

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: ADAPTING AND FILTERING POPULAR CULTURE IN MALAYSIAN TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

The view that culture is ever changing is now widely accepted. The localisation of foreign culture becomes significant due to the presence of global mass media. This paper aims to explore the concept of hybridity in popular culture and also to demonstrate the way Malaysian government promotes hybridisation of popular culture in the television programmes. Hybridity relates to the process in which culture is changed through adaptation, reinforced by deterritorialisation, and conditioned by a set of unequal power relationships. Hybridisation in cultural industry represents the interaction of local cultural agents with global forms to produce dynamic localised cultural commodities. In Malaysia, adaptation and censorship are two significant ways of hybridisation which is enforced and monitored by several government and non-government bodies. This study maintains that while hybrid culture benefits subaltern group, hybrid process is being used by dominant sectors in Malaysia to maintain their political hegemony.

Keywords: *Censorship, drama serials, hybridity, popular culture, adaptation.*

INTRODUCTION

The argument for cultural purity, which implies that culture is static or fixed, is viewed as being irrelevant (Werbner 1997). According to Tomlinson (1999: 144) the nature of culture as “fluid, dynamic, protean, ever changing—and at no point in history fixed, established, static” is now the widely accepted view. The changes of cultural aspects in the local scenario are evident in many cultures in the world due to the influence of foreign cultures. Hybridity takes many forms. For instance, in the post-colonial study the adaptation of colonial language in the local has produced hybrid languages which are termed as pidgin and creole.

In the global era, the adaptation of foreign culture in the local setting is pervasive due to the presence of the global mass media in facilitating the transfer of knowledge

and images. The paper's aim is firstly, to explore the concept of hybridity in popular culture. Secondly, the aim is to demonstrate the way Malaysian government promotes hybridisation of popular culture in Malaysian television programmes.

ADAPTATION AND HYBRIDITY

"Adaptation" rather than the term "hybrid" is commonly used in popular culture to demonstrate a process in which global or foreign culture become localised. On the one hand the term *adaptation* means "to change (something or yourself) to suit different conditions or uses" (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English* 1995: 14). Hybridisation, on the other hand, is a term originally used in biology. Hybrid refers to "a plant or animal that has been produced from two different types of plant or animal, especially to get better characteristics, or anything that is a mixture of two different things" (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English* 1995: 696).

In social sciences and humanity, hybridisation relates to the political process in which culture is adapted or changed through adaptation. Hybridity symbolises power which has the potential of "empowering, transformative, dangerous or transformative force" to the local culture (Werbner 1997: 4). The work of Bhabha (1994) has been seminal in changing attitudes towards hybridity. In Bhabha's (1994) post-colonial study, the notion of hybridity is entwined with a discourse of race. That is, racial-mixing was viewed by imperial power as being negative. Bhabha's work demonstrates that the colonised subject gains power from the new cultural site created from the coloniser's and colonised's combined cultural practices. He states that the new culture that often surfaces as a result of cultural mixing can be more accurately recognised as a "third space." In another study, Garcia Canclini (2005) demonstrates that the marginalised culture of Latin America's migrant towns is not diminished in the process of hybridity. Rather, these rural migrants here successfully commercialised these so-called marginalised art and craft for tourists' consumption. Hybrid culture bestows power to subaltern groups to create a new political culture to resist hegemonic power (Bhabha, 1994; Canclini, 2005).

Cultural critiques in the post-colonial study (Canclini, 2005) have led to hybridity being celebrated in popular culture. The process of globalisation has had a particular impact on modern popular music, a forum in which can be found many examples of hybrid cultural forms, as attested by researches which have been undertaken in this area, at least in Asia (Shim 2006; Dujunco 2002; Roberson 2001; Lockard, 1995). Lent (1995) gives an example of a Japanese music group, named Shang Shang Typhoon, which creates a musical fusion. Lent (1995: 5) states, "Shang Shang Typhoon, mixes Western rock, jazz, and reggae with Japanese *enka* ballads, folk, Okinawan melodies, and Buddhist festival song." Tomlinson (1999) takes an example of youth popular music forms like hip-hop (1999) to demonstrate the notion of hybridity. He states that the music is useful for comprehending the proliferation of new cultural identifications. Shim (2006: 27) argues that hybridity embraces "new practices of cultural and performative expression." Hybridisation experienced by Korean popular music industry represents the interaction of "local cultural agents and actors...with [new] global forms, using them as resources" (Shim 2006: 38) to produce dynamic localised cultural commodities that can be exported to other countries.

