

## Followership: Boosting Power and Position in Popular TV Fiction

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### ABSTRACT

Research by Andaya (1999) has shown that the “expansion of authority” in Southeast Asia is jostled through culture. In Malay archipelago, such authority and legitimacy are manifested in the regulation of “dress, language, and custom,” reinforcing powerful gains emanating from wide cultural control. Following this premise, we seek to provide insights that work in tandem with how culture evolves to signify one’s power and position through conversational exchanges palpable in popular TV fiction. Specifically, in this paper, we argue that reasons related to culture including religion and communal beliefs are employed by the “dominant knower” to prevail in TV fiction’s narrative exchanges. Based on Conversation Analysis (CA) of *Julia* and *On Dhia*, we show that “dominant knowers” triumph using Malay *adat* (customs), as a reasoning firstly to justify the behavior of everyday discourse (friendships, relationships, and parenthood) and secondly to explicate one’s choices in instituting the roles of women and men in the Malay world. Through such analysis, it is also found that any arguments through logic are denied and eliminated. Given these findings, this study demonstrates whether followers do or do not possess agency and whether followership does or does not dwell on loyalty to friendship and kinship over the course of navigating their private and public lives. By focusing on the narrative exchanges, we also contend that although TV fiction evokes issues that are decidedly modern and liberal in response to forces of globalization, Malay *adat* is still powerful for boosting power and authority in everyday Malay discourse.

**Keywords:** narrative exchange; conversation analysis; TV fiction; Malay *adat*; power

### INTRODUCTION

Barbara Watson Andaya (1999) cogently argues that one of the ways the “expansion of authority” plays out in Southeast Asia is through “the expansion of ‘capital culture’” (p. 110). The development of “dress, language and custom,” Andaya (1999) continues, emerges as the “dominant culture,” (p. 110) evolving to signify culture’s exclusive position. Thus, from the chronicles of Malay kings to Malay *adat* (customs), culture remains important to intensify authority and power, where they manifest *daulat-derhaka* (sovereignty-infringement) and followership issues (Kessler, 1992; Khoo, 2007). Drawing on followership, the concept “emphasizes that one must have a ruler and be ruled as a follower” (Kessler, 1992, p. 147). If we extend Kessler’s theory about Malay culture to television (hereafter, TV) fiction studies, we may converge the culture of deference with subservience.

This paper examines two critically-acclaimed popular TV fiction: *Julia* (2012) and *On Dhia* (2013), both of which have been positioned at the forefront of contemporary TV fiction scene in Malaysia. Apart from earning accolade and praise in the 2013 top 20 most watched TV programs across all TV channels in Malaysia, they lured 1.67 million viewers (Media Prima, 2012) and drew over 11 million viewers in 2013 (Media Prima, 2013), leading to online reruns of 120 million viewers (Tonton, 2014). Our central argument is that although modernity and media landscapes in Malaysia have witnessed shifts in cultural foci, power and position in everyday narrative, exchanges shown in TV fiction is still dominant through idealizing Malay *adat* (customs). In the following pages, we depart from studying about Malays elsewhere but focus on Malays in Malaysia, as many "factors are intimately linked and infect each other in the process of Malay identity formation" that "they may appear to be mutually exclusive where one may exclude or preclude the other" (Jerome, 2013, p. 131). Secondly, we also investigate how *adat* and Islam are fetishized by the dominant knower to prevail in arguments, as manifested in the narrative exchanges. That being said, this study does not intend to generalize the findings of this analysis across all other TV fiction or capture the elite constructions of Malayness. Rather, this study explores the everyday, embodied, unconscious experience of power-related issues as expressed in *Julia* and *On Dhia*. As TV fiction is emblematic of a mirror orchestrating stronger realization of reality (Dhoest, 2004, 2007, 2011), what will be revealed in this essay are discursive exchanges between men and women and between parent and child and among friends which attempt to compromise sentiment with power and position through the reasoning of Malay *adat*.

We firstly begin by presenting a background on *Julia* and *On Dhia*. After that, we present how *adat*, Islam, and modernity intersect through elaborations of Wazir Jahan Karim's works to bridge the gap between Malayness and Malayness as shown in TV fiction's narrative exchanges. By linking these notions, we show the stereotypical evidence of the Malays that are reflected in the discourse roles, that is who has a leading role in what and who complies to Malay *adat* more in *Julia* and *On Dhia*. That being elaborated, we also want to establish a connection between TV fiction and Malaysia chant as well as mediascape in order for us to contextualize our study. By doing so, we contend that the issue of power, position, and legitimacy in TV fiction cannot be interpreted without making use of the many nuances and intricacies in the media spheres. We then analyze the narrative through corpus transcribed and show how conversation analysis reveals the disproportionate power legitimized through the dynamic use of Malay *adat* in the narrative exchanges. Finally, a recapitulation of main points is presented as the outcome of the article.

### **JULIA AND ON DHIA**

*Julia* and *On Dhia* stage the readings of Malays from different socio-economic brackets. On the one hand, *Julia* revolves around a story of two protagonists- Julia and Amir. Issues begin to escalate in *Julia* when the rural-born girl, Julia, fetishizes the idealizing of being modern and educated through pursuing her university degree instead of fulfilling the sentiment of her parents- to have her become a rural-raised, modest Malay girl. In college, Julia meets Amir. Conflicts erupt as Amir also prides in the embodiment of Malay *adat* and expectations of lifestyles. *On Dhia*, on the other hand, seeks to display gender relations, where the parents of the main protagonist- Dhia, expect her to conform to certain gender imaginations; through living by the Malay *adat*, which clashes with Dhia's everyday personal desires. One such imposition is through, for example, prohibiting casual contacts between Dhia and her prospective fiancé Rafie (another protagonist) - and with such tensions, which represents one among the many cultural frustrations and struggles, the discord between Dhia and Rafie also results in a heart-wrenching love life that eventually ends in frustration and early marriage

separation due to different gender politics and social statuses.

