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"GREETINGS FROM HELL (NERAKA KIRIM SALAM)": A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS-BASED CYBERBULLYING OF DEHIJABIS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Many studies have been conducted on cyberbullying discourse in Malaysia, but religious-based cyberbullying discourse has received comparatively less attention. Malaysia's second place ranking in cyberbullying practices among Asian countries in 2018 is striking, and it is worth highlighting that many public figures in the country have encountered cyberbullying upon deciding to remove their hijab. This paper examines how the first dehijabed Instagram posts by local celebrities, Uqasha Senrose, Emma Maembong and Liyana Jasmay incited religious-based cyberbullying.

Methodology: This paper employs a mixed-methods approach. We examined the initial post-dehijabbing captions, along with a total of 300 comments on these posts. Through a two-tiered coding and categorization process, we identified 168 religious-based comments containing religious-related terminologies, Arabic expressions, Quranic verses, and Hadith. From this subset, 70 of them exhibit cyberbullying characteristics: Defamation, Defense, Encouragement, Exclusion, Sexual Talk, Insult and Threat/Blackmail. The most prevalent categories, Insult (n=29) and Threat/Blackmail (n=18) were further qualitatively analysed using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse framework and Halliday's transitivity analysis.

Findings: The findings reveal that public figures who have removed their hijab have created a hegemonic intervention that challenges Malay Muslim hegemonic practice. Meanwhile, cyberbullies have created a hegemonic closure to counter the hegemonic intervention created by the dehijabed celebrities through the implementation of "Insult" and "Threat". Nevertheless, the effects of the hegemonic closure, which involves the stabilization of myths as objective reality and the rearticulation of the transgressors' identities as the sinners, have reproduced the power imbalance between the dominant group and the antagonists.

Contributions: This paper demonstrated that while such practices allow cyberbullies to reinforce their dominance and hegemonic practices by manipulating religion, it is crucial to problematize religious-based cyberbullying discourse as yet another form of hegemonic intervention that appears to be a natural articulation in contemporary discourse.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, religious-based cyberbullying, Malay hegemony, dehijabing, Malaysian celebrities.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is a prevalent issue in the digital era. It is characterized by intentional, repetitive, and aggressive behavior towards vulnerable individuals (Cheng et al., 2020). Among Asian countries, Malaysia ranked second in cyberbullying practices, with India leading the list in 2018 (Yap, 2020). As of mid-2021, the Malaysia Cybersecurity Outreach and Capacity Building had already received 267 reports of cyberbullying or harassment, a notable increase from 2020, when 596 reports were recorded, compared to only 201 reports in 2019 (Nation, 2021). This paper delves into the disconcerting issue of cyberbullying, particularly concerning prominent figures in Malaysia who have chosen to remove their hijab, often becoming targets of online harassment (Au, 2021). This form of cyberbullying is fueled by the belief that being Malay and being a Muslim are mutually inclusive, and claiming a Malay identity without adhering to Muslim practices is seen as invalid (Musa, 2014). This issue of cyberbullying takes on even greater significance in the country, given that Islam is the official religion, and the hijab holds substantial cultural and religious importance, particularly within the Malay community, despite its enforcement being limited to the state of Kelan (Hochel, 2013; Umair et al., 2022).

Consequently, this belief system contributes to the normalization of discrimination against individuals perceived as deviating from societal expectations.

Within this context, social media play a significant role in amplifying the impact of cyberbullying by reinforcing narratives controlled by dominant societal groups, specifically the Malay Muslim majority in the country. To illustrate how religious-based cyberbullying discourses gain moral justification, this paper adopts Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) theory, which highlights the antagonism between two main discourse articulations: religious and cyberbullying. In this framework, terms such as 'hegemony', 'antagonism', 'articulation', and 'equivalence', as central concepts in Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) discourse theory, are used not only to describe social change but also to explain how particular discursive positions manage to become widely accepted in society (Stengel & Nabers, 2019). It is crucial to emphasize that this paper aims to analyze the manipulation of religion for the benefit of the dominant group, without undermining the significance of Islam or the religious commandment of wearing the hijab itself.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Hijab, Identity, and Religious Based Cyberbullying

From a semiotic perspective, the hijab functions as a signifier or symbol that characterizes Muslim women to some extent, conveying meaning and identity to others. According to Omar (2020), the hijab is considered a social and moral agent in Islam, symbolizing a woman's honor, preserving her chastity and livelihood. It has evolved as a practical dress code for Muslim women in Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore, similar to other Muslim garments (Grine & Saeeda, 2017). Given that religious and ethnic issues are closely intertwined, Islam also serves as an ethnic signifier for the Malays (Paoliello, 2019).

By incorporating Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) understanding of the signifier, the signifier 'religious' derived from the representation of hijab, can be established as the central pivot (nodal point) around which a Malay individual's identity revolves. This suggests that the identification of a Malay person is intricately molded through ongoing discursive processes. Here, we are referring to the idea that a Malay's identity is continually shaped and defined through discourse, conversations, and cultural representations, particularly with regard to the concept of 'religious' as associated with the hijab. Zuraidah (2019) emphasizes that in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, Islamic values have become a stronghold in society's culture. This is supported by Nurzihan and Siti Mazidah (2020), who add that the concept of female modesty has been revitalized by Muslim-majority countries as a cultural uniform for modern

Muslim women, serving as a means to express Islam as a progressive religion compared to its Western counterparts. This means that the hijab phenomenon in Malaysia is also a reflection of identity, resulting from the country's Muslim-centric progress.