HYBRIDITY AND HETEROGENEITY OF CULTURE

Tomlinson (1999) argues that, in the age of globalisation, the emergence of hybrid culture has been reinforced by deterritorialisation. He states that:

[T]he idea that globalised culture is hybrid culture has strong intuitive appeal which follows directly from the notion of deterritorialisation. This is because the increasing traffic between cultures that the globalisation process brings suggests that the dissolution of the link between culture and place is accompanied by an intermingling of these disembedded cultural practice producing new complex hybrid forms of culture (Tomlinson 1999: 141).

Thus, deterritorialisation is a process that has been brought about by globalisation and occurs when “production, consumption, community, politics and identities become detached from local place” (Kearney 1995: 554). Thompson (1995) emphasises the role of the mass media in conveying symbolic forms to distant locales. Thompson (1995: 22) claims that “the development of new technical media may also have a profound impact on the ways in which individuals experience the spatial and temporal dimensions of social life.” Connell and Gibson (2004) highlight an example of deterritorialisation which is evident in the consumption of cultural commodity on television as well as a result of both migration and multicultural society. When local television delivers foreign television programmes into the home it is an example of deterritorialisation. For instance, they contend that:

[t]he “third world” is now very much a part of the “first”, whether in terms of the content of television, music and literature consumed by audiences, or in terms of the populations of most major cities, now polyglots of indigenous peoples and diverse migrant groups (Gibson 2004: 342)

The existence of global and national television has meant that the Third World is no longer a place which exclusively represents local culture. In relation to this, Appadurai (1990) highlights the significance of communication and technology in their role of repositioning and reimagining places. Globalisation, through the process of deterritorialisation, provides the alternative view that globalisation does not produce a homogeneous world culture (Featherstone 1993; Tomlinson 1999).

Canclini (2005) uses the notion of deterritorialisation to point to the weakening of the Western hegemony. He presents an example from Latin America, focusing on emigration in two locations in Mexico; Tijuana and Aguililla. Canclini (2005) shows the rise of margin cultures at the centre of globalised culture. Tomlinson (1999) summarises Canclini’s work by stating that, “what the example of Tijuana provides, then, is of a place where identity is complexly forged out of a ‘local’ experience dominated by its relationship with other places: the rest of Mexico, North America, the wider world—it is a “delocalised locality” (Tomlinson 1999: 140).

The emergence of new centres of cultural production has altered the global flow of cultural commodities which were previously dominated by Hollywood. The success of regional media centres, including Japan (Iwabuchi 2004), Korea (Shim 2006), Bollywood (Ganti 2002) and Brazilian television (Kottak 1990) provide choices for countries to diversify the content of their television programmes and intensify hybridisation.

POWER RELATIONS IN HYBRIDITY

Power relations are an important variable in the production of a hybrid culture. Tomlinson (1999: 146) argues that hybridity is not a “simple form of anarchic, unregulated culture.” Instead, hybrid culture is conditioned by a set of unequal power relationships (Kraidy 2002). Power struggles occur at the point at which imported cultural resources come into contact with local cultures. According to Kraidy (2002) the use of critical hybridity theory is useful to highlight the existence (or non-existence) of the political potential of hybridity. He argues that “[p]olitically, a critical hybridity theory considers hybridity as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential power” (Kraidy 2002: 317). He further argues that, “if hybridity consists merely of observing, cataloguing and celebrating multicultural mixture, the inequality that often characterises these mixtures is glossed over” (Kraidy 2002: 318). What Kraidy is suggesting then is that hybridity is not simply a neutral phenomenon; rather those that occupy hybrid spaces are inherently engaged in a political project. It should not be assumed that in the confluence of cultural resources the “powerful” does not simply integrate the “less powerful” entity for the latter’s benefit. Nederveen Pieterse (2009) argues that power relations are dynamic and transformable. He states that “hegemony is not merely reproduced but *refigured* in the process of hybridisation” (Pieterse 2009: 75). Power is refigured within a new (hybrid) cultural site.

