



**Cultural Threads, Ghostly Bonds: An Intersectional Feminist Study of Hanna Alkaf's
*The Girl and The Ghost***

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Approval Sheet

This research paper attached hereto, entitled Cultural Threads, Ghostly Bonds: An Intersectional Feminist Study of Hanna Alkaf's *The Girl and The Ghost* prepared and submitted by Soong Ke Min in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Language is hereby accepted.

Date: 5/5/2024

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Abstract

This intersectional feminist study delves into Hanna Alkaf's *The Girl and The Ghost*, exploring gender dynamics and cultural influences within the story. By adopting an intersectional feminist lens, the research emphasizes the importance of analyzing the interconnected influences of gender and cultural dimensions such as religion and class to unravel the nuanced dynamics shaping characters, particularly Suraya. The study sheds light on how characters navigate societal expectations and express femininity, focusing on Suraya's evolving journey challenging conventional representations. Through a comprehensive analysis, as pointed out in the conceptual framework of this research, it evaluates the effectiveness of the intersectional feminist framework in shedding light on gender, cultural influences particularly in religion and class portrayed in the narrative. The conclusion draws from this research is that Suraya's experiences are influenced and shaped by the interplay of gender and cultural dimensions such as religion and class. At the same time, the forms of oppression faced by Suraya as well as her empowerment in a marginalized society as the result of the interplay of gender, cultural dimensions such as religion and class are discussed in the research paper. All these discussions are integral parts of intersectional feminist framework proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory.

Keywords: intersectionality, feminism, intersectional feminism, gender identities, culture, religion, class, oppression.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research embarks on a journey through the nuanced realm of Malaysian Literature in English, delving into Hanna Alkaf's *The Girl and The Ghost* (2020). Against the backdrop of a society deeply rooted in cultural traditions, the novel unravels intricate dynamics surrounding gender and identity. Unlike conventional portrayals that often cast women as weak and inferior, *The Girl and The Ghost* challenges these stereotypes, offering a multifaceted exploration of women's experiences.

The Girl and The Ghost revolves around the friendship between the protagonist, a Malay girl named Suraya and her pelesit, whom she calls Pink. They formed an inseparable bond because they are bonded by blood. Pink, unlike the name given by Suraya, is a male ghost and is gifted by her deceased witch grandmother. This story will uncover Suraya's personal development as she started to explore a world that is greater than her village when she is attending secondary school in the city and her friendship with Pink started to be aroused by jealousy.

Hanna Alkaf is a Malaysian author known for her captivating works in children's and young adult literature. With her debut novel, *The Weight of Our Sky*, she quickly gained recognition for her ability to explore themes of identity and belonging through the lens of her own Malaysian heritage. Alkaf's writing delves into the rich tapestry of Malaysian culture, incorporating elements of folklore, history, and social issues. Her second novel, *The Girl and The Ghost*, further solidified her reputation as a talented storyteller, showcasing her unique perspective and ability to tackle complex emotions and relationships. Alkaf's contributions to

Malaysian literature have garnered international acclaim, and she continues to captivate readers with her engaging stories and thought-provoking themes.

This study draws inspiration from the broader feminist discourse, recognizing the continued struggles faced by women in societies where their social position is undermined. As we navigate through the narrative intricacies of *The Girl and The Ghost*, we confront the intersections of gender, culture, and identity that shape the protagonist's journey. This research, guided by an intersectional feminist framework, seeks to unravel the complexities of Suraya's experiences, and shed light on the broader implications for Malaysian literature in English (MLE).

This introduction establishes the foundation for an in-depth examination, reflecting the ongoing international discourse on feminism while emphasizing the importance of nuanced analyses within different cultural frameworks. The upcoming sections will dig into how women are portrayed in *The Girl and The Ghost*, shedding light on the different types of oppression that Suraya experiences. This exploration seeks to uncover the intricacies of gender dynamics woven into the story. Chapter 1 will elucidate the study's background, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance, definition of terms, and the scope and limitations of the study.

Research Background

The mid-20th century witnessed a transformative period with the emergence of the women's movement, catalyzing shifts in societal attitudes and challenging traditional norms. This movement paved the way for advancements in education, employment, and voting rights for women. However, despite these progresses, women continued to grapple with patriarchal structures that perpetuated stereotypes and hindered social equality.

As feminism gained momentum globally, scholars began scrutinizing literary works through feminist lenses, challenging the portrayal of female characters, and unraveling the subtle threads of gender inequality woven into stories. In the realm of MLE, this exploration takes on added significance. Literary luminaries like Bernice Chauly and Tash Aw assert the feminist nature inherent in every story, emphasizing the exploration of power, identity, and the multifaceted lives of women.

This research extends its focus to *The Girl and The Ghost* (2020) by Hanna Alkaf, utilizing an intersectional feminist framework. The choice of intersectional feminism is deliberate, recognizing the complexities of women's experiences beyond a singular lens. The intersectional approach acknowledges that women's identities intersect with various aspects such as race, class, and culture, shaping their nuanced experiences.

The Girl and The Ghost unveils a rich tapestry of intricate dynamics surrounding gender and identity within the story, deeply rooted in Malaysian culture. The story intricately weaves through cultural expectations, illuminating the societal norms that govern the lives of female characters. Within the Malaysian cultural context, traditional gender roles often prescribe specific behaviors and responsibilities for women. The story centres around a young girl named Suraya, who befriends a ghost named Pink, and together they embark on a journey that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations.

At its core, the novel navigates the delicate balance between traditional expectations and the evolving roles of women, adding layers of complexity to the characters' experiences. For instance, Suraya's friendship with Pink challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. The ghost, being gender-neutral, allows the story to question and challenge societal norms regarding how girls and boys should behave. This challenges the binary perspective of gender and opens discussions on fluidity and self-expression.

The novel's strength lies in its exploration of intersectionality — the convergence of gender, religion, and cultural identity. Suraya's identity, shaped by her mixed heritage, reflects the nuanced experiences of women with intersecting identities. The intersectional lens allows for a deeper understanding of how gendered experiences intersect with other aspects of identity, shaping Suraya's responses to the challenges she faces.

Within the story, Suraya grapples with the quest for agency and empowerment, highlighting the evolving roles of women in a changing society. Suraya's journey becomes a testament to the resilience of female characters as they negotiate their identities in the face of societal expectations. The novel invites readers to witness Suraya's internal struggles and triumphs as she carves spaces for herself within the constraints of cultural norms.

The novel challenges conventional representations of femininity, disrupting stereotypes and presenting a spectrum of Suraya's experiences. By doing so, it fosters a dialogue on the diverse ways in which women navigate societal expectations and express their femininity. The narrative nuances the portrayal of Suraya, rejecting one-dimensional archetypes in favor of an authentic, multidimensional representation.

As Suraya grapples with the complexities of her identity, the story underscores a theme of cultural resilience. The novel portrays how women, despite societal constraints, find strength in their cultural identities. The interplay between gender and culture becomes a source of resilience, showcasing the intricate ways in which cultural heritage influences Suraya's perceptions of herself and her role.

In short, *The Girl and The Ghost* becomes a literary canvas that intricately paints the multidimensional experiences of Suraya within the Malaysian cultural context. The story not only challenges traditional gender norms but also invites readers to engage with the profound interconnections between gender, identity, and cultural dimensions such as religion and class,

contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics that shape the lives of women.

Statement of Problem

Within the context of MLE, the intersectional dynamics of gender identities within the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* by Hanna Alkaf remain largely unexplored. The characters in the story navigate intricate webs of cultural, religious, and contemporary societal expectations, shaping their gender roles and identities. However, the nuanced ways in which these intersections influence and construct gender identities within the Malaysian literary landscape require in-depth examination.

This statement of problem highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis employing an intersectional feminist lens to unveil the complexities of how gender roles are portrayed, negotiated, and challenged in the novel. The study seeks to explore how characters in the story navigate their gender roles. It aims to uncover detailed insights into the complexities of forming one's identity in this cultural context. Moreover, it aims to address the challenge of applying Western-centric feminist theories to MLE, seeking to adapt and contextualize intersectional feminism to the unique socio-cultural landscape of Malaysia.

