



FOR GOD AND COUNTRY:

THE MULTI-FACETED IDENTITY OF CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN
MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIA

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PREFACE

This research could not have happened without the help of many people. First we want to thank Tan Kan-San and Ling Loun for being the first Malaysians we have met and whose broad network and guidance allowed us to do our research in Malaysia. We want to thank the Christian Student Movement in Malaysia for welcoming us in their community, allowing us to get involved in everything and being interested in our research. It is impossible to mention all the things they have done for us, ranging from taking us out to good food to having deep discussions about Malaysia, they made us feel at home. We are also thankful for the Christian Fellowships that have welcomed us into their community, not minding us constantly observing, taking notes and asking numerous questions. We are thankful for many individuals that, despite their busy lives, wanted to take time for us. As novice anthropologist we needed a lot of guidance to bring this thesis from nothing to what it is today. We thank Sara ten Brinke for guiding us through this process, giving us the needed free cups of coffee and unlimited flows of feedback. She really pushed us further and helped us to really think critically about our own experiences and observations. Last but not least we want to thank our God and our own Christian communities for being a source of inspiration throughout this research.

INTRODUCTION

Iris Bruijn and Marten van den Toren

Doaku Untuk Malaysia¹

Doaku untuk Malaysia (My prayer for Malaysia)

Satukan kami suku suku bangsa (Unity among all races)

Disini ku tetap nantikan (Here I am hoping)

Kadamaian atas tanah ini (For peace in this land)

These are the words of a song in *Bahasa-Melayu* that expresses the Christian students' aspirations for the Malaysian country in which they live. The first time we heard this song was at meeting of Christian university students. In this song it becomes clear that a Christian and a Malaysian national identity are connected. This in a context where many other religious and ethnic identities are present. This diversity creates complexity in society, defining the Malaysian identity becomes near to impossible. In such a context, how do so many identities interact and function side by side? To answer such a question we must reflect on what identity is. Barth (1969) has created a very influential approach to the study of identity in which the boundary between identities is key. These boundaries are what define identity. On top of this, Cohen (1969) argues, that a community or an individual can have various simultaneous identities, which he calls boundary systems. These theoretical approaches recognise the importance of the *Other*, and the diversity of identities and boundary systems someone can belong to. However, it does not account for how the various identities interact and mutually shape each other. Another question one might ask is how identities are learnt and shaped in such a context of complexity. Beekers (2014) coined the term *pedagogies of piety* for spaces where young people come together to learn about their religion. This term is relatively new and not yet connected to debates of identity. However, as will become clear, we see a strong influence of the *pedagogy of piety* and the identity of its members. These spaces function in the broader context of the nation-state. Yet through Beekers' research not much is known about how these religious spaces relate to a national identity. Recognizing these theoretical gaps, and with the Malaysian context in mind, we have come to the following research question:

¹ A song written and performed by Gidong.

What is the relationship between a multi-faceted identity formed in Christian pedagogies of piety and Christian tertiary student's place in, and understanding of, the multicultural nation-state of Malaysia?

But what makes Malaysian universities such a relevant context for this particularly research question? The ethnic Malay, who are legally bound to the Islamic faith, constitute 50.1% of the Malaysian population.² Other ethnic groups are the Indian-Malaysians who are mostly Hindu, the Chinese-Malaysians who are mostly Buddhist and the smaller group of various indigenous ethnicities who adhere to different religions. Christians form an interesting community since they are ethnically mixed and can be all ethnicities apart from Malay. Within this Christian community our research population are students who are a members of *pedagogies of piety*. Students are an interesting research population because the universities in which they study are ethnically and religiously diverse. This often creates a context of daily interaction with people different from themselves. On top of this, university students form an interesting research population because universities are a space where the nation-state exerts control.

To answer our main question we have conducted complementary research. Iris Bruijn looked at the formation of a multi-faceted identity within the Christian *pedagogies of piety* and adds to the concept of the *pedagogy of piety*. Marten van den Toren studied Christian students' place in, and understanding of, the multicultural nation-state of Malaysia.