Given the inseparable connection between Islamic faith and Malay ethnocultural heritage (Ziegenhain, 2018), the hijab can be understood as a multifaceted indicator that signifies various aspects of women's identity, including their religious devotion, Islamic modesty, moral values, gender roles and ethnic affiliation (Grine & Saeeda, 2017; Ziegenhain, 2018; Zuraidah, 2019, Umair et al., 2022). However, despite the long-standing presence of Islam in Malaysia, it is worth noting that the widespread adoption of the hijab, or '*tudung*' in Malay, is a relatively recent phenomenon. While Islam has had a rich history in the country (previously Malaya) since the seventh century (Andaya & Andaya, 2001), the hijab was not historically a common feature of Muslim women's attire. In the past, they generally wore the *kemban* (a sarong worn up to the chest without a top), *baju kurung* (long loose tunics), or baju kebaya (tight-fitting top), along with the *kain kelubung* or *selendang* (shawl) (Thaera, 2020). Over the course of time, women desired *baju kurung* blouses that accentuated their body shape, leading to requests for bodices tailored to their body curvature, heavily padded shoulders, sweetheart-shaped necklines, and high ruffled collar. Moreover, the independence of Malaya in August 1957 granted working women the freedom to make personal and lifestyle choices, with the decision to wear a head cover remaining optional as they entered the workforce as office workers and teachers (Teh, 2019).

The 1980s witnessed a notable increase in the popularity and acceptance of hijab among Muslim women, marking a significant cultural and social shift. During this time, various factors contributed to the growing traction of the hijab, including increased religious consciousness, a desire for identity expression, and a renewed focus on Islamic values. Muslim scholars who studied in Iran, Makkah, and Cairo during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 brought back influential ideas and teachings, contributing to a wider adoption of the hijab and the spread of religious awareness (Nurzihan et al., 2015). Similarly, Mouser (2007) asserts that Malay students who received scholarship to study abroad in the 1970s, particularly in the UK and US, formed close-knit communities and focused on Islamic teachings as a response to concerns about Western cultural decadence. Drawing inspiration from Islamic scholars like Al-Shariati, Al-Maududi, and Al-Banna, according to Nagata (1980), these students brought back the *Dakwah* movement, upon their return to Malaysia, which emphasized adherence to Islamic doctrine and the strengthening of Islamic identity. The Iranian crisis, Arab-Israeli conflict and

the influence of Egyptian and Pakistani scholars further reinforced these messages, shaping the religious landscape and inspiring a new generation of Muslim leaders in Malaysia.

However, it is important to note that not every Malay Muslim woman adheres to the hijab-wearing practice. The decision to wear the hijab remains a personal choice influenced by a variety of factors, including individual interpretations of religious teachings, cultural traditions, family dynamics, and personal beliefs. As supported by Grine and Saeeda (2017), some hijab-wearing women implement the hijab as a religious obligation, indicating a protective measure to avoid male attention and as a witness of their sacrifice and faith to God, whereas non-hijab-wearing women state their reason for not conforming to the practice as their unreadiness to fulfill this obligation. In a broader scope, Hochel's (2013) findings reveal that the symbolism of hijab can represent several meanings, such as a symbol of piety, oppression, rejection to Western morality, rejection to modernity, a religious statement supporting Islam as a way of living, or even as a political statement supporting violent Islamists. Yet, regardless of whatever reasons people may wear the headscarf, Grine and Saeeda (2017) argue that those who cover their heads are still looked up to as practicing Muslims who are modest and of high moral character compared to non-wearing hijab women.

Consequently, this situation contributes to the negative perception of non-hijab wearing women in a Muslim-majority country. Zuraidah (2019) emphasizes that the provocative sense could be directed towards the value of hijab and Muslim women who wear hijab according to Islamic obligation. This means, even if those who do not wear the hijab practice other religious obligations such as praying and fasting better than hijab-wearing women, it still evokes an exasperating response from society. Aytar and Bodor (2019) add up that the negative perception of non-hijab wearing women is owed to the position of hijab as a strong symbolism of a practicing Muslim, which is also a result of the norms within the social circle in which they grew up. This also indicates that the authority of the dominant cultures in which the veil is worn is frequently used to symbolize the veil. Nevertheless, those who view it from a religious standpoint gain a sense of supremacy, leaving people unable to reject or give any opinion (Omar, 2020), illustrating that the portrayal of how the veil is viewed and how it should be dealt with is determined by the dominance and uneven power between those who favor and those who oppose the practice of veiling. Thus, in a Muslim majority country like Malaysia, the role of religion is misused as a social forcethat the society imposes on non-hijab wearing women, leading to cyberbullying based on religion.

Online comments as a genre of the text in media discourse are the biggest contributor to the reinforcement of cyberbullying practices. Joinson (2017) asserts that when communicating

anonymously online, commenters are reported to have lower levels of public awareness, which leads them to reduce their concern over personal accountability for expressing their views. Likewise, the unstructured and unrestricted format encourages offensive and abusive discourse by commenters who know they will not be held accountable for their actions (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018; Kim et al., 2023). Combined, online comments contribute to the occurrences of personal attacks, hostile disagreements, and sarcasm, which are commonly directed towards other individuals' political affiliations and education/intelligence levels (McMillen, 2013). In the context of this study, the targets of such comments are public figures who have chosen to remove their hijab. The online comments that serve as a text genre in this religious-based cyberbullying discourse are religious-based cyberbullying comments. This paper aims to clarify the relationship between the two by illustrating that religion can be manipulative in cyberbullying discourse when misused by cyberbullies. As supported by Sîrbu (2019), manipulation of religion in discourse occurs when theological concepts are used to prove the veracities of the religious truth and thus makes lies seem truthful. It also suggests that whenever religious discourse is included, society gradually accepts cyberbullying behaviour to the point that it becomes naturalized and widely prevalent. Our analysis is based on the following questions:

1. How do the postings by public figures on their Instagram account trigger society to perform religious-based cyberbullying practice?
2. How does the netizens' language use in religious-based cyberbullying comments contribute to the manipulation of religion in discourse?