The discourse exchanges between parents and children, males and females display the intricacies between conforming to *adat* and understanding personal spaces. It is through these symbolic cultural moments where issues of power and position are brought to the fore. In addition it is through these cultural crises that we seek to understand the argumentation that legitimizes Malay power in everyday setting, constituting the germane consciousness of Malay *adat*. But do these powerful discourses upset the cognitive understanding of Malayness or contribute further toward its ethnic or cultural identity construction? Will the concept of Malay *adat* become fossilized one day? Perhaps not, as these pages will show that they will mutually work to reinforce and reify Malay *adat*.

### **ADAT: A BACKGROUND**

Taib (1974) suggests that Malay *adat* beliefs and values is a result of the interaction between Islamic tradition with traditional beliefs and scientific inquiry. He also cautions that the readings of these three praxes do not suggest easy understanding, but entail fissures as Malay experiences are intricately woven. The Malays, firstly, want to live in harmony with others (Provencher, 1972). The harmonious lifestyle is so fundamental in that any subjects attempting to disrespect the Malay *adat*, which is akin to an “attack” on the older generation (Banks, 1976), will be sanctioned. In other words, the Malays would keep disagreements to the self, without going against the status quo or the hierarchical structure. For instance, children not arguing with parents or wives conforming to husbands can represent adherence to the hierarchical structure of Malays. It is this silencing that sometimes results in marginalization and power struggles in the sense of giving voices.

Secondly, the socio-cultural worldview of Malay *adat* also shows that gender inequality is still inherent. Firstly, women are not expected to question principles appropriated to them by men. Ong (1990), in her anthropological study observes that Malay women should accept any position and in one illustration, reluctance towards bearing children means “resistance against Allah giveth” (24). Stivens (1998) highlights how Malay women are subjected to closer scrutiny and frequently discussed as metaphors for various aspects of modernity, serving the symbolic and moral anchor. Thirdly, with what is considered appropriate for Malay women to be “domestic” and “feminine” (Healey, 1994), gender relations among Malays are upheld by categories of patriarchy (Joseph, 2013; Ruzy, 2003; Zainal, 1995). In the TV fiction we examine in the following pages, we will show how these readings may reverse, blur, preserve, or destabilize the notion of Malay *adat*.

### **FOLLOWERSHIP: POWER, ADAT, AND TV FICTION**

Our understanding of how *adat*, gender, and power intersect in *Julia* and *On Dhia* branches out from Wazir Jahan Karim’s earlier studies (for instance Wazir, 1990, 1992) where gender is jostled under the broad themes of political influences (both government and opposition), placing women as subjects of scrutiny between Islamic powers that-be and religious fundamentalists of Persatuan Agama Se-Malaysia (PAS) in a liberal modern state. Such complications, according to Wazir, may result in the perceptions of *adat* and Islam (being Malay-Muslim women) as both conflicting and complementary. On the one hand Malay women are “not completely subsumed by Islam except in matters of marriage and divorce.” On the other hand, *adat* is maintained by “ensuring equitable distribution of inheritance, property, and status between men and women” (Wazir, 1990, p. 14). Wazir’s insights may work in tandem with the present analysis.

In chorus, we believe our analysis in *Julia* and *On Dhia* may be approached based on Wazir's readings. In *Julia*, for example, Julia is torn between becoming accepted in school and becoming accepted as a traditional Malay woman at home. Whereas in school she is outspoken and assertive, at home, she is expected to be obedient and submissive to her parents. Conflicts usually erupt when Julia's father's instructions to remain silent are questioned by Julia (Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy & Raihanah, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). In this sense, power follows that the hierarchical structure between parents and children are to be observed and resistance towards *adat* is frowned upon. Although Wazir Jahan Karim's position on the intricacies among *adat*, gender, and power entrenched in the discourse fabric of Malay society at times are seen as too extreme and far-fetched, it has merit for addressing the power struggles between those who conform to and dissent against Malay *adat* through the narrative exchanges in which they are involved. In other words, they have a place in explaining some aspects of the subjects' understanding and resistance against some components of Malayness.

### POWER AND MALAYSIA'S MEDIASCAPE

Having sketched the above trajectory, we now begin to contextualize the work of TV fiction in Malaysia. Two of the most relevant television stations in which TV fiction is exercised are Radio, Television, Malaysia (RTM) and TV3. It is these forces in which TV fiction is (de)regulated and maintained. They are further scrutinized to bring forth the lived reality of TV fiction, which is central to this study. We firstly begin to understand the tasks of RTM as gatekeepers to modernity. Although changes in the mediascape warrant greater understanding of the themes across TV fiction to include modernity and the destabilizing of Malay *adat*, power in narratives still rests with conforming to the idealization of *adat* and being Malay. Such irony strengthens the position of Malay *adat* as the point of reference in which TV fiction is produced. Even though this form of contextualization is confined to selected time periods, it has a place in understanding the forces and acts that legitimize narratives on Malay *adat* in narrative exchanges.