For our research we conducted fieldwork from the 29th of January till the 12th of April 2017. During this time we used various anthropological methodologies to create more varied data. This usage of various methodologies also would also allow us to check various analyses that were made throughout our time in the field and to create more depth. Our most important research methodology was participant observation. This meant that everything we saw, experienced and took part in, while spending time with Christian students, we tried to note down as best we could. Through this methodology we were able to analyse what the student did, not only how they perceived things. This was especially important when looking at performance as this is something the students *do*. When we wanted more depth we also did many semi-structured interviews with students, this would often be done in a university café. The experiences and observations made through participant observation would often be discussed further in these interviews. By basing our interviews on experiences and observations we hoped to minimise the risk that students would give socially expected

² <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/kuala-lumpur-population/>

answers. It was important to always stay critical, despite these efforts. For the purpose of adding some variety and creativity in the research methodologies we also used photo elicitation. A student took pictures of her daily life. These pictures were later used as the basis for an interview with this participant. Despite it being a very interesting, yet intensive methodology, it did not create significantly different insights. Right at the end of our time in the field we organised a focus group with students from two universities, public and private. Through various statements discussions were stimulated between the students. This was a great way to collect the final data as it allowed us check the preliminary analyses which came up in the field. It was also very useful to explicitly see interactions between students of different universities as this gave us new insights.

While all these methodologies were used so that we could be as objective as possible, it is however important to recognise that as researchers we always remain subjective. Both of us were already very familiar with the research context. We're both members of a Christian student network in the Netherlands which is similar to the Christian student movement in Malaysia. We are both also Christian, the religious aspects were therefore neither new to us. Consequently our research context felt very familiar to us. On the one hand this allowed us to gain more depth at an earlier stage of our research. On the other hand we always had to remain critical so that we would not take anything for granted, or as common sense. We both struggled, especially at the beginning, with the fact that our research was gendered. Iris struggled in gaining a rapport with men, while Marten struggled in the early stages to gain rapport with women. We do not consider this a problem. Both of us interviewed both genders eventually and the results were no different. One of the best aspects of being a researcher in the Malaysian context was that both of us had a liminal identity. Because Malaysia was not our home we were able to float between many different groups. This allowed us to gain an insight that many Malaysian themselves would not get as they are more bound to specific groups. It was important for us to already analyse our data in the field as it helped us to see which aspects of our research needed more depth and which aspects were already saturated with data. For coding and analysing our data we used N-VIVO.

Very important in anthropological research is flexibility. This became very clear to us as soon as we entered the field. Our research question with which we entered the field was not relevant in the context in which we would do research. The necessary changes that were made also made our research increasingly sensitive. Consequently, there were many rather complex ethical considerations which before our field research we did not anticipate. It became increasingly important to protect the anonymity of our informants as we did not want to put

them in a difficult situation. For this reason the exact locations, names of universities, and names of our informants all needed to be kept anonymous. In our research therefore all the names of participants and universities were changed. The gatekeepers were very helpful in helping us reflect on these ethical complexities. These discussions also really helped to consolidate our relationship with them. Getting informed consent from individuals was not difficult as we could ask and explain this before an interview. A lot of our research however was done within religious communities. We considered it important that the whole community would at least have some knowledge of what we were doing among them. To do this, we always asked if it would be possible for us to be introduced to the whole community during one of their weekly meetings. In so doing we hoped that our presence among these religious communities would not remain a mystery, and that if people wanted to know more they could approach us personally. Sadly enough some people remained confused about our presence.

We will now continue with the theoretical framework in which the theoretical basis of our research will be explained. The relationship between the various theories and approaches will also be clarified in this section. After the theoretical framework we will continue with two empirical chapters. In the first chapter the *pedagogies of piety* and how they influence identity will be shown. In the second empirical chapter how students engage their identity in broader society will be described. In the last chapter both empirical chapters will be brought together in an attempt to add to the theoretical debates surrounding identity, boundary systems and *pedagogies of piety*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Religious and Ethnic Identities

Marten van den Toren

Identity is a broadly studied concept in the social sciences.. Barth (1969) has been, and still is, of great influence in going against the focus on the content of identity, focussing rather on boundaries. While he writes about ethnic identity we use his argument for group identifications other than ethnicity as well, something Barth later also advised (Barth in Jenkins 2008, 128-131). He argues that it is important to look at boundaries between ethnic groups saying that ‘it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them’ (Barth 1969, 9). This means that categories stay, while participation and membership might change. The continuity of the group therefore depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The dichotomization between members of the group and outsiders shows a shared ethnic identity for those who are included in the group by the exclusion of others (Barth 1969, 13-15). In the same year, Cohen also writes about groups with social boundaries. He implies that there are different forms of social boundary systems, this means that people can belong to multiple social boundary systems as one can be a part of an ethnic group, religious group and belong to the supporters of a certain sports team all at the same time (Cohen 1969, 107). Cohen argues that people are quite skilled in combining these various boundary systems or allegiances, even though frictions do sometimes arise. Whether or not a number of boundary systems can be combined depends on the function of the group. The boundary systems of which the functions overlap cause the strongest conflicts of allegiance (Cohen 1969, 112).