In what follows, we clarify the methods and procedures employed in the analysis.

3.0 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

We selected the first dehijabbed post (caption) of three celebrities on Instagram, i.e. Uqasaha Senrose (2 September 2016), Instagram handle: @uqashasenrose2 (https://www.instagram.com/p/BJ2My_jDNZc/), Emma Maeembong (6 February 2019), Instagram handle: @emmamaembongofficial (https://www.instagram.com/p/Btigez8nP_m/) and Liyana Jasmay (22 January 2020), Instagram handle: @liyanajasmay (https://www.instagram.com/p/B7oAiMHpyE0/). These celebrities were selected based on three criteria: (i) the individuals are Malaysian public figures, (ii) the individuals decided to stop wearing their hijab, and lastly, (iii) their Instagram accounts are in public mode. In

addition, a total of 300 comments on each post was also extracted using a web exportation tool, Export Comment (https://exportcomments.com/).

These comments were then compiled into a single PDF document and imported into ATLAS.ti 9.0 software, which streamlined the two-tiered coding and categorization process for identifying religious-based cyberbullying comments within the exported data:

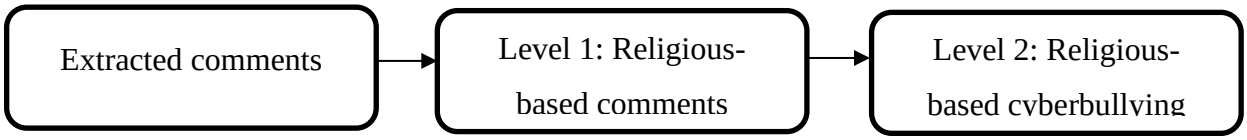

Figure 1**:** Two-tiered data selection process

In Level 1, we carefully examined the comments to gain a deep understanding of their content, before identifying relevant keywords indicating religious references. Based on the characteristics of these keywords, we then created specific codes that encompassed *religious-related terminologies*, *Arabic expressions*, *Quranic verses*, and *Hadith*. Finally, the comments were assigned the appropriate codes, enabling the accurate selection of those that were related to religion. Following the completion of the coding process, the categorization was automatically generated by ATLAS.ti 9.0. As a result, out of the 300 comments, more than half (n = 168) were identified and selected as religious-based comments, belonging to one or more of the previously mentioned categories, representing over 56% of the comments.

In Level 2, the identified religious-based comments were manually categorized using cyberbullying-related categories discussed extensively in Van Hee et al. (2018; see also Tan, 2018). These categories served as guidelines to identify religious-based comments that exhibited cyberbullying elements:

Table 1: Religious-based cyberbullying categories

Code	Definition
Defamation	Any expression inducing a false statement of fact that may injure the addressee's reputation
Defense	Any expression in the form of supporting the public figures by other Instagram users
Encouragement	Any expression in the language consisting of support towards the cyberbullies
Exclusion	Any form of ostracization from any social group through any platform, real, virtual, and/or imaginary
Sexual Talk	Any expression in the language expressing a playful sexual attraction or allusion to sexual imagery
Insult	Any expression in the language purposely intended to insult the addressee or that of degrading abusive and vulgar language.
Threat/Blackmail	Be it psychological or physical threats or any indication of such threats

Out of the 168 religious-based comments, 70 were coded, while the remaining comments were excluded due to reasons such as not fitting into the predefined categories in Table 1, being neutral towards the celebrities and/or cyberbullies, or being out of context or irrelevant. Among the categorized comments, the negative categories of *Insult* (29) and *Threats* (18) received the highest number of comments, highlighting the prevalence of derogatory and intimidating remarks. Following closely were the categories of *Exclusion* (n=4), *Defamation* (n= 4) and *Encouragement* (n= 2). Interestingly, there were no comments related to *Sexual Talk*, which may suggest a certain level of restraint in that specific aspect. In contrast, the *Defense* category only comprised of 13 comments, indicating a relatively lower presence of individuals expressing support for the public figures' decision to remove their hijab. This stark contrast emphasizes the disproportionately high occurrence of religious-based cyberbullying comments, overshadowing the comparatively limited expression of support for the public figures' choices. We proceeded with qualitative analysis on the categories of "*Threat*" and "*Insult*" due to their significant representation.

3.1 Qualitative Analytical Procedures

While Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) framework provides valuable insights into power dynamics and discursive formations, it is necessary to note that their framework does not provide specific procedures for analyzing the textual data in this study. Therefore, we incorporated Halliday's

(2014) transitivity as a method for examining linguistic evidence in the religious-based cyberbullying comments. Additionally, we also employed Jones' (2019) levels of analysis, i.e., Formal, Functional, and Social, as our analytical steps to ensure a systematic approach. By integrating these approaches, we could enhance the depths and rigor of the analysis, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic phenomenon.

