hmm
K	10b	It's not just that. It's not just that, you know
F	11b	Okay

K	12b	Uh so, I said <i>tadi apa</i> [[what was it]], confident, kind, I'm not very confident obviously, because of all this but I would like to be kind. I would like to help people a lot. I would like to um serve this UNI X Malay students and let them become a bit better than what they are, IF <i>lah</i> they need, if they need it. Um (.) I think that's Islam.
F	13b	Mm
K	14b	I think that's Islam.

Comparing Kartika's perceived ideal of a Muslim woman in (a) (Excerpt 5.1) to herself in (b) (Excerpt 5.2), it can be seen that she initially displays congruence between the two. Kartika affirms in lines 2b, 4b, and 12b that she possesses similar qualities as previously described in line 6a (Excerpt 5.1). The quality of kindness appears more prominently than others, as it is often repeated (lines 2b, 4b, 8b, 12b), though she dismisses the quality of confidence in line 12b. This admission that she is "not very confident obviously" because "of all of this" is highly contextual and alludes to a point made earlier – Kartika is referencing the persistent feelings of insecurity she struggles with that are brought upon by her belief that others have been silently judging her for not wearing the hijab. This is a point expressed by most participants, and is explicated further in Chapter 6.

Kartika's indexing of her religious identities emerge through the discourses in the form of several specific localised interactional forms. Namely, Kartika indexes herself as a kind Muslim (lines 2b, 4b) and as a God-abiding Muslim (lines 4b, 6b). However, this conviction soon falters as she indexes herself as a disobedient Muslim (line 8b), referencing the "things like this, which I cannot do, yet" that arguably refers to Kartika's non-veiling. Because of this disobedience, Kartika then indexes herself as an expiatory Muslim by asserting, "I must be (.) kinder, I must be, better than anyone else," which also simultaneously indexes an identity of an inadequate Muslim – because she is not observing one of God's commands, she now feels the need to make amends for it. The construction of her religious identities as a disobedient and expiatory Muslim also paves the way for the emergence of two intersecting identities, namely Kartika's ethnic and institutional identities as a Malay who lectures in a Malay & Bumiputera-only institution (line 12b).

It was remarked earlier that Kartika does not include any traits explicitly linked to religiosity and religious practice in her description of a Muslim woman in Excerpt 5.1.

However, when this is juxtaposed against her description of herself as a Muslim woman in Excerpt 5.2, the traits that are tied to aspects of religiosity curiously emerge to the fore. Although she did not do so previously, Kartika now foregrounds an expression of herself through an explicitly religious lens – though she tries her best to obey God, she still believes she is disobeying God by not wearing the hijab, and as a result, she feels she needs to be a kinder Muslim to make amends for her perceived shortcomings.

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality, as well as the concept of intersectionality can help further illustrate how these various forms of identities emerge and intersect in Kartika's discourse. At the surface level, indexicality operates by indexing (pointing) at the identity labels and categories Kartika invokes either explicitly and implicitly for herself. However, Kartika's indexing of herself in multifarious ways can also be understood as an act of (conscious or otherwise) positioning (and thus, evaluation) of herself in particular subject positions and in relation to other entities, whether they be literal (though physically absent from the conversation) or metaphorical (for instance, ideologies and social norms and beliefs). This positionality is most saliently at work through Kartika's implicit indexing of herself as a disobedient and inadequate Muslim for not wearing the hijab:

By doing um things that God tells me to...But there are things like this, which I cannot do, yet... (lines 6b; 8b)

By virtue of being a non-veiled Muslim woman, Kartika assumes the position of a 'disobedient follower' who defies the command of an authoritative divine figure, namely God. Kartika's self-perceived feeling of inadequacy resulting from this act of disobedience then leads her to assume the position of inadequacy – not only is she not doing enough, she also perceives herself as being insufficient. But, in whose eyes is Kartika so? Kartika implies that she is not good enough in the eyes of other people, especially Muslims. This can be inferred from this quote:

But I need – until it happens, I must be (.) kinder, I must be, better than anyone else, **so that um (.) people know that being a Muslim is not just the tudung...**It's not just that. It's not just that, you know (line 8b)

Thus, Kartika does not merely position herself as disobedient and inadequate in relation to God and scripture, but she also positions herself as such against beliefs

prevalent among Muslim communities that the hijab defines the identity of a Muslim woman. Kartika's empathic assertion that she wants people to know that being a Muslim (woman) is not defined by the wearing of the hijab subsequently can be further examined through the principle of relationality.

Relationality is most apparent in lines 8a – 12a and 8b – 10b. In 8a – 12a, Kartika distinguishes herself from veiled Muslim women whom she considers as not necessarily embodying the Islamic mores of modesty:

And um, they need to understand what modesty is. Because I see a lot of people who, may have materials covering their bodies but they are not modest...Either in physical sense or, *perangai* [[behaviour]] ...They are not. Yeah. So, Muslim women cannot be that.

The significance of her doing so can be explicated using the positionality and relationality principles. The positionality principle is evident through Kartika's construction of the binary of 'me vs. them', through which she positions herself against these women. On the other hand, the relationality principle is evident through two pairs of "tactics of intersubjectivity" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a, 2005), namely adequation and distinction, and authentication and denaturalisation. Kartika describes modesty in another part of the interview as follows:

Extract 5.10 Kartika:

649. F Then how would you describe your modesty *lah*. What is modesty to you?
650. K What is modesty. Okay. Clothed modestly, which is (.) reasonably loose.
651. F Hmhm
652. K Okay. Like our *baju kurung* is really beautiful.

Baju Kurung is the traditional dress of Malay women (though it is typically worn by Malaysian women, regardless of ethnicity and religion), and is fitted loosely over the body with long sleeves and skirt (Appendix S). Kartika admits her preference for wearing the garment in our conversation, "I wear *baju kurung*," (line 664) and, "Uhhh long skirts, long skirts I love long skirts" (line 684). Therefore, when taking this particular statement into consideration to explicate her remark in lines 8a – 12a, it can be argued that Kartika believes she is already practicing modesty by wearing long, loosely-fitted clothing, even though she does not wear the hijab.

Kartika is therefore performing simultaneously the tactics of adequation and distinction. She accomplishes this by indirectly distinguishing herself as a modest Muslim woman in relation to veiled Muslim women who, via inference, were not necessarily modest (that is, she asserts in the interview that they may wear tight-fitting clothes and loud makeup). In doing so, Kartika highlights her similarities with her perceived ideal of a Muslim woman, whilst at the same time underscoring the differences between this ideal Muslim woman and these veiled, yet immodest, Muslim women.

Consequently, Kartika also mobilises the tactics of authentication and denaturalisation; by adequating herself to her ideal of a Muslim woman, Kartika asserts a stamp of authenticity on her own self as a Muslim woman, while at the same time denaturalising (or putting into question) the widespread perception that a woman who veils is a true reflection of a Muslim woman. This claim is reiterated in lines 8b – 10b, where Kartika again denaturalises the prevalent belief expressed earlier by saying, “so that um (.) people know that being a Muslim is not just the *tudung*...It’s not just that. It’s not just that, you know.” Furthermore, Kartika’s use of the verbal hedging “you know” serves as a camaraderie-grounding marker whose primary purpose is to establish rapport (and possibly encourage affirmation) from myself, her collocutor. Kartika, like Fatma, as will be seen later, also creates a dichotomy of ‘us vs. them’ and through the use of such strategy, she thus invokes a kind of in-group identification with myself, as non-veiled Muslim women.

As was argued earlier, Kartika’s indexing of herself as a disobedient and inadequate Muslim is foregrounded in line 8b. This leads her to position herself as an expiative Muslim through her empathic assertion that she must be “kinder...better than anyone else.” Following this, in line 12b, Kartika offers further explanation as to how she can be kinder and better, which is by helping other people and also the Malay students she teaches:

I would like to be kind. I would like to help people a lot. I would like to um serve this UNI X Malay students and let them become a bit better than what they are, IF *lah* they need, if they need it...

By doing so, Kartika not only indexes her institutional and ethnic identities as a Malay lecturer, but she demonstrates how these two identities intersect and interplay with her religious identity. Specifically, Kartika constructs these identities to support or

compensate the perceived inadequacy of her religious identity (Staunæs, 2003), a strategy mirrored in other participants' excerpts, which is further discussed in Chapter 7.

Other participants who mobilise institutional identities in their discourses are Liza, Dayana, and Zureen. Suzana also mobilises her institutional identity as she rests her description of herself as a Muslim woman on not only religion but also her position as a head of a department:

Extract 5.11 Suzana:

I—think that I make conscious decisions...And I make it well...Sometime based on, who I am as a Muslim woman...Sometimes because of my position...

Finally, Kartika's self-description as a Muslim woman culminates with her asserting at the end of line 12b, and reiterating in line 14b that, "I think that's Islam." I argue that such a conclusive finality serves to foreground Kartika's belief that beyond the dress, Islam is truly embodied by one's kindness and service to one another, which is a view shared by several other participants such as Juliana, Amirah, Thalia, Rose, and Munirah.

To summarise, although Kartika initially does not construct her religious identity through the lens of performing religious acts such as prayers, she nonetheless positions herself as an inadequate Muslim because of her non-veiling. She addresses this self-perceived sense of inadequacy through acts of kindness, thus positioning herself as an expiatory Muslim. In doing so, Kartika mobilises her ethnic and institutional identities in her capacity as a lecturer to help her Malay students to become better versions of themselves.

5.4.2 Fatma's construction of religious identities (vis-à-vis gender, filial, and ethnic identities)

Fatma is a Malay woman in her 40s who is married with two young daughters. She works in management at a multinational company. Despite our interview being the first time we have ever met, amongst all the participants, the ensuing conversation with Fatma was one of the most relaxed and easy-going. The interview took place at a restaurant in a shopping mall. It had one of the more interesting dynamics in terms of setting, as her husband and two daughters were present. However, they were seated

at a table a little distance away from us. The implications of this interview setting were addressed in Chapter 2.

One of the things that I believe contributed to the ease of our conversation is Fatma's friendly and personable character. Both of us naturally fell into and assumed the local sociocultural positions and roles between an older and younger female respectively. As soon as she sat down, I felt comfortable addressing her as *kakak*, typically shortened to *kak*, literally, 'older sister', but also an honorific used for unrelated females younger than one's mother. I asked her soon after whether she minded being addressed as such, and she laughed jovially and conveyed her consent. As a result of this ease of rapport, it was easier for me to probe further into more intimate details of her life and experiences, and Fatma seemingly also had little reservation about providing me with descriptive answers.

Fatma's strained relationship with her in-laws, particularly her mother-in-law, is the most striking recurrent topic throughout our conversation. According to Fatma, her in-laws are visibly displeased with her being a non-veiled woman, a sentiment they vocally expressed before her wedding when they requested that she wear the hijab during the solemnisation as an act of saving face (see Chapter 6: Section 6.4). Fatma had refused, a decision supported by her then groom. Although it is now years later and the situation has somewhat improved, her non-veiling remains a source of tension, especially during family celebrations. In the excerpts that follow, however, this tension is not explicitly referred to, though the importance of family in Fatma's conception of herself and of the Muslim woman is highlighted.

Below is the excerpt illustrating Fatma's description of a Muslim woman:

EXCERPT 5.3: Fatma describes a Muslim woman

Interlocutors	No.	Description of a Muslim woman
Farhana (F)	1a	<i>Okay, bagi, bagi akak kan, ummm boleh tak akak describe uh siapa akak rasa seorang wanita Islam tu?</i> Okay, to, to you right, ummm can you describe uh who you think is a Muslim woman?
Fatma (Ft)	2a	<i>Uhhh (.04) alaaa, susah ni! ((laughs))</i> <i>Uhhh (.04) alaaa, this is hard! ((laughs))</i>
F	3a	<i>Cuba cuba!</i> Try try!

- Ft 4a *Pada saya...(03) kalau dia...(.) dia taat dekat suami dia, dia taat dekat mak bapak dia...kan. Dia...dia tak buat benda benda yang...dilarang. Dia cuba habis baik buat apa yang...di suruh Allah tu...aaa okay ah.*
To me...(03) if she...(.) she's obedient towards her husband, she's obedient towards her parents...right. She...she doesn't do things that are...forbidden. She tries her best to do what is...commanded by Allah...aaa okay ah.
- F 5a Okay
- Ft 6a *Saya ni, takde...nak extreme sangat lah. Aaa. Kalau kata nak suruh saya extreme alim alim sangat hari hari pegi masjid tu pun...saya tak berkenan jugak ((chuckles))*
I'm not, not...really extreme lah. Aaa. If say [you] wanted me to [be] extreme religious religious everyday going to the mosque...I don't really like that ((chuckles))
- F 7a Mmm
- Ft 8a *Kalau nak suruh saya hari hari huhahuha pun...*
Even if say [you] wanted me to everyday huhahuha...
- F 9a Mmm
- Ft 10a *Saya tak rajin jugak. Aaa. So, saya...tengah tengah.*
I don't really do that too. Aaa. So, I'm [in the] middle.
- F 11a Mmm
- Ft 12a *Aaa. Sebab tu saya rasa orang nak...nak...argue argue, ataupun nak...nak persoalkan saya pun orang macam, susah nak persoalkan saya. Sebab (.) uh hh macam dulu masa saya dekat Australia kan, macam dorang pun, macam...discriminate jugak lah kitorang lah. Aaa.*
Aaa. That's why I feel people who want...want...[to] argue argue, or want [to]...even to question me people are like, [it's] difficult to question me. Because (.) uh hh like when I was in Australia right, like even they, like...discriminate [against] us lah. Aaa.
- F 13a Mmm
- Ft 14a *Those yang pakai tudung dia panggil sis – dia panggil sisters*
Those who wear tudung they call sis – they call sisters
- F 15a Aaa
- Ft 16a *Aaa kan. Saya tak tau kat UK macam tu ke tak lah. Aaa. Macam...kitorang yang tak pakai tudung ni dia panggil girls.*
Aaa right. I don't know lah in the UK it's like that or not lah. Aaa. Like...we who don't wear the tudung they call girls.
- F 17a *Yang Muslim lah?*

The Muslims *lah*?

- Ft 18a *Aaa. Memang gitu. Budak budak Malaysia lah!*
Aaa. It's like that. Malaysian kids lah!
- F 19a Mmm
- Ft 20a *Kakak kakak senior kan. Saya takde masalah pun.*
 The senior sisters right. I don't have a problem anyway.
- F 21a Mmm
- Ft 22a *Ko nak panggil aku girls ke sister ke, ko punya pasal lah.*
Macam tu kan.
 You want to call me girls or sister, it's your business *lah*. Like that right.
- F 23a Mmm
- Ft 24a *Aaa. Tapi bila dia buat...uhhh sembahyang Jemaah, dia buat ada ceramah, kitorang pegi!*
Aaa. But when they do...uhhh Jemaah [[congregational]] prayers, they do lectures, we go!
- F 25a Mmm
- Ft 26a *Aaa kan. Tapi bila ada kata buat makan makan, dia ada – siapa ada buat birthday party, uhhh pegi!*
Aaa right. But when say they do makan makan, they do – whoever has a birthday party, uhhh [we] go!
- F 27a Mmm
- Ft 28a *So macam...saya...takde lah kata macam...(.) uh extreme...kedua dua belah lah. Saya...tengah tengah lah. Buat hal saya je (laughs)*
 So like...I...I don't *lah* say like...(.) uh extreme...on both sides *lah*. I'm...[in the] middle *lah*. [I] just do my own thing (laughs).

In line 4a, Fatma's description of a Muslim woman is foregrounded on filial grounds when she asserts that a Muslim woman is someone who is obedient towards her husband and her parents. This is then followed by the trait of religiosity – a Muslim woman is someone who obeys God's commands. A similar pattern is evident in Fatma's self-conception of herself as a Muslim woman, but this is subsequently discussed. Comparing Fatma to other participants, two other women also include family and typical gender roles in their descriptions of a Muslim woman:

Extract 5.12 Amirah:

she [a Muslim woman] also is someone who has to...be balanced ((stutters)) who knows how to balance between her work and her family...Okay meaning she knows

how to take care of the kids...And also the husband and also she she also knows how to to you know, be productive.

Extract 5.13 Hayati:

well, I suppose ummm (.) ummm (.) I don't know. ummm ((clicks tongue)) in...i think (.) uh hh God sees uh men and women as equal...to me. you know. uh hh it's just that ((clicks tongue)) uh hh men and women are given different roles, you know?...like, ummm men - errr or women are generally given the roles of mother...uh hh wife...home-homemaker...you know...while maybe those are traditional roles *lah*.

Whereas Fatma employs the use of the Malay third person gender-neutral (Malay is a gender-neutral language) pronoun *dia* (she) to refer to the metaphorical Muslim woman, she abandons this practice starting from line 6a, when she begins to use the polite form of the Malay first person pronoun *saya* (I). This indicates a switch of focus towards her – and not a metaphorical ‘Muslim woman’ – in the conversation. I remark here that Fatma’s use of various Malay pronouns is rather interesting, and this point will be unpacked as this chapter progresses.

In lines 6a – 10a, Fatma indexes her religious identity as a moderate Muslim by initially prefacing this with her assertion that she is not “extreme”. She positions herself as being in the middle along the spectrum between religious conservatism (“If say [you] wanted me to [be] extreme religious religious everyday going to the mosque...I don’t really like that”) and secularism (“If say [you] wanted me to everyday huhahuha...I don’t really do that too”). Other participants also mention the adjective ‘extreme’, though in reference to religious conservatives and/or radicals. This is a curious point to be further explicated in Chapter 7 in light of the increasingly conservative climate of Malaysia. In the subsequent lines, the significance of Fatma’s indexing and positioning of herself as a moderate Muslim is revealed.

There exists a prevalent stereotype that brands non-veiled Muslim women as secular individuals who lead lives of excess and who completely shun religious practice. This is why I interpreted her ‘huhahuha’ (which is a very Malaysian expression) as euphemism for leading an excessively social life, such as partying. As was exemplified in Chapter 4, such stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in popular drama and film, and the implications are discussed in Chapter 7. This stereotype is also mentioned in various parts of the respective interviews of other participants, such as Kartika, Juliana, Saleha, and Munirah:

Extract 5.14 Saleha:

and (.) I think, I have (.) a bit (.) slightly coloured hair. They think ((snickers)) I'm wild...[I] go to club, and stuff right? but, *itu lah* [that's it]. Then, when I say I don't go – I don't do that kind of stuff, they don't like believe me, but (.) *tu lah*, they give, like, bad impression (.) to...a Muslim (.) that doesn't wear, wear tudung.

Extract 5.15 Munirah:

aaa! usually I can say that my friends ummm they are...they are social. I can say that (.) even if they wear tudung they are very outgoing, and everything...and it's not like they really religious, but (.) uhhh we are just a social..bunch *lah*. social bunch but we are not wild. in uni, my group of friends I can say that ummm they are made of international students, but they are not the wild kind.

By asserting that she does not subscribe to such a lifestyle while at the same time not being excessively religious either, Fatma's moderation thus acts as a shield of armour that can deter other people's prejudices and criticisms of her for not wearing the hijab, which she asserts in line 12a, "That's why I feel people who want...want...[to] argue argue, or want [to]...even to question me people are like, [it's] difficult to question me." This alludes to an attempt by critical others who were trying to delegitimise Fatma's religious identity, an attempt that Fatma believes she had successfully foiled, as will be revealed. In the later part of line 12a and continuing until line 26a, Fatma shares an anecdote that happened when she was an undergraduate student in Australia. This anecdote is illustrative of several intriguing points; not only does it show the emergence and intersection of Fatma's gender, religious, and ethnic identities, but it also reveals the dichotomy of 'us versus them' between non-veiled Muslim women and their critics.

Fatma's mobilisation of her religious identity as a moderate Muslim vis-à-vis her other emergent identities can be illustrated through the interrelated workings of the principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), as well as intersectionality.

The indexicality principle is evident in Fatma's overt labelling of herself as a moderate Muslim. Furthermore, the relationality principle (particularly authentication and denaturalisation) operates when Fatma mobilises this particular identity label as a tool to resist the presupposed (mis)perceptions about herself as a Muslim woman. By doing so, she is consequently denaturalising (or putting into question) what it means to be a non-veiled Muslim woman while simultaneously asserting her stamp of authenticity as a Muslim woman. This, in part, could be why she feels that others find

it difficult to question and critique her, which leads to her constructing an authenticated religious identity.

In mid 12a – 26a, the principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality operate when Fatma elaborates on an anecdote in which she faced discrimination from senior university colleagues who were (presumably) veiled. In lines 14a and 16a, Fatma draws forth the indexicality principle when she invokes the labels “sisters” and “girls”, supposedly used by these seniors to refer to veiled and non-veiled students, respectively. By doing so, Fatma inadvertently conjures the dichotomy of ‘us versus them’. Fatma employs “*kitorang*”, the informal form of the Malay plural first person pronoun, to collectively group herself along with other non-veiled women in a position against “them”, the veiled seniors.

‘Sisters’ is a term that most Muslim women call one another (see Peek, 2005), and as the term connotes, this helps to create a sense of unity and family among Muslim women, even those who are strangers to one another. That is why the use of the term ‘girls’ to refer to non-veiled Muslim women can be regarded as one that implies ‘otherness’, specifically that the latter are outsiders and are unlike the ‘sisters’ who are metaphorically regarded as family members. Furthermore, ‘girls’ also connotes a tone of condescension and implies females who have not yet reached a certain level of maturity.

In line 16a, Fatma asks whether the practice of calling Muslim females ‘sisters’ exists among Muslim communities in the UK, and though I did not respond, I clarify here that among the members of my UK university’s religious community, female members are called ‘sisters’ regardless of their status and appearance. Indeed, even among members of my Malaysian community here, this is also true. Nevertheless, this sense of ‘otherness’ – a dominant and recurring theme – felt by participants as it is created by others is explicated further in Chapter 6.

However, in line 20a, Fatma asserts that she does not mind being grouped as one of the “girls.” Yet, this claim becomes interesting when it is compared to the following line in 22a, when Fatma uses *aku* and *ko*, informal (also considered as crude to most native speakers of Malay) forms of the Malay first and second person pronouns, respectively, to refer to herself and her seniors. Until this point, Fatma has been using the polite personal pronoun forms since she is conversing with me, a relative stranger

whom she had just met. Therefore, by Fatma abruptly switching to an informal form of personal pronoun mid-conversation, she is actually revealing a brief glimpse of her more intimate insights and feelings into the matter. Specifically, she is stressing to me that she truly does not care what others choose to label her.

Her religious, gender, and ethnic identities intersect to position Fatma as an outsider by her university seniors. As she recounts the anecdote of how she and her peers were dismissed by their seniors through the latter's authoritative imposition of the labels 'sisters' and 'girls', Fatma is demonstrating an act of illegitimation and undermining of their identities as non-veiled Malay Muslim women.

However, in line 24a Fatma mentions her friends and her performing congregational prayers, and in line 26a, attending "*makan makan*" (literally, 'eat eat'). The latter is quintessentially Malaysian, and this event refers to occasions during which Malaysians gather to eat traditional food and socialise amongst ourselves. *Makan makan* is an especially integral part of the lives of Malaysians abroad as it helps to foster a strong sense of community, belonging, and identity. In so being, the phrase therefore has a close link to a Malaysian/Malay identity. Here Fatma demonstrates how she (and the rest of the 'girls') resist this attempt at ostracism implicit in the labelling by attending both religious and social events organised by these seniors.

Finally, in line 28a, Fatma concludes the conversation by once more reiterating her moderate Muslim identity, something that appears in the following excerpt when she describes herself as a Muslim woman:

EXCERPT 5.4: Fatma describes herself as a Muslim woman

Interlocutors	No.	Self as a Muslim woman
Farhana (F)	1b	<i>Jadi, bila akak rasanya bila akak dah cakap macam tu, uh akak describe diri akak pulak macam mana?</i> So, when you say it like that, uh how do you then describe yourself?
Fatma (Ft)	2b	Uhhh
F	3b	<i>Sebagai seorang wanita Muslim?</i> As a Muslim woman?
Ft	4b	<i>Itu lah saya cakap. Saya ada macam....saya tak extreme lah. Aaa. Ada benda yang...(.) ummm saya follow, yang saya rasa saya mesti mesti mesti buat. Ummm kalau sebab pada saya macam...uhhh (.) jaga mak saya...kan. Jaga bapak saya masa dulu masa dia ada...</i>

		That's what I said <i>lah</i> . I have like...I'm not extreme <i>lah</i> . Aaa. There are things that...(.) ummm I follow, that I feel I must must must do. Ummm because for me like...uhhh (.) taking care of my mum...right. Taking care of my dad when he was around...
F	5b	Mmm
Ft	6b	<i>Aaa. Ikut cakap husband saya...buat apa, jaga...rumah tangga apa semua tu, aaa itu semua memang, saya punya duty lah. Aaa, saya buat lah.</i> Aaa. Obeying my husband...doing what, taking care...the household all that, <i>aaa</i> those are all really, my duty <i>lah</i> . Aaa, I do [them] <i>lah</i> .
F	7b	Mmm
Ft	8b	<i>Tapi macam, saya tau jugak benda tu. Macam, uh okay, macam sembahyang semua tu, kita kena buat lah.</i> But like, I know too those things. Like, uh okay, like praying all that, we need to do <i>lah</i> .
F	9b	Mmm
Ft	10b	<i>Aaa macam mana susah pun, macam mana takde masa pun, kena carik jugak masa tu kan.</i> Aaa no matter how difficult it is, no matter how there seems to be no time, the time needs to be found right.
F	11b	<i>Aaa</i>
Ft	12b	<i>Aaa. Kena sembahyang lah macam mana pun. Aaa dengan budak budak ni pun sama lah, kena sembahyang.</i> Aaa. Have to pray <i>lah</i> in any case. Aaa same <i>lah</i> with these kids, [they] have to pray.
F	13b	Mmm
Ft	14b	<i>Aaa. Mengaji...</i> Aaa. Reading the Quran....
F	15b	Mmm
Ft	16b	<i>Baca Quran..even macam saya, pegi kerja (.) one hour driving</i> Reading the Quran, even like me, [I] go to work (.) one hour driving
F	17b	Mmm!
Ft	18b	<i>Apa nak buat dalam kereta tu?</i> What to do in the car?
F	19b	Mmm

Ft	20b	<i>Aaa. So, husband saya bagi list uh “awak baca ni”</i> <i>Aaa. So, my husband gives me a list uh “you read this”</i>
F	21b	
Ft	22b	<i>So, sepanjang jalan tu kita ada benda kita nak baca</i> <i>So, along the way we have things to read</i>
F	23b	Mmm
Ft	24b	<i>Kan. So macam, okay lah.</i> <i>Right. So like, okay lah.</i>
F	25b	Mmm
Ft	26b	<i>Cuma...(.) uhhh bila, bila sampai part pakai tudung tu,</i> <i>saya...(.) macam, malas sikit nak melayan. So</i> <i>macam...pada saya...saya takde lah perfect pun. Aaa kan.</i> <i>Pada saya kurang saya kat situ lah.</i> <i>It’s just...(.) uhhh when, when it comes to the wearing</i> <i>tudung part, I...(.) like, don’t really entertain it. So like...to</i> <i>me...I’m not lah perfect anyway. Aaa right. To me my flaw</i> <i>is there lah.</i>
F	27b	Mmm
Ft	28b	<i>Tapi saya cuba cover dengan benda benda lain lah.</i> <i>But I try to cover with other things lah.</i>

In Excerpt 5.4, Fatma begins describing herself as a Muslim woman by reiterating her moderate Muslim identity through the assertion of her non-extremeness in line 4b. Then, in lines 4b and 6b – just as in line 4a – Fatma demonstrates how her gender and filial identities intersect with her religious identity as she once more foregrounds the notions of being a good daughter and a good wife as a Muslim.

The indexicality principle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) is most saliently at work in the construction of these various forms of identities. Particularly, Fatma indexes her filial identity as a good daughter in line 4b, “...taking care of my mum...right. Taking care of my dad when he was around...”; and as an obedient wife in line 6b, “Aaa. Obeying my husband...doing what, taking care...the household all that...”. Furthermore, in line 12b, she also indexes herself as a responsible mother who ensures that her children are also performing their religious obligations, “Aaa. Have to pray *lah* in any case. Aaa same *lah* with these kids, [they] have to pray.” In these instances, Fatma demonstrates how her gender and filial identities intersect with one another to reinforce her religious identity (Staunæs, 2003).

As my research involves multilingual participants, the practice of code-switching and code-mixing also provide curious insights. Linguistic devices and strategies can help convey particular social meanings in the interaction between the interlocutors, which consequently also helps to indicate the interlocutors' orientations to specific identities.

In the excerpts presented, the identities indexed by participants become foregrounded with the use of the Malay word-ending particle *-lah*. This can be seen in Kartika too, but most saliently in Fatma. The *-lah* is ubiquitous in Malay speech, and according to Goddard (1994) it serves various functions, one of which is to add weight to Fatma's assertions. For instance, this emphatic effect helped by *-lah* is most prominent in lines 6b and 12b; firstly, when Fatma emphasises that “*aaa* those are all really, my duty *lah*. *Aaa*, I do [them] *lah*,” (line 6b) with regards to her obeying her husband and taking care of the household, and secondly, when she extends her practice of religious rituals to her children, “same *lah* with these kids, [they] have to pray” (line 12b).

The gendered and filial identities of a responsible-mother-who-ensures-her-children-perform-their-prayers she indexes in line 12b actually follow the initial construction of an explicitly religious articulation of herself in line 8b through the mention of performing prayers:

Tapi macam, saya tau jugak benda tu. Macam, uh okay, macam sembahyang semua tu, kita kena buat lah.

But like, I know too those things. Like, uh okay, like praying all that, we need to do *lah*.

Several things are noteworthy; in the first sentence, Fatma uses the Malay conjunction of contrast *tapi* (but) to preface the assertion that she too knows “those things.” I argue that “those things” can be inferred from the subsequent sentence to mean Fatma's knowledge of the need to do religious rituals, such as praying (performing the five daily prayers is one of the five pillars of Islam). It seems, then, that Fatma – despite her emphatic insistence on executing her duty as a Muslim woman by taking care of her family as an integral part of her religiosity – also acknowledges that religious obligation – such as praying five times a day – should not be forgotten.