Boundaries are not only drawn by people within the group but it is also an external process. Jenkins uses Barth to argue that identification has to do with relationships of similarity and difference. This can be both ‘external’ identification by others as well as ‘internal’ self-identification. He concludes that identity is produced and reproduced both in discourse and in the practical consequences of identity (Jenkins 2008, 200-201). This view of identity as process of being and becoming shows the never final nature of identity. People identify with a group to map their world and find a place in it. This is always a process and ‘it is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does’ (Jenkins 2008, 5). This identification is not with one single group but as stated above people have a number of allegiances to different social boundary systems and thus multiple identities. Different values

are placed on different identifications at different moments, as the ethnography of Guadeloupe (2008) shows for the people of St. Maarten.

To study identity, we think it is important to look at social boundary systems of which people are a part or to which they are the *Other*. We will thus look at processes of inclusion and exclusion surrounding groups. As people are a part of multiple groups they also have multiple identities that can cause conflict. Through these groups people map the world around them and create a social identity. This identity is both self-ascribed as ascribed by others, it is therefore always in a process of becoming which will be of great importance to our study of the creation of a religious identity.

Religion and ethnicity are two important boundary systems that often work together and sometimes contradict each other in the creation of a social identity. To begin with, we want to look at how religion shapes identity in a multicultural context. Religious identity is never isolated, it is often influenced by the broader religious, political and cultural context (Appadurai 2006, 66-77). With the example of St. Maarten we see how Christianity is very central to the formation of an island identity. This Christian island identity, being influenced by the political context, becomes what Guadeloupe calls a *metalangue* of inclusiveness, in other words a discourse for a multicultural ideology (Guadeloupe 2008, 55-74). As Christianity is embedded into the local context, religious rituals and beliefs are used for boundary making. Boundaries are created between those who practice certain rituals and those who don't, between those who have certain beliefs and those who don't. In such a way religion becomes a boundary system for processes inclusion and exclusion (Guadeloupe 2008, 11-32).

As has been mentioned before, if we want to understand the role of ethnicity in shaping identity we cannot ignore Barth. Despite the fact that Barth focusses on the importance of boundaries, he still defines ethnicity as a group that has four fundamental traits. Firstly, the group is based on shared fundamental cultural values. Secondly, the ethnic group is a field of interaction and communication. Thirdly, it is identified by others and identifies itself as a recognisable category. Finally, an ethnic group also biologically self-perpetuates (Barth 1969,10). When looking at ethnicity in a multi-ethnic context we need to recognise the importance of the *Other* (Barth 1969, 13-15). The four traits can be used to create boundaries between ethnicities, they can be used for processes of inclusion and exclusion (Eriksen 2010, 81).

What then is the relationship between various identities? Communities aim to create a certain synthesis between their multiple identities, they aim to unify their various identities

(Guadeloupe 2008; Hoffstaedter 2011). This can be done in various ways. One is to create a synchronicity between a religious and ethnic identity. This happens when communities consider that a certain religious and ethnic identity belong together, for example the Malay are considered to be Muslim, and the Chinese-Malaysians are mostly considered to be Buddhist in the Malaysian context (Hoffstaedter 2011, 17-21). A coherence between identities can also be created through the creation of a dominant all-encompassing identity under which diverse identities can find their place, for example the inclusive Christian identity in St. Maarten. (Guadeloupe 2009, 39). In this case a boundary can be created between those willing to accept a certain unification of multiple identities and those not willing to accept this unification (Guadeloupe 2009, 71-74). Through this process of boundary making and *Othering* social identities are strengthened.