To outline the sequence of events, we employed Halliday's (2014) transitivity analysis and identified the linguistic components of the texts. This involved classifying the grammatical structure of clauses, including "subject", "verb", "object", "adverbial" and "complement" into simpler categories using the terms "participant(s)", "process", and "circumstance". The following illustrates this classification:

Table 2: Functions of group, phrase classes and Malay grammatical rules

Type of element	**Typically realized by**	**Malay grammar**
Participant(s)	Subject, Object	Actor (Noun, Pronoun, Verb that functions as a noun)
Process	Verb	Verb
Circumstance	Adverbial, Complement	Complement

In order to maintain the authenticity of the original texts and avoid any loss of meaning in translation, we conducted the textual analysis based on Malay grammatical rules since the majority of the comments were written in the Malay language. By adhering to Malay grammar, we aimed to comprehensively analyze and interpret the linguistic nuances present in the texts. We focused on analyzing several fundamental sentence patterns, known as "pola grammar" in Malay, at a substantive level, which include:

(a) Actor + Verb,
(b) Actor + Verb + Complement,
(c) Verb + Complement,
(d) Complement + Verb + Actor,
(e) Complement + Verb.

These basic sentences from the original comments underwent transitivity analysis following an understanding of Malay pola grammar. Furthermore, in line with Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) theory, we examined the obtained linguistic description using seven key concepts: "articulation", "moments", "closure", "field of discursivity", "nodal points" and "floating signifiers". In this context, "moments" refers to emerging signs in discourse, while "elements" signify multi-layered and unfixed signifiers."Nodal points" are privileged signs that assign meaning to other signs in their proximity, while "floating signifiers" can serve as nodal points in other discourses. The different meanings of each sign beyond a specific discourse are encompassed by "the field of discursivity". To establish fixed meanings, the discourse employs "closure", transforming "elements" into "moments". This process of modifying the meanings of signifiers in relation to other words is termed "articulation".

All of the signs in Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) terminologies, despite their abstract nature, can be found in the texts. Each of these signifiers is fundamentally grounded in two levels of signification: denotation and connotation. However, since it primarily concerns the implied meanings of a linguistic elements, what Laclau and Mouffe (2014) consider as a matter of identity marks the second stage of analysis, involving the interpretation of why users choose their language in certain ways. To clarify the ambiguity surrounding the text producers' word choices, our analysis focused on "closure" and "articulations" by examining how discourses in an antagonistic relationship generate new identities using the same signifiers identified in the earlier linguistic description. From this, the notion of "struggles over identity" within this discourse could be recognized, with the "floating signifiers" representing the "myths". These conceptsoverlap due to their shared derivation from the connotative meanings of signifiers.

By myths, Laclau and Mouffe (2014) refer to distorted representation of reality that constitutes what is commonly verbalized by society as a totality. While the concept of totality, which implies an objective reality, contradicts Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) approach that views society as a non-objective entity, these myths have the power to shape societal behavior to the extent that what is not entirely true becomes perceived as a "fact". At this stage, the analysis also revealed the hidden meanings and identities of netizens through the examination of "subject positions", "contingency", and the concept of "split subject", which refers to the conceptualization of the social actors involved in the conflicts explored in this discourse study, extending to the broader social sphere.

The following section presents our analysis of the data. When discussing the findings, we translated the data. In the translation process, the representative comments used in the findings were reviewed by a team of four bilingual individuals. The purpose of involving

multiple individuals was to facilitate a thorough comparison and evaluation of the translated versions of the comments, aiming to identify the translations that most accurately captured the original meaning. The original comments can be found in Appendix 1.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Before delving into the findings of the netizens' reactions in the comments, it is crucial to examine the action of the public figures in removing the hijab. To reiterate, all three public figures, namely Uqasha, Emma and Liyana, are members of the Malay Muslim community who have previously worn the hijab. In their first Instagram posts announcing their decision to stop wearing the hijab, they portrayed themselves as "free hair" women. This marked a significant shift in their public image and religious identity, as they manifested the absence of the hijab symbol, which is the veil itself. The identity of the public figures as "free hair" women, therefore, collides with their religious identity as "hijab wearing" women. This visual representation of their identity transformation is depicted through the relational process *"is",* where the relationship between the public figures and the clause *"not wearing the hijab"* signifies their newfound identity as "*free hair*" women:

Table 3: Relational Process in the visual texts

Carrier	Process	Attribute
Uqasha/Emma/Liyana	is	not wearing a hijab (possession)
not wearing a hijab (possessed/Token)	is a part of	Uqasha/Emma/Liyana (possessor/Value)

Here, it implies that each of these public figures has relinquished an identity associated with the signifier "religious" in favour of embracing an identity as a *"free hair"* woman. Consider the captions below:

(1). "Accept me for who I am" (Uqasha, 2 September 2016)
(2). "The ones that always be there for me" (Emma, 6 February 2019
(3). "In need of winter weather #mababybehindmesocute" (Liyana, 22 January 2020)

In (1), the use of the mental process *"accept"* in the verbiage indicates the concept of "*consent"* as its signified meaning. This suggests that Uqasha seeks the recognition of netizens regarding her new identity as a *"free hair"* woman. Furthermore, in the clause *"who I am"*, the relative pronoun *"who"* signifies Uqasha's appearance without the veil in the photo, and the relational process *"am"* functions as the identifier to the carrier *"I"*. Through this, she asserts that embracing the 'free hair' identity reflects her true self. Similarly, both (2) and (3) convey the same event as presented in (1) where their identity as *"hijab-wearing"* women has been abandoned. However, the verbiage in (2) and (3) lacks significant elements that signify being *"free hair"* as their newly adopted identity, rendering them irrelevant to the current discussion. Nevertheless, the collision between the two identities of these public figures is rooted in their identity as *"free hair"* women, which is associated with the signifier "*non-religious"*. In Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) terminology, the two identities are in an antagonistic relationshipto each other, in that being a *"free hair"* implies a lack of religiosity, while being 'religious' means being entitled to wear the hijab. Therefore, the public figures themselves have created a hegemonic intervention through their newly adopted identity as *"free hair"* women, which subsequently challenges the hegemony of hijab-wearing practice in the Malay Muslim community. Consider the table below:

Table 4: The literal and possible (implied) meanings of the signifiers

Signifier	**Signified (Denotation)**	**Signified (Connotation/Myth)**		
Hijab	A veil worn by Muslim women	Religious	Pious	Us
Free hair	Not wearing a hijab	Non-religious	Sinful	Them

By analyzing the signifiers "*free hair"* and *"hijab"* respectively, one can understand that the perpetuation of myths such as "*religious"*, *"pious"* and *"us"*, along with their binary pairs contributes to the obligation felt by some Muslims to personally hold transgressors of hijab-wearing practice responsible and pass judgements on them. This phenomenon manifests in the form of religious-based cyberbullying. In the following section, we will discuss the stabilization of these myths as nodal points to explore how they shape the reactions of netizens and give meaning to their responses. As explained earlier, the findings commence by focusing

on the two most prevalent cyberbullying elements identified during the preliminary analysis: *Insult* and *Threat*.

4.1 Reaction of the Netizens towards the Action

4.1.1 Direct insults

In the findings, direct insults are characterized by utterances where elements of *"disrespectful"* are directly present, without the need to delve deeper into the layers of meanings. In line with this, the most frequently identified moment of this particular type is the use of swearing or degrading words. Consider the examples below:

1. How stupid of her, (she) used to wear the hijab (but) (look at) how she is now, (does she/do you) want fame? [Translation, Text 6]
2. Stupid woman!!! (you) post(ed) on your (Instagram) story that (you) went to Makkah (and you) performed Hajj…But now that (you) have come back, (your) behavior is like that of *Satan*. Why did you take off your hijab, (you) stupid! It's not even pretty wkwkwwk. [Translation, Text 7]

In the texts above, the netizens display their *"disrespectful"* attitude by repeatedly employing the term *"stupid",* thereby labeling the public figures as unintelligent. This negative portrayal is exacerbated when other netizens also employ the term, as evidenced in Texts 2, 6, 8 and 27 (See Appendix 1 for the original and complete excerpts). The findings reveal that the term *"stupid"* is positioned either as an adjective attributing to the participant *"she"* in the clause or even as a noun substituting the public figures themselves. Regardless of its placement within the sentence structure, the term "stupid" carries a strong linguistic connotation that implies a lack of intelligence attributed to the Carrier ("she/you/woman") or the targeted celebrity. This label not only pertains to the action of removing the hijab, but also seeks to establish the attribute of stupidity as an inherent characteristic of their being. Furthermore, the Malay term *"betina",* which is also positioned as the Carrier, is highly degrading to the public figures since it dehumanizes them by associating with an attribute of female animals. The use of noun *"ikan kembong"* (Indian Mackerel) as the Carrier (Text 21) may not have an explicit negative connotation, but it is the way the netizens mocks the public figure's name by exploiting the similarity between the sound /bong/ sound in *"Maembong"* and *"kembong"* to create a humorous effect. However, this simultaneously humiliates the identity of the addressed celebrity. The same pattern emerges in elements that signify poor quality or low standards,

with insults being lexically realized by the terms "*worst"* (Text 3)*, "sampah*" (rubbish) (Text 12), *"gile"* (crazy) (Text 16), *"busuk"* (smelly) (Text 20), and *"babi" (pig)* (Text 28), including the swearing expression *"what thefuck"* (Text 13) which is one of the most insulting expressions.

Concurrently, another type of direct insult found in the texts is the utilization of negative religious labels. This demonstrates that when religious remarks intersect with the discourse of cyberbullying, they carry the same weight as swearing and degrading words in devaluing the identity of the targeted celebrities. Notably, this is evident through the use of outgroup identity markers within Islamic terminologies. One illustrative example can be overserved in the text above through the use of "Satan", which originally refers to an evil spirit or fallen angel. However, in this context, Muslims use the term to label public figures who share the same religious affiliation. In the phrase "your behavior is like Satan", the relational process "is' associates the attribute of "Satan" with the public figures, which is highly offensive as it undermined their self-concepts. It is worth noting that this usage of the term "Satan" aligns with Islamic theology, where Satan is understood as an arrogant being who opposes God and tempts humans towards wrongdoing. This type of insult is also evident in the usage of nouns such as "*kafir"* (infidel) (Text 13), "*munafik*" (hypocrite) (Texts 23 and 26), and "*murtad*" (apostate) (Texts 15 and 11). Each of these terms also signifies individuals who reject Islam, whether openly or secretly. These outgroup identity markers revolve around the floating signifier "them", which serves as a nodal point. Through the articulation of the transgressors' identity as "the sinners', cyberbullies establish a dichotomy of "us" versus "them". This reinforces the notion of an antagonistic divide and reinforces the cyberbullies' position as the morally superior group. Consider the examples below:

> If you are no longer wearing a hijab, for sure, that means your Iman is not that (strong). [Translation, Text 29]

With the transgressors now labeled as sinners, cyberbullies take the opportunity to associate the public figures' decision to remove their hijabs with the notion of having weak faith. This is shown in the clause "*for sure that means your Iman is not that (strong)",* where the condition of *"not that strong"* is attributed to the participant *"Iman"* (faith) as its circumstance through the relational process *"is"*. Consequently, the signifier of *"weak faith", grounded in the floating signifier of "sinful" as a nodal* point, becomes one of the subject positions assigned to the public figures as sinners. Additionally, this notion extends to the usage of the signifier

"HOT", which entails the idea of *"Hellfire"* as the signified. In the text (see Text 15 Appendix 1), it is articulated as another subject position assigned to the transgressors. This serves to depict that cyberbullies go as far as considering free-haired woman as members of Hell, thereby inflicting extreme insult and denigration upon them.

