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Soft Power and Stress:
The Health Impacts of Indonesian Soap Operas on Malaysian Millennials

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ABSTRACT

Background: The onslaught of Indonesian popular culture in Malaysia is an inevitable phenomenon. It enters without being prevented because of its presence in addition to the factor of technological sophistication, also because of the demand of many Malaysian audiences. The number of soap operas has infuriated certain circles. The reason is that the Indonesian culture that is born in Indonesian soap operas is shredded and superstition and it is not in accordance with the culture in Malaysia. All of this raises concerns that the presence of Indonesian culture will affect the identity, religion, and language, of the local community.

Aims: This study aims to investigate and looking at the extent of the impression of Indonesian popular culture in Malaysia and to see the perception of Malaysian society, which is predominantly Muslim, in accepting non-Islamic elements aired in one of Indonesia's popular cultural products and see to what extent this affects emotional health, mental health and identity formation.

Methods: To achieve the objectives and in order to avoid subjective views, this study is conducted in a controlled manner, namely by collecting data that supports presumptions, assumptions, and theories and also collecting opposing facts so that conclusions are not based on wishes, but what is found empirically. The data collection techniques in a qualitative approach can be done through observation, unstructured interviews, conversations, oral history and text analysis by using the basic question, namely Open-Ended questions. This is type of question allows respondents to answer more deeply and unexpectedly because the answers given will be subjective, according to the views of those people. Answers from open-ended questions can make us discover unknown and more in-depth topics about a study.

Conclusion: Indonesian soap operas, as a form of soft power, have the capacity to influence the cultural and psychological landscape of Malaysian millennials. The consumption of such media can lead to stress, emotional fatigue, and identity conflicts, particularly when the content challenges established cultural and religious norms. By understanding the complex interplay between cultural influence and mental health, future research can focus on developing media literacy strategies and providing psychological support to help viewers navigate the potential stressors of cross-cultural media consumption.

Keywords: *Soft Power*; *Indonesian popular culture*; *Soap opera*; *Media consumption*; *Mental health*; *Malaysian millenials.*

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1. Introduction

Soft Power was popularized in the late 1980s by Joseph S Nye Jr, Professor of Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA. Professor Nye's more detailed explanation of soft power was written in Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (2004). Nye defines this 'third dimension' of power as the ability to create choices for others, namely the ability to bind others to willingly choose to do what we want without us asking. Nye adds that a country's soft power comes from 3 things, namely: culture, political values and foreign policy.

A country's soft power is usually done by co-opting and is done indirectly. This is very different from Hard Power, which is coercive or commanding in nature and is operated and carried out directly. The institutions of this hard power are military power, sanctions, money and payment, so that this hard power is likely to cause resistance.

The explanation of the difference between Soft Power and Hard Power above is actually another lexicon of what Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) has popularized about hegemony. Like hegemony, Soft Power is a subtle attempt at a sympathetic invitation mechanism. Both Soft Power and hegemony are forms of co-opting through instruments such as culture, police, values and institutions.

The difference between Soft Power and hegemony is the background of the thinker. Hegemony is a concept popularized by an Italian Marxist with efforts to carry out class resistance. While Soft Power emerged by US academics with the intention of providing the right strategy for the United States to maintain its hegemony and dominance so far. With the term soft power, Nye wanted to show the neutrality of his concept and tried to free the stigma of hegemony that Gramsci had seen as pejorative.

The practice of exercising soft power has begun to be carried out by western countries that carry out 'cultural colonization', especially America. The practice of Hard Power can be seen in Iran, which has always waged war and resistance to western imperialism against their country. The practice of Soft Power is carried out by western countries with the help of the media. Media Soft Power relies on cultural power as its source, for example, selling culture through the media to influence the target audience.

A famous communication scholar, Marshal McLuhan once stated that there will be a borderless world called the 'Global Village'. This happens because of the influence of globalization which allows the flow of information and media content to spread to many countries quickly so that western countries, especially the United States are able to provide media content and messages through music, films, dramas and several other television shows and reach a large audience in Third World countries. This situation has been going on for a long time and has continued to penetrate into the culture of local communities.

But nowadays, the cultural colonization from Western countries can be said to be diminishing. In fact, the one-way flow of Western media content no longer exists due to the existence of many-way flow in international media relations (Morris, 2002). In fact, regional media now plays an important role due to cultural proximity, as suggested by Straubhaar (1991). In this case, it is the acceptance of Indonesian popular culture into Malaysia.