Fatma's emphasis on her personal commitment to devote time to performing her religious obligations as seen from lines 8b – 22b demonstrates the intersection of several identities, namely her religious, gender, and filial identities, particularly to index a ‘practising Muslim working mother’ identity.

In the final sentence of line 8b, she underscores this point not only by using the Malay word-ending particle *-lah*, but also by using the Malay first-person plural pronoun *kita* (we) to invoke a reminder that prayer is a collective obligation for all Muslims to follow. This assertion receives further weight in the following line in 10b:

Aaa macam mana susah pun, macam mana takde masa pun, kena carik jugak masa tu kan.

Aaa no matter how difficult it is, no matter how there seems to be no time, the time needs to be found right.

And in the first sentence of line 12b:

Aaa. Kena sembahyang lah macam mana pun...

Aaa. Have to pray *lah* in any case...

In both lines, Fatma stresses that other daily commitments should not be a hindrance to one's execution of religious obligations. Then, in lines 14b – 22b, she further illustrates how she accomplishes this, by reading the Quran (14b and 16b) even during her daily drive to work (16b – 22b). Fatma's take is a decidedly different perspective compared to several other participants, such as Amirah, who in describing herself as a Muslim woman cited her busy work life as the reason why she has been struggling with performing religious rituals:

Extract 5.16 Amirah:

And, of course there are bumps along the way, for example let's say, okay, I want to pray, (.) um but there are times I don't pray because of maybe because of busy and all. Or...let's say I want to fast, but I cannot fast because there are times where you know, I'm busy.

Other women such as Suzana and Thalia in different parts of their respective interviews also cite similar reasons why they may not regularly pray the required five daily prayers.

Fatma's commitment may also be likely why, in line 24b, she considers herself as doing enough, therefore conveying a sense of adequacy in herself as a Muslim woman:

Kan. So macam, okay lah.

Right. So like, okay *lah*.

However, just as evident in Kartika, she then contradicts herself in the following line in 26b:

Cuma...(.) uhhh bila, bila sampai part pakai tudung tu, saya...(.) macam, malas sikit nak melayan. So macam...pada saya...saya takde lah perfect pun. Aaa kan. Pada saya kurang saya kat situ lah.

It's just...(.) uhhh when, when it comes to the wearing tudung part, I...(.) like, don't really entertain it. So like...to me...I'm not *lah* perfect anyway. Aaa right. To me my flaw is there *lah*.

Thus, despite her assertion in line 24b that she believes she has done enough to ensure religion is an integral part in her busy life, Fatma claims here that she still believes that because she does not wear the hijab, she is flawed and imperfect, two traits underscored with the word-ending particle *-lah*. And, just like Kartika and several other participants, Fatma therefore positions herself as an inadequate Muslim. However, unlike Kartika, who addresses this self-perceived sense of inadequacy through acts of kindness – Fatma, chooses to explicitly address hers through the doing of religious rituals, as she implies in 28b (and by doing so she also positions herself as an expiatory Muslim):

Tapi saya cuba cover dengan benda benda lain lah.

But I try to cover with other things *lah*.

To summarise, in constructing her religious identity, Fatma also mobilises her gendered and filial identities as a good daughter, obedient wife, and responsible mother. The construction of her religious, gender, and ethnic identities also show how these identities intersect to position her as the outsider among her own community of Malaysian Muslims abroad. Nonetheless, Fatma attempts to navigate through this ostracisation by foregrounding and positioning herself as a moderate Muslim.

5.5 Conclusion

In answering research questions RQ2 and RQ2a, analysis of the participant excerpts revealed that the women's religious identities are also constructed by and through mobilising simultaneously various identities such as gender, ethnic, institutional, and filial. The constructions of these various identities manifest themselves in the respective interactions in more specific, localised forms, providing evidence of the rich and complex interplay of identity work in discourse. The application of the principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality help to illuminate upon these elaborate processes of discursive identity work, specifically by demonstrating the

ways participants not only overtly label themselves as being particular identities; but also, the numerous positions they assume and abandon, in relation to the veil and non-veiling, as well as the interlocutors and actors involved in the interaction. Moreover, the application of the ‘doing of intersectionality’ (Staunæs, 2003) helps demonstrate that the various identities participants construct are strategic; that is, the participants construct identities to compensate for the perceived inadequacy of certain identities, or to reinforce the perceived strength of others.

In constructing and mobilising these numerous forms of intersecting identities, participants also invoke a multitude of other issues that call into question the presence and influence of other parties in the respective interaction. There are instances in which the parties are constructed by the participants as positive figures. However, in the overwhelming number of instances, these parties are often constructed and positioned as the ‘other’ in contrast with the participants, usually in less than hospitable anecdotes. This is evident in instances wherein participants recount personal stories of discrimination they faced from those who were critical of their not wearing the hijab. This highlights that such constructions of the ‘other’ and ‘othering’ in general inevitably involves issues concerning power. And coupled with the reality that for all these participants, their lives and experiences are a result of their various intersecting identities; this creates complex dynamics that offer rich insights. Although such a dynamic was explored to a certain extent in this chapter, it is explored in greater scrutiny in Chapter 6, where the objective is to discover the ways participants construct their identities by talking about the kinds of challenges they face as non-veiled Muslim women, and the ways they construct and overcome or navigate through these challenges in their discourses.

CHAPTER 6:

CONSTRUCTING AND NAVIGATING THROUGH CHALLENGES AND STRUGGLES AS NON-VEILED MUSLIM WOMEN

6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to relate the micro-level analysis of the previous chapter to a macro-level one. The macro-level analysis examines how individual identities are constructed and negotiated by considering the norms, values, and practices of the social groups and communities with and within which the participants are engaged (Van de Mierop & Schnurr, 2017). Some of these norms and values emerged in the media data presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I look at how such norms and values are interwoven into the challenges and struggles the interview participants face as a consequence of not wearing the tudung.

In a society that is increasingly becoming more conservative in religious ideals and practice (Barr & Govindasamy, 2010; Neo, 2006), Muslim women in Malaysia who do not wear the tudung may face challenges and struggles that include criticism, ostracisation and estrangement, as well as mistreatment by certain members of their local communities (Othman, 2006). For the purpose of analytical clarity, the working definition of ‘challenges’ as used here relates to the difficulties the research participants face as non-veiled Muslim women, particularly those concerning their identities, character and morals, and the various impediments in certain aspects of their lives. As such, challenges stem from difficulties that are instigated by others and experienced in the physical, ‘external’ world. This contrasts with ‘struggles,’ which is viewed through more of an ‘internal’ lens. ‘Struggles’ refer to research participants’ difficulties in experiencing life as non-veiled Muslim women and their attempts to not only feel safe and accepted for who they are, but also efforts by them to resist and negotiate through others’ judgments and prejudicial thoughts and behaviours against them. These struggles also entail an internal fight – participants not only spoke about battling feelings of anger, frustration, disappointment, and shame at being treated unjustly, but they also grappled with questions regarding faith and God. Finally, struggle illustrates the participants’ narratives of trying to receive approval and fair treatment from others, as well as reach a sense of completion as Muslim women.

Throughout the interviews, all participants spoke about the challenges they faced and the struggles they endured in some form of another, as a result of not wearing tudung. Some of these challenges were less discernible to the eye than others; some women spoke about feeling excluded by others or being subjected to “the look” by strangers (see Izharuddin, 2018). Others have been denied rights to religious space and practice because they do not wear the headscarf, which is widely considered to be a primary marker of a woman’s degree of Muslimness (Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018; Marshall, 2005).

To examine the identity constructions and negotiations of participants, the perspectives of challenges and struggles have been chosen because in each domain, participants convey and position themselves as certain kinds of identities (for example, as a daughter, an employee/employer, a neighbour, etc). However, these identities are not constructed in isolation. Participants find themselves having to wrestle with others’ dismissal, rejection, and/or legitimisation of these identities, apart from having to negotiate with the complexities of competing norms, values and beliefs of the respective domains and of the wider society (Van de Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017).

From the interview data, it is discernible that these challenges most frequently occur in three domains – family, institution, and community. The specifics of each domain are elaborated as the chapter progresses. Based on Appendix I, the themes related to these domains also feature prominently in participant interviews. Nevertheless, as the analysis shows, participants’ accounts of their challenges and struggles take place in one or more of these most prominent domains.

Thus, the objective of this chapter is not only to discover the kinds of challenges and struggles these women face as a result of their non-veiling, but also to examine the ways they construct these challenges in their discourses, with particular focus on how the various incidents and parties involved are represented and constructed in talk. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to discover how, in talking about their challenges and struggles, participants construct and negotiate their identities. This chapter thereby aims to address the following research questions:

RQ3: What kinds of challenges and struggles do these women face as a result of their decisions not to wear the veil?

RQ3a: How do they construct and negotiate their identities as they make sense of these challenges and struggles in their discourse?

Unlike in the previous analytical chapter, the analysis here is not confined to any specific questions from the interviews. Rather, the analysis is conducted based on excerpts from selected participants that centre on the challenges and struggles they faced within three of the most prominent domains – family, institution, and community. These domains were also identified as emergent themes. The selection of excerpts for Chapter 6 was conducted on an ad hoc basis. In selecting the excerpts for further dissection under each domain, I referred to my codebook to identify the participants whose excerpts had been coded under each domain/theme; for instance, under ‘workplaces and institutions.’ The ad hoc component of the excerpt selection was done to showcase diversity of experiences amongst the participants, as will be seen in this chapter. These selected excerpts are contrasted and corroborated with data from other participants. However, some of these experiences are unique to particular participants and hence could not be compared to or contrasted with other participants, which is noted under the analysis of each selected excerpts. The analysis is informed principally by Baxter’s (2003) Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA), and intersectionality.

The discussion begins with Section 6.2, which provides an overview of the discourses of challenges and struggles identified from the interview data. This is followed by Section 6.3, which describes what is meant by domains. Sections 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6 present the analyses of the selected participant excerpts in each of the respective domains. The chapter concludes in Section 6.7, which answers the outlined research questions.

6.2 Discourses of challenges and struggles among non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia

The analysis is primarily informed by Baxter’s (2003) FPDA and employs the denotative micro-description of talk together with the interpretive connotative approach. Together, they link descriptions of linguistic details to macro-level discourses that manifest within talk (Baxter, 2008). Procedurally, I also follow the work of Laurel Kamada (2009) on mixed-ethnic girls and boys in Japan, whose FPDA-based analysis helped inform the approach I am taking for the ensuing analysis.

The author identified several discourses that emerged from the ethnographic and interview data of her participants (see Kamada, 2009), which helped to demonstrate how these girls and boys were multiply positioned as powerless and the powerful within alternative and competing discourses (Baxter, 2002, 2003).

In referring to discourse, this analysis distinguishes between small ‘d’ and big ‘D’ discourses. According to (Gee, 2014) the former concerns language in use whereas the latter concerns “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the “right” places and at the “right” times with the “right” objects” (p. 34) useful for the identification of an individual as a member of a group. From this point on, the usage of ‘discourse’ in this chapter refers to big ‘D’ discourses.

Following the definition offered, the identified discourses are those that relate to beliefs and norms regarding Muslim women broadly, and those that focus particularly on (non)veiling. As such, as will be exemplified the women in the interviews draw upon religious, gendered, and ethnic discourses (among others) that intersected with one another to multiply position the women as marginalised and powerless within these discourses by virtue of them being non-veiled. The intersection of these discourses also highlights the interplay of these women’s various identities as they operate to also position these women in specific ways.

The identification and subsequent naming of these discourses are primarily informed by Sunderland (2004). Specifically, the discourses are named ‘descriptively’ and ‘interpretively.’ The former follows the most salient features in the text, such as the use of specialist lexical items. On the other hand, the latter follows much of the analyst’s own recognisability and reading of the discourses they believe exist in the text. Under interpretive discourses, Sunderland (2004) further distinguishes between ‘general’ and ‘gendered’ discourses, and she employs the use of scare quotes (‘x’) to denote the interpretive nature of such discourses, a convention which I also follow.

As per the interpretive discourses, I relied on my ‘insider knowledge’ to identify and name these discourses because most of these relate to specific notions, beliefs, and norms widely-held and practiced among Malay and Muslim communities in Malaysia (and thus which may seem unfamiliar to ‘outsider’ readers). Explanations as to why

these discourses are named as such are provided, and literature (academic and/or mainstream) that can corroborate my claims are included when available.

6.3 Domains of challenges and struggles

As was mentioned earlier, participants report that they face challenges in various domains. According to Holmes (2013) “a domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings” (p. 22). Derived from the ‘domains of language use,’ a concept propagated by American sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (see Fishman, 1965), a domain is a social situation in which individuals’ language choices can be examined, which is then subsequently used to identify the differences and similarities in patterns of usage across other domains. Figure 6.1 shows some of the identified domains of language use from Holmes (2013):

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Addressee</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Variety/Code</i>
Family	Parent	Home	Planning a family party	_____
Friendship	Friend	Beach	How to play beach tennis	_____
Religion	Priest	Church	Choosing the Sunday liturgy	_____
Education	Teacher	School	Solving a maths problem	_____
Employment	Employer	Workplace	Applying for a promotion	_____

Source: Based on Fishman 1972: 22.

Figure 6.1: Holmes’ (2013) domains of language use

Though the focus of this research is not specifically on code-choices employed by individuals in specific speech domains, the definition provided offers a useful guideline which I can employ to examine the language used by my participants to construct their identities as non-veiled Muslim women within particular social situations. This is because domains, just as Fishman (1965) posited, are not just merely useful for analyses of language, but they are also “related to widespread sociocultural norms and expectations” (p. 73). As was remarked in the beginning of the chapter, the domains identified in this study are family, institution, and community, and the definitions for each are provided under each respective section.

6.4 Constructing and negotiating identities through challenges and struggles in the domain of family

From the interview data, the notion of ‘filial obedience and loyalty’ (see Appendix I) under the theme ‘family, filial piety, and femininity’ is the most frequently coded.

This notion underscores much of the conflict and tension that participants face in the family domain.

The family domain includes settings such as the home and the *kampung* (village/countryside), that is, locations wherein participants face challenges from family members and relatives. Such challenges can also be present in more general situations of daily life, or even in more specified ones such as family gatherings during religious celebrations such as Eid. They mainly involve participants facing criticism and rebuke for not wearing the hijab; however, in some cases, they also consist of rebukes by relatives for expressing the intent to wear the hijab at some point (which consequently deterred participants from wearing it), such as Syakira, whose persistent taunts from her aunts about the former's desire to veil consequently discouraged her to wear it:

Extract 6.1 Syakira:

- | | | |
|-----|---------|--|
| 639 | Farhana | Alright. okay. ummm so can you can you maybe tell me why you don't wear the hijab? |
| 640 | Syakira | (.) mmm I did have - like, a year ago (.) I did have this nudge to wear it |
| 641 | Farhana | Okay |
| 642 | Syakira | But then this time, instead of being scared of my teacher who was (.) who commented on me when I was younger [about not wearing the hijab] |
| 643 | Farhana | Hmhm |
| 644 | Syakira | Now I'm scared of (.) judgment from...my aunts. |
| 645 | Farhana | Aaa okay |
| 646 | Syakira | Mmm cuz they're very...they're very against - whenever I talk about like (.) Islamic things. |

Such sentiments echo the findings in Read and Bartkowski's (2000) study, and they underscore the fluidity and complexity the issue of non-veiling brings forth, as well as the interpersonal dynamics it conjures up. Consequently, participants struggle not only to resist these criticisms from their loved ones, but also arguably to gain their respect, acceptance, and understanding.

6.4.1 Fatma

Fatma's excerpt was selected as her anecdote, which revolves around her in-laws is one of the most illustrative of challenges and struggles the women I interviewed face in the domain of family. In Excerpt 6.1 below, she talks about the pressures she faced

from her husband's family, in particular her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, who both demanded that she wear the hijab before her nuptials. Note that the left side of the transcript contains the original interview in Malay, and the right, the respective English translation. The excerpt begins with Fatma explaining why her husband's family allegedly showed dislike prior to their *nikah* (solemnisation):

EXCERPT 6.1: Fatma's conflict with her in-laws prior to her solemnisation

Original transcription			Translated transcription		
01	Ft	...Cuma masa...nak kahwin tu uhhh parents dia macam tak suka sangat lah.	Ft	...	just when...[we were about to] marry uhhh his parents like didn't really like <i>lah</i> .
02	F	<i>Iye?</i>	F		<i>Really?</i>
03	Ft	Aaa sebab (.) (unintelligible) sebab dia tak pakai tudung lah.	Ft	Aaa	because (.) (unintelligible) the reason was because [I] don't wear tudung <i>lah</i> .
04	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F		<i>Mmm</i>
05	Ft	Even masa...ummm lagi...few weeks nak...nikah tu, aaa. Kakak dia ((speaks conspiratorially)) ooo dia tak boleh cakap kuat kuat nanti dia dengar ((chuckles)) kakak dia...mak dia dok push lah, uhhh dok push lah call call kan uh "boleh tak masa hari kahwin nanti pakai tudung?" lepas tu, saya pun macam terkejut lah! Saya ni pulak jenis, bila orang cakap cakap saya macam tu, saya tak pandai marah tau. Saya tak pernah marah. Sebab pada saya...ummm benda tu memang benda yang tak betul kan, so takkan saya nak marah orang yang bagitau saya benda yang...saya buat tak betul. So, saya ((unintelligible)) bila orang cakap tu	Ft	Even when...ummm just...few weeks to...the solemnisation, <i>aaa</i> . His sister ((speaks conspiratorially)) ooo this can't be said out loud because then he'll hear ((chuckles) his sister...his mum was pushing <i>lah</i> , uhh was pushing <i>lah</i> call call right uh "can you on the wedding day wear tudung?" after that, I was like shocked <i>lah</i> ! Then I'm the type, when people speak to me like that, I don't get angry you know. I never get angry. Because to me...ummm that thing is really not the right thing right, so how can I be angry that people are telling me the thing that is...[that] I'm doing [is] not right. So, I ((unintelligible)) when people say that	
06	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F		<i>Mmm</i>
07	Ft	Saya memang tak marah lah. So bila, dia cakap macam tu, saya sengih je lah. Lepas tu, ummm apa ni, dia cakap	Ft	I really wasn't angry <i>lah</i> ! So when, when they said like that, I just smiled sheepishly <i>lah</i> . After that, ummm what,	

		“boleh tak masa hari kahwin tu pakai?” lepas tu saya pun macam pelik lah. Saya pun tanya lah “kenapa?”		they said “can [you] on the wedding day wear [tudung]?” then I was like weird <i>lah</i> . So I asked <i>lah</i> “why?”
08	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
09	Ft	Sebab dia kata...uhhh kesian lah dekat (.) mak dia kan? Malu nanti dengan orang kampung. Sebab saya tak pakai tudung. So macam saya pun macam pelik lah masa tu.	Ft	Because they said...uhhh pity <i>lah</i> at (.) his mum right? [She’ll] be ashamed with the village folk. Because I don’t wear tudung. So like I felt like weird <i>lah</i> that time.
10	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
11	Ft	So saya pun masa tu “alamak! Macam mana ni ah?!”	Ft	So that time I was like “ <i>alamak!</i> How <i>ah?!?</i> ”
12	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
13	Ft	Saya cakap. Sebab saya jenis (.) jangan lah suruh saya buat benda benda yang pelik pelik macam ni kan. Lepas tu saya cakap lah dengan dia, uh apa mak dia cakap. Lepas tu dia, pergi balik kampung marah mak dia ((chuckles))	Ft	I said. Because I’m the type (.) don’t <i>lah</i> tell me to do weird things like this right. After that I said <i>lah</i> to him, uh what his mum said. After that he, went back <i>kampung</i> [and] scolded his mum ((chuckles)).
14	F	((laughs))	F	((laughs))
15	Ft	Tak marah, macam...macam	Ft	Not scold, like...like
16	F	<i>Aaa</i>	F	<i>Aaa</i>
17	Ft	Argue lah jugak kan. <i>Aaa</i> . So masa...(clicks tongue) masa nak kahwin dengan masa first, first year kahwin tu agak (.) susah jugak lah. And then, ummm makcik makcik ni pun sama...aaa suma jenis...perli perli kan. Macam...uhhh tak tutup aurat ((mumbles)) memang selalu menjadikan benda tu sebagai sindiran lah. Tapi saya pun tak paham lah kenapa saya hati kering gila lah.	Ft	But arguing <i>lah</i> right. <i>Aaa</i> . So when...(clicks tongue) during the wedding and the first, first year of marriage was quite (.) quite difficult <i>lah</i> . And then, ummm these aunties are the same...aaa everyone’s the type...[that] mocks right. Like...uhhh not covering aurat ((mumbles)) always making that thing [Fatma’s non-veiling] as a jibe <i>lah</i> . But I also don’t understand <i>lah</i> why I’m really so <i>hati kering</i> [[stubborn]] ah.
18	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
19	Ft	Saya macam langsung tak peduli tau.	Ft	I like really don’t care you know.
20	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
21	Ft	Kau nak cakap apa pun cakap ah! Saya macam tak kesah pun.	Ft	You want to say whatever say <i>ah!</i> I like don’t care anyway.
22	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>

23	Ft	Sebab, pada saya...macam...ko nak cakap apa ko punya pasal lah. Aku nak pakai ke, aku tak nak pakai ke, aku punya pasal lah. Macam dia pun, dia tak kisah. Lepas tu macam dia cakap, “awak jangan pedulik lah dorang cakap apa. Ummm kita satu tahun ada tiga ratus enam puluh lima hari. Kita jumpa dorang tak sampai sepuluh hari setahun. So buat apa nak pening pening kepala pikir.”	Ft	Because, to me....like...you want to say whatever [it's] your business <i>lah</i> . I want to wear, or I don't want to wear, my business <i>lah</i> . Like even him, he doesn't mind. After that like he said, “you don't mind <i>lah</i> what they say. Ummm in one year we have three-hundred-and-sixty-five days. We only see them not even up to ten days a year. So why do [we] need to get all worked up.”
24	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
25	Ft	Apa yang orang yang...awak jarang jumpa cakap pasal awak kan.	Ft	What people...you rarely see talk about you right.
26	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
27	Ft	So macam...buat buat bodoh je lah! Aaa. So memang masa first, first few years punya...lepas kahwin tu memang...kalau balik kampung tu, memang, sakit hati ah! Tapi...	Ft	So like...just ignore <i>lah</i> ! Aaa. So really during the first, first few years of...after marriage was really...if [we] go back <i>kampung</i> , really, hurts <i>lah</i> ! But...
28	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
29	Ft	Saya buat bodoh je lah.	Ft	I just ignore <i>lah</i> .

In lines 1-3, Fatma mobilises the ‘*nikah* discourse,’ as a Muslim bride in Malaysia is normally expected to don the hijab as the marital religious ceremony involves the *Tok Kadi* (male cleric that officiates the ceremony), the bridegroom, and the bride’s father, and moreover, is witnessed by family and guests. Within this discourse, Fatma positions herself as the relatively powerless individual under pressure to subjugate and conform to such expectations under her in-laws’ request. She reinforces this positioning in line 5 by drawing attention to the confrontation she had with her husband’s mother and sister through the use of indirect reported speech. She constructs her in-laws as forceful and aggressive as they persistently urge her to don the hijab at the wedding:

...*kakak dia...mak dia dok push lah, uhhh dok push lah call call kan uh “boleh tak masa hari kahwin nanti pakai tudung?” ...*

...his sister...his mum was **pushing lah**, uhh was **pushing lah call call** right uh “can you on the wedding day wear tudung?” ...

I argue that Fatma’s code-mixing, specifically her repeated use of the English words “push” and “call” to make this claim serves to underscore the gravity of the action, as the use of foreign words in a largely Malay text acts as a contrast that directs the listener’s attention to the claim or scene the speaker is illustrating. However, despite framing her in-laws persistent request with such intensity, Fatma mitigates the force of the request by reporting that it was made in the form of a question. This can be interpreted as Fatma implying that despite their persistence, they still allowed her space to decide whether she would wear the hijab or not. However, it can also be interpreted as Fatma trying to remain respectful to her husband, who was sitting nearby and could potentially overhear the conversation. Besides this, Fatma’s acknowledgment of her husband’s presence also denotes a matter of temporality. Specifically, although Fatma begins the anecdote by using the past tense to place the events in the past, by acknowledging her husband’s presence in such a cheeky manner, she is actually marking the continuation of the event to the present; and also, alluding that traces of tension still linger as a result from these said events.

Nevertheless, although taken aback by the request, Fatma claims that she was not angered by it, a sentiment she emphatically repeats:

Saya ni pulak jenis, bila orang cakap cakap saya macam tu, saya tak pandai marah tau.
Saya tak pernah marah.

Then I’m the type, when people speak to me like that, **I don’t get angry** you know.
I never get angry.

She explains the reason she feels this way, and though it is not uttered directly, Fatma is arguably referring to her state of non-veiling when she talks about what she is doing as “not right” (line 5), hence why she cannot fault her in-laws for requesting that she don the hijab on her wedding day. Here, Fatma’s gender and religious identities continue to intersect to reinforce Fatma’s powerless position; by virtue of being a Muslim woman who does not veil, Fatma is faulting herself for not obeying the religious commandment for Muslim women, and as consequence, she accepts the brunt of the criticism targeted towards her. This not-wearing-tudung-is-a-wrong-

thing-to-do sentiment is also echoed by several other participants, namely Kartika, Azreen, and Yasmin.

The intersection of gender and religion continues with Fatma repeating the request in line 7. In line 9, this intersection also foregrounds ethnicity when she reveals the alleged reason behind it, which is to prevent Fatma's would-be mother-in-law from feeling ashamed with the *kampung* folk for having a daughter-in-law who does not wear the tudung. Considering the *kampung* setting, which is regarded as an enclave for Malay culture and tradition, the weight of shame that her mother-in-law would have endured becomes compounded (see Chapter 4: Figure 4.11 for a similar portrayal in the drama *7 Hari Mencintaiku*). Subsequently, Fatma draws upon and positions herself as relatively powerless within a gendered 'women as bearers of family honour discourse.' Yasmin, a participant who hails from a *kampung* background, also draws upon a similar discourse, as she explains that "[women] who wear tudung (.) she can guarantee...her parents' honour" (line 306). Thus, refusing to conform to this gendered norm among the Malay *kampung* community insinuates Fatma to have brought shame upon her in-laws' family.

In line 11, Fatma draws upon a gendered 'filial piety discourse' when she expresses her internal struggle to resolve the conflicting desires arising from her in-laws' request for her to wear the hijab to avoid societal rebuke, and her need to remain true to herself as a non-veiled Muslim woman. Fatma underscores the severity of the dilemma she faced from her in-laws through her use of several Malay emotive particles, namely *alamak* and *ah* (line 11): "So saya pun masa tu '**alamak!** Macam mana ni *ah*?!'" (So that time I was like '**alamak!** How *ah*?!). According to Koh (1990), *alamak* is an interjection speakers use to express various emotions such as surprise and embarrassment, whereas *ah* is used by speakers to indicate frustration over an unexpected state of affairs, which shows that "the speaker is uncomfortable about a given situation and wishes to relieve himself of the feeling somehow" (p. 75).

Conflicted, Fatma turns to her husband. In line 13, she involves him as an actor in her story, although his physical presence at the interview was acknowledged earlier in line 5. Fatma carves out a significant role for her husband to occupy in lines 13, 23, and 25. Specifically, he is positioned as Fatma's ally in her conflict with his mother and sister, as well as his aunts whom she constructs as forceful in lines 5-9, and

spiteful in line 17 (“...these aunties are the same... always making that thing [Fatma’s non-veiling] as a jibe *lah*...”) respectively. In another interview, Liza also positioned her husband as a supportive ally against her conservative father-in-law:

Extract 6.2 Liza:

- 135 Liza ‘Cus my husband is quite supportive ((chuckles))
- 136 Farhana Oh really?! Ahhh
- 137 Liza Of course my g – my my ((stutters)) father-in-law will say “you know females should stay in the house” “you shouldn’t be going out with your husband” but my husband will tell his father “oh, times have changed” ((laughs))
- 138 Farhana Ah okay. So how would you describe your husband? What kind of a person he is
- 139 Liza Supposed, should be quite open-minded

This construction and positioning of males as allies and females as enemies also emerges in the data of several participants, such as Rose, Juliana, and Erma. This points to an interesting inquiry about gendered dynamics surrounding (non)veiling, a point that is further discussed further in Chapter 7: Section 7.4.4).

Nevertheless, despite Fatma positioning her husband as an ally, she still faces criticism and mockery from his female relatives, in particular his aunts (line 17). However, in the face of such attacks, Fatma claims that she remained stubborn (described using the idiomatic *hati kering*⁶), perhaps steadfast in her resolution not to succumb to pressure and wear the hijab or simply that she did not care, and as well, was unaffected (line 19): “*Saya macam langsung tak peduli tau*” (I like really don’t care you know). Though she claims indifference, the nonchalance persona she constructs is broken when Fatma displays more explosive emotions in lines 21-23.

Here, Fatma’s switch between formal and informal Malay personal pronouns warrants further examination. She uses the informal Malay second-person pronoun *kau*, “***Kau nak cakap apa pun cakap ah!***” (**You** want to say whatever say *ah!*) followed by the formal first-person pronoun *saya*, “***Saya macam tak kesah pun***” (**I** like don’t care anyway) to address two different audiences. In the former, Fatma addresses the

⁶ *Hati kering*: Literally, ‘dried heart.’ The phrase conveys an individual as someone who is immovably fixed in his/her stand and does not wish to change it regardless of constant appeals from others.

women who had made derisive comments about her non-veiling, calling for them to say whatever they wanted about her; whereas in the latter, Fatma is speaking to me, asserting that she did not care what others said. She reiterates this in the beginning of line 23, “*Sebab, pada saya...macam...ko nak cakap apa ko punya pasal lah*” (Because, to **me**....like...**you** want to say whatever [it’s] **your** business *lah*) and reinforces the point in the following sentence by employing the informal first-person pronoun *aku*, “*Aku nak pakai ke, aku tak nak pakai ke, aku punya pasal lah*” (I want to wear, or I don’t want to wear, **my** business *lah*).