### THE GATEKEEPERS

Historically, the promulgation of mediascape in Malaysia does not begin completely as a space for preserving Malayness. Rather, the acts of the media industry to protect the content are characteristic to promoting national unity using the framework of *Rukunegara*. The *Rukunegara* (National Ideology) is oriented towards fostering national unity and harmony among races deeply rooted in the beliefs of a united nation, democratic, just, liberal, and progressive society (Foo, 2004; *Malaysia Merdeka*, 2013). However, over the course of its attempts to address cultural diversity and initiate the stability among races, Malays are given "30 percent participation of the total commercial and industrial practices of the mass media" (Foo, 2004, p. 29). It is here that the power on Malay *adat* is likely to transpire although Lent (1975) further asserts that *Rukunegara* is to be an adherence for all segments of media. This suggests that even though *Rukunegara* centers on creating a just society and democratic way of life, the singly-unitary and exclusive cultural position of Malays begin to take root.

Today, the government, through RTM, has established a five layer sub-gatekeeper (Siti Zanariah, 2011). Formed initially under the forces and involvement of media and government (Nain, 1991, 2002; Wang, 2001), the five layers include the film censorship board (FCB), governmental agencies (The Ministry of Home Affairs for example), the television station itself, mass media laws and prime minister of Malaysia. The five layers of forces have tasks before them (Foo, 2004; Siti Zanariah, 2011) that include but are not limited to receiving, screening, legalizing, and broadcasting TV fiction. In addition to the five

layers, politicians also, periodically, raise issues connected to the media. Criticisms of TV fiction, for instance, generally derive from Malay politicians. Rahmah Idris, a Member of Parliament, for example, highlighted during a General Assembly that “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” (New Straits Times 18 November, 2006). Such comments directed at TV fiction in Malaysia may illustrate how political influences are at work, forming the bases for what can and cannot be shown.

Despite these controls, TV stations have resisted these flows. This is likely due to the cultural changes (elimination of the Malay quota) in the recent telecommunications, and media industry act, in line with the 1Malaysia chant. Prior to 1970, two of the established codes were formulated with regard to the regulations of TV works by RTM but today, these codes have changed. Of concern are the following specific changes to the mission of the RTM that have led to an observation of new realities of culture:

- 1970: To assist in promoting civic consciousness and in fostering the development of Malaysian arts and culture (McDaniel, 1994)
- 2013: Becoming a pioneering nation builder through broadcasting service in upholding the 1Malaysia concept (RTM, 2013)

and;

- 1970: To provide suitable elements of education, general information and entertainment (McDaniel, 1994)
- 2013: Benefiting information technology and new media ideas for the public maximum viewers (RTM, 2013)

In the first objective, civic consciousness (1970) has been substituted with pioneering nation (2013), suggesting a shift in focus from postcolonial Malaysia to a modern Malaysia; Malaysian arts and culture (1970) has now been changed to 1Malaysia (2013) which in turn, signals diversity, irrespective of the domination by a single cultural entity. Moreover, in the second objective, suitable (1970) and general (1970) have both been shifted to benefiting (2013) and new (2013) respectively, indicating welcoming gestures to new cultural reality. In turn, the reworking of content on TV fiction should no longer emphasize the notion of single and unitary cocoon of Malayness, but function as the producers for ‘modern’-cultured themes. As such, the resulting increase in more visible TV fiction of Western and modern-Asian themes can now be witnessed. Kim’s (2010) study, is one example of research where a number of TV fiction in Malaysia now reflects the melting of “other” TV fiction. 65, 872 minutes are accommodated for “other” or foreign programs including TV fiction, totaling 53 percent of the total broadcast hours (Kim, 2010, p. 26).

Furthermore, these changes by RTM suggest the accentuation of adaptation of TV works. Many TV shows have been adapted to articulate local flavors from foreign programs, crossing the borders of Malayness. For instance, the famous TV fiction *Ugly Betty* and *Yo Soy Betty La Fea* are adapted as *Manjalara* in Malaysia, drawing over 1.8 million audiences each episode (Budiey, 2010), proliferating the melting of “other” TV fiction. In addition, RM200 million have been invested in TV fiction content, enabling the imports of worldwide TV programs (Media Prima, 2012) and often serving as a means to centralize issues that present an antithesis to Malay cultural traditions. In other words, with such ‘melting’ and investment of TV fiction, they may mean more TV serials showing transgressions that include, but are not limited to infidelity, drug-abuse, fornication, taboo, and single-parent American families which stand in stark contrast against the Malay *adat* and values.

It is here that the crises we observe begin to figure themselves. While embracing diversity in adapting “other” or foreign TV fiction, the TV fiction in the present study, however, will show that some narrative exchanges still rely on the authorial discourses of Malay *adat*. Our arguments on scrutinizing TV forces and their recent changing landscapes also respond to the claims that Malay *adat* on TV fiction is not institutionalized. Moreover, by highlighting this conundrum, we follow the trails of Gray and Lotz (2012) who persistently ask that we scrutinize TV fiction to “flesh out how they work” (p. 89). Although Malay *adat* regulated by the gatekeepers is thought of as a given and at times appear too context-specific, understanding them allows us to engage the specific kinds of demands mainstream Malay political forces make on TV stations. By understanding these layers of control and forces, the lived reality of TV fiction’s appropriation on the position of Malay *adat* can be understood.