The presence of Soft Power in third world countries, especially Malaysia, cannot be avoided. As can be seen, the soft power is growing rapidly in Malaysia has seen in the popular culture that comes from neighboring Indonesia, such as soap operas which is popularized through television. Facts on the ground reveal that many people of all ages, whether working in formal institutions or the public or domestic world, are willing to leave their jobs in order to watch the soap operas played by television stations. This indicates that the popular culture is indeed a fun culture and many people like it. Therefore, the discussion of the presence and influence of the above popular culture on local culture, and how it affects mental health and Identity formation of Malaysian millennials, is the subject of study in this paper.

One of Indonesia's popular cultural products that aired for a long time on Malaysian television is the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih. This soap opera got a place and an extraordinary response from the audience from the Malaysian millennial generation. Broadly speaking, the themes offered by the soap opera and the film are about life and love, i.e. the depiction of the realities of real human life, which is born in human attitudes and behaviors in the categories of good - bad, black - white. But this also raises concerns from the Malaysian millennial generation about the possibility of degradation on all fronts. For example, will soap operas

cause identity and language confusion? And will soap operas have a negative influence on Islamic religious values? Because some soap opera shows have superstitious elements, where the actors are friends with spirits, and this is contradictory to the teachings of Islam, the official religion in Malaysia. Exposure to narratives in Indonesian soap operas that conflict with viewers' beliefs (e.g., supernatural elements) can create cognitive dissonance, leading to feelings of anxiety or stress. Language is a core aspect of cultural identity. For Malaysian millennials, adopting informal language of soap opera (e.g., *lo*, *gua*) might create a sense of alienation from traditional Malaysian cultural norms. This adoption may blur the boundaries between Malaysian and Indonesian identities, leading to identity confusion. Millennials who use informal language might feel disconnected from both their cultural roots and peers who adhere to standard Malaysian speech, potentially leading to stress, anxiety, or a diminished sense of belonging.

2. Literature review

Soft Power and Media (Television)

In discussing this problem, various forms of studies have been carried out by previous reviewers. Among the studies that have been done is by Sudirman Haji Rosli (1991) with the title 'The Influence of Television on Malaysian Malay Teenagers'. Sudirman stated that television is able to provide influence and change in taste, will, lifestyle, thoughts and habits among teenagers. This is quite reasonable because in a matter of seconds, minutes the teenagers can watch all the movements of their idol actors; they are forming identities. The search for identity manifests in behavior and each individual will always connect himself with the environment. At this time teenagers begin to have a certain degree of freedom. If during this time adolescents have an incorrect concept of self, then of course it is very dangerous to themselves and others. For children too, the role of parents in controlling them is very necessary. Therefore, the program should be assessed by the viewers before watching it. This study proves that media (television) is a medium that has a strong influence over its audience.

Related to the development of identity formation of adolescents, Laile Suzana Jaafar (1996) in her book 'Developmental psychology: child and adolescent psychology' states that self-concept is an important aspect to the existence and behavior of an individual. If an adolescent has a low self-concept, then of course it will lead to self-hatred and this then leads to isolation or aggressive behavior. Not only that, adolescents who have a low self-concept are also more likely to succumb to social pressures compared to adolescents who have a high self-concept. Likewise, adolescents with low self-concept are more likely to make wrong judgements and this is why they often rely on judgements made by others. This book is highly relevant to the topic of the current study.

Abdul Khalil Ahmad (1999/2000) in his study 'Television in Malaysia: An Analysis of Professionalism in Broadcasting'. He said that the development in the field of television broadcasting in Malaysia which is so rapid has made it possible for digital satellite television stations, such as Astro to load many plans for the viewer's gaze. With the popular culture attack from outside Malaysia, Indonesian popular culture such as soap operas as well as songs and video clips have increased the choice of viewers to watch. Then a scientific exercise written by Asseni Binti Wapaannahar, 2009 entitled 'Audience Perception of Indonesian soap opera on Television: A Comparative Study Between Viewers in Marang, Terengganu and University of Malaya Students' which tried to see the audience's perception of Indonesian drama on Malaysian television. According to her, one of Indonesia's popular cultural products (soap opera) has gained a place in the hearts of the audience. However, this drama from Indonesia does not need to be over-shown from local dramas so as not to jeopardize the local industry.

The reviews of the above studies all have a connection with this study because with the proliferation of Indonesian popular culture in Malaysia such as soap opera that will cause an impression on the audience, whether positive or negative. Indonesian Popular Culture that is increasingly entering into Malaysian media, especially soap opera that increasingly often decorate Malaysian television and radio, can give a deep emotional impression and can be achieved in a short time. Based on freelance studies, it is evident that people emphasize their characteristics by dressing, socializing, speaking, thinking and also behaving in their lives through watching dramas on television.