I interpret this contrast of Fatma’s assertion of aloofness yet emotional display, evident through her switching of personal pronouns, as indicative of her struggle to maintain a façade of indifference to outsiders (the critical relatives as well as myself) while facing emotional turmoil. She offers further proof of this argument in line 27 when she admits that she becomes emotionally hurt whenever she and her husband return to the *kampung*, but in the face of her own admission that she is in the wrong, Fatma chooses instead to act indifferent (line 29).

Thus, against the backdrop of her *nikah* in a *kampung* setting, Fatma talks about the challenges she faced from her in-laws due to her non-veiling, as well as the ensuing emotional struggle she grappled with during and at the aftermath. Throughout her narrative, Fatma demonstrates how her religious, gender, and ethnic identities continuously intersect to position herself as the subjugated subject within several intersecting discourses. Though her feigned nonchalance and indifference can be construed as an act of acquiescence in the face of constant criticism, I interpret it as her attempt at exerting some degree of powerfulness; through her indifference, she mobilises the ‘meek daughter in-law’ position by not allowing their criticism to outwardly affect her while simultaneously mobilising the ‘good wife’ position out of respect for her husband who remains her staunch supporter.

If Fatma’s attempt at subversion and show of (subtle) powerfulness is evident through her aloofness, then the following discussion with Juliana about the tension she faces with her mother is striking in its contrast.

6.4.2 Juliana

Juliana is a Malay woman in her mid-20s who is single and works in the media industry. Excerpt 6.2 is her response to my question about whether an incident had

occurred to make her decide not to wear the tudung. Note that as Juliana mostly spoke in English with the odd peppering of Malay words, italicised words that appear in the translated transcription column are words translated from Malay to English:

EXCERPT 6.2: Juliana's strained relations with her mother

Original transcription			Translated transcription		
01	J	Ummm yeah, nothing really happened um my mum's reaction was just like, she's always telling me that I should and (.) for a while, like, dia macam, (.) trying to like get me to like (.) wear it lah. Like like (.) whenever we go out together. Cuz that time kan macam tak reti tak reti.	J	Ummm yeah, nothing really happened um my mum's reaction was just like, she's always telling me that I should and (.) for a while, like, <i>she's like</i> , (.) trying to like get me to like (.) wear it <i>lah</i> . Like like (.) whenever we go out together. Cuz that time <i>right</i> [I was] <i>like didn't know</i> .	
02	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
03	J	Bawak kereta lagi and everything. So macam she'd be like "you're not getting in a car until you wear tudung" and like, okay then I'll stay at home.	J	[how to] <i>drive a car yet</i> and everything. So like she'd be like "you're not getting in a car until you wear tudung" and like, okay then I'll stay at home.	
04	F	((chuckles))	F	((chuckles))	
05	J	((chuckling)) and then – yeah...	J	((chuckling)) and then – yeah...	
06	F	<i>Aaa</i>	F	<i>Aaa</i>	
07	J	So...ummm yeah. But then after some time, macam...mmm you know like she can't really – I think she knows lah, dia macam like, dia dah penat dah berbuih mulut dah cakap	J	So...ummm yeah. But then after some time, <i>like...mmm</i> you know like she can't really – I think she knows <i>lah</i> , she's <i>like like, she's tired</i> [and her] <i>mouth's foaming talking about</i> [it]	
08	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
09	J	So macam yeah (unintelligible)	J	So <i>like</i> yeah (unintelligible)	
33 TURNS OMITTED during which Juliana spoke about her sister and brother					
10	F	Okay so how – when you finally decided to, you tak nak pakai, how did it make you feel?	F	Okay so how – when you finally decided to, you <i>don't want to wear</i> , how did it make you feel?	
11	J	((contemplates)) mmmm	J	((contemplates)) mmmm	
12	F	what was going through your mind at that time?	F	What was going through your mind at the time?	

13	J	(.) Hmmm (.) ((clicks tongue)) I think it's hard for me to remember these things, because I haven't – I've never really like wondered pun. [clicks tongue] I think like mostly like oh yeah I don't have to (.) you know, but tudung, or like think about like what matches and stuff	J	(.) Hmmm (.) ((clicks tongue)) I think it's hard for me to remember these things, because I haven't – I've never really like wondered anyway. ((clicks tongue)) I think like mostly like oh yeah I don't have to (.) you know, but tudung, or like think about like what matches and stuff
14	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
15	J	And like, you know (.) I don't have to cover up lah!	J	And like, you know (.) I don't have to cover up <i>lah</i> !
16	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
17	J	Cuma macam sometimes I feel like oh I'm a bit insensitive lah like (.) ((clicks tongue)) for example when we balik kampung, and then macam nak stop by sembahyang right? And then I don't have like anything, as in like I don't have a selendang or whatever. So macam that kinda made me feel bad lah. Macam oh I should have been more sensitive about this.	J	Just like sometimes I feel like oh I'm a bit insensitive <i>lah</i> like (.) ((clicks tongue)) for example when we go <i>back kampung</i> , and then <i>like</i> [we] stop by to pray right? And then I don't have like anything, as in like I don't have a <i>scarf</i> or whatever. So <i>like</i> that kinda made me feel bad <i>lah</i> . Like oh I should have been more sensitive about this.
18	F	Mmm	F	mmm
19	J	So macam – sometimes like my mum says that I'm a bit insensitive like like dia macam, like this is like macam (.) much recent, as in the last three years maybe?	J	So <i>like</i> – sometimes like my mum says that I'm a bit insensitive like like <i>she's like</i> , like this is like like (.) much recent, as in the last three years maybe?
20	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
21	J	She macam like “oh I tau lah you tak nak pakai tudung, tapi macam like you know like, cover lah sikit” what ke	J	She's <i>like</i> like “oh I <i>know lah</i> you <i>don't want to wear tudung</i> , but like you know like, what, cover <i>lah</i> a bit”
22	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
23	J	So macam...okay...like...I think there's nothing wrong, but I guess like you know the society, like	J	So <i>like</i> ...okay...like...I think there's nothing wrong, but I guess like you know the society, like
24	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
25	J	Things like that lah. ((clicks tongue)) ...	J	Things like that <i>lah</i> . ((clicks tongue)) ...

In contrast to Fatma, Juliana frequently uses the cosmopolitan speech style typical of the urban population of Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas. This feature is most

evident in her code-switching and code-mixing, as well as with the presence of English “*like*” that she uses together with the equivalent Malay word *macam* and “whatever.” This is telling in terms of identity construction, a point to be elucidated further towards the end of the section.

The settings relating to Juliana’s account were the home and the *kampung*. Particularly with the former, Juliana draws upon a gendered ‘filial piety discourse’ in which she positions herself as the subjugated and relatively powerless individual against her domineering mother and the latter’s insistence that Juliana wear the tudung (lines 1 – 7):

...she’s always telling me that I should and (.) for a while, like, *she’s like*, (.) trying to like get me to like (.) wear it *lah*... (line 1)

She exemplifies this respective positioning while simultaneously illustrating a power dynamic between her mother and her in lines 1-3. Juliana claims that her dependence on her mother to drive her around (as she was then a younger woman who did not know how to drive) was allegedly being capitalised on by the latter, who was trying to intimidate her into wearing the tudung (line 3), “So *like* she’d be like you’re not getting in a car until you wear tudung...”

Here, Juliana demonstrates how religion, gender, and age intersect within a ‘filial piety discourse’ to position her as relatively powerless against her mother. This is because Juliana implies that her mother was able to assert such a demand not only because of Juliana’s young age, but also because of the latter’s role as a daughter who is expected to comply with the wishes of the mother (who in turn wanted her daughter to comply with a religious injunction). Such a belief has its roots in Islamic teachings, specifically the decree that ‘heaven lies at the bottom of a mother’s feet’ (see Husain, 1998; Nagata, 1986).

In her interview, Thalia also spoke about how her non-veiled sister and herself would oblige their mother’s request to dress modestly to certain social occasions hosted by their mother, in order to preserve her reputation as a respectable corporate figure:

Extract 6.3 Thalia:

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 19 | Farhana | So, so you guys would uh, would obey <i>lah</i> , or would you be... |
| 20 | Thalia | Um |
| 21 | Farhana | Rebellious? |
| 22 | Thalia | Obey to a certain point |

- 23 Farhana ((chuckles))
 24 Thalia Like, [we'd] obey until we reach the venue, and then just whoosh take it off! [a shawl] ((chuckles)) yeah
 25 Farhana ((chuckles)) okay, then what does it make you feel when she [their mother] says that [that people will talk if her daughters do not dress modestly]?
 26 Thalia In my heart I'll be like "nobody is gonna say anything"
 27 Farhana Mmm
 28 Thalia But, you just do it anyway, cause...
 29 Farhana Mmm
 30 Thalia [It's my] mother right ((chuckles))

Therefore, Thalia and her sister can be seen to have been subject to a subordinate position, similar to Juliana. Nevertheless, the earlier claim that Juliana positions herself as a subjugated subject may be inaccurate. This is because instead of compliance, Juliana thwarts her mother's efforts by choosing to defy the latter's demands (line 3), "okay, then I'll stay at home," consequently constructing herself as a defiant youth, instead of the possibly more desirable (at least to Juliana's mother) obedient daughter. Juliana apparently sustained this teen defiance until it exhausted her mother and the latter was forced to curtail her efforts in demanding that Juliana wear the tudung. This claim is made more compelling with Juliana's code-mixing:

*So...ummm yeah. But then after some time, macam...mmm you know like she can't really – I think she knows lah, dia macam like, **dia dah penat dah berbuih mulut dah cakap** (line 7).*

*So...ummm yeah. But then after some time, like...mmm you know like she can't really – I think she knows lah, she's like like, **she's tired [and her] mouth's foaming talking about [it]***

Despite only peppering her sentences with Malay words such as *macam* and *dia* in mostly English constructions thus far, I interpret Juliana's use of Malay as having an empathic effect. This is made even more salient with Juliana's use of the Malay proverb "*berbuih mulut*" (frothing mouth) to describe her mother's repeated (though, ultimately, futile) attempts to compel her to wear the tudung.

In the second part of Juliana's excerpt starting from line 10, Juliana struggles to make sense of her thoughts and emotions regarding her non-veiling, which is evident from her admission and tongue-clicking (line 13). Nevertheless, in lines 17 and 19, Juliana draws upon a gendered and religious 'dress etiquette in religious spaces' discourse that refers to societal mores that compel Muslim women to dress modestly and to

cover their hair when entering religious spaces (though the same is true for men, especially in dressing modestly). Indeed, wearing the tudung as a sign of politeness and observing etiquette norms (such as when entering religious spaces) was also mentioned by other participants (such as Erma, Thalia, Azreen, among others). In contrast with the rebelliousness she displays in her youth, Juliana displays a more considerate character when she admits she was being insensitive for not bringing a scarf to cover her hair to enter a religious space, accentuated with the emphatic use of *-lah* to berate herself:

Just like sometimes I feel like oh I'm a bit insensitive *lah* like (.) ((clicks tongue)) for example when we *go back kampung*, and then *like* [we] stop by to pray right? And then I don't have like anything, as in like I don't have a *scarf* or whatever. So *like* that kinda made me feel bad *lah*. Like oh I should have been more sensitive about this (line 17)

Her mother's rebuke in lines 19-21 further serves to underscore the severity of Juliana's dismissal of this established and respected practice. In fact, other participants such as Rose and Dayana recounted incidents where they were questioned and/or denied entry to religious spaces because they were not veiled. Nevertheless, in lines 23-25, Juliana still attempts to justify her actions by attributing some blame to society for still upholding such traditions.

To summarise, Juliana draws upon several intersecting gendered, religious, and ethnic discourses, demonstrating how she is positioned as relatively powerless against dominant sociocultural expectations and religious norms. More explicitly, Juliana grapples with the notion of the obedient and filial Muslim daughter, one who is quasi-apologetic of her dismissal of established traditions among Muslim communities. Her urban sensibilities and youthful rebelliousness that are in conflict with these mores underscore the chasm between the urban and the *kampung*, which, as with Fatma, Juliana has to manoeuvre through.

Thus far, I have discussed the challenges and struggles faced by Fatma and Juliana as a consequence of their non-veiling. The following excerpt, however, takes the discussion to a contrasting perspective.

6.4.3 Erma

Erma is a Chinese woman in her 30s who works in the education sector and is married. Erma is a *muallaf*, 'a convert to Islam,' like Rose and Liza. Born and raised as a devout

Christian, Erma decided to convert to Islam to marry her Muslim husband (a legal requirement in Malaysia), but also because she claims she had received *hidayah* (guiding light from God) to do so after years of personal study. The excerpt below begins as I prompted Erma to elaborate on a point that she brought up earlier in the interview regarding the tudung and her mother. The excerpt layout is the same as that for Juliana:

EXCERPT 6.3: Erma struggles to find a balance between being a filial daughter and a good Muslim

Original transcription			Translated transcription		
01	F	<i>And then you said tadi kan, you didn't want to wear tudung because you wouldn't your mum...</i>	F	<i>And then you said before right, you didn't want to wear tudung because you wouldn't [want] your mum...</i>	
02	E	<i>Oh! This, I tell you one thing ah</i>	E	<i>Oh! This, I tell you one thing ah</i>	
03	F	<i>Be devastated kan – ah okay</i>	F	<i>Be devastated kan – ah okay</i>	
04	E	<i>(.) I think one of the reasons saya tidak pakai tudung because I made promise with my mum – a lot of things I have done have hurt her so much.</i>	E	<i>(.) I think one of the reasons I don't wear tudung because I made promise with my mum – a lot of things I have done have hurt her so much.</i>	
05	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
06	E	<i>Ummm (.) but there's one thing my mum – I don't know lah, she very specifically, she asked me (.) “can I ask you just one thing?” I said “what is it mum?”</i>	E	<i>Ummm (.) but there's one thing my mum – I don't know lah, she very specifically, she asked me (.) “can I ask you just one thing?” I said “what is it mum?”</i>	
07	F	<i>Hmhm</i>	F	<i>Hmhm</i>	
08	E	<i>[She] said “you know even though you already converted into Muslim, can I ask you not to wear tudung?” (.02)</i>	E	<i>[She] said “you know even though you already converted into Muslim, can I ask you not to wear tudung?” (.02)</i>	
09	F	<i>Hmmm</i>	F	<i>Hmmm</i>	
10	E	<i>So at that time your mum is devastated, ko cakap lagi “mak, aku mau pakai tudung jugak!” ((dramatic inhalation)) gempa bumi lagi tu...</i>	E	<i>So at that time your mum is devastated, what more you say, “mum, I still want to wear tudung!” ((dramatic inhalation)) there'll be earthquake...</i>	
11	F	<i>((chuckles))</i>	F	<i>((chuckles))</i>	
12	E	<i>Taufan lagi tu...ya ampun...</i>	E	<i>Typhoon too...my goodness...</i>	

13	F	((laughs)) okay	F	((laughs)) okay
14	E	But uh hh she...she knows that I wear tudung if like for example if I go to (.) mosque and everything	E	But uh hh she...she knows that I wear tudung if like for example if I go to (.) mosque and everything
15	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
16	E	Ummm and slowly I'm actually introducing to her that you know uh me being a Muslim, we have responsibility, we have to jaga kita punya solat.	E	Ummm and slowly I'm actually introducing to her that you know uh me being a Muslim, we have responsibility, <i>we have to observe our solat.</i>
17	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
18	E	And all this thing. So...uhhh I slowly you know, give her hint you know, I'm also doing my prayers.	E	And all this thing. So...uhhh I slowly you know, give her hint you know, I'm also doing my prayers.

In the exchange above, Erma draws upon two interlinked discourses, namely, a gendered 'filial piety discourse' and a religious 'Muslim convert discourse'. Within these discourses, Erma's gender and religious identities, specifically, as the daughter of a Christian woman who has converted to Islam, intersect to position her as powerless.

This is first demonstrated in line 4, when Erma reveals the reason she does not veil before abruptly admitting that she has done much to hurt her mother. Based on information divulged in other parts of the interview, the source of the hurt refers to Erma's act of converting from Christianity to Islam, as this broke her devout Christian mother's heart (and led to the latter's ostracisation of Erma for a while). Notably, rather than positioning her mother as the hostile party, Erma instead occupies this position while simultaneously taking up that of the conciliatory daughter trying to pacify her heartbroken mother. This is accomplished through a promise made between the two, as evident in lines 6 and 8:

Ummm (.) but there's one thing my mum – I don't know *lah*, she very specifically, she asked me (.) "can I ask you just one thing?" I said "what is it mum?" (line 6)

[She] said "you know even though you already converted into Muslim, can I ask you not to wear tudung?" (line 8)

Unlike Fatma and Juliana, Erma therefore faces a challenge of a different kind. Instead of rebuke for not wearing the veil, Erma faces inevitable heartbreak and

disappointment from her mother if she were to wear the tudung. Here, Erma's gender and religious identities intersect within a gendered 'filial piety discourse' in that despite being a Muslim woman with religious obligations to meet, Erma's identity as a daughter is instead foregrounded, and with that, the expectation that she would comply with her mother's wishes.

Erma's position as the conciliatory daughter who wishes to pacify her mother within this 'filial piety discourse' becomes more illustrative in lines 10 and 12, when she humorously likens a hypothetical dismissal of her mother's wish to natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoon.

However, in lines 14-18 this position and Erma's desire to pacify her mother come into conflict with her identity as a Muslim woman. Erma admits that despite giving in to her mother's wish, she still makes it known to the latter that she wears the tudung when she visits the mosque (line 14). And in line 16, Erma not only explicitly indexes her identity as a Muslim, "me being a Muslim", she also constructs this identity collectively with me when talking about the religious duty of observing the daily prayers, "**we** have to *jaga kita punya solat*" (**we** have to observe *our solat*). Thus, within a 'Muslim convert discourse' and a 'filial piety discourse,' Erma demonstrates how she negotiates between the competing demands required of the role as a filial daughter to a non-Muslim mother and one of a practicing convert to Islam. Among the *muallaf* participants, Liza remarked that she has not had to contend with tension from her family members with regards to her conversion to Islam, as she claimed them to be accepting and without disagreements. Rose, on the other hand, has also had to face her own struggles as a *muallaf* non-veiled Muslim woman, which is further explored in Section 6.6.3.

In the following section, participants demonstrate how they negotiate through expectations, norms, and beliefs espoused in various settings under the domain of institution.

6.5 Constructing and negotiating identities through challenges and struggles in the institutional domain

Based on the interview data, 'workplaces and institutions' is one of the most dominant themes (Appendix I). Just as the family can be regarded as a social institution, I define and operationalise the domain of institution to include settings with an organised

hierarchical structure with the presence and involvement of figures of authority. However, what distinguishes between the family and the various institutional contexts that make up the focus of this section is where each falls in terms of the private and public; the family is located within the sphere of the private, whereas the following institutional contexts lie within the sphere of the public. Thus, institutional environments include workplaces and educational settings (including college and university).

Religious spaces such as mosques can be regarded as institutions as well; however, I chose to exclude mosques from discussion under this domain. This is because the interview data suggest that challenges participants face in religious spaces usually take place without the presence of a clear figure of authority (although, arguably religious ideology that manifests through the challenges presented by certain individuals can be considered as such), and also because a mosque is not an environment in which participants commonly spend time, unlike the workplace and school. In the latter domain, participants speak about facing challenges such as receiving discriminatory treatment from superiors and colleagues, and in some cases, subordinates, because they do not wear the hijab. For instance, Liza had to contend with a superior who criticised her for not wearing the tudung. Her former boss, whom Liza considers as a hardcore Muslim allegedly told her to wear the tudung, and when the latter ignored the reprimand, she was later purportedly told that she “will never go to heaven” (line 389). Consequently, their struggles involve efforts not only to be accepted as a member of the institution but also to fully function and serve as a member. The first excerpt, Amirah, exemplifies this point clearly.

6.5.1 Amirah

Amirah is a single woman in her 20s of Mixed-Asian ancestry who works as a tutor at a college. Amirah used to wear the hijab but due to personal reasons (the details of which are undisclosed), later chose to stop wearing it. In the excerpt below, she talks about how this decision has impacted her in the workplace:

EXCERPT 6.4: Amirah's challenges in the workplace

- 01 *F* *And how did that make you feel?*
02 *A* It was sad actually because people are still judging. (.) Okay. People are still judging you based on what you wear.
03 *F* *Okay*

- 04 A And...because some...I don't do anything, I don't do anything to them. It's just me and my work. It's just me and my department. But when they started to...you know, carry these stories around, just because of your appearance, it's not good.
- 05 F *Mmm*
- 06 A It's not good. It's bad. So...(unintelligible) so rather than...retaliating about it, so I just you know, just, I just wear something that they know me about *lah*, so, that's why I decided to wear tudung. And also my students also they started to ask me "Miss, how come all of a sudden you don't wear?"
- 07 F *Mmm*
- 08 A "Miss how come all of a sudden you don't wear?"
- 09 F *Mmm*
- 10 A So...because I'm an educator, and my image is...y'know portraying a good image to to your...students, and to people around you is very important. So that is why I decided okay at work I just wear tudung. But outside maybe I'm just being me.

Amirah draws upon a discourse of workplace and profession realised through words and phrases such as "my department," "at work," "my students" and "I'm an educator." Within this discourse, Amirah also draws upon several more specified workplace-based discourses within which she constructs her identities and positions herself as the marginalised and relatively powerless against institutional norms and values.

This marginalised positioning she constructs for herself is evident in lines 2 and 3, when Amirah draws upon a 'judgment based on appearance discourse,' realised through the repetition of the phrase, "...people are still judging. (.) Okay. People are still judging you based on what you wear" (line 2). Eight other participants such as Saleha, Siti, and Munirah also echoed the same sentiment as Amirah.

I argue that this discourse is the result of its intersection (albeit implicitly) with another discourse, namely, a 'professional integrity discourse.' I define this discourse as compliance with and exhibition of the values and practices accepted as the norm by members of an organisation. Amirah positions herself as the marginalised, non-veiled professional within these intersecting discourses when she positions herself as relatively powerless against her colleagues, who presumably have been judging her ("people are still judging you based on what you wear,") and circulating stories about her unveiling ("when they started to... carry these stories around, just because of your appearance..."). She stresses the severity of the situation as others are beginning to talk about her, further underscoring her marginalised position; this is evident from the

antithetical assertions of “it’s not good...it’s bad.” However, Amirah insists that she has done nothing to antagonise her colleagues, “I don’t do anything, I don’t do anything to them.”

As she had already divulged to me, Amirah used to wear the tudung to work (which was something she did from her first day of work), but she decided to stop after some time. As was remarked earlier, an individual’s choice to unveil can be regarded as bringing shame upon oneself⁷ (Davary, 2009). Among Malaysian and international Muslim communities, the backlash is heightened with a woman who wears the tudung and then stops wearing it. This is evident in the cases of Malaysian celebrities Uqasha Senrose who unveiled in 2016 (Awang Chik, 2016), and most recently, Emma Maembong in early 2019 (Mohamad, 2019; Othman, 2019), as well as global Muslim figures such as Dina Tokio (Srouji, 2018). Thus, the reason Amirah faces criticism and judgment at work is arguably because of her act of removing her tudung, which can be considered a violation of the accepted professional image and ethics espoused by an organisation, especially one in charge of moulding the youth’s mind, such as a college (a claim she alludes to in line 10).

Furthermore, Amirah’s marginalised and powerless position becomes more salient with her defeated declaration to revert to an appearance that everyone is familiar with (and by extension and implication, approve of) which is to resume wearing the tudung to work. Her emphatic assertion (underscored with the use of *-lah*) in line 6, “So...(unintelligible) so rather than...retaliating about it, so I just you know, just, I just wear something that they know me about *lah*, so, that’s why I decided to wear tudung,” therefore serves to mark her succumbing to such expectations in the workplace.

Amirah then proceeds to construct her institutional identity as an educator when she mentions via direct speech, her students’ persistent curiosity regarding her decision to stop veiling (lines 6-10). I argue that in line 10, Amirah attempts to subvert her marginalised position within these discourses by actually drawing upon a ‘professional obligation discourse’. By justifying her decision to resume wearing tudung to work on the basis of her believing that it is her duty to convey a positive image to her students and others, she not only constructs her identity as an educator,

⁷ Davary (2009) also notes that unveiling is also considered by some Muslims to be a liberating act.

but she can be seen to have reclaimed agency in her action, an assertion of stark contrast to her earlier claim that she had decided to do so in the face of others' criticism.

However, I argue that Amirah may not necessarily have been successful in reclaiming powerfulness and agency, as her attempts could be understood as her trying to navigate her position within the confines of discourses and authoritative structures that are constraining her. This point can be corroborated by Amirah's claim that "but outside maybe I'm just being me", underscoring the fact that her decision to wear the tudung to work again was ultimately an act of concealment of her true self in the face of institutional conventions.

In the following excerpt, the hijab is also implicated as Dayana attempts to negotiate the complexities of working in the business and finance world.

6.5.2 Dayana

Dayana is a single woman in her 20s who works in the marketing industry. A Malaysian citizen, Dayana was born in Indonesia but migrated to Malaysia as a young child with her family. The interview took place at a café in a popular shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur. Although struggling to define her ethnic identity in contrast to the rest of the participants, Dayana nevertheless identifies herself as an Indonesian Malay. Similar to Amirah, Dayana had worn the tudung previously, but chose to stop wearing it due to both personal and professional reasons. In the excerpt below, she talks about how the tudung impacted her performance and the role it plays in the workplace:

EXCERPT 6.5: Dayana's veiling impacted her job performance

Original transcription				Translated transcription			
01	F	[[TWO LINES OMITTED]]	F	[[TWO LINES OMITTED]].			
		<i>Um...alright. So, kenapa you (.) you macam tak pakai tudung? Apa reason dia?</i>		<i>Um...alright. So, why did you (.) like you don't wear tudung? What's the reason?</i>			
02	D	Um bila I start kerja in sales line	D	Um when I started working in sales line			
03	F	<i>Hmhm</i>	F	<i>Hmhm</i>			
04	D	Back in banking, I kena, bercakap dengan customer yang, sorry to say lah, mereka yang have, yang ada power to invest.	D	Back in banking, I <i>had [to], speak with</i> customers who are, sorry to say <i>lah</i> , <i>those</i> who have, who have power to invest.			
05	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>			
06	D	So, they are not coming from Malay [race]	D	So, they are not coming from Malay [race]			

07	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
08	D	My area yang I jaga tu, Bukit Bintang, and area dekat-dekat memang bukan Malay. You have to deal with Chinese, Indian. So bila I pakai tudung, I think macam benda tu (.) buat I di uh – macam mana ah rasa? Okaylah uh, because you are not my kaum	D	My area <i>that I'm in charge [of is]</i> Bukit Bintang, and the surrounding areas are really not Malay [areas]. You have to deal with Chinese, Indian. So <i>when I wear tudung</i> , I think like <i>that thing (.) made me uh – how ah [I] felt?</i> Okaylah uh, because you are not my race
09	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
10	D	And you, you are sangka macam, sebab all in banking not semua orang yang very ethical	D	And you, you are <i>thought like</i> , because all in banking <i>not everyone is very ethical</i>
11	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>
12	D	Okay. So, bila they nampak you pakai tudung, they will just be macam (.) there's a barrier lah. You tak boleh nak connect easily dengan mereka.	D	Okay. So, <i>when they see you wear tudung</i> , they will just be like (.) there's a barrier <i>lah</i> . You <i>can't</i> connect easily with <i>them</i> .
13	F	<i>Mmm okay. Alright</i>	F	<i>Mmm okay. Alright.</i>
14	D	It's totally different. Bila bukak and lepas, I just nak share lah. Bila lepas bukak, I (perasan) jumlah sales I dapat or connections I dapat, and orang yang I lebih rapat, is much more bigger circle compared to bila I pakai tudung.	D	It's totally different. <i>When [I] took it off and after</i> , I just want to share <i>lah</i> . <i>After I took it off</i> , I (<i>noticed</i>) the sales amount I got or connections I got, and the people I am closer to, is much more bigger circle compared to <i>when I wore tudung</i> .

Dayana mobilises a discourse of workplace and profession within the specific context of business and finance. This is realised through 'semi-specialist' (Sunderland, 2004) words and phrases such as "working in sales" (line 2), "banking," "customers," and "invest" (line 3). By mobilising this discourse, Dayana paves the way for the mobilisation of an ethnic 'Malay inferiority complex' discourse realised with this assertion:

I kena, bercakap dengan customer yang, sorry to say lah, mereka yang have, yang ada power to invest... So, they are not coming from Malay [race]

I had [to], speak with customers who are, sorry to say *lah*, those who have, who have **power to invest**... So, **they are not coming from Malay** [race] (lines 4 and 6).

This discourse asserts the belief prevalent among Malays (in particular nationalists who exploit it to perpetuate propaganda that advance pro-Bumiputera policies) that they are socio-economically inferior to the more economically powerful non-Malay population (see Nair, 1999). Thus, within this discourse, Dayana's ethnic Malay identity and her institutional identities intersect as she positions herself as the marginalised and relatively powerless Other in relation to her customers, whom she claims to be Chinese and Indians (line 8). This is made even more salient as Dayana uses the tudung to index her gender, religious, and ethnic identities as a Malay Muslim woman, mobilising them as contributing factors to her positioning herself as the Other within an ethnic 'not one of us discourse':

So bila I pakai tudung, I think macam benda tu (.) buat I di uh... Okaylah uh, because you are not my kaum

So when I wear tudung, I think like that thing (.) made me uh... Okaylah uh, because you are not my race (line 8)

However, it is not merely ethnic distinction within Malaysia's complex history of ethnic relations that can explain Dayana's construction and positioning of herself as such. In line 10, she mobilises a 'unethicality in business and finance discourse' the significance of which becomes clearer when her next statement is considered:

Okay. So, bila they nampak you pakai tudung, they will just be macam (.) there's a barrier lah. You tak boleh nak connect easily dengan mereka.