Within the realm of MLE, *The Girl and The Ghost* stands as an interesting story that mixes cultural richness with contemporary storytelling. However, a critical examination reveals a significant gap in the exploration of gender dynamics and identity representations within the novel. The intricate interplay of cultural traditions, religious influences, and modern gender norms in the Malaysian context shapes the characters and their experiences. Despite the richness of the story, there exists a paucity of research that delves into the nuanced intersections of gender, identity, and culture within the story.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study emerges from a critical void in Malaysian Literature in English (MLE) regarding the intersectional exploration of gender identities within Hanna Alkaf's novel *The Girl and The Ghost*. The characters in the narrative intricately navigate webs of cultural, religious, and contemporary societal expectations, influencing their gender roles and identities. By employing an intersectional feminist lens, this research responds to the pressing need for a thorough analysis of these intersections, aiming to unravel the complexities of gender portrayal, negotiation, and challenge within the novel. Moreover, it seeks to fill a research gap by examining the intricate intersections of gender, cultural dimensions such as religion and class, providing a thorough exploration of the characters' experiences within the context of Malaysian society. In the context of this culturally rich and contemporarily woven story, the study addresses the dearth of research on nuanced intersections of gender, identity, and culture, contributing to a richer understanding of Malaysian culture.

Research Questions

1. How does the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* represent and discuss the intersections of gender and cultural dimensions which shape Suraya's identities and oppressions faced by her in the novel?
2. In what ways does adopting an intersectional feminist lens enhance our understanding of gender dynamics among the characters, as well as addressing the women's marginalization and empowerment found in the novel?

Definition of Terms

1. Intersectional Feminism - Intersectional feminism involves recognizing the influence of various intersecting aspects of women's identities, such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, on the unique ways in which they encounter oppression and discrimination (Dastagir, 2017).

2. Gender - Gender refers to the social and cultural roles, behaviors, expectations, and identities that society assigns to individuals based on their sex. It is a complex concept that encompasses the ways in which individuals understand and express their own sense of being male, female, or non-binary. Gender is not solely determined by biological factors, but is also influenced by cultural, social, and psychological factors. It is important to note that gender is a social construct and can vary across different cultures and societies (Newman, 2002).
3. Religion - Religion can be defined as a complex system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and values that involves a belief in and worship of a higher power or powers. It often includes moral codes, ethical guidelines, and a sense of purpose or meaning in life. Religion can provide individuals with a framework for understanding the world, their place in it, and their relationship with others. It can also serve as a source of comfort, guidance, and community. Different religions have different beliefs, practices, and traditions, and they can vary widely across cultures and societies (Mack, 2003).
4. Culture - Culture can be defined as the learned and shared patterns of behaviour, knowledge, beliefs, and habits that are transmitted through non-genetic means within a group of individuals. It encompasses the norms, values, customs, traditions, and shared meanings that shape the way people think, feel, and act within a particular society or community (Birukou et al., 2013).
5. Social class - Social class refers to a system of stratification based on socioeconomic factors such as income, education, occupation, and wealth that categorizes individuals into different groups with varying levels of power, prestige, and access to resources. It plays a significant role in shaping individuals' opportunities, social interactions, and life outcomes within a society (Dorling, 2014).

Scope of research

This study focuses on the in-depth analysis of Hanna Alkaf's novel, *The Girl and The Ghost*, utilizing an intersectional feminist lens. The scope is centered on examining the portrayal of female characters, notably Suraya, within the intricate context of Malaysian culture. The research aims to uncover how intersecting identities, including gender, cultural dimensions such as religion and class which contribute to the multifaceted experiences of women, providing a nuanced understanding of the broader sociocultural dynamics within the story.

Conclusion

In the contemporary landscape of MLE, the intersectional exploration of gender and identity within stories stands as a pertinent yet underexplored domain. This research embarks on a journey to scrutinize the intricacies of *The Girl and The Ghost* through an intersectional feminist lens, probing the layers of representation, cultural nuances, and the interplay of religious identities within Malaysian society. The justification for adopting an intersectional feminist approach stems from the need to address the multifaceted dimensions of gender, encompassing not only the conventional aspects but also intricacies embedded in cultural and religious contexts. The study positions itself within the broader framework of feminist literary criticism, acknowledging the challenges of applying Western-centric theories to a rich and diverse cultural tapestry like Malaysia. By selecting *The Girl and The Ghost* as a focal point, the research aims to unravel the gendered narratives woven into the fabric of Malaysian literature, opening avenues for dialogue on representation, agency, and the negotiation of identity. This introductory chapter sets the stage by presenting the background, rationale, and objectives of the study, acknowledging the complexities of applying feminist theories to the Malaysian literary landscape.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will explore critical aspects of this study. Initially, I will define intersectional feminism, a pivotal element in this research. Additionally, I will delve into the intersections of gender, cultural dimensions such as religion and class within the framework of intersectional feminism, shedding light on how these intersections shape the construction of the protagonist, Suraya's identities in the novel. These examinations aim to provide readers with a deeper insight into how the adoption of an intersectional feminist perspective enhances the understanding of gender dynamics in *The Girl and The Ghost*.

Intersectionality

Considering the implications of intersectionality, ever since Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal theorist, introduced the concept of intersectionality in the late 1980s, scholars within the realms of social sciences and humanities have engaged in ongoing discussions regarding its merits and drawbacks in theoretical, methodological, and policy contexts. This symposium aims to purposefully leverage the expertise in intersectionality and the identities of political scientists to highlight various approaches to this concept. The intention behind (Simien et. al., 2011) is to actively foster the creation of inventive theoretical perspectives and novel empirical research designs within this scholarly domain by showcasing instances of intersectionality research from diverse subfields. Within feminist theory, intersectionality has emerged as the predominant framework for understanding the interplay between systems of oppression, which shape multiple identities and social positions within hierarchies of power and privilege. Ever since Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal theorist, introduced the concept of intersectionality in the late 1980s, scholars within the realms of social sciences and humanities have engaged in ongoing discussions regarding its merits and drawbacks in theoretical, methodological, and

policy contexts. This symposium aims to purposefully leverage the expertise in intersectionality and the identities of political scientists to highlight various approaches to this concept. The intention behind (Simien et. al., 2011) is to actively foster the creation of inventive theoretical perspectives and novel empirical research designs within this scholarly domain by showcasing instances of intersectionality research from diverse subfields. Within feminist theory, intersectionality has emerged as the predominant framework for understanding the interplay between systems of oppression, which shape multiple identities and social positions within hierarchies of power and privilege.

Carbin and Edenheim (2013) highlighted that intersectionality serves as a framework acknowledging the intricate and interconnected aspects of social identities, illustrating how they intersect and mutually influence one another. It goes beyond a single-axis analysis of oppression and acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage simultaneously. For example, a person's experience of discrimination may be shaped not only by their gender but also by their race, class, sexuality, and ability.

The focus of (Carastathis, 2014) is to elucidate the genesis of intersectionality as a metaphor, along with its conceptualization as a provisional idea within Kimberle Williams Crenshaw's scholarship. Subsequently, it explores how intersectionality has been embraced and integrated into mainstream discourse as a paradigm by feminist theorists during a time characterized by its extensive and, at times, unexamined—but occasionally superficial and inattentive—application.

Besides, research conducted by Oleksy (2014) explores the matter of intersectionality, examining its relevance in contemporary research and its standing among other theoretical frameworks. The author acknowledges the primary contributors and researchers in the field of intersectionality, including Kimberle Crenshaw, Johanna Kantola, Nousiainen Kevat, and

Kathy Davis. Originating in the Black feminist legal scholarship of Kimberle Williams Crenshaw and evolving to become a central topic in online activist discussions, intersectionality has consistently conveyed both academic insights and activist implications.

Furthermore, as noted by Harris et al. (2015), the application of intersectionality within the social sciences, encompassing research areas like religion, health, gender-based violence, and interdisciplinary studies are explored. The study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, utilizing Mansour Fakih's concept of gender discrimination and Kimberle Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality. This approach focuses on understanding the interplay of multiple dimensions, such as gender and class, in the manifestation of discrimination.

Rosida et al. (2017) underscores the importance to explore the portrayal of the primary female character residing in a patriarchal culture within the narrative. Keywords: Intersectionality; Intersectional Feminism; Human Rights.

Intersectionality also recognizes that power operates in complex ways, with certain social identities being privileged while others are marginalized. It challenges the notion of a single, universal experience of oppression and highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique experiences and needs of individuals with intersecting identities.