Mental Health and Soft Power

Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez in their research entitled Mental Health and Soft Power Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy explained that social isolation is happened due to the lack of social relationships, while social integration can be happened by individual's level of involvement in informal relationships, in this case with partner or family, and another one is with the formal relationship such as colleague. They stated that the quality of relationships covers positive aspects, such as emotional support, and negative aspects like conflict. Social networks describe the structure of relationships surrounding an individual, including their type and strength. Each of these aspects has a profound impact on health. In their article, they use the term of social relationship and social ties. Their research is focuses on providing a starting point to consider the role of social ties when developing strategies to improve public health and reduce health disparities. Social ties are a critical factor in shaping population health. Umberson and Montez stated that policies should focus on promoting the positive aspects of social ties while mitigating the risks associated with negative ties. Tailoring policies to the needs of vulnerable groups, addressing social isolation, and integrating these issues into broader health and social strategies are key to improving overall health outcomes.

Nick Chater, Hossam Zeitoun, and Tigran Melkonyan in their research entitled The Paradox of Social Interaction: Shared Intentionality, We-Reasoning, and Virtual Bargaining, discussed about the role of shared intentionality in human social behavior, focusing on how people collectively understand and interpret each other's thoughts and actions in social interactions. They explained that shared intentionality refers to cases where individuals coordinate and agree on a common understanding, interpretation, or plan, going beyond individual mental states and requiring joint reasoning or collaboration. Social interactions are often flexible and adaptive, responding to subtle cues and shifts in context. While some patterns of behavior are learned over time, social interactions remain malleable and adaptable to the specific demands of each situation. This suggests that, although prior experience shapes behavior, social interactions are often improvised, with virtual bargaining playing a key role in adapting to the needs of the moment.

Diana C. Mutz and Beth A. Simmons through their research "The Psychology of Separation: Border Walls, Soft Power, and International Neighborliness" focuses on individuals who are aware of the existence of a border wall between two countries will perceive their relationship as more negative than if no wall were present. Furthermore, countries with border walls are expected to be evaluated less favorably than those without. This is significant because the international image and attractiveness of a country play a crucial role in shaping the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or force. Countries that are viewed positively by foreign citizens provide a better opportunity by greater credibility, global influence, and diplomatic effectiveness. The framework that they explained helps us to anticipate how border walls, as visible and symbolic structures may have far-reaching psychological and diplomatic effects, influencing not only the immediate neighboring states but also the broader international community.

As this research is focuses on how Indonesian soft power, in this term is focuses on soap opera, is influencing Malaysian millennials in psychologically, the research from Alessandro Gabbiadini, Cristina Baldissarri, Roberta Rosa Valtorta, Federica Durante and Silvia Mari entitled Loneliness, Escapism, and Identification with Media Characters: An Exploration of The Psychological Factors Underlying Binge-Watching Tendency will be related to this research. Gabbiadini and friends' research is focuses on the physical and mental health implications of binge-watching is related to social interaction, sleep quality, unhealthy lifestyle, and weight gain. Moreover, binge-watching has even been described as a potential addictive behavior by keep thinking about that "one more episode". It is similar with the forms of problematic digital technology use, such as social media addiction and online gaming addiction. This addiction is more into the concept of escapism for coping from stress. Gabbiadini and friends focus on the definitions of escapist media that is being uses as a form of emotion-focused avoidance coping. They explained that escapist media is used to serve as a functional coping strategy in certain contexts and may positively impact media users' well-being. Therefore, their main topic is about binge-watching as a key example of escapist media consumption.

Cultural Imperialism Theory

This theory was first proposed by Herb Schiller in 1973. Schiller's first paper that served as the basis for the emergence of this theory was Communication and Cultural Domination. Cultural imperialism theory states that Western countries dominate the media throughout the world. This means that Western mass media also dominates mass media in the third world. The reason is that Western media has a strong effect on influencing third world media.

In the view of the third world, Western countries are superpowers. Therefore, anything that is made, issued by these superpowers is used as a barometer, a benchmark in countries in the third world. The desire to imitate what is of interest is unstoppable. In the perspective of this theory, when the process of imitation occurs, that is when the destruction of the original culture in third countries occurs. In the perspective of this theory, when the process of imitation occurs, that is when the destruction of the original culture in third countries occurs. people in third world countries who see mass media in their countries will enjoy offerings that come from the lifestyles, beliefs and thoughts of foreigners.