## METHODOLOGY

We attempt to construct the ideology of hegemony and authority of Malay *adat* and being Malays through conversation analysis (hereafter, CA) (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008), exposing the wider frame of “systems of values and beliefs” (DeFina & Georgakopolou, 2012, p. 71). We, therefore, depart from using semiotic analysis and historiographic methods but focus on the role of textual data instead. By choosing to look at two popular TV fiction of over 11 million audiences, *Julia* and *On Dhia*, we are opened to the realm of power struggles that answer the question, “Who is the authority?” and “How does the authority maintain his or her position?” This means that while TV fiction shows issues that are decidedly liberal, social and political, we also focus on powerful and authorial discourses. By displaying such issues, we highlight discursive frameworks that legitimize the position of *adat* as a powerful tool in everyday conversation exchanges.

The transcription of TV fiction in this study followed the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). In particular, this study may be characteristic to the applied CA, given its focus on linguistic forms and the management of tensions (problems, solutions, and avoidance) to establish various positions (for instance, satirizing and demeaning). The conversation episodes were transcribed in their entirety following the tradition of CA after which they were reviewed, with dominant themes identified and isolated. Consistent with CA methodology, the researchers retained the contents or general conversational structure, departing from any reworking of the content or units for semantic purposes. CA is chosen for our analysis of narrative exchanges because we can see the sequences as the interaction unfolds immediately. Goodwin (1986; 1997), on CA, has succinctly summarized that conversation analysis provides a framework in a narrative exchange that can form a structure through two ways - the recipients and the recipients’ interpretations. DeFina and Georgakopolou (2012) have underscored that CA allows us to work on narrative structure as part of “social practices” while drawing from methods of empirical studies “through specific coding categories that allow analysts to analyze narrative as an organized set of resources” (pp. 50-51). Putting it differently, in this study, we want to show conversational units that include but are not limited to sequences, turn-takings, overlaps, and interruptions can orchestrate how Malay *adat* is employed by the dominant knower to establish his or her position as the authority in everyday narrative exchanges.

That being said, introduction of CA is in order. CA is a branch of critical discourse analysis that takes us back to the work of Goffman (1967). Goffman is of the view that there is a need for human beings to manage themselves in social situations and one of the ways of their carrying themselves in social situations is through social interactions. In interactions, there is always a need to negotiate and re-negotiate roles to observe control of situation. By

looking at the exchanges of (re) negotiations through CA, issues on identity (Bruner, 1996; Abell, Stokoe & Billig, 2000; Zimmerman & Wieder 1970), personal, social and cultural identities (McAdams, 1988; Macintyre 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986), can be illuminated. This contention means that the use of CA has cut across various disciplines. These multidisciplinary scholars in the likes of linguistic anthropologists, ethnomethodologists, and sociolinguists have used CA in multiple social interactions through the studies linked to linguistic and communicative processes. Through looking at interactions within the framework of CA, one can also find issues emblematic to everyday, unconscious experiences.

The use of CA in studying TV fiction is to centralize two areas. Firstly, CA is used to glamorize images of everyday scenario. From personal dilemmas, relationships, to images of hospitals, office, police stations, CA functions as a tool to analyze TV fiction and exploit our shared knowledge about different types of people (Wang, 2012). Wang (2012), succinctly argues that using CA to study TV represents “real conversation. It is about ordinary people and their everyday life” (2012, p. 341). Secondly, CA is used to highlight lexical and grammatical features, reflecting everyday realities. Grant and Starks (2001), for instance, have argued that the authenticity of TV fiction has been validated, consistent with the literature on conversation analysis. Al-Surmi (2012) compares the result of lexical and grammatical feature study to unscripted American conversation and finds that TV fiction reflects every day, naturally-occurring talk. All of these readings suggest CA be used to scrutinize TV fiction as it exemplifies the different kinds of small talk, characterizing everyday life. Moving on from these studies, we believe a similar application of CA may be made to illustrate the behavior of everyday discourse in *Julia* and *On Dhia*. From cultural identity conflicts, to cultural confusions and struggles over Malay traditions and modernity, CA may delineate the experiences of the protagonists.

In elaborating the questions of power, questions on who and how one holds authority are central. These are important for exploring self-legitimization. Briggs (1996), for instance, has argued that successful patternings of rhetorical and linguistic structures construct the authoritative discourse of the people in the positions of power. Some of these structures include the use of specific lexical items, and recourse to words, phrases, and expressions linked to a “specific field of knowledge to which only individuals in a position of power” index “authority” (DeFina & Georgakapolou, 2012, p. 71). This is the kind of argument that TV fiction like *Julia* and *On Dhia* explores. The repetitive moving back-and-forth using the discourse of Malay *adat* instead of logic is resonant in the scenes. In *Julia*, this is the kind of exemplification shown when Julia wants to pursue the relationship with Amir and her wish is denied by her own father who argues along the lines of Malay culture and being Malay-Muslims, although the issue at hand is considered personal or private. By using CA, we show how Malay *adat* discourse works in maintaining the status quo of the dominant “knower.”

However, critics aver that CA has several amputations. They maintain that there is no way to systematize generalization in narrative exchange that can be gained from fine-grained analysis. Other critics argue that the extent to which we know that the discourse is imposed onto the participant structures and individual strategies is unknown. Our argument is that the work in narrative structure can present a more specific study that forms the larger part of social practices. In our study, this is the kind of analysis that uncovers issues concerning the unconscious, everyday Malay social practices. Although critics argue that there is no “yardstick” to measure participant structures and individual strategies, CA’s specific coding categories can be used as a systematic set of discourse elements in our quest to uncover the discourses used to maintain power on TV fiction. Appendix A lists the conversation analysis transcription symbols.