By adopting an intersectional perspective, researchers, activists, and policymakers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of social inequalities and develop more inclusive and effective strategies for social change. It encourages a nuanced analysis of power dynamics and calls for the dismantling of intersecting systems of oppression (Fakier et al., 2020).

Stelzer et al. (2021) investigate the concept of intersectionality of oppression or intersectional inequality, which was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. The study explores the analytical potential of this concept in advancing women's access to Human Rights.

In the study by Chaulagain et. al. (2021) delves into theoretical conversations surrounding intersectionality, addressing questions such as how Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory operates within different manifestations of social divisions and how diverse scholars react to it. The authors scrutinize the landscape of intersectional theoretical perspectives explicitly rooted in Crenshaw's concepts, exploring how these perspectives challenge and complicate political practices of dominance and discrimination against minority groups in contemporary societies.

In the late 1980s, Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal scholar, introduced the concept of intersectionality to redirect the focus towards the intricate and multi-dimensional nature of Black female subjectivity. (Stephens, 2021) explores Crenshaw's positioning of this identity within what she referred to as "whiteness as a single-axis framework of analysis."

Overall, intersectionality provides a framework for understanding the complexity of social identities and the ways in which they shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. It emphasizes the need to consider multiple dimensions of identity and to address the intersecting systems of power and privilege that contribute to social inequalities.

Intersectional Feminism

Crenshaw (1989) stated that intersectional feminism is a framework that recognizes the interconnected nature of social identities and the ways in which they intersect and interact with each other. It goes beyond a single-axis analysis of gender and acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination simultaneously. Intersectional feminism emphasizes the need to consider multiple dimensions of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, when analysing and addressing gender inequality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar and critical race theorist, introduced the term "intersectionality" in the late 1980s. Crenshaw drew attention to the distinctive challenges

faced by Black women, emphasizing that existing feminist or anti-racist movements did not sufficiently address their specific forms of discrimination. She contended that individuals with intersecting identities often find their experiences overlooked or marginalized within larger social justice movements (Hill Collins, P., 2000).

Intersectional feminism acknowledges that various forms of oppression are not isolated experiences but rather interconnected and mutually reinforcing. It recognizes that individuals with intersecting marginalized identities may encounter compounded forms of discrimination and disadvantage. To illustrate, a transgender woman of color might face discrimination based on her gender identity, race, and transphobia, all intersecting to shape her experiences of marginalization (Hooks, 2000).

This framework emphasizes the importance of centering the experiences and voices of marginalized individuals in feminist analysis and activism. It calls for an intersectional analysis of power dynamics and the dismantling of intersecting systems of oppression. Intersectional feminism aims to promote inclusivity and social justice by addressing the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities. (Cho et al., 2013; Davis, 2008).

In summary, intersectional feminism, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, recognizes the intertwined nature of social identities and the need to consider various dimensions such as race, class, and sexuality in addressing gender inequality. Originating in the late 1980s, it emphasizes that oppression is interconnected, impacting individuals with multiple marginalized identities simultaneously. The framework underscores the importance of amplifying marginalized voices, fostering inclusivity, and dismantling intersecting systems of oppression. As advocated by scholars like Cho et al. (2013) and Davis (2008), intersectional feminism remains vital for a comprehensive and equitable approach to feminist analysis and activism, striving for social justice.

Gender

Exploring the multifaceted dimensions of gender, Butler (2006) and West & Zimmerman (1987) assert that gender is a complex concept with diverse dimensions. One crucial facet is gender identity, denoting an individual's profound sense of being male, female, or something different altogether. It constitutes an internal comprehension of one's gender, which may or may not align with the assigned sex at birth. Gender identity is an intensely personal and individualized experience, exhibiting considerable variation from one person to another.

An additional gender-related notion is gender expression. This term pertains to how individuals convey their gender to others through behaviors, clothing, hairstyles, and other external features. It can manifest as masculine, feminine, or a blend of both, deviating from or conforming to societal expectations. Gender expression serves as a mode of self-expression and exhibits substantial diversity among individuals.

Besides, gender roles are another important aspect of gender. These are the societal expectations and norms associated with being male or female. Gender roles define the behaviors, activities, and responsibilities that are considered appropriate for individuals based on their gender. However, it is important to recognize that gender roles can be restrictive and limit individuals' opportunities and choices.

Gender stereotypes are oversimplified and generalized beliefs about the characteristics, roles, and behaviors of men and women. They often reinforce traditional gender roles and can perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Challenging and breaking down gender stereotypes is crucial for promoting gender equality and creating a more inclusive society.

Gender equality is a fundamental principle that advocates for the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of individuals regardless of their gender. It aims to eliminate

discrimination and promote equal access to resources, power, and decision-making. Achieving gender equality requires addressing systemic barriers and challenging societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

The gender binary is a classification system that categorizes gender into two distinct and opposite categories: male and female. It assumes that all individuals can be classified as either male or female based on their biological sex. However, the gender spectrum recognizes that gender is not strictly limited to these binary categories. It acknowledges that gender exists on a continuum, with a range of identities beyond the traditional binary.

These concepts highlight the complexity and diversity of gender. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and respecting individuals' gender identities and expressions, challenging gender stereotypes and roles, and working towards achieving gender equality for all.

Additionally, gender is a significant factor that influences female's experiences. It is a social construct that encompasses the roles, expectations, and behaviors associated with being a woman or a girl in a particular society. Gender shapes various aspects of females' lives, including their opportunities, access to resources, and interactions with others. It affects their education, employment, relationships, and overall well-being. Gender inequality and discrimination can limit females' choices and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Understanding the intersectionality of gender with other factors such as race, class, and sexuality is crucial for comprehending the complex and diverse experiences of females (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020).

Furthermore, McCall (2005) stated that intersectionality is a concept that recognizes the interconnectedness of various social identities and systems of oppression, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and more. It acknowledges that individuals experience multiple forms of discrimination and privilege simultaneously, and that these intersecting factors shape their

everyday lives. In the context of females' everyday lives, intersectionality highlights how gender intersects with other identities and social structures to influence their experiences. It recognizes that women's experiences are not uniform and that factors such as race, class, and sexuality can significantly impact their access to resources, opportunities, and power. Intersectionality emphasizes the importance of considering these intersecting factors when analyzing and addressing gender inequality and discrimination.

In conclusion, this section highlights the complexity of gender, covering aspects like identity, expression, roles, and stereotypes. It stresses the need to challenge stereotypes for gender equality, particularly in understanding how societal expectations impact females. The concept of intersectionality emphasizes considering factors like race and class when addressing gender issues, recognizing the diverse experiences of women. Overall, the review calls for a nuanced and inclusive approach to grasp and address the intricacies of gender in society.

Religion

The intersection of religion and feminism within an intersectional framework is explored in these sources (Gökarıksel & Smith, 2017; Khan, 2021; Singh, 2015). One key aspect is the recognition of religious women's agency. These sources challenge the assumption that religion is inherently oppressive to women and emphasize the importance of acknowledging the diverse ways in which religious women navigate their identities and negotiate power dynamics within their religious communities. By recognizing their agency, these sources disrupt the monolithic portrayal of religious women as passive victims and highlight their active participation in shaping their own lives.

Another significant aspect discussed in the sources is the emergence of a "postsecular turn" in feminist thought. This turn signifies a shift towards acknowledging and engaging with the practices and agency of religious women. It challenges the boundaries and assumptions of

mainstream feminism, which often dismisses or overlooks the significance of religion in women's lives. The sources call for a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in shaping women's experiences and highlight the need to include religious perspectives within feminist discourse. This postsecular turn encourages a more inclusive and comprehensive analysis of the intersection of religion and feminism.

The sources also address the challenges faced by intersectionality in relation to religion. While intersectionality is widely accepted as an important framework in feminist research, the sources note a relative silence on the topic of religion within intersectional discussions. They argue for the inclusion of religion as an axis of difference alongside gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation. By highlighting the importance of attending to the religious/secular divide, these sources call for a more comprehensive analysis of the ways in which religious identity intersects with other social categories and shapes the experiences of religious women. This inclusion of religion within intersectional frameworks allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of religious identity and its intersections with other forms of oppression and privilege.