When we watch the film Independence Day, we are learning about the American Nation in the face of enemies or the struggle of the American people to achieve independence. The lifestyles, beliefs and thoughts of Americans are all in the film. Why would a third world nation want to implement a democracy that provides freedom of speech? It is all influenced by the Western mass media that enters the third world. Subsequently, third world countries unconsciously imitate what is presented in the mass media, which has been filled with Western culture. That is when the destruction of the original culture of the country occurs to then replace and adapt to Western culture. This incident can be said to be the occurrence of Western cultural imperialism. Grains of thought like this seem to be so strong poisoning the heads of Malaysian state leaders, causing high concern for the existence of other cultures such as the influx of popular culture from Indonesia brought through television shows or news broadcast by the radio, giving a negative influence on local culture.

3. Methods

This recent study is aimed to examine the impressions of Indonesian popular culture attacks in Malaysia and how it impacts on national identity and mental health, the reviewer a methodology related to the qualitative paradigm. As qualitative research, this research is phenomenological in nature. Meaning to say, this research views various problems always in their unity, both events, space, and time that are not separated individually in one event (Jaeni, 2007). Therefore, data collection was conducted on the basis of phenomenological principles, which is to deeply understand the symptoms or phenomena faced by the influx of Indonesian popular culture and its effects on local culture in Malaysia. In order for this research to run as expected, the reviewer formulates a flexible qualitative research design that is possible to change in order to adjust the plan that has been made with the symptoms that exist in the intended research site. In connection with that, there are several important elements in this research design, namely determining the focus and paradigm of research and finding relevant theories as an analysis knife. The reviewer also determines the location and place of research and determines the sources of data that can be extracted from the informants studied. To obtain data that has high credibility, it is done by using data collection techniques that characterize qualitative research, such as observation, interviews, and document studies. All data collected is checked for the degree of credibility, and then carefully analyzed through theoretical guidance. The first step is to make observations.

Although many soap operas that entered and accepted together by the Malaysian audience, but the target of the investigation is focused on the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih. This selection was made because Bawang Merah Bawang Putih have represented the themes found in other soap operas that entered Malaysia and the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih is the work of art that are most attractive to their audiences. The data collection techniques in a qualitative approach, can be done through observation, unstructured interviews, conversations, oral history and text analysis by using the basic question, namely Open-Ended questions. Departing from this phenomenon, the reviewer tries to explore and collect empirical material to reveal the problem completely in order to get a deeper understanding. Primary data was obtained through interviews with informants and respondents. The informants were selected based on the categories of gender

and age. They are a group of Malay millennials in Malaysia who have understood and experienced the times when the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih aired in Malaysia. Interviews with informants and respondents were structured to obtain information and data from specific individuals for information purposes and to obtain specific information about the attitudes, or views of the individual respondents being interviewed. Unstructured interviews were conducted by asking some open-ended questions. These questions follow on from the discussion of the two major points in this study. Here are the two issues:

- Will Indonesian popular culture such as soap operas lead to identity confusion and language confusion?
- Will Indonesian popular culture such as soap operas jeopardize Islamic religious values? Because we know that some soap opera shows have elements of superstition, where the actors are good friends with spirits, and this is contradictory to the teachings of Islam, the official religion in Malaysia.

These are type of question allows people to answer more deeply and unexpectedly to achieve the objective of this study, because the answers given will be subjective, according to the views of those people. Here are the objectives of the study in question:

1. Looking at the extent of the impression of Indonesian popular culture in Malaysia, has it become a desirable cultural product among Malaysians?
2. To find out how the impression felt by Malaysians, are they affected identitatively?
3. To see the perception of Malaysian society, which is predominantly Muslim, in accepting non-Islamic elements aired in one of Indonesia's popular cultural products.

The selected interviewees are a group of millennials of Malay nationality in Malaysia who already understand and experience the time when the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih aired in Malaysia. They are Nadia (37 years old), Fauzi (35), Siti (34), Hidayah (34) and Nurul (39).

4. Results

Here are the answers to the questions about the influence of garlic shallot soap operas on Malaysian society:

Nadya said that the stories in soap operas are a bit absurd such as the existence of peri and other spirits such as jin in human life. For children, this may not be good because it will influence their thinking that peri and jinn do exist and help humans when facing difficulties. This is certainly contradictory to the teachings of Islam which says that it is only to Allah SWT that we ask for protection when afflicted by calamities.

Fauzi is of the view that Indonesian soap operas have indeed had a negative influence on Malaysian audiences. In addition to the occurrence of identity confusion in the form of language, where Malay language as the official language of the country began to be mixed with Indonesian language heard by Malaysians from soap operas, this popular cultural product also erodes Islamic values. For example, in soap operas there are many elements of superstition or it's called as khurafat in Malay language, such as the existence of jinn and peri.