Hybridity also can be utilised for the interest of dominant sectors (Chow, 1993). In criticising Bhabha (1994), Chow (1993: 35) argues that, “[W]hat Bhabha’s word ‘hybridity’ [revives], in the masquerade of deconstructing anti-imperialism, and the difficult theory, is an old functionalist notion of what dominant culture permits in the interest of maintaining its own equilibrium.” Ahmad (1995) for instance argues that as the hegemonic economic and cultural power, transnational corporations gain material benefits from hybridity.

In the case of localisation global cultural commodity, I argue that the Malaysian government censorship bodies acts as dominant sectors that filter the process of culture mixing. The refiguration of cultural hegemony is mediated by state’s political interest. My argument is supported by Shim (2006) which demonstrates that the emergence of Korean media centres is due to the government’s relax policy on imported popular culture. For this reason, Frow’s (1992) contention on the flow of global cultural commodity which is unregulated is not always true. He claims that “[I]n popular culture, mixing of elements and styles may passed unnoticed, be taken for granted or welcomed” (in Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 116). Both Nederveen Pieterse (2009) and Frow (1992) de-emphasise the state’s political project of the cultural site of the “third space.”

My contention is that some sectors of political and religious elite Malays are the dominant sectors that filter hybridity. The undesired values of promiscuous sexual conduct, dress which reveals sexuality and extreme popular music such as heavy metal and punk are censored strictly. Meanwhile, foreign cultural elements which do not contradict with the core values of Malay-Islam culture are encouraged to be accommodated. Through the censorship process the state wants to maintain the “purity” of local culture from cultural contamination of the West and as the same time wants to gain modernity. In one way, the purity and modernity of local

culture from undesired influence is an important source of hegemony for Malay-Islam political domination in Malaysian plural society. Given this, the state power has altered the kind of cultural hegemony that emerges from cultural hybridity mediated by television that empowers the subaltern group.

The political project of hybridity in cultural commodities demonstrates resistances in many ways. Kahn (2006) demonstrates that foreign dances in a Malay film is used to voice out anti-colonialisation. He also claims that in post-colonial Malaysia, Malay hybridity creates the foundation for a cosmopolitanism outlook. Kahn (2006) shows that the 1955 Malay film entitled *Penarek Becha* or “Trishaw Driver”, juxtaposes “Malay authentic culture” with Western cosmopolitan culture. The year that the film was produced coincided with the emergence of a heightened nationalism leading to the independence of Malaya in 1957. The scene that particularly portrayed the element of hybridity was set in the cabaret-cum-night club. Kahn (2006: 163) states:

... Ghazali and his friends are seen dancing a cha-cha with the hostesses. The music ends and Ghazali returns to his table and calls for another dance, this time a samba. Instead a young man stands up and announces that the next act will be an exhibition of *Inang Baru* to be performed by five male and five female dancers and a lead singer backed by a small Malay orchestra. Before the exhibition is allowed to proceed, Ghazali shouts out his displeasure, insisting again on samba. But he is politely rebuffed and the exhibition goes ahead, much to the delight of the rest of the audience, although when the camera pans to Ghazali he is looking angry and disgruntled.

Kahn (2006: 163) argues that the film symbolises “a plea for the decolonisation of Malay culture” through the presentation of Malay dance called *Inang Baru* after popularly known of foreign dances, samba, and cha-cha. Ghazali represents villainy that link to Western cultural contamination. Kahn (2006) contended that the pure Malay authentic culture as represented by *Inang Baru* together with *Joget* dance is in fact is hybridised. He states that these dances are “from older traditions of music and dance that were indigenised from Arabian sources, and subjected in turn to further outside influence—Portuguese, Latin and North America” (Kahn, 2006: 166).