## ANALYSIS

### POWER, ADAT, AND INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES

In *Julia*, dominant “knowers” turn down logics in various aspects. One of them concerns marriage. Julia is in the middle of her college break when she returns home and discusses with her parents her intention of marrying Amir. While marriage is considered personal, arguments escalate when Malay *adat* is chosen to defend the parents’ choices. We shall elaborate this conflict by referring to Table 1. The turn-taking protocols exemplified in this excerpt (as well as the full data set in general) largely heed an equal power speech exchange system (Markee, 2000).

TABLE 1. *Julia*

1	Julia’s father:	<i>Belum habis belajar, dah nak kahwin.</i>
2		{You are not done with college yet and you are thinking of getting married.}
3		
4	Julia:	<i>Ayah (.) Julia nak kahwin lepas belajar, bukan nak kahwin sekarang pun.</i>
5		{Dad, I want to get married after I have completed my degree, not now.}
6		
7	Julia’s father:	<i>◦Itu lah kamu ni◦ asal menja::wab je &lt;asal orang bercakap je, dia menjawab&gt;</i>
8		{This is you- you always respond to what I say; every time I say something, you
9		always need to argue.}
10		
11	Julia:	<i>Dah ayah Tanya, kena la jawablah</i>
12		{Well you ask; I have to answer}
13		
14	Julia’s father:	<i>((Julia’s father looks furious))</i>
15		<i>Itu, menjawab tu. Menjawab lagi. HI NAHAS JUGAK BUDAK [NI]</i>
16		{That’s what I am talking about. You always have to respond. You are so dead }
17		
18	Julia’s mom:	<i>[Ju (.)]</i>
19		<i>Cuba jangan lawan cakap ayah. Belajar dulu, habis belajar carik kerja 2-3</i>
20		<i>tahun. Lepas tu baru lah fikir pasal kahwin. Dah takde pape lagi dah sebok.</i>
21		<i>◦nak kahwin, nak kahwin.◦</i>
22		<i>◦ Ju↑kena ingat tu Ayong tu tak lepas lagi. Dengar tak cakap mak ni?</i>
22		{Ju, please do not talk over your dad. You have to study first, find jobs after 2-3
23		years, then think of getting married. Now, you are still young but you are thinking
24		of getting married. Ju, you must remember, your elder sister is not married yet.
25		You hear me?}
26		
27	Julia:	<i>Julia dah la balik Malaysia sekali-sekala, asal balik je kena marah, AYAH DARI</i>
28		<i>DULU ASIK MARAH JULIA KAN? Julia rasa Julia macam bukan ANAK AYAH</i>
29		<i>tau, macam anak angka ↑. ((leaves the conversation))</i>
30		{It is not that I am always at home in Malaysia. But every time I’m home, dad
31		is always mad at me. I knew it from the start, you always get mad at me. It feels
32		as if I’m not your daughter anymore} ((leaves the conversation))

According to the corpus, there is minimal interruption and frequent speaker alternation (lines 1-4). In addition, it can be witnessed that there are roughly similar number of turns, showing that the participation among the characters was “balanced,” at least from this perspective.

In this scene, Julia attempts to establish herself as a dominant knower who uses logic but to no avail. Julia views arguments in the following way- that is, if one questions; another answers rather than following direction submissively (lines 11-12). While attempting to establish her position as the “knower,” she forgets to be conscious about Malay *adat* where daughters need to submit to their fathers by keeping quiet and appearing unperturbed (lines 4-



5). Although Julia seems to prevail, seconds later, the conflict takes another turn when she insists on having rights to respond to questions or comments (lines 7-9). Her father, then, responds by reminding Julia of her responsibility to maintain respect through repetitions and prolonged sounds of syllables (lines 14-16). To make matters worse, Julia's mother sides with her father (lines 18-25), reminding Julia of her role as a Malay daughter and that the Malay tradition is to let a preceding sibling get married first. This contends that parent-children interaction is not equal; parents would always have "the final word" in disputes concerning family matters (Gibson, 2008). In Malay tradition, a daughter who answers even with a short response is typically frowned upon and considered as impolite (Banks, 1976; Taib, 1974; Mat Saad Baki, 1993; Zainal, 1995; Mohd Muzhafar, Ruzy & Raihanah, 2015). As a result of the parents' authorial discourse of Malay tradition, Julia feels that she is marginalized and wrongly believes that she is not the biological child of the family (lines 27-32). Ultimately, this scene unveils an aspect of Malay parenting, shedding light on whether power struggles and marginalization are present. The fact that Julia's argument is rejected by her father and well-supported by her mother, who plays her role as the traditional "moral" supporter of the family, appears to reaffirm the parents' role as the dominant "expert" or "knower" in the Malay experience. Clearly, the claim for dominance in this scene is essentially a quest using the discourse on Malay followership. The fact that logic is ignored is also reflected in table 2 below:

TABLE 2. *Julia*

1	Julia's father:	<i>Tak boleh.</i>	
2		{You can't.}	
3	Julia:	<i>Kalau ayah tak percaya, Julia boleh ajak Ayong teman Julia,</i>	[ayah]
4		{I can ask Ayong to come along if you don't trust me,}	[dad]
5	Julia's father:		[Ju ni]
6			[Ju]
7		<i>tak faham Bahasa Melayu? Bila ayah kata <u>tak boleh</u> pergi</i>	
8		<i>KL, tak boleh lah. kalau Amir sangat nak jumpa Ju, suruh dia datang sini.</i>	
9		<i>Bukan Ju pergi sana, Ju tak malu ke pempuan dok kejar lelaki, <u>tak</u> malu</i>	
10		<i>ke?</i>	
11		{Don't you get it? When I say you cannot drive down to KL, you can't.	
12		If Amir really wants to see you, he should drive up here. You don't	
13		drive down. Girls don't go after guys, shame on you.}	
14	Julia's mom:	<i>.hh (1.2) Betul cakap ayah, Ju. Kita pun tak kenal lagi budak Amir</i>	
15		<i>tu, kenal-kenalkan diri dulu. Macam tu lah baru betul cara dia.</i>	
16		{What your dad says is right. We don't even know Amir, he should come	
17		and introduce himself. Now that's how our culture really is.}	
18	Julia:	((gets up and leaves))	
19	Julia's father:	<i>Ha, nak kemana pulak tu?</i>	
20		{Where do you think you are going?}	
21	Julia:	< <i>Bilik.</i>	
22		{To my room.}	
23	Julia's father:	<i>Tengok? Tengok la anak kesayangan awak tu. [Bila]</i>	
24		{See? Is that how your all-time sweetheart daughter behaves? [When]}	
25	Julia's mom:		[ <i>Meh tangan</i> ]
26			[Let me]
27		<i>awak saya urut.</i>	
28		{massage your hand}	

In this scene from *Julia*, Julia contests her parents' decision over the course of her negotiating the possibilities of seeing Amir. Again, when one thinks of a relationship, it conjures up images of personal quest, but not in *Julia*. In *Julia*, driving down to see Amir is thought of as culturally inappropriate and frowned upon by her parents as it is believed that men should

initiate the move towards marriage. Looking more deeply, it is evident that the father, with affirmation, completely prohibits Julia from seeing Amir (lines 1-2). Julia finds alternatives to support her contention by bringing “Ayong,” her sister, as a witness or as a chaperone in order to ensure Julia’s safety. It is here where subsequent problems begin to transpire, shown by multiple interruptions (lines 3-6). Julia’s father re-positions the arguments by checking Julia’s comprehension (line 11) and applying repetitions (also line 11). He even scolds Julia for her apparent lack of understanding of the Malay culture where girls must appear demure and modest and must wait for the prospective groom to start discussing marriage. To ensure Julia’s father as the dominant “knower,” Julia’s mother steps in and takes sides with the father (lines 14-17) by covertly complementing and supporting the notion of Malay “culture,” implying the authorial discourse of Malay *adat*. In turn, Julia leaves the scene, surrendering (lines 18; 21-22). Julia leaving the scene also shows that she dislikes being put into a position where she cannot flesh out her thoughts on logical bases and where she feels cognitively threatened, thus, by leaving, she also realizes the concept of saving face. As a consequence, her father repeatedly blames Julia for not listening well (lines 23-24), although Julia has presented her case by suggesting a chaperone (Ayong).

Based on these two illustrations, we examine how power struggles in TV fiction figure in the realms of parent-daughter narrative exchanges. Malay parents, especially fathers, are seen as the “dominant knowers.” They prevail as the dominant knower through negating arguments other than Malay *adat*. The fact that Julia competes on logical and rational bases only to be turned down by her parents in the scenes fortifies the position of the parents as the “dominant knower”. Similarly, Julia who applies the concept of "saving face," ultimately reveals that she finally has to give up. Although one may argue that these scenes show gender politics, we argue that careful reading of these scenes also unveils the power of Malay *adat* discourses governing the Malay subjects. Specifically, by showing these narrative exchanges of TV fiction, Malay tradition remains an important argumentation tool to legitimize power.

### POWER, ADAT, AND GENDER RELATIONS

In Table 3, we present an illustration where a conflict exists over what determines male-female friendships. In detail, the conflicts take turns to escalate when gender figures as the central question. It all transpires when the main protagonists in *On Dhia*, Dhia and Rafie, bump into Dhia’s father at the school gate. Dhia’s father is furious after seeing Rafie and Dhia walking and holding hands and decides to establish the grounds of friendship for both Dhia and Rafie.

TABLE 3. *On Dhia*

1	Dhia, Rafie:	((hold hands))
2	Dhia’s father:	<i>Esok, awak tak boleh kawan dengan Dhia lagi.</i>
3		{From now on, you can’t be friends with Dhia}
4	Rafie:	° <i>Kenapa, pakcik?</i> °
5		{Why?}
6	Dhia:	< <i>A’ah (2.4) Kenapa, ayah?</i>
7		{He’s right. Why, daddy?}
8	Dhia’s father:	>- <i>Sebab, Dhia perempuan, jadi, dia hanya berkawan dengan perempuan.</i>
9		<i>dan kau apa? Laki ke perempuan? Laki, kan? Kalau lelaki, kawan</i>
10		<i>dengan lelaki.::, baru betul.</i>
11		{Because, girls befriend another girl. And not boys. Are you a girl? No
12		You are a boy and boys stick with boys, now that’s how it should be.}
13	Dhia:	<i>Tapi, [aya:h]</i>
14		{But [dad]}
15	Dhia’s father:	[ <i>Dah-dah</i> ]
16		{[End of discussion]}

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17	<i>jom, balik (2.1) Besok jangan kawan dengan Dhia lagi.</i>
18	{Let's go. Leave Dhia alone.}
19 Dhia:	((Leaves Rafie))

---

The narrative exchange that takes place reflects some overlaps (lines 13-16). Although at the beginning equal turns exist, the precise meaning of “friendship” is already problematic for Dhia and Rafie after the brief declarative utterance by Dhia’s father (lines 2-3). From the beginning to the end, Dhia’s father is in control of the exchange, while Dhia acts as a passive recipient of the trade off of what friendship is. The exchange closes and ends with Dhia’s father turn takings, and prolonged syllable seem to be the structural preference found in this analysis, almost always intersecting with his stressing on important words (*lelaki*). Dhia’s father continues to attribute the blame on Dhia by promoting same-sex friendship. As a result, Dhia becomes powerless especially after her attempt at turn-takings is denied (lines 13-14). Sensing the potential to be rude should she side with Rafie, Dhia decides to leave and follow her father instead.