In soap operas, it is also told that good characters always fall prey to the ferocity of evil characters, so that *jinn* and *peri* help good characters. When evil characters are told to be too evil and the rewards received are not appropriate. This can give the impression that a bad person will not receive a reward that suits his crime. Another negative influence of soap operas is the presence of sexual elements, because many artists from other countries wear sexy clothes.

Siti said that the mass media which has an important role by broadcasting soap operas, also has a role in destroying the morals of the audience, this is due to the ease with which Indonesian soap operas are accepted by Malaysian society and soap operas that show non-Islamic teachings and culture, especially stories in the form of fairy tales, this is very clear decreasing Islamic values, besides that, soap operas also show a lot of free life in the community and make Malaysians affected into this social culture.

Hidayah added that soap opera has a negative influence on Malaysian audiences, especially children. If you look at the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih where there is a scene of the main actor facing difficulties, then jinn and peri appear to help him. This makes children affected and feels that jinn and peri exist, and of course this is against culture and religion. In Islam, it is only to Allah that we ask, not to jinn and peri.

*The same reason was also stated by **Nurul** that Indonesian soap operas do contain elements of superstition that can confuse our morals as Muslims. For example, in the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih, Muslim asks for help from jinn and peri to get out of trouble. Children who are underage will certainly be quickly influenced by soap operas that display superstitious elements such as the existence of these jinn and peri. **Nurul** also added that the Indonesian popular culture in Malaysia also causes language confusion, soap operas make Malaysian audiences affected in language, for example they start speaking with the language they always hear in soap operas such as gua, lu, ya sih, dong and so on.*

5. Discussion

The Mental Health Impacts of Indonesian Soap Operas on Malaysian Millennials

Critiquing the phenomenon of Indonesian cultural attacks occurring in Malaysia historically, is inseparable from the tug of war between two opposing opinions, namely between those who view the culture as a subjective reality 'product' of personal interpretation alone, and those who hold the opposite view that culture is an objective reality, free from personal interpretation. They believe objectivity can be achieved. As Karl Popper said, objectivity must be sought in the institutions and traditions of criticism of a discipline. Only through the give and take of open criticism and mutual influence between various biases can we hope for something approaching objectivity (David Kaplan and Albert A. Manners, 1999: ix). This phenomenon is interesting and phenomenologically can be explained about the audience or society in interacting with the media.

Malaysia and Indonesia, both countries have come from the third world countries, and still able to influence each other through soft power such as through music, films, and dramas. These pop-culture that has been popular among today's generations have still giving the impact in psychologically as the media is a tool that able to influence people's mental condition and well-being. Soap opera that most of them dealing with family drama, relationship, and moral dilemma, may impact well-being of the viewers, for example, constant exposure to certain narratives can shape their expectations and self-identity, potentially causing stress, anxiety, or even influencing their interpersonal relationships.

Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez in their study explained that being involved in social relationships improves health. They concluded that several psychosocial mechanisms explain the relationship between social ties and health, such as social support, personal control, symbolic meanings, and mental health. Social supports are referred to the emotional comforts provided by relationship, the constant exposure of social support is beneficial for mental and physical health as it will reduce stress, improves mental health, and trigger the positive physiological response. In personal control, it refers to individual beliefs that they can influence their outcomes through actions; by using the support it could enhance a person's sense of control which it will promotes better health habits. The symbolic meaning is being attached to social ties, for example the responsibility attitude toward family, and it can foster healthier behavior in which can shape health behavior. Lastly, by involving in social relationship, it will affect the mental health as well, because social support contributes to mental well-being and it will influence the physical health. If the mental health is being affected negatively, then it will lead to mental disorders which the cause of disability. Those elements that was explained by Umberson and Karas is being shown in soap opera as the soap opera tend to talk about relationship whether it is with family, partner, or friends. The elements are also being seen in songs where the lyrics also talk about relationship.

Contradictions with Islamic Beliefs:
The Mental Health Impact of Supernatural Reliance in Bawang Merah Bawang Putih

Alqasir and Ohtsuka using the Arabic culture in their research stated that the muslims use their Islamic faith as a foundation for their cultures, traditions, and customs (2023). Following this culture, they concluded that cultural and religion have a significant impact in understanding about mental disorder and its treatment. In their research, they stated that Muslims in Arab believe that mental disorders are caused by God, Allah as a test of faith or punishment. As a result, they believe that Allah tests or punishes people for something that they have done (2023) which this believe is being supported by Quran and Hadiths. In psychology, it is being said that

mental health is bond to relate with a good relationship with God while the mental disorder is the result of punishment from God through supernatural entities like magic or demons.