Other works signal the birth of intended or unintended political project of resisting national culture through accommodation of foreign culture (Abu-Lughod 2005; Moorti 2004; Mandel 2002). Moorti’s (2004) study highlights how popular British quiz shows, and Hollywood game shows,¹ are adapted for Indian television. For example, the copyright for game shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* are bought by Indian television stations and then re-produced locally. When this occurs, these locally produced shows demonstrate a cultural fusion between Western and Tamil culture. On the other hand, Moorti’s study shows that Tamil versions of Western quiz and game shows have led to the creation of a Tamil vernacular identity, rather than a pan-Indian national identity. For instance the clothing of the hosts and contestants, which always consist of jeans, t-shirt and sneakers, represents Western identity. On the other hand, the Tamil cultural markers are evident in the requirement during the show that participants show their fluency in a pure Tamil

¹ This particular television game show is a version of the popular “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” program, renamed *Kaun Banega Crorepati*.

without English loan words. Moorti stresses that, “commodities become the access route for the expressions of vernacular nationalisms, bypassing national discourses of Indian-ness” (Moorti 2004: 550). In this case, indigenisation as a form of hybrid culture risks national sovereignty.

Another study which demonstrates “cultural fusion” is Mandel’s (2002) study which focuses on the production of a drama serial from Kazakhstan. The production of this drama serial has been guided by a British crew involved in the production of the well known drama serial *Crossroads*. The production of the Kazakhstan serial accommodates two cultural styles, which has contributed toward its success. In the end, the format replicated the glamorous lifestyles of the Hollywood *Santa Barbara* and *Tropicana* soap operas, whilst the content message highlighted “past and present politics, genres, ideologies, and nationalism” (Mandel 2002: 223) in addition to local development issues. She states, that “[t]he intertextualities of the products broadcast as *Crossroads* are variously understood by producers, sponsors, and audiences to be vodka, information on a new tax law, or a fashion statement (Mandel 2002: 223). Hence, both Moorti’s and Mandel’s studies show that the popularity of these locally produced programmes in India and Kazakhstan, at least in relation to audience reaction, are celebrated as they symbolise a desired Western modernity (Moorti 2004; Mandel 2002). These studies have also confirmed the successful indigenisation of Western commercial cultural resources. For instance (Moorti 2004) has shown that the local reproduction of a popular Western television game show has enabled viewers in Tamil Nadu to bypass the pan-Indian identity.

Abu-Lughod (2005) highlights the influence of Western cultural ideology as it is presented in locally produced drama serials on Egyptian television. This indigenisation emerges from the personal background of Al-‘Assal, the writer for the drama serials, who has a “Western” cosmopolitan background. Abu Lughod (2005: 123) explains that “Although her [al-‘Assal’s] political and social concerns are passionately focused on Egypt, her political vocabulary is international; she is well aware of foreign literature, film and media; she has grown children who work in Finland and France.” Al-‘Assal who writes a drama serial entitled *Mothers in the House of Love*, states that:

In the retirement home itself, they started a class for teaching English, because one woman had been an English professor; another woman who had been a silversmith opened a small silver workshop and taught women the skills needed for this work. They participated in the eradication of illiteracy by teaching neighbourhood girls to read and write. They also gave classes on household management, and even agriculture... (Abu Lughod 2005: 39).

Al-‘Assal advocates a socialist feminist message in the narrative of the drama (Abu Lughod 2005). The messages she promotes for women focus on education, skills development for the family and also for commercial purposes. Here the writer promotes an ideology which allows women to be independent from men, and also to encourage women to take on more dynamic social roles, despite their old age. Thus, Western ideology contests women’s traditional roles and men’s authority in a patriarchal society. However, Abu-Lughod (2005: 127) justifies her focus on “cultural fusion” because it provides a window through which to view,

particular configurations of power, education, and wealth in particular places—like an agricultural village in the heart of the tourist industry in disadvantaged region in Egypt in the 1990s.