Okay. So, when they see you wear tudung, they will just be like (.) there's a barrier lah. You can't connect easily with them (line 12)

By claiming that wearing the tudung acted as a barrier between herself and her supposedly unethical clients, Dayana is drawing upon a religious and gendered 'tudung as a symbol of the good Muslim woman discourse' that imbues the tudung and its wearer with a sense of virtue and piety, which Dayana implies is incompatible in this unethical professional setting.

Just like what she accomplishes in line 8, Dayana uses the tudung to index her religious, gender, and ethnic identities, furthermore imbuing her with a sense of piety that is the supposed cause of her limited ability to connect with her allegedly unethical clients. Traces of the prevalence of this discourse can be seen in an article that reported on Malaysian actress Lisdawati's comment that her veiling does not mean she cannot play antagonistic characters. This statement implies that there is a commonly-held belief among societies that actors who wear the tudung should only

be playing good characters (Zainal, 2016). This notion is also mentioned by other participants, such as Syakira who says that a veiled Muslim woman is someone who is “pure, clean, and all that stuff *lah*. So she’s a good girl,” (line 452) in contrast with the ‘easy’ non-veiled Muslim women, whom men think they can easily exploit. Another participant, Hayati, also spoke about how the wearing of the veil brings certain lifestyle changes, in particular in how veiled women are expected to behave concerning men. As she elaborates in the following extract:

Extract 6.4 Hayati:

- | | | |
|-----|---------|---|
| 711 | Hayati | uhhh ((clicks tongue)) err and then uhhh you know you can't (.) let's say, you know, because I live alone. |
| 712 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 713 | Hayati | So you wanna (.) bring uh male friends, you have to be (.) |
| 714 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 715 | Hayati | Very careful. that kind of thing you know? |
| 716 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 717 | Hayati | So these are the things that (.) are expected from you when you wear the tudung, but when you don't wear the tudung, people...don't care! |
| 718 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 719 | Hayati | People just think that, you're just (.) any other... uhhh woman? |
| 720 | Farhana | Okay |

Therefore, it can thus be argued that wearing the veil brings certain lifestyle changes to the women who wear it. Moreover, there are more specific behavioural expectations that also come together with it, such as in women’s interpersonal conduct with men. Considering this prevalent societal belief with Dayana’s claims in line 14 further draws upon a complex power dynamic. Though Dayana mobilises the tudung to position herself as the marginalised Other within certain discourses, the tudung has also imbued her with a ‘good Muslim woman’ virtuosity that places her on the moral high ground in relation to her supposedly unethical clients. Still, this perceived virtuosity left Dayana marginalised within this unethical professional setting and consequently restrained her ability to execute her professional duties in sales, which was to establish connections with clients. Therefore, to subvert and challenge her marginalised position (as claimed to be brought upon by the wearing of the tudung), Dayana chooses to remove it, an act that resulted in an increase in performance.

Thus, by drawing upon several interlinked professional, gendered, ethnic, and religious discourses, Dayana demonstrates how she has been positioned as the

relatively powerless Other in an unethical corporate setting. Specifically, her religious, gender, and ethnic identities as a veiled Malay Muslim woman come into conflict with her institutional identity – the former imbues her with a sense of piety and virtuosity that is allegedly incompatible with the unethical demands of the latter. Thus, the tudung becomes a symbol of morality in an otherwise unethical world of finance and business, and in order to be fully considered as a participating member, Dayana felt compelled to stop wearing the veil, thus insinuating, or rather presenting herself to the clients that she too could be ‘immoral’ and thus engage in their unethical practices.

In the following excerpt, Siti – unlike Amirah and Dayana – talks about the implications of her non-veiling in a university classroom.

6.5.3 Siti

Siti is a single Malay woman in her 20s who at the time of the interview was an undergraduate student. Our interview took place via a Skype phone call. In the excerpt below, she talks about how she was discriminated against by a lecturer for not wearing tudung (note that as the gender of the lecturer was not specified, the translated pronoun is ‘they’):

EXCERPT 6.6: Siti's non-veiling causes problems in the classroom

Original transcription			Translated transcription		
01	St	I was free hair, going to classes.	St	I was free hair, going to classes.	
02	F	<i>Okay</i>	F	<i>Okay</i>	
03	St	ummm ada lecturer yang actually judged me, based...on just judge people based on what they wear.	St	Ummm <i>there was a</i> lecturer who actually judged me, based on...just judge people based on what they wear.	
04	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
05	St	dia macam amalkan favouritism yang I rasa memang very inappropriate, very unprofessional as a lecturer.	St	<i>They like practised</i> favouritism <i>that I felt really</i> very inappropriate, very unprofessional as a lecturer.	
06	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
07	St	So sebabkan I tak pakai tudung	St	<i>So because I don't wear tudung</i>	
08	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F	<i>Mmm</i>	
09	St	Dia actually like - didn't give me a lot of marks, and dia sendiri cakap like, okay you tak pakai tudung, mulai - you	St	<i>They actually like – didn't give me a lot of marks, and they said like, okay you don't wear tudung, starting – you</i>	

		patutnya tutup aurat seperti seorang islam bla bla bla! and I feel (.) I felt (.) so... (.)			<i>should cover aurat like a Muslim bla bla bla! And I feel (.) I felt (.) so... (.)</i>
10	F	<i>Mmm</i>	F		<i>Mmm</i>
11	St	((clicks tongue)) I've been treated so...un((snickering))fairly...	St		((clicks tongue)) I've been treated so...un((snickering))fairly...
12	F	<i>Ya...</i>	F		<i>Ya...</i>
13	St	so... ((clicks tongue))	St		so... ((clicks tongue))
14	F	<i>Okay</i>	F		<i>Okay</i>
15	St	Masuk degree so I pegi kelas pakai tudung. pegi kelas lah I pakai tudung. because I (.) feel like I don't deserve to be treated that way...and that's affecting my marks	St		<i>Enter [my] degree [years] so I went to class wearing tudung. Going to class lah I wore tudung. Because I (.) feel like I don't deserve to be treated that way...and that's affecting my marks</i>
16	F	<i>Okay</i>	F		<i>Okay</i>
17	St	So I pegi kelas pakai tudung. and uh (.) tapi benda lain pulak jadik. bila (.) dalam kelas pakai tudung, tapi bila duk kat luar tak pakai tudung, kawan kawan I pulak - I dengar lah murmurs here and there, yang I ni hypocrite. yang I ni main mainkan agama. Oh my God!	St		<i>So I went to class wearing tudung. And uh (.) but then something else happened. When (.) in class [I] wear tudung, but outside [I] don't wear tudung, my friends actually – I heard lah murmurs here and there, that I am a hypocrite. That I am playing around with religion. Oh my God!</i>

The incident took place within a classroom discourse (specifically in a university setting), realised through words such as “classes” (line 1), and “lecturer” (line 3). In line 1, Siti explicitly indexes her religious and gender identities as a non-veiled Muslim woman with her use of the phrase “free hair,” a common terminology used to label Muslim women who do not wear the hijab in Malaysia, as was explained in Chapter 1 (see AR, 2014; Izharuddin, 2018) Furthermore, she also indexes her institutional identity as a student. Like Amirah, Siti explicitly mobilises a ‘judgment based on appearance discourse’ in line 3, referring to herself as a “free hair” student. Within this discourse, her religious, gender and institutional identities as a female non-veiled Muslim student intersect to position Siti as the marginalised and relatively powerless subject, a victim of alleged discrimination from her lecturer, which she claims in the following:

So sebabkan I tak pakai tudung...dia actually like - didn't give me a lot of marks...

So because I don't wear tudung... They actually like – didn't give me a lot of marks... (lines 7 and 8)

According to Siti, the lecturer used Siti's state of being "free hair" as grounds to discriminate against her; Siti claims that she did not receive the marks due to her on account of her non-veiling. Although an institutional power imbalance is clear between a figure of authority – a lecturer – and a student, I am unable to adequately argue for a gendered power imbalance, as the Malay third-person pronoun *dia* is gender neutral (hence why I translated it to English as 'they').

Saleha – another participant – also recalled an incident at university when she and another non-veiled friend bore the brunt of a lecturer's insults (and the 'unwrapped versus wrapped candy' analogy makes its presence here):

Extract 6.5 Saleha

234. Saleha: ...and then both of us get made fun of *lah* always.
235. Farhana: ((snickers))
236. Saleha: [the lecturer would say to us] when do you want to wear tudung and all that. Uhhh – ah! Once they gave a quote *lah*. This...lecturer, they said right, if you (.) have a candy they said (.) one is wrapped and one is unwrapped...
237. Farhana: Mmm
238. Saleha: which one would you choose they said. And then...
239. Farhana: Mmm
240. Saleha: the - the whole class would say (.) *aaa* the wrapped one! Why? Because the unwrapped one has lots of ants eating away at it! So, so it's not (.) that...it's...not good (.) compared to the wrapped one. So, like
241. Farhana: Mmm
242. Saleha: uh [to Saleha and her friend] do you hear that, said the lecturer, so (.) *bah* when are you going to wear tudung? It's like (.) ((clicks tongue)) [in front of] the whole class *bah* they asked. If they asked in person, then it would've been all right, right? So...I just pretended like I didn't hear that right? [I was pretending to] write. Because (.) I always sit in front, [and] they wanted to embarrass me like that, so like, [I] got pretty embarrassed *lah*.

Siti makes clear her displeasure at being treated "unfairly" (line 11), which she stresses by clicking her tongue several times. Nevertheless, in line 15, she displays her attempt to navigate through this challenge. Despite Siti asserting that "I (.) feel like I don't deserve to be treated that way" she implicitly acknowledges that her non-veiling negatively impacted her grades. Thus, by choosing to yield to the lecturer's demand for her to wear the hijab, Siti illustrates her struggle to negotiate between her

religious and gender identities as a non-veiled Muslim woman, who due to her institutional identity as a student, is bound to the subordinate position in relation to the authoritative lecturer.

Though Siti has apparently managed to overcome this challenge, another one emerged as a consequence of how she chose to manage the problem with her lecturer. Siti thus far has positioned herself as the marginalised and relatively powerless Other in relation to the powerful figure of her lecturer in class. However, she then draws upon a ‘hypocrite Muslim discourse,’ whereby she positions herself as the marginalised Other in relation to her friends who had deemed her actions hypocritical (line 17). Her claim that she was accused of “playing around with religion” (line 17) is a common accusation among Malaysian Muslim communities that heavily condemn women believed to not be fully committed to the practice of veiling. Such sentiments are evident in Izharuddin's (2018) study, and also in a newspaper report on Malaysian actress Elfaeza Ul Haq, who was also accused of “*playing around with the image*” of veiling by her fans (Amry, 2016). As will be detailed in Section 6.6, another participant, Suzana, also had to contend with a similar accusation.

Siti’s account underscores the constant struggle that Muslim women experience as a result of their non-veiling, particularly demonstrating how Muslim women constantly juggle between various demands and expectations from multiple facets in their lives. She demonstrates how her gender and religious identities as a non-veiled Muslim woman clashed with her institutional identity as a student, and how these identities intersected to position her as marginalised and powerless within multiple discourses. Siti’s struggle crosses the realms of both the institution and the community, as her attempts to address the challenges faced in the classroom resulted in negative consequences for her outside of it.

In the following section, I examine the incidences of prejudice and discrimination that non-veiled Muslim women can face in the domain of community.

6.6 Constructing and negotiating identities through challenges and struggles in the domain of community

‘Muslim communities and societies’ is one of the most dominant themes identified in the interview data (Appendix I). In defining the domain of community, it is helpful to distinguish the term community from society. Without delving too deep into

semantics, my use of the term community revolves around a common definition that views community as spaces within which interactions among diverse people of different characteristics who are tied together by common interests and goals, as well as participation in joint activities, take place (MacQueen et al., 2001; Storper, Lavinas, & Mercado-Célis, 2007). Norms and values are internalised and practised among community members to maintain group harmony; but if a member is considered to not conform to or espouse these accepted ideals, then such community environments can prove to be challenging to navigate through (an argument that can be extended to the domains of family and institution as well). The domain of community includes various settings, such as the neighbourhood and public spaces such as shopping malls and mosques, in which participants speak about facing discriminatory behaviours from neighbours and strangers. Whilst other participants have mentioned in their interviews the issues they faced in the domain of community, I have chosen the three that best capture the diversity among the participant experiences, although they may not be shared by others.

6.6.1 Zureen

Zureen is a single Malay woman in her late 50s who works in the education industry. Our interview took place in her office. In the excerpt below, she talks about an incident in which she was not invited to attend a *kenduri*, which is social gathering of religious significance characteristic of Muslim communities in Malaysia. The *kenduri* was held by her Malay Muslim neighbours, a couple whom she had earlier in the interview described as “pious”:

EXCERPT 6.7: Zureen's account of being excluded by her neighbours

Original transcription		Translated transcription		
01	Z	[[8 LINES OMITTED]]	Z	[[8 LINES OMITTED]]
		so one day... ((snickers))		so one day... ((snickers)) I
		saya balik masa tu, I took		came home one time, I took
		my niece from (.)		my niece from (.) University
		University X. Kami balik.		X. We came home. Then I see
		then I tengok macam		like their house has like...(.)
		rumah dia macam ada... (.)		tents. Tents. Canopy. (.) a lot
		khemah. khemah. kanopi.		of people [attending] <i>kenduri</i> .
		(.) ada banyak orang		“Ish!” I said to my niece. “Eee
		kenduri. “Ish!” aku cakap		my neighbour is having
		dengan anak buah. “Eee		<i>kenduri</i> . Eee they didn’t even
		jiran aku ada kenduri. eee		invite me <i>eh</i> ?”
		dia tak invite cik pun <i>eh</i> ?”		

02	F	((snickers))	F	((snickers))
03	Z	I was joking lah! joking! tapi tak kisah lah! [[5 lines omitted]] then...I found out, from my neighbour yang Cina, (.) dia baru balik haji. so then I remember ooo dia buat kenduri tu... [[3 lines omitted]] Yang nak pegi haji tu	Z	I was joking <i>lah!</i> joking! But never mind <i>lah!</i> [[5 lines omitted]] then...I found out, from my Chinese neighbour, (.) they just returned from Hajj. So then I remember ooo they did that <i>kenduri</i> ... [[3 lines omitted]] For Hajj
04	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
05	Z	They won't invite me	Z	They won't invite me
06	F	Aaa	F	Aaa
07	Z	Padahal...kalau ikut (.) uh, Islamic way	Z	But actually...if following (.) uh, Islamic way
08	F	Forty	F	Forty ⁸
09	Z	you must invite (.) your jiran.	Z	You must invite (.) your neighbour.
10	F	Mmm	F	Mmm
11	Z	tak kira dia tu (.) tak married ke...tak pakai tudung ke...kan?	Z	Doesn't matter if she's (.) not married...or doesn't wear tudung...right?

The recounted incident takes place within a neighbourhood discourse realised through words such as “home” (line 1) and “neighbour” (lines 1, 3, and 9). In addition, through the word “*kenduri*” (lines 1 and 3) and the verb phrase “didn’t even invite me” (line 1), Zureen draws upon a religious ‘Islamic neighbourly discourse’ that paves the way for the ensuing discussion.

Zureen snickers as she recounts her anecdote, alluding to the ludicrous notion that such an incident happened to her in the first place. She uses the Malay emotive particle “*ish!*” to express extreme frustration (Koh, 1990), a sentiment further underscored through the expression of disgust conveyed by the repetition of “*eee*” twice. The *eh* in “...they didn’t even invite me *eh?*” (line 1) also expressed Zureen’s surprise at this particular situation (Koh, 1990); namely at not being invited to an important neighbourhood event such as the *kenduri*. Zureen thus draws upon a ‘neighbourhood outcast discourse.’ I respond to her sentiment in kind with a snicker of my own, emphasising with Zureen’s predicament. However, Zureen contradicts her earlier

⁸ Forty: My comment was referring to the teachings in Islam whereby, Muslims are encouraged to invite up to forty of their neighbours to attend religious/community events as a practice of good neighbourly conduct.

shock and frustration by exclaiming that she was only joking and was unaffected by the discourteous gesture of her neighbours, both sentiments underscored by the emphatic use of the Malay word-ending particle *-lah*. This can be understood as Zureen's attempt to "save face," specifically hers.

Zureen eventually discovers the purpose of the *kenduri*, which was relayed to her by her Chinese neighbour. Here, Zureen's religious and ethnic identities are foregrounded. As the *kenduri* is a social gathering with a distinctly religious purpose, the fact that Zureen (a Malay Muslim) had not been informed and invited, but a Chinese (who is most likely not Muslim) had, serves to highlight Zureen's positioning of herself as the outsider in her community, courtesy of the couple's actions. She then resignedly accepts her perceived status by declaring, "they won't invite me," reiterating this 'neighbourhood outcast discourse.' Though Zureen frequently code-switches between Malay and English, I argue that her declaring such a statement wholly in English adds emphatic expressiveness to the utterance, lending weight to the implied sentiment of 'they will not invite me even though I am their neighbour.'

Thus far, it is evident that Zureen is positioning herself as the marginalised outsider, though the reason behind her exclusion by her Malay neighbours remains undisclosed. However, in lines 7 and 9, she claims:

***Padahal...**kalau ikut (.) uh, Islamic way... you must invite (.) your jiran*

But actually...if following (.) uh, Islamic way... You must invite (.) your neighbour

This is arguably her attempt to challenge her marginalised position, by invoking religion, specifically by drawing upon an 'Islamic neighbourly discourse.' Zureen accomplishes this indirectly by using the Malay word '*padahal*' which carries a similar meaning to the English 'but actually.' However, in Malay, it carries an inherent sentiment of veiled rebuke. This is because Islamic religious teaching of neighbourly conduct tells Muslims to invite their neighbours to such events to nurture a sense of community and togetherness. Because her neighbours have failed to comply with this norm, Zureen thus is able to implicitly position the couple in an unfavourable light.

But it is only in line 11 that Zureen finally suggests the reasons she believes to have been used to exclude her as a guest to the *kenduri*:

tak kira dia tu (.) tak married ke...tak pakai tudung ke...kan?

Doesn't matter if she's (.) not married...or doesn't wear tudung...right?

Here, I see the intersection among Zureen's gender, religion, ethnicity, and age. Specifically, as a non-veiled, unmarried, Malay Muslim woman in her 50s, this combination could have possibly contributed to her marginalised position. Although Zureen does not explicitly mention age, it becomes salient here because this is what underscores her status as a single woman. Thus, Zureen draws upon a gendered 'spinsterhood discourse,' which view unmarried women who have passed their prime age for marriage (between 25-30 years old) as not only unattractive, but also problematic (Azmawati, Mohd Hashim, & Endut, 2015; Balraj-Ambigapathy, 2000). This belief, when compounded with Zureen's non-veiling, possibly contributes to her experience of exclusion. In Malaysia, such women are called '*anak dara tua*' (literally, 'old female virgin'). Similar beliefs are also prevalent in other Asian societies such as China, evident in the *shengnu*, or 'leftover woman' (see Feldshuh, 2018).

Thus, the example of Zureen demonstrates how within a neighbourhood setting, multiple religious, ethnic, and gendered discourses intersect with one another to position her in a marginalised position. By virtue of being a non-veiled Muslim woman, Zureen demonstrates her exclusion, an affront compounded by her Malayness and justified partially due to the fact that she is an unmarried woman in her 50s. Nevertheless, Zureen draws upon religion to challenge her marginalised position, particularly by indirectly positioning her neighbours as the ones in the wrong, having disregarded religious teachings on good neighbourly conduct.

In the following excerpt, Suzana talks about an affront she faced on social media.

6.6.2 Suzana

Suzana is a single woman in her 40s who is of mixed Malay and Chinese ancestry. She works as a head of department in a college. Our interview took place at her office. In the excerpt below, Suzana talks about her reaction when she was criticised (in particular by one individual) for uploading a photo of her wearing the hijab on social media:

EXCERPT 6.8: Suzana faced criticism on social media

- 01 S For me, personally, I felt ummm well, insulted
02 F Okay

- 03 S You know in a way that I did not expect myself to feel that way
 04 F *Mmm ((surprised))*
 05 S You know, but I did put myself in that position
 06 F *Mmm okay*
 07 S By putting it on a social media, so I have to accept that responsibility too
 08 F *Hmhm*
 09 S That the comments will come in. I just never EXPECTED
 10 F *Mmm*
 11 S Um that kind of you know
 12 F *Yeah*
 13 S Pessimistic comments. Mmm.
 14 F *Why why did you feel insulted? What part of that comment made you feel uh*
 15 S Insulted?
 16 F *Yeah*
 17 S Okay I felt insulted because, the person, in the tone that they spoke, made me feel like, I was not, SERIOUS in that, in that fact.
 18 F *Mmm okay*
 19 S But then, again I reflected back – it's my choice!
 20 F *Mmm*
 21 S It's not her choice, it's not for her to dictate my life.
 22 F *Mmm okay*
 23 S But then she is, you know, allowed her own opinion.
 24 F *She was female?*
 25 S Female, wearing tudung.
 26 F *Okay*
 27 S Wearing hijab.
 28 F *Uh are you close to her?*
 29 S Nope!
 30 F *I see*
 31 S She was someone (.) uh I have to say, it was my ex-student.
 32 F *((gasps))*
 33 S Yes
 34 F *Really? So someone younger than you?*
 35 S Someone much younger
 36 F *Ahhh*
 37 S And she is someone who takes off her tudung once in a while. So I did not need to (.) say that.
 38 F *Okay*
 39 S Because basically to me, wearing this tudung.
 40 F *Uh-huh*
 41 S What you wear, how you pray.
 42 F *Hmhm*
 43 S Um the times that you pray, things like this is between you and God.

44 F *Mmm*

45 S Really. It's between you and God.

This incident takes place within a social media discourse, as evident in line 7. It is interesting to note that although Suzana expresses the feeling of being insulted after being criticised by an individual for uploading a photo of her wearing the veil on social media, Suzana nevertheless assumes part of the responsibility for the outpouring of negative comments as evident in lines 5-7. This marks the distinctiveness of the online community, in particular social media, because it brings up the notion of collective action and responsibility, in which social actors (in particular the uploader of posts and the commenters on them) are regarded as bearing shared responsibility for their actions online (see Chapter 8).

I interpret Suzana's answer in line 17 to the question of why she felt insulted as referring to her act of uploading a photo of her wearing the tudung on social media, although she does not typically wear it as part of her daily attire. Earlier, Suzana claims that the person commented, "One PERSON, in particular, said this 'if you wanna wear it, just wear it, you don't need to comment on it, you don't need to take a picture on it.'" Here, it can be argued that Suzana considers the individual to be chastising her act as playing around with the wearing of the tudung by uploading a photo of herself wearing it, when under everyday circumstances Suzana would not typically wear it. This echoes Siti's experience in 6.5.3, and similar sentiments are also found in some of the newspaper articles presented in Chapter 4.

Regardless, Suzana counters her critic, invoking a 'freedom of choice and expression discourse' with regards to her choice to do whatever she pleases without others' dictation, as illustrated in the following:

But then, again I reflected back – it's my choice!... It's not her choice, it's not for her to dictate my life (lines 19 and 21)

Up to this point, details regarding the critic's identity have been scarce, but in line 23, Suzana finally reveals that the individual was female. Here Suzana also draws upon a 'freedom of choice and expression discourse' to defend her critic's right to express her opinions about Suzana. In line 25, not only does Suzana affirm my question in line 24 regarding the person's gender, she also mentions that the person wears the tudung, and adds in Line 31 that she is also her former student. The last is an admission

that elicits a shocked gasp from me. Suzana's flat utterance of "Yes" in line 33 serves to affirm my shocked expression, which I follow with a question of confirmation of the person's age relative to Suzana's, to which she responds with an emphatic "Someone **much** younger" (line 35).

This exchange from lines 31-35 illustrates a power dynamic between the two that revolves around gender, religion, and age. The exchange took place on the grounds of a cultural norm regarding communication between (former) teacher and student, and between older and younger individuals that dictate for respect to be observed especially on the part of the student and younger individual. Although the critic is a former student of Suzana's, cultural norms in Malaysia preserve the teacher-and-student relationship (and the expectations that are included in it) even long after the student graduates and/or the teacher retires. Therefore, by her comment to Suzana, the student is viewed to have breached these norms.

Furthermore, in line 37, Suzana draws upon a 'hypocrite Muslim discourse' as she brings attention to the alleged hypocrisy on the part of her former student, of whom Suzana claims "And she is someone who takes off her tudung once in a while" thus indirectly criticising the former's 'holier-than-thou' approach. However, by following it up with "So I did not need to (.) say that" Suzana serves to construct and position herself on a higher moral ground, of being the bigger person because she does not stoop low to point out this hypocrisy on the part of the student. Suzana reveals part of the reason she may have done this in lines 39-45 when she invokes God, simultaneously invoking a religious 'between me and God discourse.'

Thus, it can be seen that religion, gender, and age intersect to position Suzana as the marginalised as she faces criticism from a former and younger female student who wears the tudung. As the exchange takes place within a social media discourse, the notion of collective responsibility is brought to the fore and in addition, it appears the relative security afforded by the Internet and social media gives certain others the impudence to dismiss cultural norms and etiquette of interpersonal communication. Nevertheless, Suzana invokes a 'freedom of choice and expression discourse' as well as a religious 'between me and God discourse,' to challenge her marginalised position by underscoring the notion of choice and positioning herself as someone on a moral high ground.

6.6.3 Rose

Rose is a single Indian woman in her 20s, who at the time of the interview had just completed her undergraduate degree but now works as a research assistant at a local university. Like Erma, she is a *muallaf*, one who was born into a devout Hindu family and converted five years ago (at the time of the interview) after attending several months' worth of comparative religious classes. However, unlike Erma whose family know of her conversion to Islam, Rose's family remains in the dark, because Rose fears disappointment and possible estrangement from her family. One of the ways Rose has managed to maintain her faith a secret from her family is by not wearing the tudung. The interview was done at a café at the university she was working at. In the excerpt below, Rose is responding to my question on why she felt not ready to wear tudung:

EXCERPT 6.9: Rose is questioned for keeping her Muslim identity a secret from her family

Original transcription			Translated transcription	
01	F	<i>Kenapa Rose rasanya tak bersedia?</i>	F	<i>Why do you feel not ready [to wear the tudung]?</i>
02	R	Satu sebab family saya tak tau. Satu, susah sebab bila saya pakai tudung kan, saya pernah pakai tudung untuk pergi program muallaf. Tapi yang hadir-hadir semua muallaf yang Chinese, yang asal dari Sabah Sarawak.	R	One because my family doesn't know. One, [it's] hard because when I wear tudung right, I've worn tudung to attend a programme [for] muallaf. But all those who attended were muallaf who were Chinese, who came from Sabah Sarawak.
03	F	<i>Hmm</i>	F	<i>Hmm</i>
04	R	Automatik dorang akan cakap, "eh kamu India kan? Masuk – kenapa kamu masuk Islam?" Lepas tu, kalau orang Melayu sendiri, dia akan dia tau lah saya tu muallaf. Lepas tu dia tanya kenapa masuk Islam, saya tak selesa bila dorang tanya soalan macam tu. "Oh family tak tau, you ni jahat lah" ha saya rasa macam tak selesa.	R	Automatically they will say, "eh you are Indian right? Convert – why did you convert to Islam?" After that, if Malays themselves, they will they know <i>lah</i> I am muallaf. After that they will ask why [I] converted to Islam, I'm not comfortable when people ask questions like that. "Oh [your] family doesn't know, you're mean <i>lah</i> " ha I feel like not comfortable.
05	F	<i>Kenapa dorang cakap</i>	F	<i>Why do they say</i>

- | | | | | |
|----|---|--|---|--|
| 06 | R | Ada. Seorang pegawai perempuan pernah marah saya. Dia kata - dia mula-mula tegur saya elok je, lepas tu dia marah saya. Dia kata, “You ni teruk lah kenapa you buat macam ni kat parents you? You ni tak baik lah ((mumbles))” | R | They do. One female officer has scolded me. She said – firstly she reprimanded me nicely, after that she scolded me. She said, “you are horrible <i>lah</i> why do you do this to your parents? You are not nice <i>lah</i> ((mumbles))” |
| 07 | F | Pegawai tu bangsa apa? | F | That officer is what ethnicity? |
| 08 | R | Melayu. Pure Malay. Bertudung. ((giggles)) | R | Malay. Pure Malay. Wearing tudung. ((giggles)) |
| 09 | F | Oh okay. ((giggles)) | F | Oh okay. ((giggles)) |

As reiterated here, Rose is able to keep her identity as a Muslim a secret from her family by not wearing the tudung. By doing so, Rose draws upon a gendered ‘filial piety discourse,’ whereby she positions herself multiply as a loyal daughter who does not wish to disappoint her devout Hindu family because of her conversion to Islam, yet at the same time betrays them by deliberately keeping them in the dark.

She then indexes her identity as a *muallaf* in lines 2-4 when speaking about attending a programme in which other fellow *muallaf* were in attendance. However, instead of emphasising the commonality of this shared identity with others, Rose instead positions herself as the ‘other’ against other *muallaf* who are Chinese and those who come from Sabah and Sarawak. This can be implied from her juxtaposition of herself as an Indian, an identity label that is mobilised and underscored when she uses the contrastive conjunction, “but.”