Two points are intensified in this narrative exchange. Firstly, Dhia remains marginalized and voiceless in the conversation, as signified by simultaneous and overlapped speech. This type of narrative exchange clearly indexes the power struggles that Hutchby (2006) highlights as needing further scrutiny. The double marginalization which stems from tensions of defining the nature of friendship is further complicated by her loss of voice in defending opposite-sex relations. Dhia’s voicelessness also further intensifies the authorial position of her father who repeatedly puts the blame on Dhia for ignoring gender differences in establishing her circle of friends. This power struggle could have been avoided if Dhia’s father had listened to Dhia’s subsequent elaboration. Instead, he inadvertently declares “end of discussion.” Finally, Dhia responds in the affirmative and leaves Rafie, as if agreeing to the decision made by her father.

With the conflict possibly settled by Dhia’s father’s authorial voice, Rafie returns home and reports this to his parents, who both become furious. Table 4 illustrates the exchange:

TABLE 4. *On Dhia*

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1	Rafie’s mom:	<i>Dia caka::p, tak boleh belajar sama-sama ke atau tak boleh berkawan?</i>
2		{Did he say you can’t study together or you can’t be friends with each other?}
3	Rafie:	<i>&gt;Mula:: mulakan, mama, pakcik ( ) cakap, jangan belajar dengan Dhia</i>
4		<i>lepas tu tak boleh berkawan dengan Dhia.</i>
5		{At the beginning, he said I can’t study with Dhia; later he said I can’t
6		be friends with her.}
7	Rafie’s mom:	<i>&lt;Ambo::i besar sangat ke diaorang tu? Sampaikan anak kita tak boleh nak</i>
8		<i>berkawan dengan anak dia?</i>
9		{Who do you think he is? Is he so special that Rafie can’t be friends with Dhia?}
10	Rafie’s dad:	<i>Ini bukan beso ke kecik, ini soal halal-haram, Muhrim, tak muhrim.</i>
11		<i>.hh Anak kita lelaki, anak dia perempuan. Memang la tak elok, kawan</i>
12		<i>rapat-rapat macam tu::</i>
13		{No, this has got nothing to do with status. This is what can and cannot be done
14		in Islam. Boys are forbidden from befriending girls unless they are married.
15		It doesn’t look nice if our son goes out in close contact with his daughter.}
16	Rafie’s mom:	<i>&lt;Rapat-rapat amende nye bang. Budak-budak ni kecik lagi, baru 10 tahun.</i>
17		<i>Kalau dah belasan tahun tu saya faham lah. Ini kecik lagi, rebung, bang</i>
18		{What did you mean by close contact? These are kids, they are not mature enough
19		and they are just 10. I can understand if they are 18, but they, they are just
20		plain kids.}
21	Rafie’s dad:	<i>Sebab rebung la, kalau dah jadi besar, tak guna pun. Dah la:: jangan</i>
22		<i>nak panjang kan lagi isu ni lagi:: Lagipun tak mati Afie ni kalau tak</i>

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23		<i>berkawan dengan anak dia:: <u>Lagipun</u> ramai lagi kawan Afie kat sekolah</i>
24		<i>yang Afie boleh kawan, kan?</i>
25		{That's exactly my point. We should teach them now, if not it's going to be too late.
26		Can we get over this issue? It's not like Rafie's going to die if he's not with
27		Dhia, is he? He has got more friends in schools to play with.}
28	Rafie's mom:	Tapi:: [bang]
29		{But} [ ]
30	Rafie's dad:	[ <i>sudah</i> ]
31		{[end of discussion]}
32		<i>Kan saya kata sudah-sudah la.</i>
33		{I said - That's it.}

---

As illustrated, the nature of the turn-taking enshrined in this narrative represents “an equal power speech exchange system” (Markee, 2000). The protagonists alternate and minimally interrupt one another (lines 28-31). In addition, there is roughly equal number of turns, showing a “balanced” conversation. The four turn-takings delineated by Rafie’s mother shows her agency, questioning the conversational units, in this case topics, pointed out by her husband. That being said, the question of male-female friendship is still problematic, especially for Rafie’s mother, thus, she questions the right of Dhia’s father in setting conditions for what can and cannot be done between Rafie and Dhia (pp. 7-9).

From this point on, Rafie’s father begins to show his authority through two linguistic devices - stress and prolonged syllables. By pressing and stressing on the units, Rafie’s father sets the tone of the conversation, negating all arguments posed by his wife. He further makes excuses for not allowing Rafie-Dhia’s relationship, acting as the guardian of morality and Malay *adat*, deploying *Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungnya* (equivalent to the English’s saying “strike the iron while it is hot”, Farish, 2010) to support his contention to disallow the friendship. The use of these indexes - stress and prolonged syllables seems to confirm Hutchby’s (2006) argument on exploring the relationship between conversation and power, where he argues specific linguistic devices are intensified to anchor verbal exchanges attenuating addressees’ voices. Thus, in return, when Rafie’s mother tries to reason further, she is turned down by her husband who coerces her into understanding how the Malay *adat* works. Knowing the potential to be rude if she sides with Rafie, made evident by this concept of saving face (Schegloff, 1999), his mother decides to remain silent instead, illustrating her lack of agency and to a certain extent positioning herself as the victim.