Although Abu-Lughod's (2005) work does not directly utilise the theory of hybridity, her work implies the political power relationship that exist within the local culture. For instance from the perspective of individual rights, Al-'Assal ideology is based on Western culture values democratises women's rights and alleviates men's control over women. This shows that the indigenisation of foreign cultural ideology resist state ideology.

Moorti (2004), Mandel (2002) and Abu-Lughod (1997; 2005), do not utilise the concept of hybridity; instead, "cultural fusion" or indigenisation is a process which they employ, but which is not clearly defined and is often theorised under the notion of *cultural globalisation*. However, I argue that indigenisation is a form of hybrid culture. For instance, Moorti (2004) and Mandel's (2002) studies both focus on the media text in order to demonstrate the indigenisation of Western global culture. Cultural fusion or indigenisation is a term which refers to the process in which Western cultural products are commercially localised by media producers. This type of indigenisation is celebrated because it provides ordinary citizens access to Western modernity through consumption (Mandel, 2002). Indigenisation also simultaneously enhances local and cosmopolitan identity by bypassing national identity (Moorti, 2004); and brought about cosmopolitan outlook as well as contesting national interests (Abu-Lughod, 1997; 2005). Most importantly, these studies (Moorti, 2004; Mandel, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 1997; 2005) demonstrate that popular culture has altered the hegemony of the state.

PROMOTING HYBRIDISATION IN TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

The global reach of Malaysian television can be illustrated through a process of hybridisation between imported popular culture and local programmes. According to Wang (2010) the number of adapted programmes broadcast on Malaysian television is increasing. In the case of Malaysian television, hybridisation occurs in two ways, firstly when locally produced popular culture programmes are encouraged by the government to incorporate, for example, moderate Islam, western modernity and other suitable elements from imported popular culture into the production of local popular culture programmes. Secondly, imported popular culture programmes are censored and monitored to eliminate perceived negative values to the local. Here, adapting and filtering are two significant ways of hybridisation. This section, therefore, focuses on the role of those government bodies and the public that enforce and monitor hybridisation.

To this end there are five regulating bodies which monitor and censor television popular culture programmes in Malaysia; The Film Censorship Board of Malaysia (LPF), government agencies such as the Religious Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the television station itself, the laws governing the mass media, and the prime minister. In addition, there are unofficial monitoring sections including the public, political oppositions and government leaders and supporters.

ADAPTATION AS HYBRIDISATION

The process of adaptation of imported popular culture is practiced in two ways. Firstly, it is through the purchase of copyright. In such instance, the format of the original programmes is retained; however these programmes are modified to reflect the local culture through, for instance, the incorporation of local actors, languages and settings (Moorti, 2004). The purchase of copyright from foreign culture industries has occurred globally. Malaysia purchases the copyright to programmes including *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* (*Siapa nak Jadi jutawan*), *Wheel of Fortune* (*Roda Impian*) and *American Idol* or *Malaysian Idol* and a popular and controversial Mexican reality program, *Akademi Fantasia* or *La Academia*. The latter was adapted in 2003 by Malaysian Satellite television Astro (Maliki 2008). The first Spanish telenovela adapted to a Malay version was *Manjalara* or *Mi Gorda Bella* (My Sweet Valentine) which screened on TV3 in 2007 (Ghazali 2007).

The second process of adaptation occurred when the local culture industry incorporate certain foreign values in the production of local programmes. Wang (2010: 28) refers this adapted type as “cloned” or “copied” television programmes which are not acquiring the copyright from the country’s origin. Karthigesu, (1994a: 88) contends that:

Local artistes now have to dress, sing, sway and rock in Hollywood style. Local drama writers have to incorporate a certain amount of violence and sex so that their dramas will catch the attention of the audience trained in the Hollywood model.