In summary, the sources contribute to a broader understanding of intersectional feminism by recognizing the agency of religious women, calling for a more inclusive analysis of the intersection of religion and feminism, and highlighting the complexity of religious identity within an intersectional framework. They challenge the assumptions and limitations of mainstream feminism, emphasizing the need to engage with religious perspectives and experiences in order to foster a more comprehensive and inclusive feminist discourse.

Culture

Culture plays a significant role in feminist discourse, particularly in understanding the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and culture. Feminist scholars emphasize that culture is

not a monolithic entity but a complex and multifaceted concept. They argue that culture is not an inherent characteristic of a particular group but is socially constructed and shaped by power dynamics (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

In feminist discussions, culture is seen as a system of beliefs, values, norms, and practices that influence gender roles, expectations, and inequalities. It is recognized that different cultures have different ways of understanding and perpetuating gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression. However, it is important to distinguish between culture and patriarchy, as patriarchal practices are often wrongly attributed to culture (Volpp, 2001).

Feminist scholars also highlight the need to challenge cultural relativism, which can sometimes be used to justify or tolerate harmful practices against women. They argue that cultural practices should not be used as an excuse to perpetuate violence or discrimination. Instead, they advocate for a critical examination of cultural norms and the promotion of gender equality within cultural contexts (Waits, 1998).

Overall, the concept of culture in feminism recognizes the complex and dynamic nature of cultural influences on gender relations and calls for a nuanced understanding that considers the intersections of race, class, and gender. It emphasizes the importance of challenging oppressive cultural practices while respecting diverse cultural identities and experiences (Naples, 2012).

Social class

The concept of social class plays a significant role in understanding female marginalization in various societies. Gilmore (1990) explores the impact of social class on male and female power dynamics, highlighting the asymmetries that exist within different social strata. Similarly, Gill (1993) delves into the changing class relationships in La Paz and how

they affect women's experiences, emphasizing the contested meanings of gender and class in shaping women's lives.

Furthermore, Burger et al. (2017) argues for a multi-dimensional approach to categorizing the middle class, emphasizing empowerment and capability as key factors. This perspective is crucial in understanding how social class intersects with gender to influence women's experiences of marginalization.

Social class in Malaysia has been a topic of interest in various studies. Ong (1990) explores the social effects of the secular state and Islamic resurgence on Malay women, kinship, and identity in Malaysia. BRH (1998) discusses how norms associated with the royal class maintain social stratification in Malaysia. Thompson (2003) focuses on the transformation of the political economy in Malaysia, highlighting the negotiation of intersecting fields of identity, ethnicity, gender, migrancy, religion, and class by Malay men. Owuamalam et al. (2017) present contrasting explanations from system-justification theory and social identity theory on why individuals from low-status groups support class systems that disadvantage them in Malaysia. Matondang (2018) traces the influence of Mahathir's leadership in shaping the New Economic Policy in the 1990s, leading to the creation of a new Malay middle class and social transformation in Malaysia. While some studies focus on specific aspects of social class in Malaysia, such as the use of social media among college students (Alshuaibi et al., 2018) or the improvement of pedestrian sidewalks towards supporting a world-class city (Rashid et al., 2018), the overall understanding of social class in Malaysia remains a complex and multifaceted issue. The impact of digital economic liberalization and capitalization on different class societies in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, has also been studied (Ikhsan et al., 2020). These studies collectively contribute to a broader understanding of social class dynamics in Malaysia and its implications on various aspects of society.

Past Studies of *The Girl and the Ghost*

(Ain & Zainor Izat Zainal, 2022) focuses on the human-ghost bond in the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* by Hanna Alkaf. It explores the relationship between the protagonist, Suraya, and a ghost named Pink. The study applies John Bowlby's attachment theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the emotional bond between Suraya and Pink.

The paper argues that the representation of the human-ghost bond in the novel challenges the traditional portrayal of ghosts as evil and vengeful. Pink, the ghost, is depicted as an anthropomorphized character with tender human emotions and qualities such as protection, support, and benevolence. This portrayal deviates from the usual depiction of ghosts in Malaysian literature.

The research highlights the significance of attachment figures beyond traditional motherly figures. Suraya forms a secure attachment with Pink, who serves as a safe haven and a secure base for her. Pink provides emotional support, protection, and comfort to Suraya, enabling her to explore the world and overcome her reserved personality.

The literature review section discusses the cultural context of ghost stories in Malaysia, influenced by Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures. It notes that ghosts are often portrayed as embodiments of evil and the antithesis of humanity. However, the representation of Pink in *The Girl and The Ghost* offers an alternative viewpoint, emphasizing the potential for attachment and positive relationships with supernatural beings.

Overall, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of attachment relationships in literature, specifically exploring the human-ghost bond in *The Girl and The Ghost*. It provides insights into the unique dynamics of this bond and expands the concept of attachment figures beyond traditional boundaries.

Conclusion

In this chapter's comprehensive literature review, the focus centered on intersectionality, intersectional feminism, gender, religion, and culture within the context of the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* by Hanna Alkaf. The exploration of intersectionality, rooted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, revealed its significance in understanding complex identity constructions and power dynamics. Scholars contributed diverse perspectives, emphasizing the interconnected nature of social identities and advocating for a more inclusive analysis of social inequalities. The examination of gender, religion, and culture highlighted their multifaceted dimensions and the need for nuanced approaches. The chapter also delved into past studies of the novel, emphasizing the unique portrayal of the human-ghost bond and its application of attachment theory, challenging traditional literary depictions. Overall, this literature review sets the foundation for subsequent chapters to explore how these theoretical frameworks enrich the analysis of gender dynamics, cultural influences, and religious perspectives in *The Girl and The Ghost*, contributing to a broader understanding of its thematic elements and implications for social justice.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As evident in the literature review portion of this investigation, various approaches exist for examining literary works through a feminist lens. This research will employ the framework of intersectional feminism to address the posed research questions. The study's aims are to explore: the intersections of gender, culture and religion being represented in the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* and in which way an intersectional feminist lens can enhance readers' understanding of gender dynamics in the novel *The Girl and The Ghost*.

Intersectional Feminism

In this research, the exploration of *The Girl and The Ghost* is guided by the lens of intersectional feminism. This framework, examining the interconnected influences of gender, culture, and religion, proves instrumental in unraveling the intricate dynamics shaping the characters, especially the central figure, Suraya. The significance lies in recognizing that these facets of identity are not isolated; they intersect and weave together, forming a nuanced story.

The adoption of an intersectional feminist lens becomes pivotal for a nuanced analysis of *Suraya's identity*. It moves beyond a singular focus on gender, delving into the complex interplay of cultural dimensions such as religion and class with her gender identity. This approach discourages oversimplification, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of Suraya's character.

A second crucial aspect is the emphasis on *inclusivity*. By employing an intersectional feminist lens, the analysis ensures sensitivity to the diverse experiences of individuals. This is particularly pertinent in a story like *The Girl and The Ghost*, where cultural and religious diversity holds significant weight. The aim is to acknowledge that identities are multifaceted and to avoid a generic approach.

Furthermore, the framework enriches the comprehension of *gender dynamics* within the novel. It goes beyond surface-level observations, delving into the portrayal of these dynamics and their resonance within cultural context of religion and class. The approach strives for a comprehensive and culturally attuned analysis, rejecting superficial interpretations.

In short, the research sees intersectional feminism as more than a mere theoretical concept. It serves as the key unlocking a profound understanding of *The Girl and The Ghost*. The goal is to appreciate the layers, complexities, and cultural intricacies shaping the characters' experiences. This research is not confined to literary analysis; it strives to bring a crucial perspective to the forefront, enhancing the understanding of the novel within the realm of Malaysian literature.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework in a research paper is a theoretical framework that provides a structure for understanding and analyzing the research problem. It consists of a set of interconnected concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that guide the research process. The purpose of a conceptual framework is to provide a lens through which the researcher can view and interpret the phenomenon under investigation.

The conceptual framework helps to establish the context and scope of the research by defining the key concepts and variables that will be studied. It helps to clarify the relationships between these concepts and variables, and how they contribute to the overall understanding of the research problem. By organizing and structuring these concepts, the conceptual framework provides a roadmap for the research process.