These two scenes shed light on the dynamics of power exchange system regarding underlying gender relations in the context of being Malay-Muslims. Malay *adat* has been chosen to defend one’s choices in order to determine three concepts. Firstly, instead of allowing Malay children to socialize and expand their creativity by having them work together in school, Malay *adat* has been chosen as a compass to guide how they should behave. In essence, what it suggests is that this dominant role of Malay *adat* will guarantee the success of the children as Malay subjects through observing and limiting their socio cultural and gender relations. This brings us to the second point- gender relations. In two of these cases, we have seen two types of relationship- the first allows women to consent and the other to dissent. Even when Malay women attempt to establish themselves as the dominant “knower” through using logic, we have seen that their arguments are rejected. Additionally, in scenes where women are hardly given any chance of a voice, they are made invisible and pushed to a position where they lack personal choices or a position where they are voiceless. This illustration is strengthened by the roles played out by Rafie and Dhia’s mothers respectively. Thirdly, these scenes may reflect the hierarchical structure of Malay families (Syed Mohamed, Yusof, & Ruzy, 2010:146). As argued by Ungku Maimunah (1987), any resistance to the “ruler” of a family, or to anyone of a higher status is vaunted as *derhaka* (infringement) towards *daulat* (sovereignty). Alternatively, these protagonists’

experiences resemble what Khoo (2010) has observed, "The Malay individual is caught between his or her identity as an individual and as part of a social community" (304). Thus, what we have seen here in *On Dhia* gives an indication that in any event where there is disagreement, logic is thrown out while cultural status is chosen instead. Specifically, the lower someone is in the Malay hierarchical status, the less of a chance he or she can become a dominant knower. This is made clear in Tables 3 and 4 where both Rafie and his mother are made to agree to Dhia's father's decision. Through the analysis of these four scenes, we show that the power struggles between them have supported the concept of followership.

## CONCLUSION

Our analysis invites a reading that is consistent with previous studies. While Kessler (1992) has explored the notion of followership in Malay political settings, Farish Noor (2010) has implied in his writing how Malay subjects seem to have lacked agency while operating their everyday lives in relation to responding to modernity. In contrast to Khoo (2007) who has examined the notion of followership to magnify conflicts in short stories, this study extends these scholars' work by scrutinizing TV fiction's texts.

In this study, our analysis has presented evidence supporting the notion of the authorial discourses of Malay *adat* on TV fiction. Our central argument is that although TV fiction is broadcast in times of modernity and in tandem with the *IMalaysia* chant, any argument against Malay *adat* (Malay culture and being Malay-Muslims) will not be successful. Secondly, we answer the question of "how is Malay *adat* employed by the dominant knower?" Or in other words, we ask the questions that relate to the kinds of aspects Malay *adat* has been employed to defend the protagonists' choices of reasoning. In the TV fiction studied (*Julia* and *On Dhia*), we have found that Malay *adat* has been employed as a reason to justify the behavior of everyday discourse, for instance, in friendships and relationships. We have also shown that Malay *adat* has been chosen to defend one's choices to differentiate the roles of women from men in a traditional patriarchal Malay society. For instance, the Malay women are simultaneously seen as silenced, consenting and dissenting to the employment of Malay *adat* in their discourses. Most importantly, we have unveiled that in any kind of disputes (social and cultural), whether it is about parenting, schooling, friendships or even relationships, Malay *adat* is still retained while logic is thrown out. In other words, through power struggle and marginalization, Malay *adat* still prevails, although common-sense dictates that the issue at hand is personal or private.

To conclude, we would like to make a final note in relation to making suggestions for future research. There remain many areas and accentuation of issues that can further be explored in TV fiction, for instance, the investigation of sexuality and filial piety in *Ombak Rindu* that remains popular in the mainstream TV channels, in addition to issues of corruption, infidelity, and mercifulness in *Teduhan Kasih*, a popular TV fiction that has enjoyed recent success and popularity. One can also surmise hypocrisy and idiosyncracies in *Love You Mr Arrogant* as well as aspects of power, position, and authority in *Ariana Rose*.

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## APPENDIX A

### Conversation analysis transcription symbols

.	(period) Falling intonation.
?	(question mark) Rising intonation.
,	(comma) Continuing intonation.
-	(hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.
::	(colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.
wo:rd	(colon after underlined letter) Falling intonation on word.
wo:rd	(underlined colon) Rising intonation on word.
word	(underlining)
<u>word</u>	The more underlying, the greater the stress.
WORD	(all caps) Loud speech.
CAP ITALLICS	Utterance in subject's L1.
°word°	(degree symbols) Quiet speech.
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch.
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch
>word<	(more than and less than) Quicker speech.
<word>	(less than & more than) Slowed speech.
<	(less than) Talk is jump-started—starting with a rush.
Hh	(series of h's) Aspiration or laughter.
.hh	(h's preceded by dot) Inhalation.
[ ]	(brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
{ }	(curved brackets) translation of L1 utterance.
=	(equal sign) Latch or contiguous utterances of the same
(2.4)	(number in parentheses) Length of a silence in 10ths of a second.
(.)	(period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
()	(empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.
((writing))	(double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.
(try 1)/(try 2)	(two parentheses separated by a slash) Alternative hearings.
\$word\$	(dollar signs) Smiley voice.

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