What is observed by Karthigesu in 1990s was that locally produced musical and drama programmes need to incorporate representations of Western culture if they wanted to attract Malaysian audiences. For instance, North American popular culture depicts a far greater degree of freedom and creativity with regards to their costumes and actor behaviour, which seems to appeal to Malaysian viewers. Some “copied” programmes are recognisable. Wang (2010) states that the programmes, for instance are shows that the police drama *Chips* has been adapted in Malaysia to *Gerak Khas* or *Special Force*; and *SWAT* to *Skuad Elite* or *Elite Squad*. According to Wang (2010), 80% of adapted programmes are in the form of “copied” (Wang 2010: 30).

FILTERING AS HYBRIDISATION

The first and most prominent of the five regulatory censorship bodies that monitor and censor popular culture content is LPF. The LPF is the authority which all television producers, filmmakers and program importers must abide by. LPF was formed by the Malaysian government under Section 3 of the Film Act (Censorship) 1952 (and revised in 1971) (Foo, 2004). Basic foundation of censorship work is to foster universal values for the nation and for the world (Abdullah, 2001). In regard to the interest of national identity, LPF censors those elements in popular culture which contradict national aspirations and Malay-Islamic values (Abdullah 2001). In regard to foster good relationship between countries, LPF censors those elements which lead to the sentiment of disrespect to foreign leaders or put the country to

shame (Abdullah, 2001).

The board's chairman, deputy chairman and its 63 members are recommended by the Ministry of Home Affairs and appointed by the Supreme Ruler or *Yang Dipertuan Agong*. The King is the highest patron of Islam and protector of Malay custom in Malaysia. To ensure that the LPF's decisions conform to government policy, the majority of its appointees are retired Malay senior civil servants (Censorship Board members 'competent', 2001 in Foo, 2004: 114). Foo further states the long lists of the guidelines used by the LPF members to vet television programmes, including the Federal Constitution, Internal Security Act, Printing Presses and Publication Act, Seditious Act, Police Act, Penal code, Defamation Act, Official Secret Act, Broadcasting Code of Ethics, National ideology (*Rukunegara*), Islamic (*Syariah*) law, as well as recommendations from various government organisations (Foo 2004: 123–124).

The LPF in-house censorship guideline is known by its acronym of VHS. It refers to Violent, Horror and Sex. These three elements are censored if the LPF authority finds out any undesired images, offensive scenes or conversation. Sexual references are a significant element in popular culture shows and are a major concern of LPF and certain sections of the Malaysian public alike. Malaysian attitudes towards open references to sex are more conservative than in Western countries. For the LPF, physical intimacy (for example bedroom scenes, kissing and hugging) revealing clothing and open discussions about sex are ideally prohibited. Because sexual references frequently occur in imported popular culture shows, these scenes cannot be totally censored. For instance, it is impossible to censor female characters who are attired in a revealing manner. Foo (2004) highlights an interesting newspaper report as to how the LPF went about censoring sexual references in the film *Nine Months*. The word "penis," spoken by Hugh Grant when he wanted to know the sex of his child in the film *Nine Months* was censored by the National Censorship Board. Foo (2004) regards this is an extreme case of misjudgement between what is a stated fact and sexual conversation. He also brings into focus the limitations of LPF censorship of imported popular culture shows.

The second regulatory body includes government agencies such as the Religious Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs; both of which must be consulted by local producers before filming can begin. For shows that involve "sensitive issues" such as those associated with religion, crime and law, producers must seek approval for the script. The third regulating body is the television station itself. Each station has a policy of allowing producers to self-censor. Most conform to this in order for their work to be bought and broadcast on TV. For example, although all TV stations are careful when depicting or discussing racial issues, TV1 and TV2 are stricter in handling these issues. For TV3, its preference is to portray the urban, modern, wealthy way of life and to limit the depiction of poverty in society due to its target viewers of urban population. The element of wealth is depicted through expensive houses with elaborate furniture, luxury cars, Western overseas education and fashionable clothes. Thus, it is common to watch Malay dramas with a plot that revolves around wealthy urban families.