It might seem that communities always succeed in creating a synchronicity between their various identities. We consider it important to recognise that this is not always the case. Quite often communities experience friction and conflict between various identities (Hoofstaedter 2011, 21). Even though a community might not have a single unified identity, we consider that it is important to recognise that at least they try to create some sort of synchronicity between their multiple identities. Or as Kernerman (2005,5) puts it: “The logic of identity is grounded in a refusal of alterity, a denial of complexity, in favour of reified and simplified identity categories”. Now that we’ve seen how identities can be very diverse and that to understand these identities boundaries are key, we will now delve into how these identities are learnt and stimulated.

Pedagogy of piety

Iris Bruijn

Religious groups have been of great importance in the study of religion from a social science perspective. The famous definition of religion by Émile Durkheim already states that religion is ‘beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them’ (Durkheim 1915, 47). Later on, the study of religion became more focused on the individual. Davie’s concept of *believing without belonging* is an example of this. Although he does not state that religious institutions will disappear he argues that people believe, but do not necessarily belong to a religious community. For instance, people can identify as Christians but still not belong to a Christian community (Davie 2013). Another example of the focus on the individual is Taylor’s concept of expressive individualism which

describes a new kind of self-orientation that became a mass phenomenon since the 1960s. He states that in a post-Durkheimian age spirituality is utterly privatized. This does not mean churches will be empty, but that it is people's own spirituality, rather than the focus on the group, that might lead them to a church (Taylor 2007). In our research we go against these notions by acknowledging the importance of the individual but focusing on the importance of the religious community in the shaping of a religious identity. As people identify with a community we will look at how religious identity is formed by being a part of a religious boundary system.

In our focus on the religious community we agree with Beekers (2014) and will use his concept of the *pedagogies of piety*. These are “spaces, or spheres, of religious transmission that young people actively engage with and themselves give shape to” (Beekers 2014, 84).³ He argues that “among these groups, religious forms of community do not merely survive as a kind of traditional heritage, but continue to be vital in their everyday efforts at (re)constructing their personal faith” (Beekers 2014, 90). This striving for piety of young Christians happens in a specific context, in the case of Beekers' research the context of the Netherlands. The pedagogy of piety helps these Christians with challenges to their faith posed by their context. This way, the religious community helps the Christians live a Christian life in their time and place (Beekers 2014, 92). By looking at the concept of the *pedagogy of piety* in a different context we want to explore the importance of these groups in the multi-religious society of Malaysia. We will also show their function in shaping the identity of its members. Beekers (2014) leaves out this identity-shaping aspect of the *pedagogy of piety* to make his convincing argument that young Muslims and Christians in the Netherlands can, and should, be studied in the same research field. Muslims are often looked at from a perspective of minority studies in which an Islamic identity plays a big role. Christians on the other hand are often studied from the perspective of secularization and religious transformation (Beekers 2014, 79-82). While we agree there should be comparison between Muslims and Christians, and their *pedagogies of piety*, in the Netherlands we argue that the strong function of identity formation of the *pedagogy of piety* should not be overlooked. This because it is a strong pedagogical setting that students make a decision to attend. They consciously choose to be a part of a *pedagogy of piety* and desire for it to help them grow in their faith and for it to shape their religious identity. Because it is important for its members that it shapes them in who they are, we argue it is important to look at this in more depth. As mentioned before

³ Examples of these pedagogies of piety given by Beekers (2014) are youth groups, student associations, conferences, friendship networks or small study groups.

“[Identification] is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does” (Jenkins 2004, 5). Therefore, to give shape to identity we will look at how these groups function as a community and what they do.

Performance

Iris Bruijn

To look at the things that are *done* within the *pedagogy of piety* we will use the concepts of performativity and ritual as these are things one *does*. Catharine Bell had a great influence on the study of performance. She wants to go beyond the dichotomy of thought and action by stating that ritual fuses action and belief (Bell 1992,6). The way people view the world is expressed through the structuring of their actions, which is ritual. These rituals in turn also have the ability to shape and remake beliefs and cultural schemes (Bell 1992, 115). Through the embodiment of these unifying cultural schemes social bodies are created, bodies which can relate to each other in a structured manner due to shared rituals (Bell 1992, 80; Butler 1988, 524-528). Therefore the performance of ritual not only carries meaning, it shapes how people relate to each other, it actually *does something*.