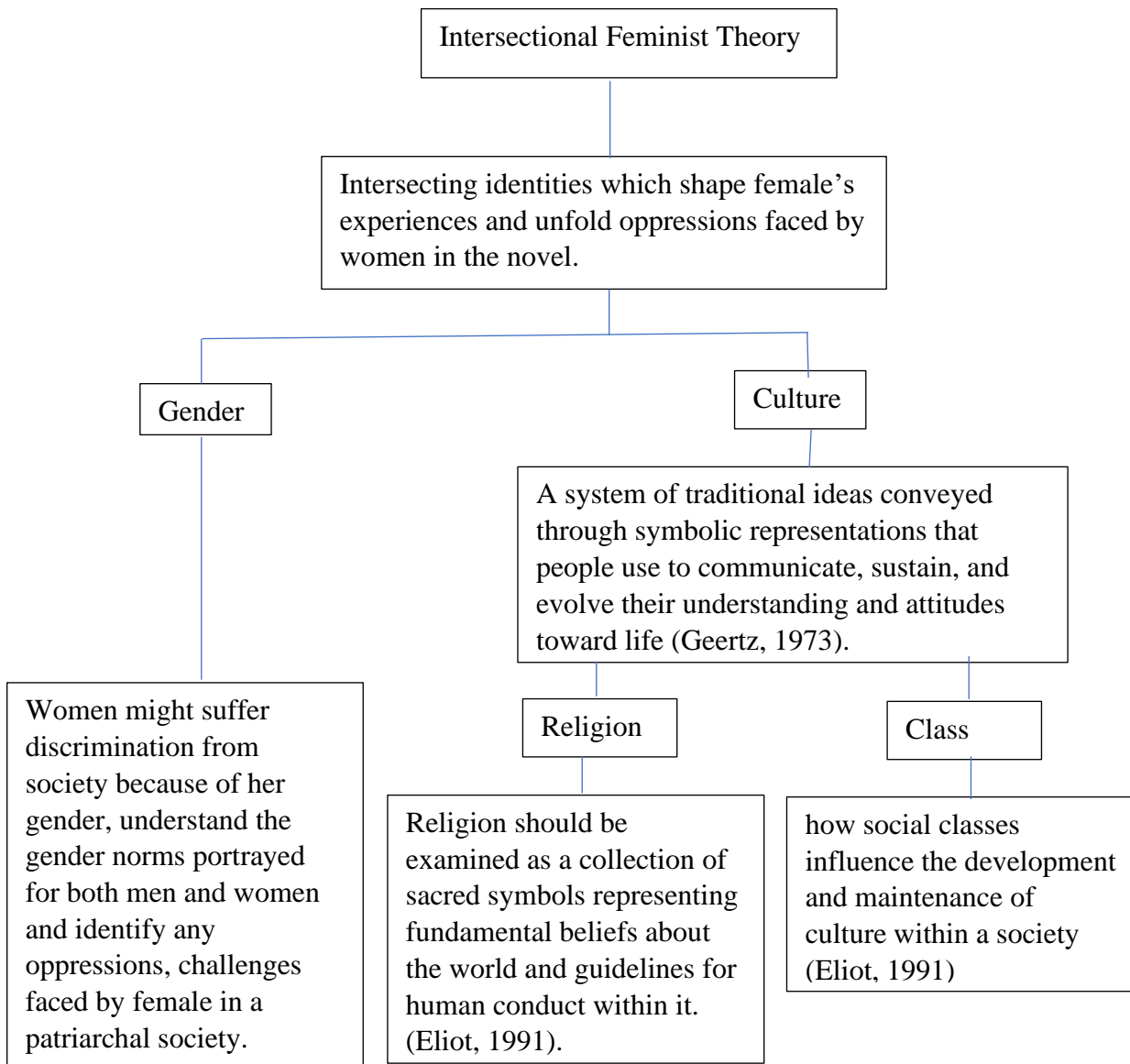
In addition, the conceptual framework helps to inform the research design. It assists in formulating research questions and hypotheses, selecting appropriate research methods, and

identifying potential sources of bias or confounding variables. It also helps to identify gaps in existing knowledge and areas for further exploration.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework plays a crucial role in qualitative research paradigms. It helps to guide the researcher in collecting and analyzing data, as well as interpreting and making sense of the findings. It provides a theoretical lens through which the researcher can understand the subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations of the participants.

Overall, a conceptual framework is an essential component of a research paper as it provides a theoretical foundation for the study. It helps to structure the research process, guide data collection and analysis, and contribute to the overall validity and reliability of the research findings (Tamene, 2016).

Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This section will unfold how Crenshaw's framework on intersectional feminism is applied for the in-depth analysis of the novel *The Girl and the Ghost*. This analysis is meant to contribute to a richer understanding of Malaysian culture by exploring the intersections of traditional values, religious influences and contemporary gender norms in the novel. In addition, this research will mainly revolve around the subject of interactional feminism, focusing on the protagonist of this novel, a Malay girl named Suraya. The 2 research questions: (i) How does the novel *The Girl and The Ghost* represent and discuss the intersections of gender and cultural dimensions which shape Suraya's identities and oppressions faced by her in the novel? (ii) In what ways does adopting an intersectional feminist lens enhance our understanding of gender dynamics among the characters, as well as addressing the women's marginalization and empowerment found in the novel?, formulated beforehand will assist the researcher in narrowing down the analysis of the story.

Intersectional feminism, as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a framework that acknowledges the complex ways in which various forms of oppression, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and compound each other. It emphasizes that the experiences of oppression are not just the sum of individual identities but are shaped by the interplay of these identities. This framework seeks to dismantle the siloed understanding of oppression by highlighting the unique experiences of those who are marginalized by multiple aspects of their identity. It is a call to action for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of oppression, advocating for policies and practices that consider the interconnected nature of these identities to address the root causes of discrimination and disadvantage.

Interplay of gender and cultural dimensions such as religion and class

In *The Girl and The Ghost* by Hanna Alkaf, Suraya's experiences with oppression are deeply intertwined with her gender and cultural identities, reflecting the complexities of intersectional feminism. Intersectional feminism acknowledges that individuals can experience oppression based on multiple aspects of their identity, including gender, culture, race, class, and more. This framework is crucial for understanding Suraya's experiences, as it highlights how her gender, cultural background, class, and race shape her interactions with the world and the oppressions she faces.

Suraya's gender identity, as discussed earlier, challenges traditional binary thinking, and emphasizes the performative nature of gender. This aspect of her identity is closely tied to her cultural background, as her experiences with the ghost and her interactions within her society reflect the cultural norms and expectations of her community. For instance, growing up, Suraya does not have a father figure because her father had died way before Suraya was born. A study conducted by McLanahan et al. (2013) on the causal effects of father absence shows that six investigations explored internalizing behavior in children, encompassing research on loneliness and challenges in forming friendships, with some of the analyses showing no significant results. Therefore, it is significant that Suraya faces this difficulty in forming friendships since young. Besides, that Suraya does not receive sufficient attention and love from her mother is another significant factor that she does not know how to have meaningful connections with people around her. For instance, when Suraya was 8 years old, she did not have any friends although she saw the same kids every day, was together with them in the classroom, knew details like their names and families (p. 22). Deep down, she imagined herself as one of them and wondered how belongingness to the group felt like. However, Suraya told her pelesit, "You're all I need, Pink" (Alkaf, 2020, p. 23). After telling Pink about this, she is vulnerable to Pink and tells him that no one wants to become her friend. Again, it goes back to Suraya's gender identity, how she perceives herself in a marginalized society, such as

her cultural and religious practices dictate specific behaviours and roles for her, influencing her self-perception and societal acceptance. For instance, Suraya tends to look down on herself. When she was young, she told Pink that the other kids did not really like her because her mother is a discipline teacher, and she also thought that people will just judge her as someone who is weird, including her drawings. Therefore, she does not allow space for anyone to enter her life and her strong bond with Pink, her pelesit, becomes a central aspect of her life, providing companionship and understanding that she feels she lacks from humans. This unconventional bond illustrates Suraya's unique perspective on relationships, influenced by her gender identity and experiences of marginalization within her society. On the other hand, Pink as a male ghost, he thinks very differently from Suraya. One major distinction between Suraya and Pink is that Pink is a vengeful ghost but Suraya is not a vengeful person. Suraya is kind enough to not seek revenge against the group of school bullies that bullies her vigorously, but Pink would not let things off his hook. When Pink flicked his antennae, disasters will happen to the targeted people, especially those who cause harm to Suraya. For instance, Pink fills each lunch box laid out on the table with worms and maggots, creating a scene where the sticky, squirming creatures traverse through the noodles, fried rice, porridge, cake, and other items that the bullies' mothers had lovingly prepared earlier in the day (p.35). Although Suraya has warned Pink to stop, but he chooses not to listen to his master and still act in those ways which he thinks that he is trying to “protect” his master. All these incidents illustrate Pink's differing perceptions regarding unfortunate events befalling Suraya, and his commitment to serve his master can be interpreted as seeking retribution. Following Pink's use of violent and drastic measures to punish the school bullies targeting Suraya, despite his underlying desire for her appreciation for his protective actions, he ultimately fails to garner recognition from her. This is because Suraya, in opposition to the girls' bullying behavior, refuses to condone such actions. Pink's independent acts of wrongdoing inadvertently create a rift between himself and Suraya. Pink's actions, while

motivated by a desire to protect his master, highlight the complexities of their relationship and Pink's distinct approach to addressing injustices. Despite Suraya's disapproval of Pink's retaliatory tactics, Pink's commitment to safeguarding her interests underscores the dynamics of power and agency between them.