Following this research, it could be seen that the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih is against the Muslims' cultural belief that help should be come from God, not from Jinn or *peri* as *peri* is associated with supernatural entities which relate to Jinn. This could create the cultural confusions for people who watch this soap opera as it is being described that the *peri* is a helper for thus who is doing a good deed.

In Bawang Putih Bawang Merah, the protagonist received social support from *peri* (fairy) or jinn. She received the emotional comfort through the fairy's help due to the feeling of loneliness as she does not have any family left that she can trust while holding a responsibility burden the keep the family intact and trying her best to meet her step-mother's expectation even though it is useless. As she does not have any family left, she is being depending on the fairy that happened to help her during the tough time. Psychologically speaking, it could lead to mental disorder where the protagonist experiencing imaginary friend that can fulfill her thirst of love because she could not receive it from people around her. Jorge Oliveira (2024) stated that the imagination is the tool to in shaping our emotions, the ability for problem solving, the creativity and the quality of life. She stated that imagination is creating the mental images, scenario, and idea that is cannot presents to to the senses (Oliveira, 2024). She mentioned that having imagination is the ability to adapt in the new situation and giving positive experience to anticipate a better future and giving meaning for our life. It does happen in Bawang Putih Bawang Merah where the protagonist has a fairy to help her way which is psychologically the fairy is actually her imaginary friend to feel her emptiness in social support and visualizing that she can overcome the obstacle of her life by getting helped from the fairy.

Unlike Bawang Putih, Bawang Merah does not have a fairy that can help her because she has received the love and emotional support that she wanted despite of being an antagonist and a bully. However, it shows that even though the character has an evil character, it keeps make her mind still standing in reality without believing the story about fairies due to receiving enough emotional support from people around her. Imaginary friend does not work for people who keeps standing on the ground. Thus, it could be seen that Bawang Merah is the representation of people in the real life, while Bawang Putih is the representation of people who needs more emotional support to help her facing the reality without believing in fairies. As Gamble and friends (2020) stated that imagination is an adaptive ability that can be directed towards the pursuit of personal goals. The fairy in Bawang Putih is come to her to help her reaching her own goal which is happiness. That makes her keep being ambitious and positive because she has a fairy that can help her while the antagonist which is Bawang Merah only have hatred for being afraid that her life will be ruined by Bawang Putih.

However, this imaginary treatment, Gamble and friends stated, that having two sides which is the negative and positive and it is being linked to mental health. The positive aspect is the happiness where someone can pursue a certain goal to happiness. However, the negative aspect is the dysfunctional goal setting that linked into depression. Bawang Putih who believed in fairy might be have the helper to pursuit the goal, however, the goal will be imaginary as there is no clear definition which happiness that she wanted and it could lead to depression. Meanwhile Bawang Merah has a clear goal which want to be more successful without people as her obstacle, thus there is no fairy around her to help that goal.

Based on the example and the definition provided, it is shown how the viewers could be impacted by the characters that they watch. As Bawang Putih has a better image, people can believe that fairy will help their way while in fact, fairy is only in the story or psychologically only an imaginary friend that could not really help people and even can lead to depression due to in the end experiencing the feeling of nothingness. Meanwhile, even though Bawang Merah has shown the more realistic life where there is no goal that can be reach without effort is being hated by viewers due to the image of being an evil sister.

Emotional Strain and Mental Health:
The Impact of Melodrama and Intense Emotions in Bawang Merah Bawang Putih

The emotional content of popular culture, such as melodramatic elements in soap operas could affects emotional health. The frequent exposure to intense emotions that is commonly being shown such as betrayal, love, or revenge tends to create emotional strain among the viewers. Such as sometime we can see the reaction from viewers how they hate the antagonist even though they know it is only in the show. Sometime, due to the constant exposure of the character in drama, viewers will think that what happened in drama is actually happened in the real world, as drama as well the representation of the reality. Therefore, there is no wonder if people happened to doubt each other. Nick Chater, Hossam Zeitoun, and Tigran Melkonyan is analyzing about shared intentionality. They stated that the role of shared intentionality in human social behavior is focusing on how people collectively understand and interpret each other's thoughts and actions in social interactions. Shared intentionality refers to cases where individuals coordinate and agree on a common understanding, interpretation, or plan, beyond individual mental states and requiring joint reasoning or collaboration. They explained that in the Reason-Based Explanations of Behavior, Human behavior is often explained using reasons, not just for individual actions but also for interactions between people. Typically, human being will explain each other's behavior by attributing intentions, motivations, and beliefs. It could be seen through the soap opera, when an antagonist actor creates mistrust toward the real viewers because how realistic their acting is.