With Bell it becomes clear how, through ritual, thought and action are unified in such a way that ritual *does something*. Yet through her work it does not become clear how we can identify rituals in the world we live in. To get a better understanding of what ritual is we will use the idea of ritual by Grimes (1990). He recognises that ritual is a term that is widely used in academia, traditionally within the religious domain, yet he argues that it can also be applied in a broader context. He describes how for example normal acts such as watching TV can be ritualized and turned into rites (Grimes 1990, 10). In this it is important to recognize that Bell and Grimes are building on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. The creation of a social body is thus seen as an unconscious and implicit process (Bell 1992, 80,98). We consider this approach lacking and we argue that it is a conscious process. Mahmood (2001) convincingly shows how Muslim women in Egypt consciously create a pious self through the performance of Salat (prayer). In her writing, she draws on the older genealogy of *habitus* by Aristotle. In contrast with Bourdieu this genealogy also “presupposes a specific pedagogical process by which a moral character is acquired” (Mahmood 2001, 838). This pedagogical process can happen in multiple spaces, including the *pedagogy of piety*.

In the *pedagogy of piety* young people perform rituals together. The *pedagogy of piety* being a space of religious transmission teaches the young people certain rituals that they

perform together. We argue that these rituals carry meaning and shape how the young people relate to each other (Bell 1992). These performances also shape the young people towards a pious mindset (Mahmood 2001) and as we will show it influences multiple facets of one's identity. It is however not only the performances learned at the pedagogy of piety that shapes the identity of its members. The community with its boundaries also shapes the identity of the young people. While Mahmood (2001) focused on the individual we will thus look at the community of religious individuals and argue that both the performances and the community shape the individuals and the *pedagogy of piety* itself. However, as Grimes argued, ritual and thus performance is not always religious. For this reason we will also look at performance in shaping other facets of identity.

Diversity and the Nation-State

Marten van den Toren

In the same way that religion and ethnicity can be the basis of various boundary systems, and therefore various identities, so can a national identity. We approach it separately here due to its often all-encompassing nature. In our modern world the nation-state has indeed become one of the most universally legitimate forms of political organisation which can create a deep sense of community and therefore identity (Anderson 2006). Nevertheless, ethnic and religious identity continue to play an important role. There are many examples whereby one national identity comprises of various ethnic and religious identities. Often religion and ethnicity are mobilised in such a way to legitimise or strengthen a national identity. In the following paragraph we want to gain a better understanding of national identity, the role religion and ethnicity play within this identity, and how this national identity is fomented.

A nation is a very complex phenomenon that has only been taking shape in modern history. It is also difficult to give one concise and short definition for a nation. Anderson is considered to be the first social theorist to grasp the essence of the nation. He defined it as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 2006, 6). He argues that the nation is imagined because it is a community which is too big for everyone to have face-to-face relations. This does not mean however that the nation has no real consequences. It is also limited because it has boundaries, a nation does not go on forever. Finally, Anderson considers a nation sovereign because within its borders the nation is the only entity that legitimately exerts power.

Religion and ethnicity play an important role in the nation (Appadurai 2006, 66-77). Anderson however claims that the decline of religion is the basis for the rise of nationalism. As sacred languages start losing importance due to print capitalism, vernacular languages started gaining significance. These vernacular languages became the medium through which non-religious, national ideologies were shared and exchanged creating imagined communities among communities who share the same language (Anderson 2006). While Anderson argues that the disappearance of religion caused the creation of the nation, we consider it however important to recognise that religion and ethnicity continue to play important roles in creating national identities, such as the *Hindutva* movement has done in India (Appadurai 2006, 66-77). The nation has not made ethnicity and religion redundant.

Eriksen (2010, 119) argues that nations gain political legitimacy by claiming that they represent some kind of cultural unity. Is this really the case? As religion and ethnicity continue to play a role in modern nations and national ideologies, they often bring with them some form of diversity and plurality. Religion and ethnicity bring with them complexity, they are never stable, people use ethnicity and religion to continually define and redefine the nation (Appadurai 2006; Eriksen 2010; Habermas 2006). We consider it very important to recognise that many modern complex societies and nations can no longer be defined by a simple political or cultural unity, and that this maybe should no longer be attempted. We will therefore look at how diverse identities find a place in, and relate to the nation.