Later, Suraya's best friend, Jing Wei, a Chinese girl comes into the picture and changes the landscape of the human-ghost bond in the novel. Due to Jing's presence, Pink becomes jealous and starts harming Jing. Pink continues to harm Jing and even targets Suraya after she confronts him and then disappears. The jealousy and dark side of Pink are worth navigating. Fortunately, towards the end of the story, there is a moment of reconciliation between Suraya and Pink. Pink admits that he cannot stop causing destruction due to his nature as a pelesit. For instance, in the past, Suraya's grandmother sent Pink to the village to bring bad luck and cast petty black magic on the villagers. When Pink hurts Suraya, he actually enjoys it, even though he doesn't mean to hurt her as a friend. Suraya doesn't blame him and continues to love him as a friend. Pink promises Suraya that he will try not to hurt her anymore, and they finally agree to work together against the pawang (p. 93). The moment Jing appears in Suraya's life, little did Suraya know, she is transforming and starts unleashing her inner superwoman. She can be so comfortable with Jing, it seems like she has known Jing for a long time, and Jing is known as Suraya's first human friend. Although Jing is a Chinese girl, but she is bold, bubbly, adventurous, she likes Star Wars (p. 46) and she keeps a cropped short hair, just like a boy. This difference portrayed in Jing's gender identity makes a huge impact in Suraya's life and it has influenced Suraya's decision later in saving Pink. Although she is a girl, but not just some typical girls, there is a power in Jing. For instance, when Jing first heard about Pink, she was not shocked and decided to help Pink get rid of the pawang, so that he would not become the pawang's next collection. Jing assured Suraya that she is "the third musketeer" while paying attention to Pink, who is in a tiny green grasshopper form on Suraya's palm (p. 104). It is truly

surprising that Jing is not scared of the gothic elements in the story, like most of the girls do, instead she became someone Suraya can count on in the mission to save Pink. The way Jing helped in planning the mission to save Pink was kind of interesting as well, based on her courageous and adventurous personality. For instance, she tried to make sense of the origin of Pink based on the characters in her favourite movie series, Star Wars (p. 105). Through this philosophical mindset, they got to know that a pelesit is made by first unearthing the body of a recently deceased child and place it on an anthill. Then, when the ants' movements and biting cause the deceased child's body to emit sounds, the witch would remove the tongue from the mouth, recite a specific chant, and bury the tongue at a crossroads for three consecutive nights (p. 106). When Jing heard of all these, she could not stop herself being exaggerated and excited, such as she exclaimed that it is “Coooooooooooooooool” and “AWESOME” after getting to know that a pelesit is made of a dead kid’s tongue (pp. 106-107). While Jing’s personality is fun, it is notable that she might not be that sensitive towards Suraya’s and Pink’s pain. It is a lesson for Jing to learn to be more resilient and mature, while Suraya to be bolder, their friendship is meant to complement one another, with different gender identity they perceive of themselves. Although Jing has her weaknesses, she is depicted as a compassionate and supportive friend to Suraya, providing her with a sense of belonging and companionship in a society that has marginalized her. Jing is also a significant character in assisting Suraya to courageously fight against the evil pawang who wants to take Pink away from her in the latter part of the story. From this fight with the evil pawang, or being addressed as Encil Ali, Suraya successfully unleashed her inner superwoman and her bravery that she has never shown to anyone before. Their plan to rescue Pink is certain, which is to return him to the grave by finding the little deceased boy who lost his tongue from a specific grave. This journey is destined to be a complicated one, because they need to make sure the exact location of the grave, where Pink’s body was buried. At the same time, they need to find a way to defeat the evil pawang with his

strong ghost armies. Suraya's boldness and her determination are the key to defeat the evil pawang at last.

Eliot (1991) discusses culture as the embodiment of a people's religion, encompassing their entire way of life from birth to death, including daily activities, interests, and beliefs. It emphasizes that culture and religion are intertwined, with culture being a manifestation of a people's religious beliefs and practices. The cultural background of Suraya is that she is a Malay and Muslim girl. The evidence from the novel that shows that Suraya is a Muslim girl is from the instances that her mother reminded her to say her duaa (p. 13); they said the pre-meal duaa before having the meal (p. 70). However, she is not just a typical Malay girl, but she came from the bloodline of her witch grandmother in which the family has the history in dealing with Malay ghosts such as bajang, langsuir, pontianak, penanggal, and toyol. This also serves as one interesting feature of *The Girl and The Ghost* as it depicts the darker side of Malay culture, the non-Islamic, animist beliefs which involve the Malay ghosts featured in the story. What makes this story even more compelling is that the type of the Malay ghost featured as main character in the story is not the usual Malay ghosts, but a pelesit. The pelesit, whether appearing as a grasshopper or cricket and feeding on blood, is deeply rooted in nature. It is a creature associated with basic magic, created to fulfil a duty through a pact involving blood (Lee, 2021). For instance, in the story, Pink is the pelesit who is bound by Suraya's blood, which makes Suraya his new master. It is notable that Pink's old master is Suraya's witch grandmother who employed him to cause trouble for the people she served. However, under the management of the pelesit's new master, surprisingly, Suraya has never asked Pink to perform any actions that harm people instead she treats him as a person, her best friend, rather than a thing. This is the whole distinctive difference between Suraya and her witch grandmother.

This family and cultural background of Suraya will later on help her in dealing with the pelesit from her grandmother and defeating the villain in this story, the pawang that comes for

Pink with the bad intention of adding Pink to his ghost collection. For instance, the pawang threatened Suraya when Suraya tried to protect Pink by not handing him over to the wicked pawang in the novel, saying: “This is your last chance, my dear, before I add your friend to my polong collection” (p.168). The pawang showed his true colour by hoping that his ghost army is more powerful with the new type of ghost, which is Pink as a pelesit. And even prior to this event, Pink already sensed that the pawang’s intention is not pure at all, is not just the “spiritual practitioner” who helps to solve Pink’s haunting that kept on torturing Suraya. This unique cultural background also serves as the key factor that Suraya’s mother will get the pawang to help them get rid of Pink when Suraya told her mum that Pink causes her all those harms due to his jealousy towards Suraya as Suraya chooses Jing over him. Pink’s haunting can be seen throughout the middle of the story such as Suraya's perception of time has become distorted, with long periods passing in the blink of an eye without her noticing (p.74). Furthermore, Pink’s haunting continues until it really affects her health that Suraya’s mum needs to bring her to the doctor after she really feels exhausted with suffering from vomiting and having nightmares. Her cheek looks pale (p.76). So, after Suraya’s mother gets to know how her daughter is tortured by the pelesit, she is trying to get help from a spiritual practitioner whom she thinks is more powerful than her witch mother and could possibly break the curse from her mother. However, this eventually leads to the climax of the story where there is a battle between the good and the evil. The pawang Suraya’s mother turned to for help is going to endanger the three people’s lives, which are her own daughter, Jing and Pink. Nonetheless, it is because of this incident also, the secret that Suraya’s mother has hidden from Suraya all this while uncovered. The secret is that Pink happens to be the tongue cut off from Suraya’s deceased brother, Imran’s body. Eventually, Suraya and her mother got to reconcile with one another. Suraya gets to understand that her mother’s enormous pain of losing both her father and her brother almost at once. Suraya shows her caring side as a daughter by comforting her mother

that they can be stronger together and not to end up with broken mothers who raise broken daughters. Pink or Imran also takes the opportunity to tell his mother and sister that he will stay forever at the cemetery and assures that they can come to visit anytime because they could not live on their whole lives associating with ghosts, they must let go of one another. Then, Suraya's bond with Pink is broken and she finally becomes a happy child.