The influence of soft power might also extend to social health by impacting cultural norms and social behavior. The representations of gender roles, family dynamics, or social values in Indonesian media influence social interactions and the mental wellness of viewers such as escapism and well-being. Many millennials may use these soap operas as a form of escapism from daily stress. This could be linked to mental health benefits, such as relaxation and stress reduction, or conversely, to avoidance behaviors that might worsen underlying issues. Gabbiadini and friends through their journal study has written that TV series on streaming platforms may provide an accessible escape for lonely individuals. It allows the viewers to identify with media characters and experience social connections through the narrative. They mentioned that lonely individuals are more likely to emotionally identify with media characters. The desire to escape from negative emotions like loneliness is more effectively met when viewers can relate to the character that is being portrayed by the media. The identification with the characters that is shown in the drama will make the viewers grow their empathy and able to relate with the perspective of the characters, and it will help to create a connection for social bond. Giving this idea, Gabbiadini and friends explore how the facilitation of escapism may mediate the relationship between loneliness and binge-watching tendencies.

The concept of escapism is depended on the coping strategy on how people dealing with stress. Annabell Haffman and Leonard Reinecke have written that two key distinctions have been introduced to categorize strategies used to cope with the cause of stress. Firstly, it is about focus on the problem. This strategy is referring to the cause of that stress itself. In other words, it is the logic by thinking the cause and the effect of stress. Meanwhile, the opposite of this strategy is focus on emotion by involving the emotional reactions that is related to the cause of that stress. Secondly, is the strategy that is related to orientation? Haffman and Reinecke stated that this approach of coping is involves in direct engagement with the stressor, whereas avoidance coping focuses on strategies that steer away from the stressor. People who use the media is using the entertainment as their coping strategy from stress. It is because the entertainment media is being use as the escape from the reality. Using the words from Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2009), Haffman and Reinecke stated that escapist media use can be seen as emotion-focused avoidance coping. In this sense, when people choose entertainment as a form of escape, they aim to distance themselves from a stressor, thereby reducing negative emotional reactions tied to it.

Language and Identity Confusion:
The Mental Health Impact of Indonesian Soap Operas on Malaysian Millennials

Even though the coping strategy is dealing with stress, but the strategy how to deal with stress also impacted to identity confusion. Following the example of soft power from Indonesia, Malaysian millennials may experience

stress due to the pressures of reconciling modern cultural influences from Indonesian media with traditional values. This conflict can lead to a struggle for identity, resulting in mental health issues. Nick Chater, Hossam Zeitoun, and Tigran Melkonyan stated that the question of who "we" are in a group is tied to social identity. A shared sense of belonging can create a foundation for a common social contract. From this perspective, social identity is based not only on how one identifies themselves but on a collective recognition within the group. This shared understanding is key to coordinating behavior through virtual bargaining.

The portrayal of idealized lifestyles and relationships in soap operas may lead to social comparison, where viewers compare themselves to the characters, potentially resulting in feelings of inadequacy or increased stress. Chater and friends stated that human social interaction is flexible and context-sensitive, not rigidly governed by fixed rules. A slightly change of behavior, tone, or context could change the entire of interaction. Therefore, rather than thinking of social norms as fixed rules, the relationship that is portrayed in soap opera may emerge from repeated interactions and improvised behavior. While soap operas can provide an escape from reality, the emotional engagement with the storylines may also heighten stress levels, especially if the narratives resonate deeply or provoke strong reactions. Dara Greenwood who came to the term of parasocial stated that parasocial interaction is referring to the development of an imagined friendship with a media figure, where viewers feel they "know" a character or personality and form an emotional bond similar to that with a real-life friend. The connection between the character in the story-line make the viewers are able to absorb the experience emotionally. Greenwood explained that adults with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles, who are preoccupied with relationship stability, are more likely to form deep parasocial bonds with favorite characters. On the other hand, individuals with avoidant attachment styles, who are comfortable without close relationships, are less likely to form strong connections with media figures. These findings suggest that people's emotional and interpersonal tendencies influence how they connect with fictional characters, similar to their real-life relationships. The interaction is more like emotional escape, as she stated that parasocial relationships may be particularly satisfying for people who struggle with managing negative emotions or controlling their impulses. Indeed, individuals who exhibited these temperament traits were not more likely to watch TV for longer periods; rather, they were more likely to report becoming deeply absorbed in entertainment characters and shows. This suggests that how people engage with media, rather than the amount of time they spend consuming it, is more relevant to their emotional well-being.