Despite the pluralism there are many ways that nation-states aim to create some sort of cultural and political unity, for example through the education system (Collet 2007, 131). However, we consider it important to recognise that in a culturally plural nation even minorities have agency to create their own alternate national identity and consciousness. Students might learn and be socialised into a culture that supports a certain political unity through an education system. Despite this, they still maintain the ability to shape their own identification process, breaking previously considered identity categories by trying to combine and mould their ethnic, religious and national identity into a coherent unity (Collet 2007, 150). A national identity is therefore ascribed by the nation as well as self-ascribed by an individual. In many ways it could therefore be considered a power game where religious and ethnic minorities and the dominant nation-state are each trying to exert some kind influence in defining a coherent national identity (Appadurai 2006; Kernerman 2004,99). A national identity therefore does not stand isolated, ethnicity and religion cannot be ignored when approaching the nation, nationalism and a national identity.

Bringing it Together

Marten van den Toren

It all starts with identity, but as we have seen this is not a simple concept. More often than not identity is formed by many different parts that don't necessarily need to fit together nicely. This is due to the fact that individuals are part of various boundary systems which influence their social identities. Ethnicity, religion and nationality are examples of such boundary systems. Through processes of exclusion and inclusion in these boundary systems social identities are fomented and strengthened. It is important to recognise that people and communities try to create some form of synchronicity between these various identities. As was shown with the example of St. Maarten it also important recognise that the various identities are not isolated, they influence and shape each other.

Very important for shaping these identities are *pedagogies of piety*. These spaces show the importance of community for shaping and expressing identity. Despite the religious character of *pedagogies of piety* they also have an influence on other identities, they don't only shape a religious identity. We will argue that *pedagogies of piety* can also exert an influence on ethnic and national identity due to the mutual influence between various boundary systems. The shared performance of rituals within these *pedagogies of piety* play an important role in shaping social identities by shaping certain mindsets and by influencing how people relate to each other. These rituals do not necessarily have to be explicitly religious.

As pedagogies of piety shape the various aspects of an individual's identity, but particularly the religious identity, we will argue that it also influences the lives and identities of the individuals outside of these spaces of religious engagement and interaction. Pedagogies of piety therefore shape and influence Christian students' place in, and understanding of broader society and therefore the nation.

CONTEXT

Religion in Malaysia

Marten van den Toren

Malaysia is a country full of diversity. Religious and ethnic diversity is especially important in shaping the Malaysian context. During the British colonial rule in Malaysia there were many immigrant arrivals searching for economic opportunities in trade and in the tin mines. South Chinese and Tamil immigrants were particularly dominant (Hoffstaedter 2011, 18). This ethnic diversity brought with it also a religious diversity. Amongst all these religions Islam was prioritised. During colonial rule Islam was made into the official religion of Malaysia. This prioritisation meant that being born a Malay also meant being born a Muslim. The ethnically Malay were, and still are, therefore legally bound to their Islamic faith. Despite the prioritisation of Islam an effort was made to leave room for other minority religions in Malaysia (Guan 2005, 633). The centrality of Islam in the Malaysian context, despite it being a plural-religious society, has continued to this day. In this plural-religious and multicultural society the *Other* is ever present, making boundaries especially visible. As we have seen with Barth (1969, 9), these boundaries are incredibly important for the creation of an identity.

Very central to the creation of modern Malaysia was president Mahathir who held his position for 22 years till 2002. Even though he was sometimes considered hard-handed, he claimed this was needed to maintain a multi-racial peace (Guan 2005, 632). Under his rule in the 1980s Malaysia was increasingly influenced by neoliberalist ideologies, which brought about privatisation, deregulation and an economic boom. These developments had a profound effect on religion in Malaysia, as neoliberalism also caused a deregulation in the religious domain. It brought about the rise of exclusionary populism of which the *Parti Se Islam Malaysia* (PAS) is an example (Guan 2005, 231). PAS' aim was to create an Islamic state. It perceived neoliberalism as a form of secularisation which had to be fought (Yong 2004, 365-357). PAS managed to gain control of various municipal governments in states far away from the centre of power in Kuala Lumpur such as Kelantan. In these municipalities it imposed an orthodox Islam where it policed the practice of Islam of people living under their control (Guan 2005, 635). The rise of a populist orthodox Islam in politics put pressure on non-Muslims who found it difficult to build places of worship and fully express their faith in the public domain (Guan 2005, 634). Pressured by the increasing influence of PAS on the national scale, Mahathir, who was not part of the PAS party, announced in 2001 that Malaysia

was officially an Islamic state (Hoffstaedter 2011, 19). We can thus see how religion in Malaysia was and is influenced by the broader political context. Ironically, the force that PAS opposed is the same force that allowed PAS to gain increasing political influence.