Eliot (1991) also delves into how social classes influence the development and maintenance of culture within a society. It explains that higher social classes often exhibit more refined cultural expressions and values compared to lower classes, leading to a hierarchical structure of cultural standards. Additionally, the text emphasizes that social classes play a vital role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions and practices across generations, contributing to the overall diversity and richness of a society's culture. In the novel, the significance of Suraya's lower social class is evident through various instances. For example, her peers, led by a girl named K, derogatorily label Suraya as a "kampung girl" to mock her background (p. 32). Suraya's economic standing is further reflected in her attire—wearing a uniform with patches and torn shoes on her first day of school (p. 32). This socioeconomic disparity contributes to Suraya's feelings of insecurity, such as her reluctance to invite her friend Jing to her humble home by the paddy fields, especially when compared to Jing's residence in a modern neighbourhood (pp. 49, 51). Additionally, the stark differences in material possessions, like Jing's mother owning a red Mercedes-Benz while Suraya lacks personal transportation and commutes to school by bus, intensify Suraya's internal comparisons with her peers. Suraya's strong friendship with Jing also adds emotional complexity to her experiences. Suraya likely fears that Jing, being a city girl from a more affluent background, might look down on her or distance herself due to socioeconomic disparities. This concern is evidenced by Suraya's hesitation when Jing expresses interest in visiting Suraya's home in the kampung. Overall, the textual analysis of the novel portrays the broader implications of

socioeconomic differences, highlighting issues of identity, self-worth, and social inclusion of Suraya in the story.

Meanwhile, the mother-daughter relationship in this novel is worth digging into. There is a similar pattern that could be observed from the two generations of mother-daughter relationship, which is between Suraya's witch grandmother and Suraya's mother as well as between Suraya's mother and Suraya. The similar pattern is that the silent treatment used by the mothers towards their daughters. For instance, we can know from the novel that Suraya's mother is the daughter of a witch and the relationship between her mother and her grandmother are very sour. We can see that the sour relationship results from the letters Suraya's mother sent back to her grandmother but received no reply. This is because Suraya's grandmother does not approve her mother to be with her father, and even for some times that her mother has asked her grandmother to come and visit them, or pledge her to write to them, her grandmother just remains silence and she does nothing about it. (pp. 3-4). Even after the witch grandmother passed away, Suraya's mother still harbours the bitterness towards her mother inside her. For instance, when Suraya asked her mother regarding her grandma, her mother "smacked the knife down on the counter and whirled around to face her and said to her: "We do not take about your grandmother," and since then, they never did again" (p. 20). Probably because Suraya's mother rarely receives love from her witch mother, this causes her to have the barrier in having a meaningful connection with her daughter, Suraya too in Suraya's growing up process. This can be seen in Suraya's interaction with her mum. For example, when Suraya excitedly shows her mum her drawing, her mum just simply murmurs "very nice" without further elaboration or depicts any different facial expressions. The evidence describes that Suraya's mum resembled an emptied tube, with all toothpaste thoroughly squeezed out. Instead, the next thing she told Suraya was to wash her feet first because they are dirty and she just left the scene, while the paper with Suraya's drawing on it just happened to drop to the floor. As a result,

Suraya accumulated all the sadness and disappointment on her young self (pp. 9-10). Because of her estranged relationship with her mum, Suraya holds all the sadness and disappointment with her. Another incident that will convince Suraya her mother is different from other mothers when one of the bullies at her school teased her with the statement that if mums care enough about their children, they will prepare “a proper lunch” for their children (p. 34). It is noteworthy that Suraya needs maternal love, especially after the tragedy took place in the family in which both her father and brother passed away. As a child from a broken family, she needs that strength and support from her mother. Moreover, Suraya's relationship with her mother lacks intimacy and security, contributing to her development of an anxious-avoidant insecure attachment style. This arises from insufficient attention and care during her upbringing, leading her to repress emotions and struggle with trust, ultimately leading to antisocial behavior (Ain Nur Iman Abd Rahman & Zainor Izat Zainal, 2022). Therefore, this family upbringing resulted from the absence of maternal love in Suraya's life is one of the main factors that she has unusual human-ghost bond with her pelesit, cause her not able to have normal interactions with other human friends except for Jing, her first ever human best friend. However, towards the end of the story, we see the vulnerability of a mother towards her daughter, and there is a moment when Suraya's mother reconciled with Suraya after they found out that Suraya's pelesit, Pink is actually Suraya's deceased elder brother. This novel has a happy ending in which the pawang lost all his control over his ghost army, followed by the reconciliation between Suraya and her mother and lastly Pink finally got to die and rest in peace forever. The leaving of Pink signifies that Suraya is finally free and no longer bound by blood with the pelesit. She could enjoy her life as a normal human by socializing with her mother and other human friends.

These cultural elements from the aspects of religion and social class serve as a backdrop against which Suraya's gender identity is explored and performed, highlighting the interplay of gender and culture in terms of religion and social class in her experiences.

Oppressions faced by the protagonist.

The oppressions Suraya faces in the novel are multifaceted, reflecting the interplay between her gender and cultural identities. For instance, Suraya's interaction with her male pelesit, Pink. Although Suraya serves as Pink's master, as compared to her witch grandmother, she has lesser power to demand Pink to obey her. It was unlike the situation where the grandmother was still around, he would be sent out by the old witch from village to village to cause many chaos such as "emptying the fish traps without leaving a single hole in the weave of the net, so that the fishermen scratched their heads in confusion; rotting whole fields of crops only on the inside", and more (p. 4). Instead, Pink often takes advantage of his friendship with Suraya, the unusual human-ghost bond to perform nasty things towards people who cause hurts towards Suraya although those actions are not asked by Suraya, his master to perform. This part of the story depicts Suraya as a weak girl as compared to her pelesit who could perform all the damages, as a male ghost figure. This act of defiance not only reflects Suraya's gender identity but also critiques the cultural norms that reinforce gender-based power dynamics. Furthermore, there is another incident where Suraya was being looked down by a male ghost at the cemetery named Hussein. Hussein straight commented that Suraya does not look much like a hero because she is a girl (p. 135). To Suraya, it is an insult that, just because she is a girl, she could not be a hero. It is unfair for females to be viewed as inferior beings in the patriarchal society, and people's perspectives are shaped to perceive females as individuals who are weaker. Besides, the pawang too looks down on Suraya by saying that she is a child who does everything as told by others, also known as a biddable child, in a way of insulting her. He even tells Suraya that her mother would not miss her at all because her mother might

not realize that she is away from home, without acknowledging Suraya's emotions as a child at all. The novel illustrates how patriarchal practices, often attributed to culture, can perpetuate gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression. Suraya's encounters with several male figures in the novel such as Pink, her pelesit, Hussein, the ghost at the cemetery and lastly the evil pawang, and her subsequent actions can be seen as a critique of these characters who still hold on to patriarchal practices. By challenging the traditional gender roles associated with the male characters in the novel, Suraya subverts the patriarchal norms embedded in her culture, highlighting the interplay between gender and culture in the novel.

Furthermore, Suraya's experiences with her pelesit, and her interactions with other characters such as her mother, Jing Wei, the evil pawang in the novel reflect the complexities of gender roles and cultural norms. These interactions serve as a critique of the binary understanding of gender and a call for a more inclusive and equitable society. Through Suraya's journey, the novel invites readers to question their own assumptions about gender and culture, encouraging a more inclusive and equitable understanding of these constructs.

In conclusion, Suraya's experiences with oppression in *The Girl and The Ghost* are deeply intertwined with her gender and cultural identities, reflecting the complexities of intersectional feminism. Through her interactions with the ghost and her challenges to cultural norms, the novel explores the interplay between gender and cultural dimensions such as religion and class, highlighting the oppressions that individuals can experience based on multiple aspects of their identity.

Marginalization and empowerment of female characters in the novel.