Greenwood highlights that media programs may link to self-esteem and anxiety. Lower self-esteem, higher attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and social anxiety were all moderately associated with increased tendencies to become immersed in media. However, attachment anxiety emerged as the strongest predictor of transportation when all emotional variables were considered together. While this style may be problematic in real-life relationships, it might be more compatible with becoming absorbed in media characters. When attachment anxiety and social anxiety were significantly correlated with parasocial interaction, they did not predict it when all emotional variables were accounted for. Hence, it would be more logical that individuals who feel emotionally immersed in media content and identify with characters would also be more likely to form imagined bonds with the characters that are portrayed in the drama.

According to Jaspal in the article entitled "Language and Social Identity: A Psychosocial Approach", stated that the social identity of an ethnic group is based through the belief in a shared heritage (2009). In this case, it is being explained that language is being seen as a marker of the distinct identity where a language is a representation of, neither inter-generationally transmitted nor associated with any particular geographical region. Jaspal stated that the repertoire of cultural elements among young subcultures enables them to establish a distinctive identity. Furthermore, it is being explained that a language may be important to a group at a symbolic level such as people may collectively lay claim to a language, which they themselves do not speak natively, in order to assert a symbolic identity which will differentiate them from others. As the concern of language that is being used in the soap opera of Bawang Merah Bawang Putih create the identity confusion as it is being used by Malaysian viewers who started to use mixed language is explained how the young generation able to adapt language quickly. Jaspal explained that the identity processes may explain both group-based and individual-based decisions to adopt or to reject languages, in other words, the young viewers show the ability in

adopting the language to their life. As Jaspal stated that cultural groups and subcultures use language as a badge of membership, and nations brandish their standardized language as the emblem of their distinctiveness from other nations, however using mixed language due to influenced by the soap opera make the distinctiveness becoming into gray area as people started to think which nation that they come from.

6. Conclusion

Malaysia and Indonesia are two Nation States, having a common ancestor, the proto-Malay people who migrated 5,000 years BC. Both are also bound in one bond, namely the culture of *serumpun*, which has been inherited long ago from their ancestors again. In fact, when it comes to the people and their lives, there are so many similarities between the two countries. As is the case in religious beliefs and beliefs. Both countries adhere to the same official religion, namely Islam. Even so, old cultural practices such as the implementation of marriage ceremonies that contain elements of waste by spending excessively on gifts and decorations, the existence of elements of worship, shamans, believing in superstition by believing in magic objects, and so on, are still adhered to by people in both countries today. Artists often use these realities as ideas to reflect in their artworks, whether they are Malaysian or Indonesian.

Regardless of the cons, there are at least 3.5 million Malaysians who will be adored every week when the favorite soap opera series Bawang Merah Bawang Putih is broadcast. From that fact, it can be concluded that the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih indeed has a place in the hearts of the Malaysian audience.

From the tug of war between the two oppositions, namely between those who view the soap opera can deviating from the faith and those who hold the opposite view, that what is shown is the reality of people's lives reflected back by the actors and disseminated widely by the media, it appears that there are themes that are implied.

There are those who try to describe various general images of Indonesian culture that are not in accordance with the prevailing culture in Malaysia, even though history has proven that the two countries have similarities, especially regarding religion and belief practices that continue to this day. This is clearly against the cognitive principle, that something must be believed by the community, accepted as legitimate and true. Hence the assertion must be made. Starting from the question, are matters concerning old beliefs that are still practiced by people in both countries disputed by Malaysians? Are the counter-opinions that are launched a subjective judgement for a particular interest? However, objectivity can be achieved through the institution and tradition of criticism of a discipline. Openness to criticism and mutual influence between various biases, it is hoped that something close to objectivity will emerge.

As in the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih, it clearly depicts the reality of people's lives. The storyline is made clear that evil is indeed evil and good is indeed good. The existence of elements such as *peri*, it also describes the reality of the community that is still practiced today, although in the soap opera it is only more to color the drama played.

Actually, many things are implied that can be captured in the soap opera Bawang Merah Bawang Putih. That in general the soap opera describes the general condition of society, especially Indonesia and certainly not much different from the lives of the people of neighboring Malaysia. The soap opera also provides teaching to its audience how to behave well, clearly and firmly. People are taught not to be a grey society, a liminal society. On the other hand, the presence of *peri* that colors the soap opera is also a criticism where in this modern era it turns out that people who have once embraced Islam, still carry out old beliefs whose existence is still tolerated.

Eliminating old beliefs adopted by the community that contradict the teachings of Islam, of course, is not as easy as turning the palm of the hand. Starting from individuals, families, and communities, accompanied by religious advice from competent people, is the solution to avoiding Allah's wrath. Therefore, awareness of this will eliminate arrogance and negative sentiments from the people involved.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest. Nothing to disclosure.

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