The following discussion will illustrate indirect insult comments, which encompass off-record utterances constructed from a third-person perspective, the use of irony, metaphor or humor.

4.1.2 Indirect insults

In the findings, there is also a type of insult that may not be readily apparent in the texts due to its ambiguous nature. However, by recognizing *"sarcasm*" as one of the nodal points along with the signifier *"disrespectful"*, it becomes evident that any negative implied meaning containing elements of mockery can be considered an insult. Despite its subtle appearance, the presence of sarcasm signifies a form of indirect insult, reflecting the underlying intent to demean and belittle the targeted individuals. For instance:

1. Good, don't wear the hijab from the beginning of (your) career as a celebrity. It is the same anyway, even if you wear it since your body (shape) is visible. Congrats [Translation, Text 4]

In the text above, the presence of sarcasm is evident through the use of positive literal expressions such as *"good*" and *"congrats"*. However, it is important to note that these positive expressions do not genuinely convey admiration or support in this context. The discrepancy arises from the contradictory nature of the imperative structure of the clause, starting with *"do not"*, which implies a directive command, and the seemingly positive remark "good". This contrast indicates that the positive expressions are employed as double-meaning words by the cyberbullies to sarcastically mock the public figure's decision to remove their hijab. The signifier "hijab" serves as the subject matter of the clause, further emphasizing the mocking intent behind the positive expressions. By targeting the action of taking off the hijab, the cyberbullies aim to undermine and belittle the public figures' choices, employing sarcasm to express their disapproval and ridicule as can also be observed in the texts below:

1. Famous celebrities' excuse for taking off hijab… "I don't want to be a hypocrite" [Translation, Text 1]
2. Don't judge, they will say it is their business with God…Chill…chill. [Translation, Text 18]

Here, another notable element of sarcasm is found in the form of satirical remarks, where commentors mock the public figures by imitating their stated reasons for removing the hijab. This imitation becomes evident through the presence of verbal processes, indicated by verbs like "tell" or "say" in Texts 9 and 18, as well as the use of the noun "excuse" in Texts 1 and 25. These linguistic choices convey the idea of cyberbullies attributing statements to the public figures, even though they may not have actually said them (See also Appendix 1 for complete excerpts). It is important to note that these utterances are not genuine statements made by the public figures themselves as can be observed in the verbiage; rather, they are assumptions and interpretations made by the cyberbullies. Consequently, the act of mocking and employing satirical remarks by the cyberbullies serve as a form of indirect insult, as it involves rhetorical speaking to undermine and ridicule the public figures' reasoning. Consider the texts below:

1. The day @emma_maembongofficial starts her dosa (sin) until today 👏👍 [Translation, Text 14]
2. Her hidayah has been taken away guys 🙄🙄 [Translation, Text 17]

Here, the implementation of sarcasm in this context is indicated through the use of emojis. Emojis serve as convenient visual indicators capable of conveying the sardonic tone of the texts. In Text 14 above, the presence of *"thumbs-up"* and *"clapping"* emojis do not necessarily indicate praise or admiration. Instead, these emojis are used ironically, as the overall clause discusses the symbolism of punishment associated with the term "*sin*", which is not a subject of admiration. Similarly, in Text 17, the *"eyeroll"* emoji, with its straight, small unimpressed line-mouth and skyward-staring pupils, conveys the cyberbullies' expression of disdain towards the addressed celebrity. This emoji, when combined with the clause, "*her hidayah has been taken away guys"*, which references the signifier "*hidayah*" (guidance) as the participant, reflects the cynicism towards the implied addressed participant. The cyberbully mocks the notion that Allah's guidance has been withdrawn from her. Additionally, sarcasm is also employed through a humorous approach, evident in the use of the metaphorical term "*serkup kepala*" (inner headscarf):

1. IT'S OKAY IF YOU DON'T WANT TO WEAR THE HIJAB, WEAR INNER HEADSCARF INSTEAD [Translation, Text 24]

Here, the term *"inner headscarf"* refers to the concept of covering one's hair without wearing any outerwear, which is seen as amusing or comical. The humor in this example stems from the notion that wearing only the inner headscarf, without the usual outer garments associated with the hijab, creates a funny or absurd appearance. It is important to note that while these jokes may appear harmless on the surface, they are not exempt from the impact of indirect insults within this specific context. In this context, humor is used to ridicule and mock others based on religious beliefs and truths. The underlying focus of the humor lies in highlighting the perceived transgression or sin of removing the hijab. Therefore, these jokes, although seemingly lighthearted, are still aligned with the broader discourse of indirect insults and carry an implicit critique of the targeted individuals' religious choices or actions.

By tying the knots *"direct"* and *"indirect"* as the chain of equivalence to the signifier *"Insult",* one can come to realize that discourse articulation *"cyberbullying"* has become more dominant than *"religious"* as the nodal points *"disrespectful"* and *"sarcasm"* come from the cyberbullying discourse itself. Religious truth is ultimately employed as an insult, serving to assert the cyberbullies' dominance over "the sinners" when combined with the discourse of "religious" articulation. This combination enables them to engage in cyberbullying practices, with "threat" being a key element that will be further explored in the subsequent section. The discourse of "religious" articulation becomes a justification for their cyberbullying actions.