As mentioned before, colonialism brought about the arrival of many immigrants. These immigrants also brought Christianity with them. Especially Chinese churches have gained a foothold in Malaysia (Stone 2003, 14). Malaysian churches, ranging from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal, especially gained fervency in the 1970s due to influence from the Charismatic Renewal Movement. This impulse also meant that an increasing number of para-church organisations came to be, such as the Christian Students Movements (CSM)⁴. CSM, and organisations like it, have a long tradition of fomenting and stimulating the Christian faith among university students in their personal lives but also in their academic thinking (Boyd 2007, 3). In this they work with *pedagogies of piety*, an important focus of this research.

As we have seen, religion is very important in shaping the Malaysian context. Religion is also central to our research. Despite this, we cannot ignore the role of ethnicity. While most religions in Malaysia correlate with a specific ethnicity, Christianity is unique in that people of multiple ethnicities belong to this religious community.

Ethnicity in Malaysia

Iris Bruijn

As said before, ethnicity is also an important parameter of identification in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. According to a 2010 estimate ethnic Malay make 50.1 percent of the total population. Chinese Malaysians are 22.6 percent, Indian Malaysians 6.7 percent and the remainder is made up of others.⁵ The Malay and other indigenous groups together are called the *Bumiputra* meaning ‘sons of the soil’ and have a special status because of this origin (Neo 2006:96).

In 1955 the constitution of Malaya, now west-Malaysia, was formed. This served as a kind of social contract between the *Bumiputra* and the *non-Bumiputra*. In exchange for citizenship for the latter, the former received several concessions like the previously mentioned naming of Islam as the formal religion. This ethnic inequality of the social contract caused simmering ethnic tensions which exploded into ‘race riots’ in Kuala Lumpur and

⁴Pseudonym in order to protect anonymity.

⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html>

across the Peninsula in May 1969. This in turn led to a state of emergency and to more policies that positively discriminated people of Malay ethnicity (Hoffstaedter 2001:23). The social contract between ethnic Malay and the others is still in place although some “are seeking redress for the deal they received, but never made themselves” (Hoffstaedter 2001:25). This history, combined with the political power ethnic Malay still have because of their electoral weight, makes for a strong boundary between this ethnic group and others. The mentioned push towards an Islamic State by PAS alienated non-Malays even more since they felt this “betrayed the government’s commitment to multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity as part of the constitutional bargain” (Neo 2006:95).

As we have seen, people can be a part of different social boundary systems (Cohen 1969:112). In the case of Malaysia the two main boundary systems are that of religion and ethnicity. In most cases there is a synchronicity between ethnic identity and religious identity. This automatic combining does not exist for the Christian community as “it would appear to be the only major religion in the country without an ‘intrinsic’ ethnic constituency, encompassing in its ranks members of diverse ethnic origins” (Wong 2014:263). This seeming lack of synchronicity between a religious and ethnic identity makes it an interesting group to look at further.

To do this it is first important to understand the counter-discourse of Malaysian Borneo, more often called East-Malaysia. Malaya, today’s west-Malaysia, and east-Malaysia were joined together in 1963. At this time the special right of the *Bumiputra* were given to all ‘sons of the soil’, thus including the many indigenous ethnic groups of east-Malaysia. Despite this *Bumiputra* status east-Malaysia is in an uneasy relationship with west-Malaysia. This because of their separate histories and the fact that the broader Malaysian society is west-Malaysian centred and while east-Malaysia has many *Bumiputra*, it does not fit into the tri-ethnic scheme of Malay, Chinese and Indian of west-Malaysia (Barlocco 2013, 468). Another noteworthy difference between east-Malaysia and west-Malaysia is in the area of religion. While in west-Malaysia Islam is the main religion in east-Malaysia Christianity is the biggest religion, and there are many Christian *Bumiputra* (Barlocco 2013, 468). The Malaysian state is however strongly influenced by Islam in both places.