By positioning herself as the ‘other’, Rose is therefore drawing upon an ethnic ‘not one of us discourse.’ These are made more apparent when Rose uses direct speech to draw attention to others’ attempts at making salient her Indian and subsequent *muallaf* identities. She also further points to both these identities herself, by claiming (with an emphatic assertion of *-lah*), that it is because she is Indian that people would know she is *muallaf*. Although not explicitly expressed by Rose, I argue that her choice to highlight her ‘otherness’ stems from dominant cultural ideologies in Malaysia that disparage dark-skinned individuals such as Rose but admires fair-skinned individuals such as the Chinese and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak (Chok, 2017; Kam, 2013,

2015; Muzaffar, 2016). Saleha, who has Indian heritage, also shared her own experience of facing racist taunts for being darker-skinned from her Bruneian-Chinese cousins who are fairer in complexion:

Extract 6.6 Saleha:

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 38 | Saleha | So (.) of course they are...like, fairer than me. |
| 39 | Farhana | Hmhm |
| 40 | Saleha | So um they would like (.) um (.) tease me for my skin colour. |
| 41 | Farhana | Hmhm |
| 42 | Saleha | And...for (.) how (.) I look different than them. Um they have like, small eyes (.) and fair skin. |

Rose also expresses her discomfort at being probed for the reason she converted. Her discomfort relates to the secrecy from her family that she upholds regarding her conversion to a new faith. Thus, she draws upon a ‘filial piety discourse’ that clashes with religious ideals, because lying – especially to one’s parents – is frowned upon. This is underscored with Rose’s use of direct speech in line 4: “Oh [your] family doesn’t know, you’re mean *lah*.” Rose then recounts another incident involving a female officer that also relates to the same discourse. Here, Rose’s response to my probe about the officer’s ethnicity serves to also emphasise her otherness as an Indian.

Thus, to summarise, within a dominant ‘filial piety discourse’ that conflicts with religious ideals, Rose is multiply positioned as a loyal daughter trying to evade disappointment from her parents yet also at the same time betraying them. Her heightened feeling of discomfort and judgment for having done so is underscored by the intersection of her ethnic and religious identities as an Indian convert to Islam, which serves to further distinguish her from other fellow converts.

6.7 Conclusion

To address RQ3 and RQ3a, the findings show that the participants experience challenges and struggles in three of the most salient domains, which are the family, institutions, and community. The hardships they face are varied, and include tensions with family members, colleagues, and even neighbours. Moreover, their non-veiling (or, in Dayana’s case, veiling) have caused tangible repercussions to them as employees and also student. In making sense of the challenges and struggles they face, participants demonstrate the multiple religious, gendered, and ethnic discourses that they draw upon, and how they intersected and interacted with each other to position

the respective participants as the powerless and marginalised. The complex interactions also highlighted the workings of identities within each discourse. Participants could also draw upon particular discourses to challenge and subvert their marginalised positions; however, as was demonstrated in this chapter, not all of their attempts were successful. Indeed, although it is the transformative ideal of FPDA to allow women the space to mobilise other readily available discourses in order to subvert their position of powerlessness to that of powerfulness (Baxter, 2003, 2008; Kamada, 2009), in a complex reality, this may not be a goal that is easily attainable. The insights gained in this are discussed further in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I bring together and discuss the findings of the previous analytical chapters to explore the implications of this study for current and future research, as well as to underscore the contributions this study makes to the study of language and identity more generally. In Section 7.2, I establish the links between the media portrayals of Muslim women, examined in Chapter 4, and the context of Islamising Malaysia, and then further examine them with regards to identity and the topic of Muslim women and (non)veiling. This is followed by Sections 7.3 and 7.4, where I discuss the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 in consideration with the literature on non-veiling and Muslim women in Malaysia. Beginning with arguments pertinent to the Malaysian context, the discussions are extended to specify links to global debates concerning (non)veiling and Muslim women. These debates revolve around the kinds of identities to which the veil is tied, and the challenges non-veiled women face. In Section 7.5, I discuss more critically the proposed conceptual framework that was applied to this research, and highlight its benefits to research on language and identity more generally. Finally, I conclude the chapter in Section 7.6. Throughout this – as well as the previous – chapters, I view the veil as a highly-contested cultural object whose constantly (re)negotiated meanings have considerable impact on the women whose sense of self is inextricably tied to the veil – even if they do not wear it. This chapter thus makes an argument for the need to more systematically consider religion (and religious artefacts) in identity research, as well as for the inclusion of Muslim women's voices (particularly those who do not veil) and their lived experiences in debates concerning language and identity.

7.2 Media, Islamisation, and (non)veiling Muslim women

In this section, I establish and elucidate clearly the links between the media portrayals of Muslim women and the Islamising context in Malaysia, and discuss their bearing on debates on identity, Muslim women, and the issue of (non)veiling.

In Chapter 4 I examined the portrayals of Muslim women with regards to the veil in selected contemporary Malaysian media. The findings reveal that in the two popular fictional works examined – the television drama *7 Hari Mencintaiku*, and the film *Ombak Rindu* – non-veiled and veiled Muslim women are depicted as opposites along the following dichotomies of bad versus good; secular versus religious; immoral

versus virtuous; and urban versus rural, among others. However, the women's talk show *Wanita Hari Ini* and the covers of the popular women's magazine *Mingguan Wanita* portrayed more diversity in the femininities of non-veiled and veiled Muslim women. For instance, they are portrayed not only as cosmopolitan professionals, but also as mothers, wives, and daughters – thereby performing a wide range of roles. On the other hand, the examined newspaper articles in *The Star* and *Harian Metro* show that a majority of articles on Muslim women and the hijab focus predominantly on the themes of fashion, commercialisation, and entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, multiple articles from the respective newspapers reported on stories of prejudice, directed against either non-veiled or veiled Muslim women (*Harian Metro* and *The Star*), as well as on state-sanctioned policing of non-veiled Muslim women (*The Star*) (see Chapter 4).

These observations show that across the diverse portrayals of non-veiled women in these selected media materials, certain discourses, particularly with gendered and religious overtones, were identified. Some of these discourses are mutually supporting, whereas others are competing and conflicting (Litosseliti, 2006). As attested by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, non-veiled Muslim women are often considered among Muslim-majority communities as liberal, Westernised, secularists (Fadil, 2011; Hammami, 1990; Marshall, 2005; Wagner et al., 2012). This labelling is in contrast with their veiled counterparts, who are often perceived as being 'ideal' Muslim women (L. Ahmed, 1992; Barlas, 2002; Izharuddin, 2018). Traces of such discourses of the modern, liberal, and secular non-veiled Muslim woman versus the traditional, conservative, and pious veiled Muslim woman are most starkly underscored in the portrayals of the female characters in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*. For instance, in the portrayal of *Ombak Rindu*'s Mila, the non-veiled, successful, US-educated actress, who is contrasted with Izzah, the veiled *kampung* girl who hails from a modest background and who teaches Quranic recitation to young children.

Portrayals of non-veiled Muslim women as 'modern and Westernised' and veiled Muslim women as 'rural and traditional' have been documented in literature on Malaysian media. For instance, Martin (2014) examined the portrayals of female characters in popular Malaysian fictional works, one of which is *Ombak Rindu*. The author noted that veiled and non-veiled characters are distinguished not only in terms

of their appearance, but also in their persona and moral attributes. Whereas the veiled character is soft-spoken and religiously observant, the non-veiled character consumes alcohol and wears tight-fitting clothes. These are similar to observations in this study (see Chapter 4: Section 4.4). Moreover, Ishak (2011) noted the following with regards to the *baju kurung*, the traditional dress the character Qaseh wears in a popular Malaysian television serial, “[t]he dress symbolises an uneducated rural Malay woman, for it is uncommon to see an urban Malay woman in other television dramas wearing authentic traditional Malay attire” (p. 11). The author then contrasts Qaseh’s appearance with that of another character, Maria, who wears a blonde wig, dresses in Western fashions, and speaks English. As exemplified in Figure 4.2 (Chapter 4), veiled women are depicted as wearing this traditional attire (see Appendix S for an example), in contrast with non-veiled women who are depicted as wearing modern clothes (Chapter 4: Figure 4.1).

In light of Malaysia’s socio-political climate, and the fact that mass media acts as a channel through which the government’s Islamic values and Islamising ambitions are propagated and upheld (Ishak, 2011; Martin, 2014), the argument offered by Kandiyoti (1991) is pertinent:

In countries where the most prominent form of cultural nationalism is Islamic...feminist discourse [can proceed in one of two ways, one of which] usually involves counter posing the dignity of the protected Muslim women against the commodified and sexually exploited ‘Western’ woman. It is thus dependent on a demonified ‘other.’

(p. 433).

Therefore, it can be argued that the discourses permeating the portrayals of the demonified ‘other’ (i.e. non-veiled women) in popular culture, as exemplified in 7 *Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*, are in support of the government of Malaysia’s vision and ambition for Islamisation. That is, that veiled Muslim women are the ideal representation of piety (Izharuddin, 2018). However, not only are these discourses evident in fictional works, but the beliefs inherent in them inevitably spill into the realm of everyday practice. This is most starkly evident in the newspaper articles reported in *The Star* (Chapter 4: Section 4.4) detailing the arrest and reprimand of non-veiled and immodestly dressed women in the ultra-conservative Malaysian state of Kelantan. These arrests underline the aspect of criminality attributed to these women by virtue of not adhering to the code of dress widely considered as Islamic,

and invite comparison with Iran's hardline stance against non-veiling, which views non-veiled women as not only deviant and sacrilegious, but also criminal (Sotsky, 2013).

However, polemical discourses of the kind found in the examined fictional works are not the only ones that permeate the examined media materials. Another prevalent discourse is that of 'Muslim cosmopolitanism,' coined by Aljunied (2016) to specifically denote the practices of Islam in South-East Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The author further described the term:

To embrace Muslim cosmopolitanism is to exhibit a high degree of receptiveness to universal values that are embedded within one's own customs and traditions (*adat*). Internalising Muslim cosmopolitanism enables a person to be at ease with his or her own Islamic and cultural identities, promoting these identities as a means to enrich public understanding about Islam and Muslims while maintaining and embracing a tolerant attitude towards people of other backgrounds.

(Aljunied, 2016, p. xix)

As exemplified in the portrayals of the hosts of the women's talk show *Wanita Hari Ini*, as well as the cover pages of the women's magazine *Mingguan Wanita* (Chapter 4: Section 4.2), Muslim women are not necessarily portrayed as direct opposites, but as representations of a cultural hybridity that integrates Islamic values with the practice of 'Western' (rather, universal) modernity (Ishak, 2011). This diversity in the portrayal of diverse Muslim femininities had also been noted by Brenner (1999) in Indonesia's print media that depict Muslim women as both pious, but also alluring. However, just as the hosts of *Wanita Hari Ini* and the models on the cover pages of *Mingguan Wanita* are not considered to be exuding blatant sexuality by not exposing too much skin (see Chapter 4: Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4), Zubair's (2010) study on Pakistani print media also noted the absence of sexuality and hyper-sexualised elements. Moreover, the proliferation of newspaper articles in *The Star* and *Harian Metro* on fashion, commercialisation, and the entrepreneurship of the tudung also corroborate the prevalence of the Muslim cosmopolitanism discourse.

Comparing the two datasets of media and the interviews, similarities and overlaps were found between them, especially with regards to the representations of non-veiled and veiled women as opposites, and the hijab's link to fashion and commercialisation. 'Expectations' (n=17), one of the most dominant emergent themes, is closely related

to the notion of self-representation as it includes instances in the interviews when participants spoke about the expectations, assumptions, and perceptions that society has towards non-veiled and veiled Muslim women (see Appendix I). For instance, participants such as Hayati and Syakira said the following regarding society's expectations and perceptions towards veiled Muslim women (which mirrored the portrayals of veiled Muslim women in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*) and how these played a part in their decision to not veil or unveil:

Extract 7.1 Hayati:

- 413 Hayati Because I think, I think - I don't know, in Malaysia, at least I think, ummm (.) you know when you wear the tudung, there are some expectations, like..
- 414 Farhana Mmm!
- 415 Hayati You're supposed to be the....uhhh prim and proper...lady...you know. uhhh you are not supposed to do this, not supposed to do that. you're not supposed to smoke
- 416 Farhana Aaa
- 417 Hayati You're you're you know you're supposed to be...a... ((stutters)) the prim (.) and proper (.) lady, right?
- 418 Farhana Mmm
- 419 Hayati ((clicks tongue)) so I thought y'know I I don't have time...and energy to comply with all these...expectations
- 420 Farhana Mmm
- 421 Hayati so I thought (.) yah! maybe I just - I should just...you know, not wear it.

Extract 7.2 Syakira:

- 232 Syakira Um you know how when you're wearing tudung, you're supposed to be...people expect you to suddenly turn into this pious figure?
- 233 Farhana Mmm
- 234 Syakira and I know that I wasn't like, super pious person, so I felt bad wearing tudung because I was lying to the world
- 235 Farhana Okay
- 236 Syakira So I decided to take it off

Based on the sentiments expressed above, there is therefore indication that veiled Muslim women are expected to look and behave in certain ways. This can make women feel distanced, particularly if they feel like they have failed or are unable to comply with such expectations with regards to the veil. Consequently, they then feel inclined to either stop wearing the veil or be deterred from wearing it. The reflection of such sentiments was found particularly in the examined fictional media data and

arguably continues the promotion of such discourses among Muslim women in Malaysia.

On the other hand, although this aspect did not emerge as a prominent theme in the interviews, several participants, such as Dayana, Suzana, Kartika, and Erma lamented about the trend that the hijab is now less about modesty and more about fashion. Erma offered a vocal opinion on the matter:

Extract 7.3 Erma:

- 06 Erma I read a lot of articles and all this thing. You know...ummm...but for me...I don't know. (.) Tudung itself is actually...supposingly, supposingly is to be a modesty. A way, you know, show modesty, become a Muslimah. But nowadays a lot of people wearing tudung is too exaggerating. (.) For me *lah*. And then (.) when you see right, the way people sell tudung right...((clicks tongue)) I think they, take it to (.) in a very different perspective, so – it's like they want to find profit *bah*.
- 07 Farhana Mmm
- 08 Erma You go and see the way people sell tudung right, oh my goodness...one tudung (.) I went into a tudung shop right, I want to look at the shawl right, and then one shawl is eighty, ninety [Malaysian ringgit] I, ish!h!
- 09 Farhana ((giggles))
- 10 Erma It's one piece of cloth bah! [And it's priced] like that...huhhh?!
- 11 Farhana Mmm
- 12 Erma What more those with...lip lap [embellishments] ((scoffs))
- 13 Farhana Right?
- 14 Erma What more those with bling bling

Erma's disdain of the current trend of commercialising and profiting from the hijab can be taken as a feminist, anti-consumerist critique, which finds resonance with Hassim (2014a). The author argued that in light of a boom in the fashionable tudung market and a rise of the fashion-forward *hijabista*, the wearing of the veil thus is transformed into a "desirable social experience" where the "consumption culture highlights incoherence of religiosity where a veiled woman sees herself as privileged rather than closer to God as they belong to a special community of Muslimahs," (Hassim, 2014a, p. 84).

Thus, the question arises: in what ways can these findings help illuminate and inform discussions concerning the identity construction of non-veiled Muslim women?

This thesis did not set out to examine media consumptions among non-veiled Muslim women, nor analyse the implications of this on their discursive identity constructions. Consequently, I do not make the claim that the discourses (in particular, those that are hostile towards non-veiled Muslim women) prevalent in the examined media materials limit the discourses and roles that are available to them. However, as explicated in Chapters 5 and 6, the traces of these discourses are reflected in those that emerged from the interviews. Specifically, the notion of ‘being othered’ and doing othering,’ which featured heavily when participants spoke about instances of challenges and struggles in the interviews, was the most dominant theme coded in the media data (see Appendix I), and is the thread that runs through the interviews.

Nevertheless, although discourses of Muslim cosmopolitanism depict diverse Muslim femininities in the media that are inclusive of culturally and religiously specific beliefs with more universal ones, the underlying ideologies arguably favour veiled over non-veiled Muslim women. This is because veiled Muslim women have long been portrayed as symbols of oppression and backwardness (see Abu-Lughod, 2002, El-Guindi, 1999; Mernissi, 1991), and as guardians of tradition and culture (Kandiyoti, 1991). Thus, discourses that promote the integration of Islamic mores and values with their practices of ‘Western’ modernity (Ishak, 2011) serve to challenge not only this long-standing misperception, but also to package veiling Muslim women as global citizens who are adept at embracing their Islamic and cultural identities with universal outlooks (Aljunied, 2016).

However, for non-veiled Muslim women who are already regarded or ‘branded’ as Westernised secularists, such discourses are problematic. Therefore, what is needed are discourses of resistance that inform and empower the realisation of not only diverse forms of Muslim femininities, but also of Muslim (feminine) pieties. Just as veiled Muslim women have been ‘branded’ as embodying universal and not just religious values within the discourse of Muslim cosmopolitanism, non-veiled Muslim women should also be ‘branded’ as embodying similar values. To accomplish this, more positive representations of non-veiled Muslim women need to be propagated in popular contemporary media such as films and television serials. Non-veiled Muslim women should be portrayed on-screen as equally religiously-observant as their veiled counterparts, and they should be distanced and disassociated from practices considered immoral by majority-Muslim communities, such as practising sex outside

marriage and consuming alcohol. This being said, it is imperative that encouraging positive representation of non-veiled Muslim women in popular media should not happen at the expense of veiled Muslim women. Towards the end of 7 *Hari Mencintaiku*, Mia's change of character from a haughty, arrogant non-veiled Muslim woman to a humble and respectful veiled Muslim woman came at the expense of the veiled Syakila, who turned out to 'betray' her pious image, as she was revealed to be pregnant from her pre-marital relationship with an unknown male. This is not the kind of resistant discourses that contemporary media should strive to disseminate – to do so would fuel the hostile cycle of perpetuating the demonified 'other' (Kandiyoti, 1991), and would be counter-productive in efforts to strive for the feminist ideal of championing choice, as well as diverse forms of gendered and pious self-expressions. If Muslim communities were to champion diversity in gendered and pious self-expressions, perhaps Muslim women would not need to strive for a certain 'look' or feel compelled to restrict themselves to the conduct of certain behaviours in order to feel like they are pious and good women.

This notion of 'what one wears does not reflect who one is' is also one of the most prominent themes. I labelled this theme as 'External vs. Internal' (n=15) (see Appendix I) to describe instances wherein participants spoke about how a person's choice to dress (external) is different and can be distinguished from the person's traits and characteristics. To illustrate, Yasmin and Zureen argued the following:

Extract 7.4 Yasmin:

- | | | |
|-----|---------|---|
| 698 | Yasmin | (.) not necessarily, the woman who veils is good right? |
| 699 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 700 | Yasmin | Aaa (.) and the woman who doesn't veil doesn't mean is not good. |
| 701 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 702 | Yasmin | Same with (.03) whether we pray or not. It doesn't mean that a woman who doesn't veil can't pray. |
| 703 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 704 | Yasmin | Aaa [she] doesn't pray. |
| 705 | Farhana | Mmm |
| 706 | Yasmin | And the woman who veils, it doesn't mean (.) she is someone uh who (.) can pray. |

Extract 7.5 Zureen:

- 296 Zureen [several lines omitted] but what I'm going to tell you is (.)
what I observe. Out of five female friends that I travel with (.)
who wears tudung, I think three of them don't pray.
- 297 Farhana Mmm
- 298 Zureen The ones who really wear the tudung that don't miss their
prayers are about two out of five. What does that mean? Even
my OWN niece, who is pressured by their parents to use
[tudung], I don't see her praying five times
- 299 Farhana Mmm
- 300 Zureen A day...but [she] wears tudung. So what does it mean?

It can be seen that participants challenged this notion that wearing the veil equates to goodness by speaking about or alluding to the doing of deeds (either good or bad) that are done in the public eye versus those that are done in secret. Although problematic in the sense that it still promotes a sense of strict binaries between non-veiled and veiled Muslim women, this was one of the most striking ways the women in my interviews constructed their own resistant discourses to the widespread perception that non-veiled Muslim women are not religiously observant (as attested in 7 *Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*).

To sum up, I have established the links between the media data examined and the context of Islamising Malaysia, and additionally, discussed their pertinence to the issue of non-veiling and veiled Muslim women. As was noted earlier, several prominent discourses were identified in the media data, some of which were reflected in the interview data. In the following Sections 7.3 and 7.4, I relate these discourses to discussions on language and identity.

7.3 (Non)veiling and identities

This section addresses the particular religious identities that the women interviewed constructed, and how these intersected with other emergent identities, as exemplified in Chapter 5. The findings show that more specific localised forms of these identities are constructed in talk, which underscores the rich complexity and nuanced nature of identity work in discourse. The findings garnered are discussed in consideration of the overarching research objective posed in the Introduction (Chapter 1), which is to explore the complex relationship between the veil and the identity construction and negotiation processes of Muslim women.

The analysis in Chapter 5, focusing on the ways non-veiled women construct their religious (vis-à-vis other identities), was undertaken by considering the women's responses to two interview questions – i.e., how the women defined the ideal Muslim woman, and how their conception of themselves compared with that ideal. The findings indicated that the women positioned themselves in various ways against their perceived ideals of a Muslim woman, which was captured by one or more of the categories of alignment, incongruence, and ambivalence (see Section 7.3.1). Through the complexities apparent in the women's responses, the veil clearly emerged as a site for the constructions of identities that intersect in the women's attempts at making sense of themselves (see Section 7.3.2). These observations are discussed in further detail below.

7.3.1 The perceived ideal of a Muslim woman versus the perceived self

These findings of the interview data reveal intriguing insights when discussed in consideration with the literature. As the veil is regarded as an important signifier of a Muslim woman's identity (Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; N. Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012), the discussions revolving around this symbolic piece of clothing and the identity of the wearer elicited responses that showcase a diversity of perspectives. Indeed, Read and Bartkowski (2000) argued in their research on veiled and unveiled Muslim women in Texas that identity negotiation is “a process and everyday practice that is fraught with ambiguity, contradiction and struggle” (p. 398). This alludes to the challenges and struggles these women face, which are discussed in Section 7.4.

Although the existing literature and contemporary discourses establish a strong link between the hijab and a Muslim woman's identity, as attested by images used by GEMAR, a pro-veiling campaign in Malaysia (see Chapter 1: Figure 1.1), the responses demonstrate that not all the women, namely Dayana, Juliana, Liza, Rose, Siti, and Suzana, believe their religiosity and identity to be contingent on wearing the veil. Rather than placing the veil in a central position when defining themselves as Muslim women, these women instead described their Muslimness through more holistic notions such as believing in oneself as Muslim and trying to live by Quranic values and principles, as well as through performing good deeds. In another study, Wagner et al., (2012) found that women who assert that “true religion should be above hijab” (p. 536) also choose to underscore the doing of good deeds as a primary

criterion of faith. This is a view also espoused by the women in Fadil's (2011) study, who argued that their non/unveiling is a different mode of piety.

Nonetheless, this does not dismiss the fact that the hijab is still strongly linked to the notions of identity and the fortitude of a Muslim woman's religiosity (Izharuddin, 2018). As such, by not veiling, non-veiled women can be made to feel as if they are "weaker" (Wagner et al., 2012, p. 536) compared with their veiled sisters. The prevailing misconception of the lack of morality and virtue of non-veiled Muslim women consequently brands them with the label of 'wild' women, who lead lives of excess, as stated by some interview participants such as Fatma, Kartika, Juliana, Saleha, and Munirah. Interestingly, the media data examined in Chapter 4 lend further support to these claims. In particular, the claims are affirmed by the respective characterisations of veiled and non-veiled Muslim women in the television drama *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and the film *Ombak Rindu* (Sections 4.4 and 4.5 in Chapter 4). Furthermore, news articles detailing reports on the policing of women's uncovered bodies (Azhar & Zulkiflee, 2016; Beh, 2016; Habibu, 2016) as well as criticisms towards female celebrities for unveiling, such as in the cases of Uqasha Senrose (Mohd Tahir, 2016b) and most recently Emma Maembong (Astro Awani, 2019; Mohamad, 2019; K. Othman, 2019; Yusup, 2019), serve to underscore the claim that non-veiled women are lesser in morality and virtue than their veiled counterparts.

Nevertheless, it is unfair to claim that such disparaging views of Muslim women are opined by all. Veiled women in Read and Bartkowski's (2000) study, for instance, did not offer scathing rebukes of their non-veiled sisters, but instead asserted that the latter are just as Muslim as them. Thus, although the former consider veiling to be important to their own realisation of religiosity, they nevertheless express the view that the veil should not be used to gauge the faith of Muslim women (Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Wagner et al., 2012). Such a position was also expressed by the women I interviewed when they spoke of their 'allies,' i.e., those men and women in their lives who do not rebuke them for not veiling and who offer support and protection in instances when they are challenged or face criticisms from others. I explore this point in further detail in Section 7.4.4.

These contestations and negotiations of the self with regards to the veil appear more complex in the responses of women who offered ambivalent and conflicting attitudes

between themselves and their perceived ideals of a Muslim woman. Fadil's (2011) and Izharuddin's (2018) studies also found instances of ambivalence among the non-veiled women they interviewed as the women struggled to make sense of their religiosity. In this study, such internal conflict is most illustrative in the excerpts of Kartika and Fatma that were chosen as the primary focus of analysis in Chapter 5 (Sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2). The following section demonstrates how, through the interplay of these conflicting voices between their ideals of a Muslim woman and their realised selves as Muslim women, the women's construction of their religious, gender (and other) identities emerged.

7.3.2 The veil and non-veiling as a site for the construction of multiple, intersecting identities

One of the most important findings from this research lies in demonstrating that the veil and non-veiling are sites where the constructions and contestations of multiple, intersecting identities take place. Five identity categories emerged as the most notable from the overall interview data (although this is by no means exhaustive): religious, gender, ethnic, institutional, and filial (Table 5.1: Chapter 5). The first three identity categories appear more saliently than the final two, which are more embedded within other categories.

It is pertinent that discussions concerning (non)veiling, Muslim women and identity consider not only the research setting, but also the majority-minority dynamics within it. Muslims make up the most dominant group of religious adherents in Malaysia, with the latest available census data putting the number of Muslim adherents in the country at 61.3% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). As the practice of veiling among the female populace is increasing and can be considered the norm (Hochel, 2013; Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Othman, 2006), I argue that Muslim women who choose not to veil are going against the grain of societal mores. Indeed, non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia are considered to be a minority in Malaysia (Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018; Mouser, 2007). Consequently, as a minority they are tacitly under pressure to engage in conscious identity work, through which their struggles are made apparent in and through their discourses. This claim is attested by Wagner et al., (2012):

Majority groups in most societies define what is "normal" social practice in the domains of religion, language use, dress and other sectors of public life.

Consequently, there are fewer pressures on majority members to engage in conscious identity work...

(p. 524)

Research has shown that minoritised and marginalised groups engage in conscious identity work by employing various strategies. For instance, Muslim women who make up India's religious minority use veiling as a way to distinguish themselves from the majority Hindu population, as well as symbolising affiliation to local Islamic communities (Wagner et al., 2012). Utilising dress to mark particular identities was also employed by some of the women in my study, particularly Amirah, Siti, and Dayana (Chapter 6). The first two women chose to wear the tudung in their respective institutions in order to avoid reprimand from authorities, whereas the latter decided to remove her tudung in the belief that it was inhibiting performance in her job. By doing so, these women mobilised and underscored particular identities, such as those of a responsible educator (Amirah). However, in Dayana's case, the removal of her tudung served to downplay her religious identity whilst simultaneously highlighting her institutional identity. On the other hand, other women in my study, in particular Zureen, employed strategies similar to the cases of Sister Goldenrod (Graham, 2007) and the Chinese immigrant couple (Han, 2007) (see Chapter 2: Section 2.3.4). Specifically, Zureen invoked religious teachings on neighbourly conduct to not only position her neighbours unfavourably for not inviting her to their *kenduri*, but she also did so to indirectly reinforce her own morally-upright positioning.

It can be said that the women are continuously engaged in a push-and-pull situation as they constantly undergo iterations of themselves as Muslim women with regards to their non-veiling. This was exemplified by Kartika's (Section 5.4.1) conflicting sentiments with regards to her religious identity and the veil. Although she did not initially frame her religiosity from an explicitly religious perspective, she nevertheless implied that veiling is one of the God-ordained things that she still cannot do. Kartika's simultaneous mobilisation of her ethnic and institutional identities – a Malay lecturer who needs to be kinder and help her students – to construct a compromise she can live with until she is able to do what she believes God wants her to do (wear the veil), points to a sense of internal struggle. Through this internal tug-of-war, Kartika therefore not only mobilised multiple identities, but these also intersected with one

another to reinforce or address the perceived inadequacy of specific (particularly, religious) identities (Staunæs, 2003).

Similarly, Fatma foregrounded her gender and filial identities as a mother, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law. She constructed her religious identity alongside these identities, as she believes that by taking care of her household, and being obedient and responsible towards her parents and husband, she is fulfilling her duties as a Muslim woman. Yet, despite all of these positive actions, Fatma, echoing Kartika, still concedes that her non-veiling is a flaw (Chapter 5: Excerpt 5.4). Thus, the construction and mobilisation of these multiple identities illustrate the pertinence of intersectionality as an approach not only for examining these women's lives but also their conceptions of themselves. It also highlights the veil and non-veiling as sites of the constructions of multiple, intersecting identities.

One way of looking at these conflicting responses is to understand them as attempts by the women to account for this self-perceived 'gap' between the Muslim ideal of a veiled woman and themselves as non-veiled women. Categories can be seen to operate alongside one another in multiple ways, such as to compensate for the inadequacy in some identities (in the case of Kartika) but also to reinforce their strengths (in the case of Fatma) (Staunæs, 2003). In accounting for this 'gap' both Fatma and Kartika in their respective interviews inadvertently constructed and mobilised multiple identities that intersected with one another.

Throughout their interviews, these women also constructed and negotiated with me as the interviewer, their identities as Muslim women, in ways that safeguarded their sense of self and belonging to a (religious) community (Howarth, 2002; Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009; Wagner et al., 2012). This is especially poignant given the necessity of having to navigate their lives within a socio-political climate that is increasingly critical of Muslim women who do not veil (Izharuddin, 2018; A. Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006). Incidents such as the recent experience of actress Emma Maembong foregrounds this climate. The torrent of public criticism that ensued after the actress' unveiling compelled her to hold a press conference, during which she admitted that her unveiling is not only a bad act but also a revelation of her lack of faith (Astro Awani, 2019; Mohamad, 2019).