4.2 Threats

4.2.1 Direct threats

In the findings, direct threats are identified as explicit statements where the language used by the cyberbullies clearly conveys the potential for causing harm on inflicting negative consequences. For instance:

1. Hmm, what in the world is happening. Never mind…In this world, hair is beautiful, (but) in the Hereafter, Allah will burn your hair severely…AURAT [Translation, Text 30]

The text above suggests that the cyberbully employs definitive language to threaten the addressed celebrity, emphasizing the concept of punishment. This is evident through the use of

the modal verb *"will",* indicating certainty, and the verb *"burn",* symbolizing the concrete action of burning. The inclusion of the adverb *"greatly"* intensifies the visual imagery of the burning action, enhancing its frightening nature. Furthermore, the goal of the action *"your hair"*, positions the addressed celebrity as the recipient of the consequences. Alternatively, this notion of the recipient can also be interpreted as "indirect sinners" upon whom the punishment will be inflicted. This is because the punishment, as depicted in the clause, is not directly directed at the Participant, but rather at a part of their belonging, namely the *"hair".* A similar understanding applies to the signifiers "husband" and "father" (Text 36) as they represent indirect sinners by being associated with women's property. Alongside that, the term *"burn"* as a signifier also alludes to the attribute of the Hellfire, which the cyberbullies employ to signify the definitive punishment for those who are categorized as "sinful". In this manner, the cyberbullies impose a sense of threat by using the symbolism of the Hellfire to position the public figures as deserving of punishment by Hellfier, based on their articulated identity as sinners. Other words found in the texts that reflect the concept of Hellfire are *"heat"* (Text 33), *"hereafter"* (Text 28), *"hot"* (Text 15 and 28), *"burning"*(Text 39) and even the term *"Hell"* itself (Text 2, 15, 30, 34, 38, 39, 42, and 43). Consider the texts below:

1. Think it's pretty being free hair? This is the shortcut to hell!! [Translation, Text 34]
2. It was already good that you wore the hijab (and it's good that you're reaping the rewards), so why did you take it off (why are you committing a sin)? [Translation, Text 35]

As demonstrated in Text 34 above, the relational process *"is"* identifies the clause *"the shortcut to Hell"* as the Attribute of the signifier "*free hair",* which is reflected in the use of the deictic tool *"this"*. This demonstrates that abandoning the hijab is equivalent to the notion of walking straight to Hellfire, and thus, the position of the sinners is concordant to the members of Hell. Owing to the floating signifier *"sinful",* the link between *"the sinners"* and the signifier *"Hell"* can be reflected in the material process *"committing"* in Text 35 above, which implies the actual action of removing the hijab. This then further emphasizes the position of the transgressors as those subjected to entering Hellfire, and eventually establishes the signifier *"Hellfire"* as a dominant symbol of threat, whereas *"sin"* as an element of the nodal point *"punishment".* At the same time, the cyberbullies also use "Hell" as a threatening term to rearticulate their position as the ones responsible for the passing of judgements on whoever they think deserves the punishments as can be observed below:

1. Uqasha, greetings from hell [Translation, Text 38]
2. The Hell of Allah awaits you [Translation, Text 42]

In the texts above, the cyberbullies establish themselves as the intermediaries between "hell" and the targeted celebrities, as evidenced by the verbal process *"sends*" in Text 3 (also seen in Text 43). This positioning suggests that the cyberbullies view themselves as conduits for conveying the regards or messages from "Hell" to the targeted celebrities. It implies a personification of "Hell" as a living entity that actively anticipates the actions of the public figures. This further signifies that the cyberbullies perceive it as their duty as Muslims to pass judgements on the transgressors and administer the consequences associated with "Hell". The following section explores the veiled threats found in the texts.

4.2.2 Veiled threats

When referring to *"responsibility"* within religious discourse, it typically denotes the concept of reminding others for the sake of Allah. However, when this notion is rearticulated by cyberbullies, it becomes a strategic tool for them to mask their threats. These types of threats, characterized by their disguised nature, are commonly known as veiled threats. For instance:

1. Let her remove her hijab. Her husband will be responsible for her sins, not us. As long as we have done our responsibility as Muslims (we are fine). Whether she heeds our advice or not, it is none of our business. At least, we will not be asked THERE (by Allah) as we have already reminded her, but it is herself that does not want to accept it [Translation, Text 32]

As shown in the text above, the verb *"remind"* is used as the cyberbullies' reasoning for whatever is being articulated by themselves as a group. This is signaled through the plural first-person pronoun "*we"* as the participant and its possessive determiner *"our*", which entails *"responsibility"* as the Participant's belonging, and *"Muslims"* as the collective identity of the Participant. As a whole, the term "*responsibility"* functions as a justification to the threats they impose on the addressed, whereas the actual threat is implemented in use of the deictic expression *"THERE"* which typically signifies *"hereafter".* This concept of *"responsibility"* then leads to conditional threats in which the threats are realized by a warning stating that there will be torments imposed on the addressed if the conditions are not met. This can be seen in advice that comes with a threat connotation in it:

1. Wtf… a pretty face with a small brain. Allah has said in the Quran "O Hawa, cover your aurah", she had covered her aurah, but simply exposing herself now. How stupid! Be moderate even if you want to be an artist. Remember this dear hawa, please take care of your aurah before the Hellfire takes care of your aurah. [Translation, Text 19]