The fourth regulating body relates to the laws governing the mass media. Since satellite television and the Internet gained widespread accessibility and use in Malaysia during the mid 1990s, the Malaysian government has shifted its

attention from the regulation of conventional broadcasting, to the regulation of the technology convergence of mass media. The government then proclaimed a new act, the Communications and Multimedia Act of 1998.

The Communication and Multimedia Act of 1998 (C&C Act) speaks a new language. The Act is written in the globalised language of the cyber sphere, the language of information and communications technology. Familiar words such as television, radio and broadcasting are not mentioned in the Act. It speaks of “network facilities” and network service providers’, and of “content applications service providers” (Kitley & Nain 2003: 88).

On the one hand, this has re-positioned Malaysia’s television industry, allowing it to embrace dynamic convergence technologies such as the 3G mobile television service which allows users to watch programmes on mobile phones. On the other hand, these advances in technology have not lessened the degree of government control over the broadcasting industry, which in fact still remains highly regulated (Kitley & Nain 2003).

The fifth regulatory censorship body is the leader of the Malay ruling political party, UMNO, which speaks on behalf of the ruling coalition party, Barisan Nasional. The leader is the Malaysian prime minister. UMNO enforces the highest level of censorship and is capable of overriding all the censorship bodies mentioned above, however, this power is usually exercised only on rare occasions. In addition, the unofficial monitoring body comes from the public and government supporters as well as oppositional political leaders in the form of criticism. Criticisms of imported TV popular culture which is highlighted by newspapers generally derive from Malay politicians and Islamic leaders. These critics are in fact often supported by the print media, which are again owned or managed by people who have a close relationship with UMNO. The criticism acts as a resource for the government in its role in censorship. Many of the critics of imported television content derive from the ranks of UMNO politicians as well as from Islamic oppositional political leaders, PAS. Furthermore, many were also leaders of government-run Islamic agencies and departments. Some criticisms are taken into action, for instance in the issue of superstitious and horror television dramas and movies.

However, not all criticisms are taken into action. The council of Islamic Jurists or *Mufti* suggest that Bollywood movies on Malaysian television should be limited due to their negative influence (Seneviratne 2001). In this case, the then Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad was asked whether Bollywood movies contributed to the sadistic rape murder recently (*Utusan Online* 2001). He responded by suggesting that there should be a detailed study to prove the claim (*Utusan Online* 2001). Mahathir, therefore, implies that he does not agree to recommendations by the council to limit Bollywood movies. In the same press conference, Mahathir did condemn the negative influence to Malaysian youth of certain lyrics in Western songs.

However the Information Minister, Khalil Yaakob, in response to criticism of Bollywood movies, promised that RTM would import Arab movies to balance the presence of Bollywood movies. Another unsuccessful criticism was directed at one of the most popular imported drama serials, especially among female viewers. This was the Indonesian production *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* which aired in 2006-

2007. Rahmah Idris, a Member of Parliament, raised the issue during the UMNO General Assembly², arguing that *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* (aired by TV3 between 2.30pm and 3.30pm) was becoming an addiction for women who tended to neglect their house-duties. Idris urged the Ministry of Information to look into the matter. A local newspaper reported her speech:

Our women are so engrossed in watching the drama serials that they cannot go anywhere and those at work don't pick up their telephones," she said. (*New Straits Times*, 18 November 2006).

HYBRIDITY AS ADAPTATION IN A MALAY MINI DRAMA SERIAL

In the following section, I explore further adaptation in a locally produced Malay mini drama serial which was broadcast on TV3 in September 2006. The drama, *Seputih Qaseh Ramadhan* (SQR) has consciously inserted the appropriate Islamic values promoted by the government, upholding multiracial values, and practicing Western modernity. SQR passed the censorship process and does not invoke any criticism from viewers. Since SQR was broadcast during Ramadan, the holy month for Muslims, the drama depicts religious practices of Muslims in this fasting month.