As iterated earlier, discussions concerning (non)veiling and Muslim women often revolve around religion, gender, and ethnicity. Besides contributing to the understanding of the discursive construction of religious identity, findings from the interview data demonstrate the construction of institutional identity (see Chapter 6). Current literature discussing the veil and Muslim women in Malaysia has yet to highlight institutional identities. The implications for such insight are explicated further as the chapter progresses.

The relative absence of institutional identities in the literature is in contrast with the notable presence of class which predominantly features in discussions on veiling and non-veiling in Malaysia (see Hassim, Nayan, & Ishak, 2015; Izharuddin, 2018; Ong, 1990) (see Chapter 2). However, although class identity in relation to the veil did not clearly emerge in the interview data (Chapter 2 explained the reasons why class was not selected as an analytical anchor point), the media data I examined in Chapter 4 corroborated, yet also refuted, these scholarly observations. For instance, the proliferation of news items on fashion, entrepreneurship, and commercialisation of the tudung in *Harian Metro* and *The Star*, as well as the images of women that graced the glossy cover pages of *Mingguan Wanita*, attest to the privileged class and social mobility of women with whom the veil is linked. However, the television drama *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and the film *Ombak Rindu* do not offer such empowering imageries of veiled Muslim women. As was illustrated in Chapter 4, the tudung instead serves as a visual marker that demarcates between humble, working-class women from the *kampung*, and the educated, cosmopolitan middle and upper-class non-veiled women of the city (compare Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). As was explained in Section 7.2, such imageries and portrayals are linked to the discourse of Muslim cosmopolitanism.

Considering the existence of such discrepancies in the media data that were examined, it begs the question why fictional works insist on portraying veiled and non-veiled Muslim women according to such simple dichotomies. I argue that such representations help not only to cement normative conceptions of the ideal Malay Muslim woman – the veiled, Islamic-oriented, family-centred woman who espouses traditional values (Hochel, 2013; Mouser, 2007), but also to embolden them. Indeed, according to Mouser (2007), “the tudung has come to symbolise a notion of modern versus traditional” (p.171). Added to the prevalence of the stereotype of non-veiled

Muslim women as wild, such representations also arguably promote oppressive narratives that help rationalise the policing of women's behaviour and dress, attested by the numerous articles on such activities carried out in Kelantan (Azhar & Zulkiflee, 2016; Beh, 2016) mentioned in Chapter 4.

As stated earlier, the findings from the interviews do not point to the emergence and construction of a class identity among the women. Moreover, this study adopted a decidedly different approach from those employed by past research that examined veiling with a socio-economic and political focus, such as Ong's (1990) work. Regardless, the construction of institutional identities in the discourses of these non-veiled Muslim women brings about fascinating insights, particularly in the ways the identities are mobilised in challenging and hostile situations. This point is further explicated in Section 7.4.

Thus far, in this chapter, I have demonstrated that not only do the non-veiling women who participated in the interviews hold conflicting notions about themselves as Muslim women when compared to their own definitions of an ideal Muslim woman, but they also construct multiple identities in attempts to account for any perceived deficiency or to complement or reinforce positive traits in themselves. Nevertheless, exploring the women's responses beyond those which addressed the interview questions (see Chapter 5: Section 5.1), some of the interviewees also constructed contradictory identities using the veil as the central catalyst. This clash of intersecting identities, as well as the sites in which they occur, are the focus of the following section.

7.4 (Non)Veiling as a site of struggles and challenges

The findings discussed in this thesis make clear that the act of (not) veiling is more than a symbolic gesture; and it plays a considerable role in the ways in which Muslim women portray themselves, and the struggles and challenges they experience. Research has shown that Muslim women who do not veil in Muslim-majority contexts face prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory practices against them (A. Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012). The forms these bigoted beliefs and behaviours take are varied. Some manifest in subtler ways in day-to-day activities, whereas others are executed publicly through state-sanctioned policies.

As the findings illustrate, multiple, intersecting and competing discourses mobilised by the participants show how these women have been marginalised as a result of their (non)veiling. The women not only face criticisms from specific individuals in their respective social networks (for instance, Fatma, Juliana, Erma), but also experience exclusion from their communities (for instance, Zureen). They also become engaged in confrontation with hostile individuals who deny them the right to religious space (for instance Rose and Dayana, among others throughout the interviews), and also those who limit their own freedom of expression (for instance, Amirah).

Discriminatory and punitive treatments against non-veiled women have been noted in the literature. In countries like Iran and Turkey, in which the veil and the act of veiling have established and turbulent histories, women who choose not to veil and/or veil face severe penalties and charges, as has been widely reported in the media (Ansari, 2014; Bayram, 2009; Marshall, 2005; Rahimpour, 2018; Toprak & Uslu, 2009). As noted in Chapter 4 and in Section 7.2, this worrying phenomenon has also been noted in Malaysia, in particular in the ultra-conservative state of Kelantan, where state authorities have legalised the policing of women's bodies (Beh, 2016; Habibu, 2016). Moreover, as has been reiterated throughout this chapter, media data also reported scathing criticisms directed at celebrities who have stopped wearing the veil, such as in the instances of actress Uqasha Senrose (Awang Chik, 2016) , and most recently in 2019, actress Emma Maembong (Othman, 2019; Yusup, 2019).

The interview data collected for this thesis indicated that for the participating women, the challenges and struggles they face occurred largely in three domains – family, institutions, community (Sections 6.3, 6.4, 6.5). Although previous research reported the increasing stigmatisation against non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia since the start of the country's Islamisation (Izharuddin, 2018; A. Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006), work explicitly specifying the spaces and contexts in which these moments of conflict take place, remained unexplored. This study, therefore, sheds light upon and helps make visible these spaces so not only can one identify the actors (the instigator and the wronged), but also most pertinently, the workings of certain structures of power and ideologies that underpin such beliefs, attitudes, and practices towards non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia. To put it more precisely, specification of these contexts shows the ways in which structures of power and ideologies operate at three different levels – the personal, professional, and the communal – and the ways in which the

women construct their identities as they navigate through these obstacles. I elaborate these claims in more detail in the sections that follow, and I bring together the implications of the findings in Section 7.4.4.

7.4.1 Family

It has been noted in the literature (see Wagner et al., 2012, for instance), that especially in the context of a Muslim-majority country, the challenges and struggles faced by non-veiling women in the domain of family is a point of conflict, and often results in strained relations between these women and their family members. Nevertheless, it is simplistic to paint a broad brush over what is a much more complex issue. This is because for veiled women in non-Muslim majority contexts such as the West, wearing the veil can also cause tensions among kin (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). The findings of this study add an additional layer of complexity, a point that I explicate more clearly below.

The most prevalent gendered discourse that emerged in the domain of family is that of ‘filial piety’. Participants such as Fatma (Section 6.4.1), and Juliana (Section 6.4.2), draw upon this discourse when speaking about tensions experienced with family members as a result of their non-veiling. However, revealing another intricate layer to the topic at hand, Erma (Section 6.4.3) – a Chinese *muallaf* – draws upon this discourse when recounting the conflict she faced with her devout Christian mother where the latter pleaded for her daughter not to veil. The analyses showed that the women’s marginalised and powerless positions resulted not only from the clash between discourses, but also from the intersection of multiple competing identities whose workings took place within these discourses. For instance, the analyses of Erma and Rose, who are both non-Malay converts to Islam, showed how their gender and filial identities as daughters came into conflict with their religious identities as (new) Muslim women. For Erma, she believes that the very act of veiling would devastate her devout Christian mother (Excerpt 6.3). Thus, a ‘Muslim convert discourse’ that underscored Erma’s conviction in her new faith, clashed with her obligation to fulfil her mother’s wishes within a ‘filial piety discourse.’ On the other hand, Rose justifies her act of non-veiling in order to keep knowledge of her conversion to Islam a secret from her devout Hindu family, thus avoiding their disappointment and possible estrangement from them (Excerpt 6.9). Moreover, as was argued in the previous section, because the veil symbolises the demarcation between the modern and the

traditional (Mouser, 2007), these notions also interacted in ways that caused conflict for participants, as attested in the analysis of Juliana (Excerpt 6.2). It was also present in the example of Siti, a Malay-Muslim whose intention to wear the veil was thwarted by pressure from her liberal aunts.

The findings of this research therefore establish that the decision to veil (or not) is a major act, the consequences of which influence the lives of these Muslim women in multiple ways. Since the women's experiences vary across a wide range of scenarios, even if they live in similar socio-political contexts, it is crucial that analysis unpacks each research participant's respective lived experience and explore a range of narratives and voices in different contexts. In the following section, similar complex dynamics can also be seen to operate in various workplace and formal settings.

7.4.2 Institutions

Structures of power and authority operate most clearly in the domain of institution. This is not surprising considering that in this domain, the women interviewed discussed situations in which they experienced conflict with a figure of authority in their respective institutions. Highlighted in Chapter 6 were the workings of these power structures and imbalances in several workplaces and contexts such as in the university workplace and university classroom (Amirah and [Excerpt 6.4]; Siti, [Excerpt 6.6], respectively) and in the financial sector (Dayana). However, there were other places of employment where participants experienced conflict, such as in the media (for instance, in the cases of Juliana and Fatin).

Various multiple intersecting discourses that compete against and mutually support one another were drawn upon in the participants' interviews. As was illustrated in Chapter 6, Dayana positions herself as relatively powerless within discourses that revolve around ethnic relations in Malaysia, in particular those that position Malays and Bumiputeras as inferior compared to non-Malays (the Chinese and Indians, for instance) when it comes to economic dominance (Ali, as cited in Nakamura, 2012). Inter-ethnic relations are most easily identifiable in the discourses of the women who are members of minority groups in Malaysia, such as the Chinese (Erma and Liza), the Indians (Rose and Saleha), and those who grew up in Sabah and Sarawak (for instance, Thalia and Amirah). Rose (in discussing the conflict she faces in the domain of community) also invokes discourses concerning inter-ethnic relations. This points

to a potential site for future inquiry, as most research on Islam, women, and the veil in Malaysia focuses discussions on the majority Malay-Muslims, most of whom are located in Peninsular Malaysia (see Othman, 2006; Tong & Turner, 2008).

Thus, the cases reported above and those of Erma and Rose in the family domain highlight the need to include more *muallaf* voices, and also other non-Malay Muslim minority voices in the study of the veil and Muslim women in Malaysia. Born and raised in different religious and cultural beliefs systems, these women inevitably face distinct experiences of conflict and struggle compared to their born-and-bred Muslim sisters, compounded with the reality that they are ethnic minorities (see Ma, 2005; Stark, 2006). A comment from Liza, another Chinese participant who converted to Islam, captures this dilemma of being caught between cultures, “my Chinese friends feel that I have deserted the Chinese, but the Muslims will think that I’m not Muslim *enough* in their group” (line 307). The value of including voices of minority women in this study is apparent. It highlights how the veil’s link with these women in a socio-political and historical Islamised context helps position them in particular ways that are different when compared with their Malay majority sisters. The most illustrative of this claim is that whereas for Malay Muslim women their ethnic identity is not seen to be at odds with their religious identity, this is not necessarily true for non-Malay Muslims who are compelled to perform conscious identity work (Wagner et al., 2012). Thus, these insights also underscore the pertinence of the intersectionality approach (see Section 7.5).

Equally significant are the contributions of the findings to existing literature on the utility of (non)veiling in certain contexts. Studies have shown that in both Muslim and non-Muslim majority contexts, women have reported that wearing the veil may afford them more respect and space for improved mobility in professional workplaces (Hochel, 2013; A. Ong, 1990; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Wagner et al., 2012). However, the findings from this study suggest that this does not apply to all contexts (see Joly & Wadia, 2017, for Muslim women experiences in Britain and France). The experiences of Dayana, Suzana, and Nadia refute such observations. Each of these women opined that wearing the veil can negatively affect workplace interaction and rapport. The analysis of Dayana (Section 6.5.2) illustrated this claim most starkly. Within the mutually supporting ‘Malay inferiority complex discourse’ and the ‘not one of us discourse,’ Dayana demonstrates how her ethnic and religious identities as

a Malay Muslim who wore the hijab intersect to position her as relatively powerless against her Chinese and Indian clients. She also draws upon a ‘tudung as a symbol for the good Muslim woman discourse,’ which compounds her marginalisation by imbuing Dayana with a sense of piety that she believes to be incompatible with the perceived unethicity of her clients in her workplace setting and thus, consequently, limiting her ability to execute her job and establish a good rapport with her clients.

To further corroborate the women’s experiences, traces of such discourses are evident in the news articles that reported testimonials by celebrities such as actors Abby Nadzri (Ashari, 2016), Mia Sara (Gun, 2016), and Falisha Crossley (Amry, 2016) who claim that their veiling has resulted in reduced acting offers. Moreover, certain institutions, most notably in the hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia, have been reported as discriminating against women who wear the veil, for instance, denying them employment opportunities on the basis of their head covering (Bernama, 2017; Chong, 2017; Jennings, 2018). Nevertheless, there are women among those I interviewed (such as Thalia and Fatma) who felt that wearing or not wearing the veil does not particularly influence their work performance or relations between colleagues and clients. This discrepancy alludes to the importance of identifying distinct spaces and the particular ways in which the act of (non)veiling affects the women’s experiences within these spaces, a point that I further unpack in Section 7.4.4.

It became evident in the analyses in Section 6.5, that the women positioned themselves as relatively powerless against others within multiply intersecting discourses. However, talking about the challenges and struggles as consequences due to their (non)veiling in these settings have highlighted the strategies these women take – not only to navigate through these constraints, but also in their attempts to subvert their powerless positions. This was demonstrated particularly well by Amirah (Excerpt 6.4) and Siti (Excerpt 6.6). Both women chose to don the hijabs in their respective workplace and classroom under the watchful eye of the authority in order to avoid professional reprimand and critique from colleagues, as well as to prevent incurring losses in academic credit. Similar strategies were found to be adopted by the women in Fadil’s (2011) study as women who veil (or remove their veil) do so as “an outcome of professional circumstances or educational requirements...” (p. 95). The decision to

veil or not veil due to professional reasons was also echoed in several other studies (see Mouser, 2007; Tong & Turner, 2008).

However, although it has not been made clear whether or not Siti and Amirah's veiling yielded favourable results in their respective circumstances (in contrast to Dayana, who claimed that her unveiling resulted in increased work performance), what has been made apparent are the struggles and challenges that persisted even after this change in appearance. For instance, in the interview Amirah foregrounded her identity as a lecturer in justifying her decision to resume veiling in her workplace, though she alludes that she is not being herself by doing so. On the other hand, by succumbing to the pressure by her lecturer to veil in class, Siti foregrounded her identities as a Muslim and student, though this act resulted in an attack on her religious identity by her friends, who accused her for being a hypocrite.

However, the analyses of the interviews showed that the women I interviewed were not necessarily always the ones subjected to the power of authoritative figures and structures that compel them to either wear or not wear the veil. Liza is one such example. As a dietitian in a hospital, Liza underscored her professional identity by rebuking her veiled subordinates for seemingly being lax in their handling of food materials,

It's just like my staff you know, working in the kitchen cooking. They think they wear a tudung they are so clean, I said "no no you come in you still have to cover – you still have to cover your tudung with your disposable cap, because you were outside it's very dirty!"

(Liza, line 515).

Thus, the findings show how in the institutional domain, participants position themselves as relatively powerless against authoritative figures and structures that undermine their rights to operate in such spaces on their own terms. What is also demonstrated are the ways in which these women navigate through these constraints, as well as their attempts to challenge their powerless positions. However, the following section demonstrates that even in the absence of clear-cut authority figures in less formalised environments, unlike the workplace and classroom, dominant ideologies still permeate and are operationalised in order to marginalise non-veiled women.

7.4.3 Community

The domain of community shows how ideologies concerning the veil operate to influence the women's lives at a societal level. The analyses of the experiences of Zureen, Suzana, and Rose in Chapter 6 help peel away more layers of the complex issue of (non)veiling, revealing more diverse insights. Along with religion and gender, age and/or ethnicity are two of the most salient identities that emerged in this domain, evident in the interviews with Zureen (Excerpt 6.7), Suzana (Excerpt 6.8), and Rose (Excerpt 6.9). The intersections among these identities serve to compound the intensity of the participants' experience, and again, highlight the workings of intersectional oppressions.

One of the most striking observations in this respect is the prevalence of age. In a Malaysian society that places respect on elders and figures of authority (Abdullah, 1996, as cited in Mazanah & Merriam, 2000), the analyses of Zureen and Suzana challenged this societal belief. Age is mobilised in the discourses of Zureen and Suzana, though its implications for the women's experiences of marginalisation differ respectively. For instance, Zureen mobilises a gendered 'spinsterhood discourse' that underscores her age (she was in her late fifties at the time of the interview) and civil status as an unmarried woman. These two identities intersected to position her as powerless and marginalised, due to a prevalent belief among Malaysian Muslims that as marriage is considered an act of *ibadah* (worship) women who are unmarried past the age of 30 are considered to be abandoning their devotional duties (Balraj-Ambigapathy, 2000). Age was also a factor that compounded the severity of the criticism Suzana received from a "much younger" former student on social media, where the latter implied that the former was playing around with the image of wearing the veil. This demonstrates that religious discourses relating to the veil trump discourses that bestow respect on elders and authority figures.

In the section below, I deliberate upon the relevance of these discussions, particularly by relating them to the idea that discourses are sites from which ideologies are disseminated, and power relations are contested and (re)negotiated.

7.4.4 Discourses as sites of ideological dissemination and the contestation of power

Although it has been widely reported in the literature that non-veiled Muslim women suffer constant reproach for not veiling (see Fadil, 2011; Ong, 1990; N. Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012), what is less clear are the contexts wherein such reproachful attitudes and discriminatory practices take place. Even more relevant to this study is the obscurity in the ways such moments are experienced by these women, and more importantly, the strategies that are used to try and overcome them (however, I have elaborated on some of these elsewhere in this thesis).

The analysis in Chapter 6 highlighted the importance of identifying domains as well as discourses. By identifying the domains (and various settings such as the *kampung*, classroom, and workplaces), this study was able to demonstrate the workings of power relations. Moreover, the analysis demonstrated the mobilisation of multiple discourses drawn upon by the participants, which serve to further illustrate the ways these discourses operate in specific ways to marginalise non-veiled Muslim women. This is an important contribution to broader academic and contemporary debates on discourse, (non)veiling and Muslim women.

However, an even more significant contribution lies in the identification of specific discourses within these specified domains and settings. Several discourses that include religious, gendered, and ethnic dimensions emerged from the interviews. Identifying and highlighting these domains and the discourses that operate within them are the first steps that can be taken by individual subjects and even collective forces engaged in transformative projects (i.e. feminists, activists), in order to begin questioning and challenging dominant underlying beliefs encouraging the marginalisation of Muslim women, whether veiled or not. Also relevant is the question of why such domains and settings are ideal locations wherein certain (repressive) discourses permeate and operate, and whether possibilities exist for marginalised subjects to seek alternatives that can challenge these discourses.

Nevertheless, although it is the objective of Baxter's (2003, 2008) FPDA to promote a transformative ideal to allow marginalised women the space to mobilise alternative discourses to challenge their positioning (Kamada, 2009), the analysis in Chapter 6 demonstrated that this is not an easily attainable objective. Arguably, the reason why

is because such women lack access to other discourses through which to articulate alternative and/or dissenting viewpoints (Cammack & Phillips, 2002); a result of the dominance of ideologies that champion veiling as the positive marker of Muslim women's identity and piety (Barlas, 2002). The opportunities for these women to access knowledge and practices that protect their rights and liberties as women of faith are arguably limited due to conventional wisdom on Islamic theology that is largely-derived from male-oriented scholarship that does not particularly encourage dissenting viewpoints (Ahmed, 1992; Barlas, 2002). This restriction is compounded by a Malaysian culture that is dominantly paternalistic and collectivist (Bakar, Mohamad, & Mustafa, 2007; Keshavarz, Somayeh & Baharudin, 2009; Schermerhorn & Harris Bond, 1997). Consequently, the existence of such limiting backgrounds arguably assist in the permeation of prejudiced ideologies that later lead to discriminatory practices.

One of the most striking observations of this study is the existence of 'allies'. Though the women in my interviews struggled to challenge dominant discourses that marginalise them, they nevertheless found 'allies' in specific men and women from their social networks, i.e., those family members and friends (and sometimes even strangers) who helped them navigate through the challenges they faced. It was clearly apparent from the role Fatma's husband played (Excerpt 6.1), but also throughout the interviews, when the women brought up instances when they were helped by such allies in challenging situations. For example, Rose and Dayana both faced incidents in which they were questioned before entering a religious space to pray because they were not wearing the tudung. In Rose's case, two of her fellow *muallaf* friends, who were male, came to her aid when an elderly man prevented her from entering and praying at a *surau*. For Dayana, an elderly male stranger assisted her when she was questioned by another elderly male about her reasons for being at the mosque, with the former inviting Dayana to pray despite the latter's objections.

This observation is made more significant as gendered dynamics become highlighted. The incidents participants spoke about highlighted men as allies, which I found surprising. Women in other interviews also mentioned other male figures as allies, such as their (ex) husbands (Fatma, Erma, Liza, Hayati) and fathers (Juliana, Thalia, Saleha, Kartika). Interestingly, in most cases, it was the female figures such as family and relatives (Fatma, Juliana, Zureen, Erma, Kartika), and superiors (Liza, Amirah,

Huda), even subordinates and friends (Suzana, Rose) who were constructed and positioned as being hostile to these women. It was surprising because I did not expect males to feature prominently as positive figures, and other women as hostile figures. This is because of a dominant (mis)belief among Muslim communities in Malaysia that claim a father (or brother, or husband) to be the bearer of the sins of their daughters (committed as a result of not veiling, for instance) (Boo, 2015). Traces of such beliefs can be found in the case of Malaysian entrepreneur Aliff Syukri, who caned his young daughter for removing the hijab in front of male strangers (Emma, 2019). Following such a belief, I expected that male figures would be more critical towards non-veiled women, and women to be more empathetic. This is an observation that warrants further inquiry.

It is a herculean task to begin dismantling, or even rattling such strongly-grounded and deeply-held ideological foundations that govern beliefs, values, and attitudes concerning the veil and the women who do or do not wear it. In a bleak context such as this, however, hope emerges in the form of increasing discussion among women's rights activists in Malaysia. This has been propelled by Islamic feminist organisations such as Sisters in Islam, who have published numerous articles championing the freedom and right of Muslim women to choose their attire (see Sisters in Islam, 2010, 2011; Woodlock, 2010). Veiled lawyer and activist, Asiah Abd Jalil who is infamous (yet also lauded) for her critique of conventional theological wisdom, published a post on Facebook in which she expressed her belief that the tudung is not divinely-ordained but is a cultural tradition (Abd Jalil, 2019). Empowered by such positive developments advocating for democratic narratives for women's voices and choices, the recent Women's March that took place on March 9, 2019 in the capital city, Kuala Lumpur, showcased voices which promoted the right of women to wear garments of their choosing, whether this includes being veiled or not (see Appendix T). Moreover, public platforms that celebrate alternative viewpoints are also beginning to appear. As was noted in Chapter 1, on April 13 2019, a forum entitled *Malay Women & Dehijabbing* took place, to launch activist Maryam Lee's book, *Unveiling Choice*.

To summarise, the findings of this thesis have demonstrated some of the ways in which these women reportedly deploy various strategies to navigate through their daily lives under the yoke of hostile dominant ideological discourses. The examples show the different approaches these women take to position themselves as

simultaneously subservient and yet subversive within these discourses but also how through drawing on different discourses, they construct and mobilise certain identities to help them resolve or make sense of the challenges and struggles they face. The findings have also demonstrated how identities can be constructed and mobilised not just in complementary but also sometimes in contradictory ways.

Thus far, I have expounded on the findings of the analytical chapters. In the section that follows, I discuss in detail the implications the arguments made so far have on the topic at hand.

7.5 Language, identity, (non)veiling, and Muslim women

This section brings together the theoretical elements that underpin the analytical chapters, and makes claims about how the findings of this research – specifically, from the interviews – can contribute to the burgeoning field of language, discourse and identity. Furthermore, I show how the insights into the construction of religious identity – an aspect that has largely escaped scholarly attention in discourse and identity studies – warrants further investigation.

To address the above-mentioned, I critically examine Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) selected sociolinguistic principles for the study of identity, Baxter's (2003) FPDA, and intersectionality. I discuss the beneficial ways in which they have informed and guided this research, but also point to areas of possible refinement. At the same time, within a social constructionist paradigm, I discuss the value of religious identity as an aspect to be explored further in the field of language and identity. In light of these discussions, I conclude this section by establishing the significance of the veil (with particular focus on non-veiling) as a highly-contested cultural and political object worthy of academic scrutiny, and thus simultaneously underscore the value of including Muslim women's voices (particularly those who are non-veiled) and their lived experiences in debates concerning language and identity.

7.5.1 Researching language, identity, and (non)veiling Muslim women in Islamising Malaysia

In the Methodology chapter, I proposed a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationships among the three frameworks utilised in this research, namely, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) principles of indexicality, positionality, and relationality; Baxter's (2003) FPDA, and intersectionality (see Figure 3.1). Considering the findings which

emerged from the data analyses, this conceptual framework has proven to be useful in conducting this research. The primary benefit of employing the framework is that it clearly illustrates the link between the disparate – yet interconnected – components of the research topic. More precisely, these three components work together to illustrate the ways in which power and sociopolitical context interact with each other thereby influencing the women's sense of self with regards to the veil (and particularly, the practice of non-veiling). Moreover, the veil's meaning is also contingent upon the sociopolitical and historical context in which it is located. In the context of this research, which is an Islamising Malaysia, the veil's meaning becomes ever-contested, reflecting contemporary worldwide debates concerning globalisation, human rights, and Muslim women (Marshall, 2005; Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012).

For instance, the selected sociolinguistic principles for the study of identity – namely indexicality, positionality, and relationality – (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) provided analytical tools with which I could specify the workings of identity construction in the women's interviews from a linguistic and discursive perspective. Although power is implicated in the women's constructions of their identities in talk, the application of FPDA (Baxter, 2003) offered a more comprehensive framework with which to investigate the relations of power as manifested in the women's discourses, and more pertinently, the ways in which these women constantly renegotiated their positions between a marginalised, powerless subject and a powerful one (a feat not always successfully achieved, as was explained in Section 7.4). Moreover, the application of intersectionality as an analytical approach also proved to be pertinent considering the diverse backgrounds of the women I interviewed and the research setting of contemporary Malaysian society which is experiencing increasing religious conservatism (compounded by historically fraught race relations). Specifically, through the interview medium, intersectionality allowed me to examine how these women's demographic characteristics (for instance, ethnicity, gender, and age, among others) intersected with one another and with the sociocultural and political context to locate the participating non-veiled women in multiple contradictory and competing positions.

This conceptual framework also gave eminence to the research context (an Islamising Malaysia), which is treated as an integral component of the research topic. Elaborating on an Islamising Malaysia was accomplished in Chapter 4 by examining selected

media portrayals and representations of Malaysian Muslim women with regards to veiling and non-veiling. Media materials are relevant sources to be examined, as cultural representations of marginalised groups (such as non-veiled women and minorities) can contribute to their devaluation and the erasure of their voices and experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). This matter becomes more pertinent in Malaysia, as the media becomes a platform to disseminate the government's Islamisation ideals (Ishak, 2011; Martin, 2014).

Although discussions concerning the research context could have been addressed as part of the review of literature, I argue that distinguishing it as one of the central components and thus dedicating analytical space for it helped to accomplish several enlightening findings in the analyses. Primarily, by foregrounding the context, traces of ideological beliefs that dictate the norms, values, as well as attitudes and practices towards Muslim women who veil and do not veil (as evidenced from the media data) were identified. This consequently assisted in making better-informed arguments concerning power dynamics and how these influenced the ways the women constructed identities that intersected with one another to position these women in particular ways in the interviews.

For example, one of the most prevalent beliefs about non-veiled Muslim women is that they are spiritually-lacking, morally-deprived, hedonistic women. This has been noted in the academic literature (see Izharuddin, 2018; Othman, 2006; Wagner et al., 2012) and in other contemporary sources (see AR, 2014; Cek Mek Molek, 2015). The popular 'unwrapped vs. wrapped candy' analogy also corroborates this prevalent belief. Traces of such beliefs were also noted in the media data examined in Chapter 4, most notably in the characterisations of the non-veiled female characters in *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu* (section 4.4), and also expressed by several interview participants in Chapters 5 and 6. Thus, by highlighting the existence and predominance of such beliefs in the context of Islamising Malaysia, the analyses of identity construction were able to highlight the ways in which the women in the interviews negotiated their positions in light of such beliefs, and the kinds of identities they mobilised through this process. For instance, in Chapter 5, Fatma constructed a 'moderate Muslim' identity to distance herself from such stereotypes. Thus, the examination of the media data provided sufficient information that helped provide the background of the research context. Nevertheless, for future research, other means of

examining the context could be undertaken, such as by conducting questionnaires or surveys on public perception of Muslim women with/out the veil.

As was stated in the Methodology chapter (Section 3.2.3), the conceptual framework is designed to primarily link the three interlinked theoretical components, and to also address the limitations identified in each framework. This approach has contributed to the robustness of the conceptual framework, in particular because the theoretical components included principles and elements that related to and supported one another. This is most evident in the relationship among a) the three pairs of intersubjectivity espoused by Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) relationality principle, b) the focus on powerfulness/powerlessness in Baxter's (2003) FPDA, and c) Staunæs' (2003) 'doing of intersectionality.'

The thread that links these components together – and indeed acts as an integral part in each – is the notion of power. The three pairs of intersubjectivity that make up the relationality principle are related to three different yet interrelated notions of identity, namely markedness, essentialism, and institutional power (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The aim of the relationality principle is to highlight and examine the processes of the construction of self by problematising the dichotomy of sameness-difference, wherein hierarchy is implied:

In most cases, difference implies hierarchy, and the group with the greater power establishes a vertical relation in terms beneficial to itself. Such ideological ranking enables the identities of the more powerful group to become less recognisable as identities, instead, this group constitutes itself as the norm from which all others diverge.

(Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 372).

The claims in the above reflect the findings in the existing literature on non-veiled Muslim women in Muslim-majority contexts (see Izharuddin, 2018; Khalid & O'Connor, 2011; Wagner et al., 2012), whereby veiled women – by virtue of being the majority – possess greater social capital (afforded by the influence of Islamisation) as the epitome of pious and good women that renders their non-veiled sisters not only deviants from this idealised norm, but also the marginalised, and thus, the powerless.

This is where the relationality principle's tactics of intersubjectivity segue nicely with FPDA and the 'doing of intersectionality'. Rather than simply conceding to the status of non-veiled women as the marginalised and powerless group, FPDA highlighted the

ways the women I interviewed attempted to navigate through these power relations as they negotiated between the positions of powerless and powerful. As Staunæs (2003) argues on the rethinking of the notions of power, “it must include thinking in terms of power, but not just power as oppression; rather, it should allow space for reconfiguring power relations in processes of subjectification and in relations between subject positions and intertwined social categories” (p. 104). However, as was demonstrated in Chapter 6, the unyielding yoke of dominant ideological structures that dictate beliefs, norms, and practices concerning Muslim women and the veil in specific institutions were difficult to challenge without tangible repercussions on these women’s lives. Indeed, as Kandiyoti (1991) argued, “Changing the terms of this discourse exacts a heavy price: alienation from the shared meanings which constitute a language of identity, affiliation, and loyalty” (p. 433).

Moreover, employing the lens of ‘the doing of intersectionality’ highlighted the women’s difficulties in challenging these underlying beliefs and practices, which are compounded by their multiple identities that intersect and interact to limit the space within which they could question their troubled and marginalised positions. For instance, Rose (Chapter 6: Section 6.5.3) who chose not to veil in order to keep her conversion to Islam a secret from her devout Hindu family, exhibited her struggles to reconcile the conflicting demands presented to her due to her gendered sensibilities as a daughter, her ethnicity, and dominant religious ideologies that condemn lying, especially to one’s parents.

The arguments presented above demonstrate the viability and usefulness of the conceptual framework employed to examine the processes of identity construction and negotiation in interviews with non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia. In the following section, I discuss the benefits of including religious identity in debates concerning language and identity more broadly, as well as the value in including Muslim women’s voices, especially with regards to debates on (non)veiling.

7.5.2 The value of religion and (non-veiled) Muslim women’s voices

As was stated at the beginning of this thesis, religion has largely escaped attention in language and identity research. Indeed, though there are various collections and papers on language and gender, not many have specifically focused on religion and the enaction of this identity in linguistic ways (Jule, 2007a). Not only has this thesis

contributed to this much needed conversation (Sunderland, 2007), but it has also added to a more nuanced understanding of the centrality of religion in the lives of individuals.

Toosi and Ambady (2011) found Islam to be one of the more deeply-embedded beliefs, and one that also regards highly the sense of community and connectedness among its adherents. Muslims are bound together closely by the ties of religion and this boundedness is signified by the *ummah* (community). Although this thesis operates through a social constructionist lens that does not subscribe to and attach essentialist qualities to concepts, it nevertheless does not disregard the importance of religion in individuals' lives (Fearon, 1999) and its influence in the construction of the self.

Within the purview of language and identity, this study has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of religion's centrality by illuminating the processes the women undertook to construct their religious identities (vis-à-vis other identities) in the interviews. By highlighting the workings of such processes, the analyses show that the constructions of religious identities manifest themselves in various forms, and that despite the perception that Islam constitutes a core identity for Muslims (Toosi & Ambady, 2011), the women nevertheless engaged in attempts to question the more orthodox conceptions of an Islamic identity and piety for Muslim women that unfairly reduce it to merely the wearing of hijab. This is in alignment with Meer's (2010) call to democratise the meaning of being Muslim and offer spaces within which Muslims can articulate definitions of their religiosity that are beyond scripturally-bound conceptions.

However, in their attempts to question what it means to be (good) Muslim women without the hijab, my interview participants were fraught with feelings of insecurity and guilt, compounded by a perceived sense of weakness and inadequacy (see Chapters 5 and 6). To address and negotiate through these feelings, they constructed and interrogated various identities – such as gender, ethnicity, and institutional, among others – that support, reinforce, or compensate (Staunæs, 2003) their perceived inadequacies as non-veiled Muslim women. Such processes were also in operation when the women spoke about the challenges and struggles they faced as a consequence of their non-veiling and in their attempts to address and overcome these obstacles.

Sunderland (2007) has argued that the secular focus of academic inquiry in much of Western scholarship has relegated religion to the background. As of late, only two dedicated publications that focus on language, discourse, and religious identity have been published (see Jule, 2005, 2007b). Even Bucholtz and Hall (2004) did not identify religious identity as one of the currently most politicised and contested identities. However, religion and the issues surrounding it continue to remain relevant in contemporary socio-political landscapes all over the world (Day, 2016; Wilson, 2010; Zwartz, 2016).

Religion affects the lives of individuals in different ways depending on the sociopolitical contexts wherein they live (Sunderland, 2007). With regard to the issue of Muslim women and (non)veiling, existing research has shown that the experiences of Muslim women living in non-Muslim-majority contexts differ from those who live in Muslim-majority contexts (for instance, Wagner et al., 2012). Non-veiled Muslim women in (non)Muslim-majority contexts are considered by the conservative members of their Muslim communities to be less pious and morally weaker than their veiled sisters (Fadil, 2011; Izharuddin, 2018; Wagner et al., 2012). Thus, there is not only the insinuation that non-veiled women have failed as Muslims, but that they are Westernised secularists (Hammami, 1990), which is perceived as negative in post-colonial societies such as Malaysia (Ong, 1990; Othman, 2006). However, among the non-Muslim majority countries, this Westernised secularism is perceived positively as non-veiled Muslim women are considered to be liberal, emancipated, and integrated members of the larger society (Fadil, 2011).

This study therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of women's lives, especially of research settings (Malaysia) and research subjects (non-veiled Muslim women) that have been largely overlooked by scholarship (Fadil, 2011; Hochel, 2013; Izharuddin, 2018). It is only through highlighting these women's voices and allowing them to articulate their experiences, which provides positive and cathartic experiences (Izharuddin, 2018), that we can begin to gain knowledge and understanding as well as empathy, all of which are powerful tools with which to champion the empowerment of the marginalised.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed in depth the findings from the analytical chapters, particularly showing how the findings from the interview data in Chapters 5 and 6 are corroborated by those of the media materials in Chapter 4. It has demonstrated that the issue of non-veiling is one that is fraught with ambivalence, ambiguity, anger, shame, and guilt, among other emotions. Although that the women interviewed found it challenging to question or oppose dominant discourses which position them as morally weaker counterparts to their veiled sisters, a number of encouraging developments in Malaysian women's rights circles paint a more optimistic picture, apart from providing tangible avenues for dissenting voices and opinions. Equally importantly, this chapter has highlighted the contributions of this study to the field of language and identity, in particular the benefits that can be gained by paying more systematic attention to religious identity, and to the inclusion of the voices of (non-veiled) Muslim women in discursive identity research. The next and final chapter draws conclusions from the thesis, further establishing and strengthening the links between the rationale, method, and findings of this study. It also further provides possible angles to pursue in future inquiries, as well as addressing the limitations of this work.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

Considering the veil's inextricable link to a Muslim woman's identity, this research has examined the construction of religious and other identities of Muslim women who do not veil. Apart from the aim of contributing to the burgeoning field of language, discourse and identity, this research also aimed to contribute to the increasingly growing – yet still scant – discussion on non-veiled Muslim women, especially in Muslim-majority contexts such as Malaysia. As a culmination of the discussions presented thus far, Section 8.2 provides a summary of the key research findings of this study. Section 8.3 highlights the theoretical, methodological, and analytical pointers this study offers to researchers, and Section 8.4 underscores its practical impact beyond the scope of academia. Section 8.5 addresses the limitations of this study, and Section 8.6 outlines some recommendations for future research. Finally, Section 8.7 concludes this thesis with some final remarks.

8.2 Summary of thesis and key findings

This study was conceived from both personal motivation and an academic interest in exploring how the veil, or rather, its absence, influences the construction of identities among non-veiled Muslim women. As a non-veiled Muslim woman who has suffered and continues to suffer reproach for not veiling, I also wanted to know and understand the kinds of struggles and challenges Malaysian women face due to their non-veiling. Thus, out of these concerns emerged two primary research objectives (ROs) that drove this study, which were a) to investigate the implications of non-veiling for Muslim women's identity constructions, and b) to explore the challenges and struggles that these women face due to their non-veiling. These objectives were encapsulated in the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: In what ways do selected contemporary print and broadcast media in Malaysia portray and present Malaysian Muslim women with regards to the tudung?

RQ2: What kind(s) of identities emerge from the discourses of non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women?

RQ2a: How do these women construct and/or negotiate their religious identities vis-à-vis other emergent identities?

RQ3: What kinds of challenges do these women face as a result of their decisions not to wear the veil?

RQ3a: How do they construct and negotiate their identities as they make sense of these challenges and struggles in their discourse?

In order to address these research questions, I adopted a social constructionist approach to the study of identity, in particular one that underscores the importance of language and discourse in its understanding and investigation. The primary research method this study employed was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with recruited research participants. This was supplemented by the examination of contemporary media sources, to provide a contextual background as well as to corroborate the analysis of the interview data.

Based on data gathered, this study found that women who choose not to veil or who have chosen to stop wearing it often experience conflicting feelings. The veil embodies a potent symbolism, as it is considered an important signifier of a Muslim woman's identity and piety (Ahmed, 1992; Barlas, 2002; Othman, 2006), so much so that "even its absence can bestow strong social and emotional effects on women who have abandoned it" (Izharuddin, 2018, p. 162). My findings from the interviews of non-veiled Muslim women in Malaysia support such claims. Through their discourses on non-veiling, the women constructed not only macro-level identities such as religious, gender, ethnic, institutional, and filial but also micro-level ones realised in-talk that included more specified variants of these larger identity categories. The discursive constructions of these identities served to reinforce and/or compensate one another, simultaneously also highlighting the conflicting and ambivalent emotions experienced by these women, such as defiance, conviction and nonchalance laced with guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy as consequences of their non-veiling.

Non-veiled Muslim women are also subject to scathing criticism and unfair judgments on their character and morality, which view them as morally-weaker and 'lesser' in faith than their veiled sisters (Sunesti, 2016; Wagner et al., 2012). Such unfair broad-brushing of non-veiled Muslim women contributes to prevalent beliefs about them as morally-depraved and they are "often blamed for sexual crimes, rapes, and illicit behaviour if they fail to cover themselves sufficiently so as not to elicit the uncontrollable desires of men" (Mouser, 2007, p. 169). The women I interviewed also recounted incidents whereby they faced discriminatory behaviour and prejudiced

attitudes, which this study identified as having occurred primarily in the domains of family, institutions, and community. Within these domains, the women reported having experienced instances of being judged, criticised, reprimanded, and even having been excluded by others critical of their non-veiling.

The claims made by these women are substantiated by findings from the examination of selected media materials in Chapter 4, which portray Muslim women in Malaysia with regards to the veil and non-veiling on three dimensions – dress and appearance, character and conduct, as well as morality and values. The findings, particularly those pertaining to the dichotomic good-versus-bad representations of veiled and non-veiled Muslim women which were exemplified in fictional works such as *7 Hari Mencintaiku* and *Ombak Rindu*, serve to highlight damaging stereotypes. For example, non-veiled women are portrayed as provocative, promiscuous, ignorant, materialistic urbanite women in opposition to veiled women who are portrayed as humble, modest, and devout women from the *kampung*. Such stereotypes arguably translate into real-life discriminatory practices towards non-veiled women, as is evident from newspaper articles on the policing of women's dress and on female celebrities who have stopped wearing the hijab.

8.3 Theoretical, methodological, and analytical implications of study

Here, in light of my findings, I outline several implications this study offers for theory, methodology, and analysis.

a) Viability of conceptual framework

Chapter 7 elucidated the contributions made to the field of language and identity in greater detail. In particular, the conceptual framework established the links between identity, power, and the research context (provided by the examined media sources). Much of the existing research foregrounds the research context through a discussion of the literature. However, I argue that it is important to distinguish the research context as an analytical component in the study of identity. This is because although notions of power are undercurrents in discussions concerning identity, the examination of the research context enables the workings of power to be better understood, especially in the ways they are operationalised to sustain the marginalisation of certain individuals and groups. Therefore, I invite researchers working in the field of language and identity, as well as in gender and religion, to pay

closer attention to the interconnections between these components. In utilising the conceptual framework, researchers have the creative and intellectual liberty to identify and select the medium through which to conduct their scrutiny of the research context. In this study, I selected media materials from a range of contemporary media, but other potential sources include data from opinion surveys and questionnaires (taken from polling firms and/or conducted by the researchers themselves), and social media content and online posts with regards to Muslim women and non-veiling.

b) Invitation for more ‘insider’ researchers

Besides the viability of the conceptual framework, I would also like to draw attention to the researcher and the analyst undertaking the work. Although existing literature has reported on the scarcity of scholarly repertoire on non-veiled Muslim women (Fadil, 2011; Izharuddin, 2018), none to my knowledge mention the lack of ‘insider’ voices who should also be encouraged to undertake such work. I believe it is important that where research with oppressed groups is concerned, insider researchers are vital to provide perspectives that others cannot (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). From the beginning of my research journey to its culmination, I have had countless encounters with Muslim women, both veiled and non-veiled, Malaysian or of other nationalities all who thanked me for undertaking this research, and conveyed to me their view that more Muslim women should be engaged with such topics, as the issue of (non)veiling remains an ever-pertinent matter that affects the lives of Muslim women everywhere. Thus, I hope that with this study, I will have also inspired aspiring Muslim women researchers to explore and investigate issues that affect not only their lives but also those of their own communities.

c) Discourses

As was remarked in the previous chapter, this study has identified several religious and gendered discourses concerning the veil, non-veiling and Muslim women. Some of these discourses are more localised and grounded in local customs and traditions, such as the ‘*nikah* discourse,’ whereas others can be linked to global discussions on gender and Muslim women, such as ‘women as bearers of family honour’. The identification of these discourses contributes to the increasing pool of knowledge on discourse and gender, which in turn enriches researchers’ understanding of the “forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations” (Baxter, 2003, p. 7) that dictate the contemporary practices of culture and society.

d) Reflection as a researcher-interviewer

The interviewing practice as a whole proved challenging to me as a researcher who was largely positioned as an ‘insider.’ Besides the obvious lesson that the interviewing process is in its entirety messy and unpredictable, the most striking lesson that I learnt from the interviews concerned my own prejudices and implicit assumptions. More precisely speaking, as a researcher-interviewer, I found that my own inherent beliefs regarding certain issues, in particular concerning ethnic relations between the majority-Malays and other minorities, as well as the well-established sociocultural and religious tensions between the more conservative Peninsular Malaysia and the more tolerant Malaysian Borneo (where I am from) became apparent to me during the transcribing process. For instance, in my conversations with participants who are ethnic minorities (such as Rose and Saleha, both of whom have Indian ancestry), and/or from Sabah or Sarawak (such as Thalia, Amirah, Huda, among others), I found that I would ask probing questions that sought to ‘confirm’ certain widespread beliefs. In Excerpt 6.9 in Chapter 6, this is apparent when I asked Rose the race of the female officer who had confronted her, and it was not surprising to me when she answered “Malay.” These instances throughout the interviews made me acknowledge and realise the need for me to be aware of my own reflexivity, and to be more critical of my own value judgments, especially for future research. This is a point pertinent to be considered by other fellow researchers – whether they be an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ – to be more aware of their own assumptions when conducting interviews.

8.4 Pragmatic and social implications of study

This study has several implications for practitioners working in a number of fields, as well for women and society more broadly.

a) Activists and women’s rights groups

I believe the findings of this study would be a much welcome contribution to the thriving contemporary debates concerning issues of veiling and non-veiling in Malaysia. Feminists and activists with their objective to empower Muslim women have become emboldened enough to argue for alternative interpretations of the Quran and religious texts. There are numerous women’s rights organisations in Malaysia, but the ones often highlighted as being at the forefront on issues concerning Muslim women’s rights, and more particularly the issue of hijab (and the championing of a

woman's right to choose to wear it or not) is Sisters in Islam, and Musawah (Arabic for 'equality'). The latter was conceived in 2009 at a global meeting of women's rights activists and scholars in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. Both Musawah and Sisters in Islam have gained international acclaim for their work in advancing Muslim women's rights particularly in Malaysia. However, in 2019, under the jurisdiction of the Syariah Court of Malaysia (which is distinct from the civil court), a *fatwa* (religious edict) was issued declaring Sisters in Islam as a deviant organisation, claiming that its objectives and activities have strayed from the true teachings of Islam (*The Star*, 2019). In a climate of increasing religious conservatism, such a ruling poses a threat in the fight for justice and equality for women (Aliran, 2019).

In light of contemporary developments, I believe that by documenting the narratives of the women I interviewed, this study can offer personal insights of trauma, defiance, and struggles that illustrate not only the multiplicity of voices and experiences that exist, but also underscore the complex implications the issue has for these women. From my engagement with the debates that have taken place, as well as in conversations with individuals involved with these feminist causes, I have been struck by the divisiveness that most often permeated these discussions. The charge to do away with 'modesty culture' propagated by some feminists (I do not make the claim or attribute this to the work of Sisters in Islam or Musawah) does not fairly and judiciously consider the desires of some women who wish to declare and realise their faith through their choice of dress.

Women's rights organisations and activists can take away from this research the multiplicity of ways through which non-veiled Muslim women have described themselves as Muslims, which can then be applied to a conceptual definition that celebrates what it means to be a good, religious Muslim woman, regardless of their choice in wearing or not of the headscarf. More pragmatically, as data from the interviews have revealed domains wherein episodes of conflict and discriminatory practices have taken place against these non-veiled Muslim women, women's rights organisations and activists can also better focus their efforts in addressing and redressing the issues that take place in these settings (see also section b) below).

Through the findings of this thesis, I hope the plight of the women I interviewed can therefore better inform the activist movement, particularly by showing them that the matter is not and cannot simply be reduced to 'taking off the veil.' In turn, platforms through which women of various inclinations with regards to (non)veiling can come

together to engage in mindful conversations about their own trajectories pertaining to their faith and religiosity as Muslim women. I believe that learning about their respective experiences as non-veiling or veiling women in Malaysia, about their own stories of experiencing prejudice, and/or even engaging in prejudicial behaviour and thoughts can be an important stepping stone to breaking down the walls of stigma and misconceptions that surround the issue of (non)veiling.

b) Labour rights organisations

This study found that non-veiled women face discrimination and prejudice in various workplace and educational contexts. Pressure to veil (and in some instances, to not veil) can negatively affect not only the women's professional performance and status but also their personal wellbeing. Malaysia's current employment laws are deemed inadequate to address issues of discrimination, which leaves vulnerable employees subject to discriminatory behaviour without legal recourse (Cheah & Lim, 2018). However, in recent years, public outcry over the ban on women wearing the hijab in certain workplaces prompted the government to propose amendments to Malaysia's current labour laws to outlaw any form of discrimination, although the Human Resources Ministry did not specify the kind of workplace discrimination that would be outlawed (Ibrahim, 2018). Nonetheless, there are loopholes that constitute defences against employee discrimination claims in Malaysia, as employers can cite reasons such as workplace needs and convention (Tan & Prashant, 2019). Nevertheless, this study's findings can help inform labour rights organisations about the plight of these women, important voices which can be utilised in awareness campaigns to encourage more women to come forward to share the ordeals they face in the workplace due to their clothing choice. It is hoped that awareness campaigns will bring about the proposal and eventual legislation of policies that will outlaw discrimination on the basis of clothing choice, and that under the increased scrutiny of a more informed labour rights organisation and more empowered female workforce, employers will also become accountable and can be brought to account on their actions towards women in their workplaces.

c) Media practitioners

The findings of this study can also help media publications and practitioners to be more critical of the ways they represent women on their respective platforms. Changes to the ways in which women are represented in contemporary media are crucial, because, as was demonstrated by this study, the wide reach of media allows it to be

an effective channel through which certain beliefs, values, and attitudes can be conveyed, encouraged, and justified. Indeed, according to Frith (2002, as cited in Izharuddin, 2018), “the image of the ideal Malay Muslim woman is mutually reinforced in state-development policies, institutionalised Islamic rulings, and media representations” (p. 162). In recent years, there have been attempts by contemporary media in Malaysia (especially in the genre of fictional works) to problematise the overly-simplistic dichotomy of the good veiled woman versus the bad non-veiled woman through television dramas such as the highly-popular *Nur* (Mohameddin & Baharom, 2018), and the findings of this study lend weight to the pertinent need for such critical alternatives to continue to be pushed forward. However, I believe that in order for media practitioners to continue to be convinced to proceed along this critical trajectory, their core audience members (Malay Muslims, for instance) need to be substantially more demanding in their needs for more critical representations. I believe that I can share the findings and discussions from my thesis on an online platform such as a blog and/or website (see below) to reach a part of this core audience of Malay Muslims, in an effort to encourage more critical viewpoints regarding the portrayals of Muslim women in Malaysian media.

d) Muslim women

Overall, I believe this study serves as a ‘therapeutic tool’ for Muslim women who struggle with veiling and also for those who struggle with the implications of not veiling. Indeed, just as the unveiled women in Izharuddin’s (2018) study found their talking about their experiences to be cathartic and therapeutic, so did the women in my study. Heartened by such sentiments, I aim to extend this opportunity of cathartic outpouring to other Muslim women by setting up a website or a blog that invites Muslim women to share their struggles with (non)veiling and the challenges and tension that ensue as consequences of their veiling and/or non-veiling. Although various websites and blogs that cater to such concerns already exist, such as the American-based *Muslim Girl* (see Halima, 2018), I have not encountered any that specifically cater to a Malaysian audience, which is sensitive to the specific socio-political and historical climate of the country, as well as the language needs of the audience. By penning my own views and inviting others from diverse backgrounds to do the same, I wish to build a community of women who come together to not only educate, but to empower one another. This online medium can also be taken to a real-

life setting. However, considering the intense scrutiny such gatherings face from authorities (see Chapter 1), this can begin within informal and private settings.

8.5 Limitations of study

This section addresses several prominent limitations of this study.

a) Participants

As noted in Chapter 3, existing studies on Muslim women and the veil have interviewed as few as 14 to as many as 127 women (see Hochel, 2013; Peek, 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Ruby, 2006). Keeping in line with the exploratory nature of this study to investigate an under-researched phenomenon, I believe that the 20 women I recruited as interview participants served well to that end, partly by allowing me to analyse in detail their interviews. Nevertheless, depending on their objectives, future inquiries should consider increasing the number of participants. This is because from the interview data of these 20 women, I was able to establish several dominant themes which encapsulate within them particular discourses that help inform the challenges and struggles these women faced. It would therefore, be interesting to see the ways in which future research could add to this finding, particularly in identifying the traces of these dominant themes, or even challenging them in revealing new ones. Beyond the number of participants, however, is an even more pertinent matter concerning the demographic attributes of the participants. As was explained in the Methodology chapter, this study recruited women who came from largely similar socio-economic backgrounds. This contributed to the omission of class as an analytical anchor point, despite existing literature reporting that the issue of (non)veiling in Malaysia is linked to class (see Mouser, 2007; Ong, 1990). In addition, as the women I interviewed reside in urban areas, the urban versus *kampung* divide was also not adequately addressed although the issue was present in the analyses of several participants (for instance, Juliana in Chapter 6, and also Kartika, Fatma, Yasmin among others elsewhere in the interviews). Therefore, by including the voices of women not only from different socio-economic backgrounds but also from different localities, future research can investigate how the similarities and differences in the way that (non)veiling affects the lives of Muslim women in different socio-economic and geographical contexts.

b) Interviews

Only one round of interviews with the participants was conducted. Because of this, I was unable to explore the diachronic aspect in their ongoing identity construction. As at least one participant who was non-veiled at the time of the interview has now donned the veil, I believe looking at the changes that these women undergo over one or several years would be interesting. Therefore, a longitudinal study to examine and document the processes of identity construction could provide rich insights.

Alternative sites for the analysis of identity constructions are explicated below in Section 8.6.

c) Types and quantities of collected media data

I have explained in previous chapters that this thesis did not seek to conduct an extensive media study of the discursive constructions of Malaysian Muslim women with regards to the veil. It also did not aim to investigate the implications of media representations on the identity constructions of the participating non-veiled Muslim women. Therefore, the types and quantities of the collected media data reflected the specific aim of this study, which was to provide a descriptive and exploratory background picture of the context of Islamising Malaysia. Regardless, I acknowledge that exploring more diverse types of media, such as online blogs and/or vlogs of non-veiled Muslim women, could yield various insights into the representations of Muslim women in Malaysia.

8.6 Recommendations for future research

Several avenues for future research have been identified from the findings of this study.

a) Rural settings

As was iterated in the previous section, the *kampung* setting needs to be researched in order to elucidate further, any variances stemming from the urban versus *kampung* divide as well as class differences on the issues concerning (non)veiling, and also on the processes of identity construction. The countryside and rural areas are enclaves of tradition and culture, and so women who live in these areas arguably have different or limited access to alternative discourses concerning (non)veiling.

b) Minority voices/regional settings

In this study, I began the work of including more minority voices, such as those of *muallaf* as well as the indigenous peoples from Sabah and Sarawak. Most of the existing literature on (non)veiled women in Malaysia focuses on the majority Malay-Muslims, as “it is the veiled and pious iteration of middle-class Malay womanhood that is taken as the normative standard and ideal to which all should aspire” (Izharuddin, 2018, p. 162). However, as there are also Muslims in Malaysia who come from minority backgrounds, for instance, some of my participants and myself, it would be interesting to examine in further detail how this deviation from the normative standard affects minority women. This is an especially pertinent point considering Islamisation (and the accompanying fraught relations between Malays and non-Malays, and between Muslims and non-Muslims) arguably affects Peninsular Malaysia more than the more integrated and tolerant Sabah and Sarawak (see Chan, 2018; Grudgings, 2014; Walters, 2007).

c) Social media

One of the most striking observations from the interview data worth further exploration in future research concerns Suzana’s account of being criticised on social media for wearing the hijab when she in fact would not normally veil (Excerpt 6.8). Increasingly, much of contemporary interaction revolves around social media, which brings about its own set of benefits and disadvantages to the parties involved. For instance, Suzana claimed that it was a former student of hers who criticised her for allegedly disrespecting the religious obligation of veiling, implying that Suzana was only doing it to acquire attention on social media. It is common for Malaysians to take offence at women who only wear the veil on certain occasions, as the latter are viewed as those who do not fully commit to it, which is also evidenced in Siti’s account in Excerpt 6.6. A veiled respondent in Hochel’s (2013) study expressed similar beliefs, stating that “the tudung is not something people should wear one day and then take off a few days later” (p. 48). Several articles in *Harian Metro* also lend support to this claim. Actresses Elfaeza and Puteri Liyana (both of whom wear the tudung) expressed their worries that the public might consider them to be ridiculing the image of veiled women as they appeared in productions in which they played non-veiled women (Amry, 2016; Sina, 2016).

This brings to the fore the presence of multiple overlapping tensions. I argue that the criticism directed at Suzana became more intense because it was relayed by a former

student, as it indicates that the latter had completely disregarded the respect owed to Suzana as her teacher. Because in Malaysia a deep-rooted culture of respect for teachers is instilled (Dolton, Marcenaro, de Vries, & She, 2018), local norms thus expect some degree of deference from student to teacher, even long after they have parted ways. However, it is possible that the student felt emboldened to utter such a disparaging comment to someone in a respected position because she is ‘a keyboard warrior.’ The feature of obscurity that social media possesses, allows for many to be both empowered and abusive to others, with the latter giving birth to the phrase ‘hiding behind a keyboard’ (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Shavers & Bair, 2016).

This observation points to social media (and online communicative media, more generally) as being a central platform or stage on (or through) which identities can be articulated (Huffaker & Calvert, 2006), because they offer users an accessible and convenient platform through which they can creatively manipulate linguistic resources to craft and perform certain identities (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Muslim social media influencers such as Dina Tokio – whose comments on hijabi communities becoming a toxic cult and whose subsequent unveiling caused an uproar and a torrent of cruel taunts from some Muslims (Amaliah, 2018; Srouji, 2018), corroborates this point. Most recently, and in the Malaysian context, Emma Maembong, known among Malaysians for her sweet, girl-next-door look with the hijab, caused a similar reaction when she posted a photo of herself on her Instagram without the hijab. This was followed shortly after with her changing her profile photo to a non-veiled one, thus, effectively announcing to the world that she was no longer a veiled woman. In light of this observation and the pervasiveness of social media, the time is ripe for future research to explore social media and Muslim women’s use of it in their construction of identities (see Piela, 2012).

d) Allies

Moreover, as was also explained previously, future research should also include the voices of the ‘allies’ who (literally) come to the rescue of non-veiled women and also support them in the face of prejudice. In this study, I also observed a gendered dynamic to be present, wherein male relatives or associates, when compared with their female counterparts, were more supportive to their non-veiled daughters, partners, friends. I believe that understanding the reasons and motivations behind their efforts to protect these women, as well as exploring the causes of such gendered dynamics

can help provide insights that can be used to inform awareness campaigns. Specifically, on the ways family, friends, and members of the public can play a part in countering hostile attitudes towards non-veiled women. Malaysia is a predominantly patriarchal society, and men continue to advance hostile messages to the masses that denigrate non-veiled Muslim women, such as in the case of the preacher noted in Chapter 1, and also Malaysian entrepreneur Aliff Syukri, who filmed himself caning his pre-teen daughter for having removed her hijab in front of male strangers (Emma, 2019). Therefore, I believe that highlighting that there are men who come to the protection of non-veiled women and that they do not espouse the dominant hostile views adopted by some men would make the latter more cognizant of their internalised biases against these women, and be compelled to challenge and discard them.

e) Former Muslims

Additionally, I recruited women who considered themselves Muslims. I did not include non-veiled women who had renounced Islam. This was a conscious decision because I had wanted to focus on how Muslim women who do not veil reconcile this fact with their faith in God and Islam. During the recruitment process, one woman asked if she could participate although she had left Islam. While I politely declined that opportunity for this research, I believe that insightful responses can be elicited from former Muslim women. For instance, some of the Malaysian women in Izharuddin's (2018) study had renounced Islam when they decided to stop wearing the hijab. However, I acknowledge that undertaking such research would be highly-controversial and sensitive, as Malaysian laws do not allow Muslims to commit apostasy, and as such these women may be exposed to legal action and reprimand.