In the realm of gender studies, the marginalization of women is a multifaceted issue influenced by various interconnected factors. Economic disparities play a pivotal role in restricting marginalized women's access to education and employment opportunities,

perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting their economic autonomy. Furthermore, discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity exacerbates the marginalization of women, denying them equal opportunities and reinforcing social inequalities. Inadequate access to essential healthcare services further compounds their vulnerability, resulting in adverse health outcomes and impeding their overall well-being. The prevalence of violence and abuse, coupled with the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes, serves to disempower marginalized women, perpetuating their marginalized status within society. These factors collectively contribute to a system of oppression that reinforces the marginalization of women, presenting a complex challenge that necessitates a comprehensive approach to address and dismantle these barriers to empower marginalized women and foster gender equality (Siti Norma Nasution, 2016).

Meanwhile, one study conducted by Andaya (2018) underscores the marginalization of female spirit mediums within the Malay community, particularly amidst changing urban dynamics and evolving religious norms. Economic shifts stemming from plantation closures have driven a migration of impoverished Tamil Malaysians into urban areas, where they increasingly turn to spirit mediums for solace. While viewed as powerful by high-status Indians, these mediums are often overlooked by the affluent. Ritual practices have adapted to align with mainstream religious expectations, with female mediums in Thailand adopting more subdued performances. The professionalization of mediumship has led to a diversification of practitioners, including more men and transgender individuals, highlighting the evolving challenges faced by marginalized individuals seeking spiritual and economic support within the Malay community.

In the novel, Suraya's deceased grandmother can be examined as one of the marginalized figures. For instance, her identity as a witch made her not well liked by people, and she did not care about being liked as well. However, she still treated Pink nicer than other

ghosts because Pink was useful to her back then and he was made by her. Furthermore, from the estranged relationship between Suraya's mother and her grandmother, we can examine further that Suraya's mother could not seem to comprehend and tolerate with her mother's career as a witch such as she refuses to disclose any information with Suraya regarding her grandmother after her death. When Suraya is being transparent with her, she told Suraya off that her magic was not made for good, and she straight away perceives Pink as an evil and dark thing (p. 85). This is obvious that Suraya's grandmother's career as a witch is not respected by her own daughter. On the other hand, Suraya is too disappointed about getting to know about her witch grandmother, as a horrible and mean person. She as the descendant of her witch grandmother, she is afraid of people will perceive her as someone who is peculiar, a marginalized woman like her grandmother. At the same time, Suraya still has a soft spot for her witch grandmother, she thinks that perhaps her grandmother was just trying to protect her and to care for her. However, the irony is that towards the end of the story, it is because of Pink, the pelesit made by Suraya's grandmother, Suraya discovered the truth behind of why her mother is cold and distant to her all this while. Suraya also successfully being empowered to battle against the villain, who owns the ghost army, with her unique identity as the descendant of a witch. Suraya is persevered, determined, and brave, there is a power within her that she is willing to try as hard as possible even though she has very little help as compared to the evil pawang. Just as what Suraya says: "Fortune favors the bold" (p. 171). In fact, this phrase appears for 5 time throughout the novel and was first mentioned by Pink to Suraya, during the first time Suraya went to the school in the big town. In the end, Suraya, Pink, and Jing managed to defeat the villain. The empowerment is significant for the female protagonist, Suraya in the novel. She managed to prove to everyone that she is not weak at all and her love for her family and friends becomes the strength that propels her forward, motivate her to get out of her comfort zone and eventually grow out of the circumstances.

In conclusion, the exploration of marginalization and empowerment of female characters in the novel underscores the complex dynamics that shape women's roles and identities within society. Economic disparities, discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, limited access to healthcare, and underrepresentation in decision-making processes contribute to the systematic marginalization of women, perpetuating cycles of inequality and disempowerment. The portrayal of Suraya's deceased grandmother as a marginalized figure highlights the challenges faced by women who defy societal norms or pursue unconventional paths, such as practicing witchcraft. Suraya's mother's rejection of her grandmother's identity reflects broader societal attitudes towards marginalized women, further complicating Suraya's own sense of identity and belonging. However, through Suraya's journey of self-discovery and empowerment, she transcends societal expectations and embraces her unique heritage, ultimately defeating the villain and proving her strength and resilience. Suraya's story exemplifies the transformative power of empowerment, demonstrating how marginalized women can challenge stereotypes, overcome adversity, and assert their agency to effect positive change in their lives and communities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive conclusion of this final year project delves into the complex layers of gender dynamics and cultural influences, particularly through the lenses of religion and class as depicted within the novel. It emphasizes the critical importance of analyzing the intersectional identities of the characters to gain profound insights into their experiences and challenges. By exploring the intricate interplay between gender and cultural dimensions such as religion and class in the narrative, this study seeks to shed light on the nuanced relationships between these elements and their profound impact on character development and interactions. Furthermore, the study identifies a significant gap in the exploration of gender dynamics within the story, highlighting the intricate interplay of cultural traditions, religious influences, and modern gender norms that shape the characters' experiences.

The examination of gender dynamics within the narrative sheds light on how characters navigate societal expectations and express their femininity in diverse ways. Suraya's journey serves as a testament to the evolving roles of women in a changing society, challenging conventional representations of femininity and presenting a multidimensional portrayal of her experiences. For instance, the development of Suraya's character from a reserved and antisocial individual to someone with the inner strength to defend her pelesit, Pink, whom she cherishes as a friend. Suraya's transformative journey challenges conventional perspectives that depict females as inherently oppressed, discriminated against, or inferior to men. Her ability to remain composed and resilient during the confrontation with the story's antagonist underscores her empowerment and contradicts prevailing stereotypes about women. The narrative nuances in depicting Suraya's resilience within the Malaysian cultural context disrupt stereotypes and

invite readers to engage with the intricate interconnections between gender, identity, and culture.

Furthermore, the conclusion reflects on the initial research questions and objectives outlined in this study, assessing the effectiveness of the intersectional feminist framework in addressing the complexities of gender identities, cultural influences, and religious perspectives within *The Girl and The Ghost*. Suraya's gender identity, situated within a marginalized family bloodline as the descendant of a witch, shapes her self-perception characterized by feelings of unpopularity, inferiority, and lack of confidence. However, as the narrative progresses, Suraya is propelled by the quest to unearth her family history and her courageous involvement in the mission to save her pelesit, Pink, alongside her best friend, Jing Wei, from the clutches of the evil pawang. This journey transforms Suraya into a more self-assured individual who can articulate her feelings and defend her loved ones, exemplified by her reconciliation with her previously distant and cold mother at the graveyard. Moreover, during the perilous battle with the evil pawang, Suraya's transformation is pronounced as she emerges victorious through her wisdom, composure, and bravery. The rich cultural backdrop shaping Suraya's experiences, as a Muslim Malay girl raised in a village, is juxtaposed against Jing's urban Chinese background, highlighting their contrasting lifestyles and perspectives, which ultimately strengthen their friendship despite their differences.

By analyzing the characters' experiences through this intersectional feminist lens, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how intersectionality shapes the lives of individuals in the novel, enriching the exploration of gender dynamics. The analysis delves into the multifaceted dimensions of gender and cultural influences, enhancing comprehension of the characters' experiences and challenges through an intersectional feminist perspective. Specifically, the examination in Chapter 4 unravels the intricate dynamics that shape characters like Suraya, recognizing the interconnected influences of gender, culture, and religion on her

character development. Suraya's personality traits, including being antisocial, reserved, thoughtful, resilient, and bold, are intricately linked to her relationships with her mother, Pink, and Jing Wei. Furthermore, her cultural and religious background as a Muslim Malay kampung girl from a lineage of witches significantly impacts her interactions and everyday life, particularly in dealing with supernatural elements. Consequently, Suraya's experiences and struggles are intertwined with intersecting dimensions of gender, cultural nuances such as religion, and social class, portraying a complex interplay within the narrative.

Limitations of Study

The study's limitations include a potential oversimplification of Suraya's identity, focusing primarily on gender dynamics, cultural influences, and religious perspectives. While the research questions are addressed through an intersectional feminist lens, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the broader societal influences and power dynamics that could impact Suraya's experiences and challenges. This narrow focus may restrict a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding Suraya's character development and interactions within the narrative, potentially overlooking crucial factors that shape her identity and relationships in the story. For instance, there are examples from the novel highlight how examining mother-daughter relationships can reveal patterns of behavior passed down through generations, shedding light on issues of identity, self-worth, and social inclusion.

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