The Storyline

Qaseh is a woman protagonist in the Malay drama serial *Seputih Qaseh Ramadhan*. When Qaseh marries Ridzuan, a son of a rich urban woman, she is a young, naïve, working class woman. Their marriage is opposed by Ridzuan's mother, Umi. In trying to protect her husband from charges of drug possession Qaseh gives a false confession and is imprisoned for several years. When she is finally released from prison, she is unable to see her husband and children again because Ridzuan has married another woman, Maria. Her story of the dutiful wife and mother is told through her fulfilment of the roles of suffering wife and a mother who was abandoned by her husband and mother-in-law. With the assistance of her best friend, an Indian woman who was her former neighbour, Qaseh starts a new life. She is also sympathised by a lawyer, Johan, who has helped Qaseh to prove her innocence. Johan fell in love with Qaseh but she would not accept his proposal. At the end of the story she suffers cancer and dies after the fact that she was wrongly imprisoned for drug possession.

Hybridity as Adaptation in *Seputih Qaseh Ramadhan*

Throughout the drama Qaseh was dressed in *baju kurung* (a type of Malay traditional dress) and a loose head scarf. The 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.³ In the role of wife and daughter-in-law, the character of Qaseh was afforded typical Malay-Muslim woman's qualities; blind loyalty to a husband, non-assertiveness, naïvety and humility. Qaseh takes a firm

² UMNO General Assembly is held annually. It is a political gathering of UMNO members to address challenges that the party has to face.

³ I consider *Baju kurung* and a loose head scarf which exposes part of a woman's hair as an authentic traditional Malay costume. Now, Malay-Islam women commonly wear 'Arabic style' hijab which covers hair, neck and shoulder.

stance against the lure of extramarital relationships. Although Qaseh's appearance is typical of a rural and uneducated woman, Qaseh's character nevertheless demonstrates confidence in managing her life in different settings; alongside her wealthy mother-in-law, in an urban law firm backdrop and in the context of her friendship with an Indian woman. As a mother, Qaseh shows her assertiveness and fought tirelessly to get her children back, a depiction of typical Malay motherhood.

The other characters are depicted of having different lifestyles. In contrast to Qaseh's working class background, Maria, Ridzuan's second wife, in one scene wears a blonde wig. Maria also wears Western fashions, speak English in some conversations and dines in hotels. Her husband, Ridzuan however is depicted as a devoted Muslim who abides by Ramadan practice. Qaseh's best friend, Dewi wears traditional Indian Sari to show ethnic difference. Dewi grieves when Qaseh dies. It is uncommon in Malay drama to have different ethnic close friendship.

Based on Qaseh's appearance and personality, she represents authentic Malay culture. Maria depicts the hybridisation of Malay, Islam and Western values constructed in the drama. The portrayal of Maria's character, for instance, is one of a hybrid identity between Western and Malay ways of life, elements of which have given birth to Malay middle class lifestyles. The portrayal of urban lifestyles which draw on foreign and local values to portray Malay middle-class characters and family who simultaneously modern, Western, multicultural and Islamic are common on Malaysian television stations. These Malay middle class characters are depicted as having consumption habits. Within this new culture the state promote the emergence of ostentatious middle class culture that emphasises consumption, as well as Malay-Western-Islam images of women that support the government's project of modernity.

CONCLUSION

My argument is that in response to globalisation, the Malaysian government enforced hybridity in popular culture to produce such a "third space" (Bhabha 1994). This third space created the opportunity of a new culture which comprises a complex interplay of an inward and outward outlook. In this view, ostentatious Malay middle class emerges from hybrid popular culture. My exploration of indigenisation of cultural commodities at the local context as a form of hybrid culture points to the fact that researchers tend to see that the foreign cultural commodities flow on television are unregulated. Researchers who use hybridity do not foresee the possibility of a dominant sector such as censorship bodies, the state or the television proprietor impose their power to expurgate the content of television programmes. I would suggest that looking at the dominant sectors' role on regulating television content illuminates that hybrid process is being used by dominant sectors to maintain their political hegemony. This in turn shows that hybrid culture not only benefit subaltern group as these studies existed in the literature, but hybrid culture also benefit dominant sector of state.

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