8.7 Final remarks

I conclude by emphasising that this thesis has crucially contributed to pertinent discussions concerning gender and Muslim women, with the particular focus on those who do not veil and their identity constructions. By exploring the discursive identity construction of non-veiled Malaysian Muslim women, this study has added to the much-needed understanding on religious identity, a perspective that thus far has been largely ignored in the fields of language, discourse, and identity. Thus, this thesis has offered critical insights to the continuing efforts to expand knowledge on theory,

methodology, and analysis on language and identity. The examination of these women's discourses not only illustrated the complexities of identity construction, but also highlighted the myriad of tensions and struggles they continuously endure in an increasingly critical environment. Inspired by their tenacity and strength, this study has also shed light upon potential avenues for empowerment and change. Furthermore, this study has identified areas for future research that can advance scholarship on language, identity, religion, gender, and Muslim women

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APPENDICES

Appendix A (Screenshot of signatures page of ethical approval form):

J Signatures

Research student	Date
	28/06/2016
Supervisor	Date
	29-06-2016

K Action


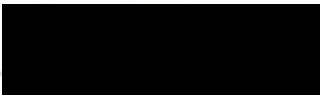
Action taken

☒ **Approved**

☐ **Approved with modification or conditions – see Notes below**

☐ **Action deferred – see Notes below**

☐ **[Where applicable] CRB clearance reported to HSSREC**

Name	Date
	30/06/16
Signature	

Appendix B (Screenshot of a part of a signed letter detailing changes to the collected data):

Changes to data collected

Name : Farhana Binti Abdul Fatah

Student ID : 1360316

Project title : Rhetoric of the Non-veiled: Exploring religious identity construction among Malaysian Muslim women who do not veil



Supervisor : Stephanie Schnurr

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is written to inform the ethical approval committee of the changes made to the type of data collected for my PhD project as titled above. In my original ethical approval form which was approved in 2016 prior to my data collection, I had outlined face-to-face interviews as my primary source of data, and public campaign materials on (non)veiling as the supplementary data. These materials consisted of posters, brochures and content media pages. The interviews remain my primary source of data, and detailed care had been taken to observe the ethical requirements and to safeguard the participants' safety and confidentiality as were outlined in the original ethical form.

Considering the details explicated in this letter, I hope that the ethical approval committee permits the project to be carried out to its completion.

Signatures:

Research student		Date	<u>23/05/19</u>
Supervisor		Date	<u>23-05-19</u>

Appendix C (Sample participant information and informed consent form):



"LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF THE NON-VEILED"

Informed Consent Form for (Participant Name): _____

This informed consent form is for the participants who are invited to participate in a PhD research entitled: Listening to the Voices of the Non-Veiled.

Name of Principle Researcher: Farhana Abdul Fatah
Name of Organization: Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK
Name of Sponsor: University of Warwick
Name of Research Project: Listening to the Voices of the Non-Veiled

This document consists of two parts. Please read the statements written under each part carefully.

Part I: Information Sheet

Researcher

My name is Farhana Abdul Fatah and I am a PhD student at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. I am inviting you to participate in my research, which seeks to explore the feelings and experiences of Muslim women in Malaysia who do not wear the hijab.

Research Purpose

I am conducting this research because I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and feelings of Muslim women in Malaysia who have chosen not to wear the 'tudung.'

Voluntary participation in interviews

As a participant, you will be invited to participate in an interview which should take roughly one hour. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. You can decide to not participate, or to withdraw at any point (even after data collection).

Interview Procedure

I would like to audio-record the interview, but will be happy to switch off the recorder at any point. If you prefer, we can also do the interview on the phone or via skype. If, at any point during the interview, you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you may choose to not answer them. Please tell me and I will gladly move on to the next question. Any information you tell during the interview will be kept strictly confidential, and any names mentioned (including yours) will be anonymized and given pseudonyms. The recorded interview will be stored in a safe location, and only I and my supervisor will have access to it.

Risks and benefits

If you feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics mentioned throughout the course of the interview, you do not have to answer, and you have the right to withdraw at any point. But based on past experience, people often enjoy the experience of being interviewed and appreciate the opportunity of sharing their stories and experiences.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept entirely confidential, and I will not share any information which could identify you with anyone, including other research participants. All information gathered from the interviews will be kept confidential, and real names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You have the right to not participate in this research. Even if you had initially agreed to participate, but change your mind later, you have the right to withdraw your participation at any point of this research.

Dissemination of findings:

If you like I will send you a brief summary of the findings of my study at the end of the research.

Contact Person

I understand that you may have further concerns regarding this research and involvement as a participant. I welcome your questions, and you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact any of the following:

Farhana Abdul Fatah

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

OR my supervisor

Dr Stephanie Schnurr

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about the feelings and experiences of Muslim women in Malaysia who do not wear the hijab. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and my role in it, which have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Appendix D (Call for participants adverts in Malay [top] and English [bottom]):

**PESERTA KAJIAN
DIPERLUKAN!!!**

SIAPA?

Penyertaan anda dialu-alukan jika anda seorang:

- Warganegara Malaysia
- Wanita Muslim yang tidak bertudung
- Sekurang-kurangnya berusia 18 tahun


UNTUK APA?

Anda akan menyertai kajian PhD yang ingin mengetahui dan memahami pengalaman dan perasaan wanita Muslim yang tidak bertudung di Malaysia.

APA YANG TERLIBAT?

- Sesi temu bual 'one-on-one' mengenai kehidupan, pengalaman dan perasaan anda sebagai seorang wanita Muslim di Malaysia yang tidak bertudung.

Sesi temu bual tersebut boleh dilakukan dalam Bahasa Melayu dan/atau English



WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Jika anda berminat dan ingin mengetahui maklumat lanjut, sila hubungi:

Farhana Abdul Fatah
f.abdul-fatah@warwick.ac.uk

Penyertaan anda dinantikan!

**RESEARCH
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!**

WHO EXACTLY?

Your participation is welcomed if you are:

- Malaysian
- A Muslim woman who does not wear the hijab
- At least 18 years-old


WHAT FOR?

You will participate in a PhD study that seeks to explore and understand the feelings and experiences of Muslim women who do not wear the hijab in Malaysia.

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- A one-on-one interview about your life, experiences, and feelings as a Muslim woman in Malaysia who does not wear the hijab

The interview can be conducted in both English and/or Malay



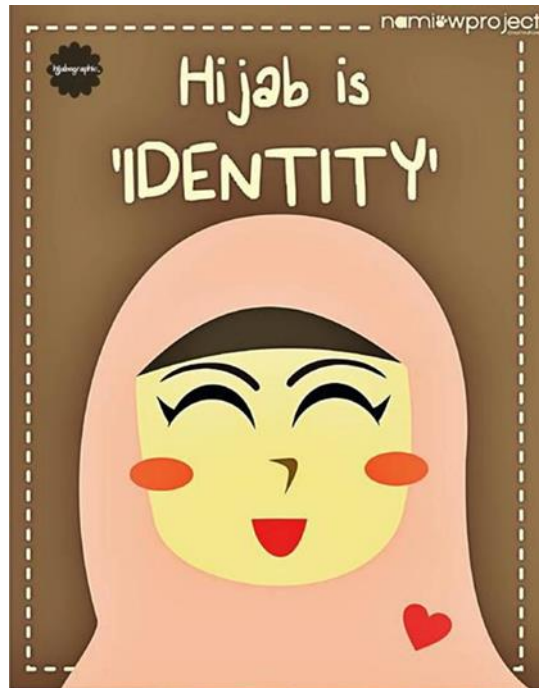
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If you are interested & would like to know more, please contact:

Farhana Abdul Fatah
f.abdul-fatah@warwick.ac.uk

Looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Appendix E (Negative rhetoric on non-veiled Muslim women used in interviews):



Appendix F (Transcription key):

Adapted from Jefferson (2004)

CAPITALS	where capital letters appear it denotes that something was said loudly or even shouted
xxx	emphasis/stress
xxx-	A single hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off, with level pitch.
yes?	A question mark indicates rising intonation at turn completion.
yes.	A period after a word indicates falling intonation at turn completion. (or just say turn is definitely complete)
((hand clap))	Double parentheses indicate transcriber's comments, including description of non-verbal behaviour.
the (park)	Single parentheses indicate an uncertain transcription.
(.)	A full stop inside brackets denotes a micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length.
(0.2)	A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause. This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription.

Personal convention:

“xxx”	in-text quotation
xxx	non-English words
...	lengthened and hanging pause
(unintelligible)	word/phrase unclear to transcribe
[xxx]	input of own word/phrase
[[xxx]]	input of translation of preceding word/phrase

Appendix G (Sample coding template):

No.	COLUMN 1 (Raw data – Excerpt)	COLUMN 2 (Preliminary Codes)	REMARKS
01	<p>25. Farhana: okay ummm so describe to me what your family is like.</p> <p>26. Syakira: (.) ummm they're a very...casual, laid-back family...we're very open to...new ideas.</p> <p>27. Farhana: okay</p> <p>28. Syakira: and...we're very close-knit.</p> <p>29. Farhana: alright. what do you mean um...open to new ideas?</p> <p>30. Syakira: um (.) open as in...we don't really judge people by what they do...if (.) they were to, you know do something different from what society (.) expects them to do, they'll be like, oh okay...it's okay. that's what you... (.) that's what you like! so, you can do it [clears throat]</p>	<p>Descriptive Coding: ¹Childhood upbringing</p> <p>Descriptive Coding: ²Open-mindedness</p>	
02	<p>130. Syakira: ummm (.) uh and...I kinda liked the environment because compared to most schools, this school is [unintelligible] like the (.) majority of the students there were Chinese and Indians.</p> <p>131. Farhana: okay</p> <p>132. Syakira: so Malays were like (.) a - malays were, you can consider as the minority</p> <p>133. Farhana: mmm</p> <p>134. Syakira: so...</p> <p>135. Farhana: okay</p> <p>136. Syakira: um...growing up with them - because now I'm in [redacted], which is pretty much all Malays</p>	<p>Descriptive Coding: ³Schooling</p> <p>Versus Coding: ⁴Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity</p>	Multiracial schools are definitely a positive thing as remarked by other participants such as Zureen and others.

Appendix H (Sample codebook template):

CODEBOOK

LEGEND:

Descriptive

Structural

Versus

Emotive

In Vivo

No.	Type	Code	Brief definition	Full definition	Rule(s) of Inclusion	Rule(s) of Exclusion	Participant(s)
01.	S/D	Conversion	Participants' conversion story	Mainly participants' conversion story, but can perhaps include family members if it is pertinent to research. Not applicable to all participants	Participants' own conversion story – process, decision, reasons, consequences	Others' conversion stories (parents, etc)	Rose, Erma, Liza, Huda
02.	D	Identity – hijab as identity marker	Hijab – (Muslim) identity	The hijab is explicitly or implicitly linked to the notion of identity	Brought up by participants, though I may ask about the link between hijab and Muslim woman	NA	Rose, Thalia, Azreen, Erma, Fatma, Huda, Juliana, Kartika, Mumirah, Nadia, Siti, Suzana, Syakira, Yasmin, Zureen
03	S/D	Reason(s) for not wearing tudung	Reason(s) the participants do not wear tudung	NA	Can range from various reasons	NA	Rose, Dayana, Erma, Fatma, Huda, Juliana, Liza, Mumirah

Appendix I (Dominant themes emergent from interview data):

No.	Themes	No. of participants (n=20)	Most dominant code(s)
01	<p>Being ‘Othered’ & Doing ‘Othering’:</p> <p>Participants talk about instances when they were made to feel different than other Muslim women, and also when they distinguished themselves from other Muslims. These instances also included situations of tension, conflict, and confrontation with other parties.</p>	n=20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veiled women vs. Non-veiled women (n=16) • Participant vs. Family (n=12) • Good vs. Bad Muslims (n=11)
02	<p>God, religion, faith:</p> <p>Participants talk about the doing of religious rituals, their relationship with God, and also any other topics that revolves around God, religion, and faith.</p>	n=20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing/not doing prayers (n=16) • Not wearing tudung as a sin (n=13) • Between self and God (n=10)
03	<p>Religious texts:</p> <p>Participants talk about texts in the Quran or Hadith, relating to whether or not the hijab is mandated by God. They also talk about the notions of choice and compulsion when it comes to wearing hijab.</p>	n=19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing the hijab or not is a choice (n=9) • Compulsion vs. Choice (n=8) • Scriptural interpretation (n=6)
04	<p>Family, filial piety, and femininity:</p> <p>Participants talk about family relationships and dynamics, as well as the gendered roles and assumptions associated with being a woman (in particular relating to the hijab)</p>	n=19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filial obedience/loyalty (n=12) • Marriage as factor in hijab-wearing (n=8) • Childhood upbringing (n=8)
05	<p>Muslim communities and societies:</p> <p>Participants talk about Muslim communities and societies particularly concerning the influence of culture, beliefs and norms, as well as various conflicts</p>	n=19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative/religious (n=10) • Certain communities and their members can be and are open-minded (n=9)

	and confrontations that take place as a result of these influences.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upbringing is important in moulding communities and societies (n=9)
06	Workplaces and institutions: Participants talk about veiling and non-veiling in workplaces, classrooms, and institutional norms regarding (non)veiling. They also talk about authoritative figures and confrontations that have ensued as a result of (non)veiling.	n=18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant vs. authority figures (n=9) • Being compelled to wear/not wear the veil (n=8) • Religious authorities/figures (n=6)
07	Expectations, assumptions, and perceptions: Participants talk about the expectations, assumptions, and perceptions society and others have regarding and toward (non)veiled Muslim women, including stereotypes.	n=17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations (n=13) • Stereotypes (n=8) • Veiled women as possessing certain positive virtues (n=7)
08	Modesty: Participants talk about broad and specific notions of modesty. The notion of taking care/safeguarding/preserving (which can be encapsulated with the Malay word “ <i>jaga</i> ”) is also talked about.	n=17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Aurat</i> (n=15) • Modesty (n=12) • “<i>Jaga...</i>” (n=12)
09	Judgment: Participants talk about the judgments non-veiled Muslim women face from other people.	n=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal judgment (n=14) • Judgment based on outward appearance (n=9) • Judgment from other people (n=9)
10	External vs. Internal: Participants talk about a person’s appearance as not a reliable indicator of their character. They also talk about the doing of deeds that are done either in front of others or in private.	n=15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External vs. Internal or Appearance vs. Deed/Character (n=14) • Good character as Muslim (n=9) • Covert vs. overt deeds (n=3)
11	Conduct and behavioural norms associated with the tudung:	n=15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing the hijab as part of observing

	Participants talk about certain conduct and behavioural norms that are tied to wearing the tudung that influence interpersonal communication, and can also be a barrier to performing certain duties.		<p>etiquette and showing politeness (n=12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tudung acts as a behavioural regulator (n=6) • Tudung acts as a barrier in interpersonal communication (n=5)
12	<p>Change:</p> <p>Participants talk about the notion of change relating to the self and also generally, with regards to the tudung.</p>	n=9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to change (to wear hijab, change for the better, etc.) (n=4) • Waiting for the time to wear hijab (n=4) • Change within oneself (n=3)
13	<p>Being an inadequate and incomplete Muslim:</p> <p>Participants talk about the notions of incompleteness, imperfection brought about due to their non-veiling, and how they believe veiling can bring about a sense of completion.</p>	n=6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperfect Muslim (n=2) • Perfect vs. imperfect Muslim woman (n=1) • “Half Muslim” (n=1)

Appendix J (Mingguan Wanita magazine covers compilation):



Appendix K (NVMW as featured on the cover pages of *Mingguan Wanita*):



Appendix L (VMW as featured on the cover pages of *Mingguan Wanita*):



Appendix M (NVMW and VMW as featured on the cover pages of *Mingguan Wanita*):



Appendix N (Emergent themes on ‘tudung’ and ‘hijab’ in *The Star* articles in 2016):

No.	Emergent themes	No. of times identified in articles (one article can have multiple themes)
01	Commercialisation	15
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the marketing of tudung or tudung-related products.	
02	Entrepreneurship	15
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention individuals who launched businesses that sell tudung or tudung-related accessories.	
03	Fashion	14
	Definition: Articles that focus on tudung or tudung-related accessories as fashion items.	
04	State-sanctioned policing of women’s bodies and conduct	12
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention state-sanctioned activities that police women’s way of dress and conducting themselves in public. This especially concerns the ultra-conservative Malaysian state of Kelantan.	
05	Tudung as a marker of identities (religious, ethnic, corporate)	11
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention tudung to explicitly mark the identities of individuals, and in several cases, the corporate identity of an Islamic-based company.	
06	Others	10
	Definition: Articles in which ‘tudung’ or ‘hijab’ is mentioned, but are either not the focus or irrelevant.	
07	Modesty/Syariah/aurat	9
	Definition: Articles that mention or discuss the tudung as an item of clothing in line with the Islamic principles of modesty, syariat, and preserving the aurat.	
08	Islamisation/Arabisation	9
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention tudung in discussions revolving increased religious fundamentalism and conservatism in Malaysia.	
09	Tudung as a symbol of unity in diversity	7
	Definition: Articles that highlight tudung-wearers to signify their religious and racial identities in a context of diverse, multicultural society to promote a message of unity. Closely tied to the theme ‘tudung as a marker of identities’	
10	Crime (appearance and/or accessory)	7

	Definition: Articles that mention the tudung worn as the attire of convicted or suspected criminals, and also tudung worn as accessory to crime committed.	
11	Not wearing tudung as a punishable offence	7
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the act of not wearing tudung and wearing indecent clothing as a punishable offence. This especially concerns the state of Kelantan, and is closely linked to state-sanctioned policing of women's bodies and conduct.	
12	Public scrutiny of women's dress and conduct	5
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the scrutiny and criticism received by mainly women who have chosen to stop wearing tudung.	
13	Commodity	5
	Definition: Articles that promote the tudung as an item of precious commodity that symbolises wealth, class, and exclusivity.	
14	Lifestyle	5
	Definition: Articles that frame and promote the tudung as an item suitable for wear to suit certain lifestyles and occasions, such as sports and formal wear.	
15	Choice	3
	Definition: Articles that mention the decision to wear tudung as an individual's choice.	
16	Tudung used as a marketing tool	3
	Definition: Articles that mention tudung as being used for marketing purposes for other primary products.	
17	Tudung-wearing perceived as oppression	2
	Definition: Articles that mention the misperception held by some that wearing the tudung is an act of oppression.	
18	Tudung as a regulator of interpersonal communication and behaviour	2
	Definition: Articles that mention tudung-wearing as a factor in influencing the ways the individual communicates and conduct themselves with others, especially those of the opposite sex.	
19	Tudung-wearing as a marker of increased religiosity	2
	Definition: Articles that mention tudung-wearing as seen by some to be a marker of increased piety.	
20	Tudung-wearing as supposed deterrent of sexual misconduct	2

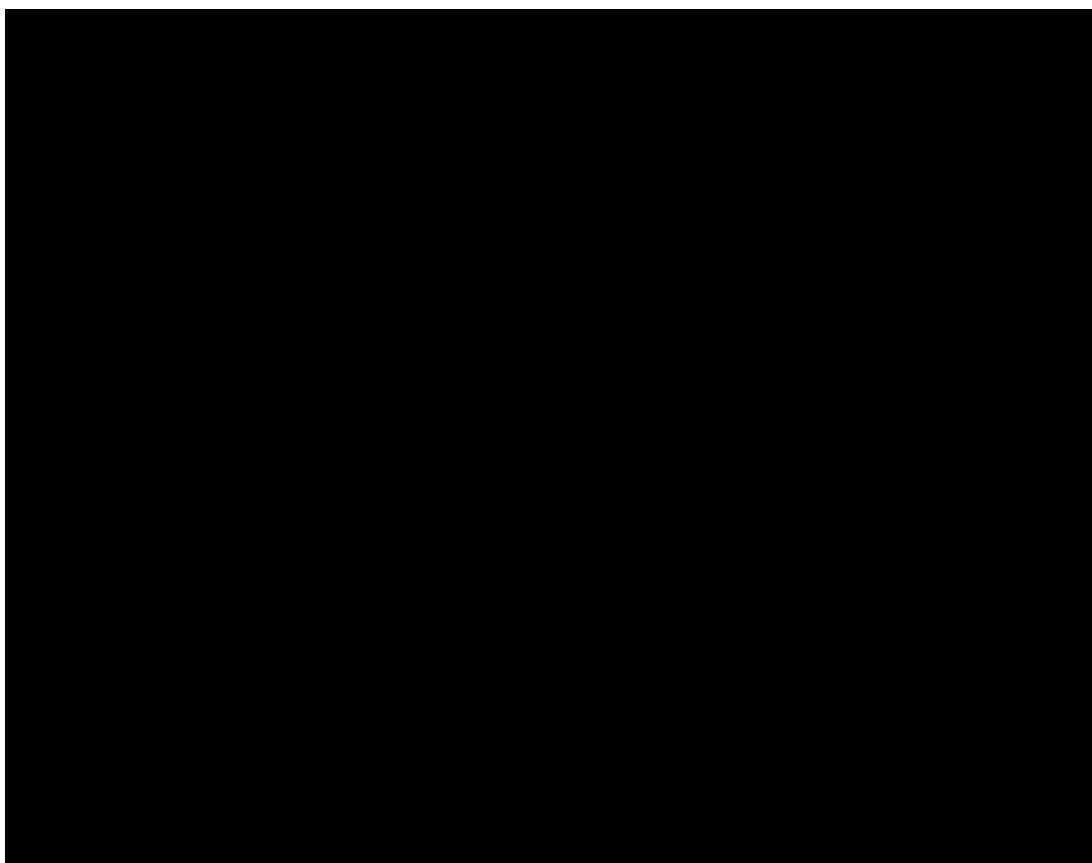
	Definition: Articles that mention that an individual who wears tudung should not be subject to sexual harassment.	
21	Not wearing tudung as an act of sin	1
	Definition: Article that mention not wearing of tudung as an act of sin.	
22	Career	1
	Definition: Article that mention tudung-wearing as an important factor in making career-related decisions.	
23	Freedom	1
	Definition: Article that mention an individual who wears tudung as being free.	

Appendix O (Emergent themes on ‘tudung’ and ‘hijab’ in *Harian Metro* articles in 2016):

No.	Emergent themes	No. of times identified in articles (one article can have multiple themes)
01	Entrepreneurship	89
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention individuals who launched businesses that sell tudung or tudung-related accessories.	
02	Commercialisation	65
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the marketing of tudung or tudung-related products.	
03	Fashion	62
	Definition: Articles that focus on tudung or tudung-related accessories as fashion items.	
04	Others	44
	Definition: Articles in which ‘tudung’ or ‘hijab’ is mentioned, but are either not the focus or irrelevant.	
05	Lifestyle	33
	Definition: Articles that frame and promote the tudung as an item suitable for wear to suit certain lifestyles and occasions, such as sports and formal wear.	
06	Career	24
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the wearing of tudung as either a hindrance to career attainment or advancement, or otherwise. Also, tudung-wearing as an important factor in making career-related decisions.	
07	Modesty/aurat/syariat	20
	Definition: Articles that mention or promote the tudung as an item of clothing in line with the Islamic principles of modesty, syariat, and preserving the aurat.	
08	Public scrutiny of women’s dress and conduct	16
	Definition: Articles that focus on or mention the scrutiny and criticism received by mainly women who have chosen to stop wearing tudung.	
09	Commodity	12
	Definition: Articles that promote the tudung as an item of precious commodity that symbolises wealth, class, and exclusivity.	
10	Crime	11
	Definition: Articles that mention the tudung worn as the attire of convicted or suspected criminals, and also tudung worn as accessory to crime committed.	
11	Choice	6

	Definition: Articles that mention the decision to wear tudung as an individual's choice.	
12	Tudung as a regulator of interpersonal communication and behaviour	5
	Definition: Articles that mention tudung-wearing as a factor in influencing the ways the individual communicates and conduct themselves with others, especially those of the opposite sex.	
13	Hijrah	5
	Definition: Articles that mention the woman's journey of 'hijrah' or spiritual change that is marked by the wearing of tudung.	
14	Religious duties	3
	Definition: Articles that mention or promote the tudung as part of the item to perform religious duties such as praying.	
15	Pro-veiling campaign	2
	Definition: Articles that focus on campaigns by public institutions or NGOs that advocate tudung-wearing.	
16	Health and beauty	2
	Definition: Articles that mention tudung-wearing women as needing to take care of their haircare as part of a wider health and beauty regime.	
17	Socio-economic status	1
	Definition: Article that mention tudung-selling as a marker of the individual's socio-economic status.	
18	Tudung used as a marketing tool	1
	Definition: Article that mention tudung as being used for marketing purposes for another product.	
19	Institutional rules/etiquette	1
	Definition: Article that mention tudung-wearing as necessity to enter a religious building (mosque).	
20	Religious matters/solat	1
	Definition: Article that discuss tudung-wearing in a context of performing prayer.	
21	Health benefits	1
	Definition: Article that promote a tudung product as having certain health benefits to the wearer.	

Appendix P (Fiza and Rena's positioning in relation to guests on *Wanita Hari Ini*):

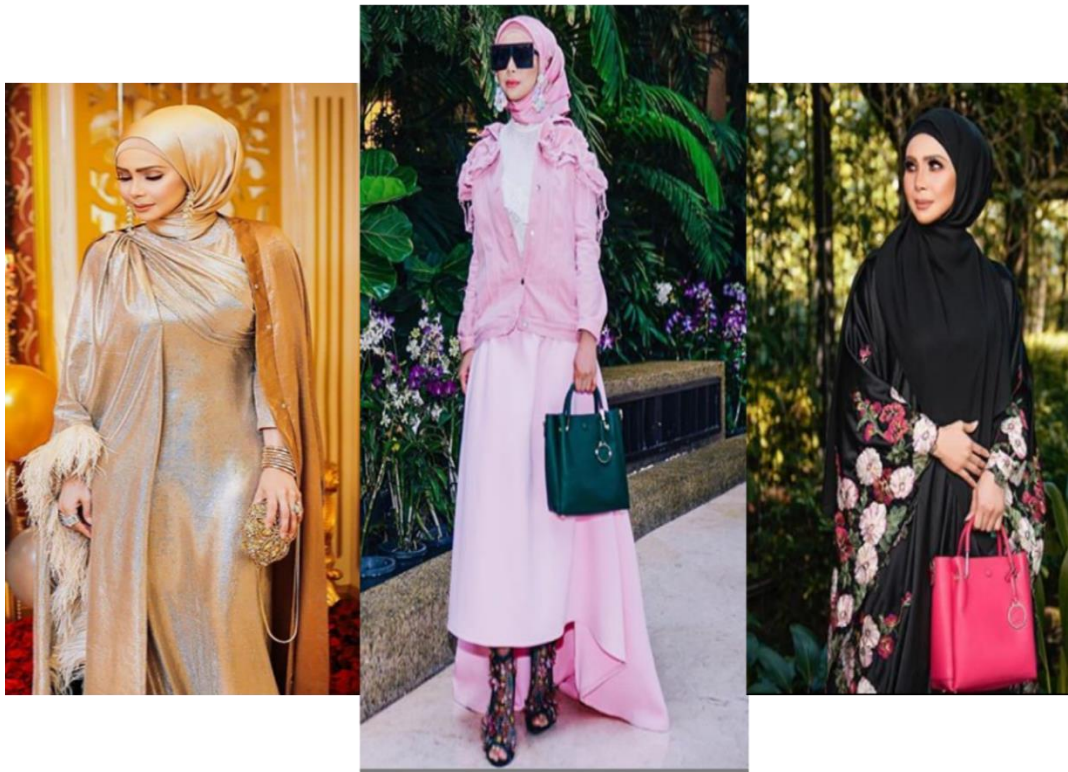


Appendix Q (Traits and characteristics of a Muslim woman as stated by participants):

Category	Traits
Faith & Religiosity	<p>Follows the Quran Embodies the essence of religion Obeys God's command Believes in (one) God Moderate Embraces religion mentally and physically Practising Observes the five pillars of Islam Observes the dietary requirements Believes she is Muslim Possesses faith Possesses <i>akidah</i> Performs the daily prayers</p>
Appearance	<p>Style of dress Modest Covers her <i>aurat</i></p>
Personal characteristics	<p>Exemplary Filial Good at balancing work and family Inspirational Determined Caring Compassionate/Kind Role model Guide/Advisor Wise Possesses dignity and self-respect Practises self-monitoring Possesses integrity Spreads beautiful things Encourages growth (Good) intentions Modest Moderate Relaxed Confident Intelligent/Educated/Knowledgeable Independent equal to men Believes that she is equal to men Happy being a woman Comfortable/self-assured Possesses freedom Respected Business-minded Successful Graceful Strong Ambitious Knows right and wrong Fair</p>

	<p>Understanding</p> <p>Conceals her <i>aib</i></p> <p>Acknowledges the traditional roles assigned to her</p>
Interpersonal behaviour	<p>Does not live an excessive social life</p> <p>Does not destroy the lives of others</p> <p>Nurtures relationship with others</p> <p>Monitors her speech and socialisation around and with others</p> <p>Respects others</p>

Appendix R (Rozita Che Wan, a Malaysian celebrity and hijabista (Instagram, 2019)):



Appendix S (A photo showing various *baju kurung* styles, taken from my own personal collection):



Appendix T (Some snippets from the Women's March in 2019 in Kuala Lumpur)
(Globalia Naesa, 2019):