In the text above, the concept of punishment is expressed through a conditional threat in where the apodosis is realized by the condition *"take care of your aurah",* and the protasis is followed by the threat *"before the Hellfire takes care of your aurah".* Although there is a verb *"remember"* referring to advice, the threat, however, lies within the imagery of punishment asthe signified of *"Hellfire",* which functions as a constraint to impose the condition on the addressed. Moreover, the verb *"remember"* is constructed in an imperative form, and the use of swearing in which a strong sense of rudeness presented sets the tone of the overall clause as downright aggressive. Also, *"aggressiveness"* and *"advice"* are never coherent, and this thus affirms the function of the clause as a threat. The same structure can be seen in Text 40, where these threats are lexically manifested by the signifier *"qiyamah"* entailing the Last Day, which is also an element of the nodal point *"punishment".* Nevertheless, by tying the knots *"direct"* and *"veiled"* as a chain of equivalence to the signifier *"threat"*, it is apparent that discourse articulation *"religious"* has become more dominant than *"cyberbullying"*, given that the nodal point *"punishment"* itself comes from discourse articulation *"religious"*. This dynamic enable cyberbullies to moralize their actions through the use of threats.

5.0 CONCLUSION

We have explored the phenomenon of religious-based cyberbullying discourse resulting from hegemonic intervention when the Malay hegemony on the hijab is challenged by public figures who choose to remove their hijab. The findings reveal that all of the three celebrities, Uqasha, Emma and Liyana have abandoned the signifier "hijab" in their Instagram posts, which is associated with the signifier "religious". The abandonment of the hijab has led to two forms of conflict. The first form of conflict arises from the public figures' identities as Muslims and women who choose to display their hair freely. The second form of conflict emerges from the tension between conforming to or deviating from the hijab-wearing practice. These conflicts challenge the Malay hegemony on the hijab and are perceived as threatening because they collide with the established association between the signifiers "non-religious" and "religious". Furthermore, this collision reveals a fundamental split in the identity of Malays, encompassing both religion and ethnicity. This aligns with the previous discussion by Ziegenhain by

Ziegenhain (2018) and Umair et al. (2022) pertaining to the inseparable connection between Islam and Malay identity. According to Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) theory of identity, the conflict within the Malay Muslim identity occurs when the split subject of "ethnicity" strives to become whole independently but needs to be relationally constituted with the split subject of "religion" to form a complete Malay Muslim identity. This demonstrates that in Malay Muslim society, cultural and religious identities are mutually inclusive and cannot be abandoned. Thus, the hegemonic intervention of public figures renouncing their identity as hijab-wearing women triggers public anger, which subsequently leads the Malay Muslim netizens to practice cyberbullying driven by religion factors.

Moreover, we have also revealed that the identity of religion in cyberbullying discourse isnot merely the reason for cyberbullying; instead, it is a strategic manipulation used by the cyberbullies to benefit their dominant position as Malay Muslims. This is represented through the establishment of "*Insult"* and *"Threat"* as a hegemonic closure, which is articulated by the cyberbullies as the solution to the public figures' conflict between these two identities, *"religious"* and *"non-religious"* discussed earlier. Note again that in the case of this study, the closure comes from discourse articulation *"cyberbullying",* which is antagonistic to discourse articulation *"religious".* It means the signifiers "cyberbullying" and "religious" are competing against one another to become more dominant in antagonism. The findings show that the language of the cyberbullies consists of both cyberbullying elements *"Insult"* and *"Threat"* where the former occurs when discourse articulation *"cyberbullying"* appears more dominant through the nodal points *"disrespectful"* and *"sarcasm"*, while the latter occurs when discourse articulation *"religious"* becomes more dominant through the nodal point *"punishment"*.

From these findings, it can be noticed that both articulations work side by side in the way that, on one hand, it allows the cyberbullies to manifest their power as the dominant group in the form of cyberbullying. On the other hand, it allows the cyberbullies to justify and moralise their cyberbullying practice through religious remarks. Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) concept of antagonism, thus, shows that the intervention between *"religious"* and *"cyberbullying"* has generated a new identity of religion that is manipulative, which is favorable for the cyberbulliesas the dominant group. Therefore, these findings support Sîrbu's (2019) understanding of the manipulation of religion in discourse, where theology is used to prove the veracities of the religious truth and thus make lies seem truthful. Given that manipulation of religion is represented through the hegemonic closure of cyberbullying

discourse, this, as a whole, reflects the reality of Malay Muslim society in which they normalize cyberbullying practice as a medium to "correct" or "punish" the "sins" committed by others.

In the realm of future research within this domain, several promising avenues beckon exploration. Firstly, there is an exigent call for an exhaustive exploration of the judgmental and self-righteous tendencies that characterize the actions of cyberbullies. While these aspects have been cursorily acknowledged in this paper, they demand meticulous examination. Subsequent research endeavors can also pivot towards an in-depth scrutiny and substantiation of these behavioral facets, embarking upon a nuanced investigation into the intricacies governing ingroup-outgroup dynamics. Secondly, future studies can venture into unraveling the intricate motivators and determinants underpinning the antagonistic responses exhibited by cyberbullies. This pursuit necessitates a comprehensive exploration of contextual variables, encompassing the potential provocation of sentiments of offense and perceived threat induced by celebrities' conduct. By triangulating textual data with insights gleaned from interviews or surveys, researchers can further delve into the multitude of factors contributing to negative defensive reactions, as well as the multifaceted articulation of cyberbullies' collective obligations vis-à-vis '*amal maaruf nahi mungkar'* (the promotion of good and prevention of evil).

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