As said before the Christian community of Malaysia comes from a variety of ethnicities. The biggest groups are the Chinese-Malaysians and the Indian-Malaysians but there are also many Christians from the various ethnic groups of east-Malaysia. This ethnic diversity in the Christian community creates a religious boundary system in which that the ethnic *Other* is present within the religious boundary system. This is also reflected in the

Malaysian *pedagogies of piety*. Here young Christians from Indian-Malaysian, Chinese-Malaysian and east-Malaysian ethnic groups come together. In these *pedagogies of piety* a religious boundary is drawn between them and the *Other* while the ethnic *Other* is seen as a member of the same community. Next we will look at the universities in which these *pedagogies of piety* function.

Malaysian Universities

Marten van den Toren

One aspect which should not be forgotten in this whole context is the contrast between public and private universities. Due to political deregulation in the 1980s, there was an upsurge in private universities. By 2000, 53 percent of tertiary students were enrolled in private universities (Lee 2004). The growth of private universities was exacerbated due to the implementation of a quota-system. Through this system each ethnicity only gets a set percentage of public university places. The quotas favour the *Bumiputra* compared to *non-Bumiputra*. Consequently an increasing amount of *non-Bumiputra* would enrol in private universities in an attempt to circumvent government bias. One clear difference is that in private universities most students come from very well to do families. Due to the very high academic fees students only have access to these universities when their families are well off. In public universities students often come from more humble backgrounds. Fees are heavily subsidised by the government and students have to be very driven to even get a place in these universities, especially when having a *non-Bumiputra* status. The contrasts between public and private universities have a big influence on the ethnic makeup of these universities, it consequently also influences how identity boundaries are perceived, experienced and formed. These themes will be explored further in the empirical chapters. In both private and public universities Christian students gather in *pedagogies of piety*. The next chapter will explain more about these communities.

1. IT'S WHO WE ARE

Identity Formation at the Christian Pedagogy of Piety

Iris Bruijn

Carter is a private university in Malaysia. In this university a group of students meets on a weekly basis. Being a student is not all they have in common, they belong to the Christian minority in their country and are gathered to pray, worship and learn about their religion. They are also there to meet each other, which is why they will normally walk over to the mall next to the university to go for dinner together after the meetings. As I walk into the room where the meeting is held the band is already practising and around fifteen of the members are waiting for the prayer meeting to start. We pray for the meeting of today and after this I find a place in the large lecture theatre which is slowly filling up. The band begins to play a song from the well-known Australian band Hillsong and all students seem to know it. Everybody stands up and sings along with the music, the lyrics being projected on the screen normally used for the lecturer's PowerPoints. After some songs a member of this Christian Fellowship's committee comes up to the stage to welcome the around 100 students that have gathered. "If you are new, can you stand up so you can introduce yourself?". A handful of people get up, introduce themselves and are welcomed by applause. She then makes some announcements about the various programs that the Christian Fellowship (CF) and the Christian Student Movement (CSM) run, closing off with the most important announcement of all: "dinner will be at McDonalds". Before walking off the stage she introduces today's speaker who is a CSM staff worker. For the next 45 minutes the students listen to a talk about the theme 'Called to Follow'. While some of the students play with their mobile phones others are focused on listening to the speaker. "To be a disciple of Jesus means to take up your cross and follow Him". She closes off with prayer and we get up and gather in our cell groups. "How would you describe yourself as a disciple?", the cell group leader asks. After a short moment of silence someone answers: "sometimes it's hard to really follow Jesus". The committee member walks on the stage again and announces that it is almost time to leave. We quickly close our discussion with prayer and follow the others to the mall for dinner.

This is a typical meeting of one of the Christian Fellowships (CF) in Malaysia. These groups are all different but all are groups of Christian students meeting to learn more about their faith and be encouraged. In this chapter I will argue that these groups help students give shape to multiple facets of their identity. I will do this by first describing what these *pedagogies of piety* do and how they work. I will then argue it shapes the religious, ethnic and

national identity of the students. I will also show the relation between the pedagogy of piety and its context.

The Functioning of Malaysian Pedagogies of Piety

Much has been written about religious communities and their importance or lack of importance (Beekers 2014, Davie 2013, Durkheim 1915, Taylor 2007). The group described above is a specific religious community made up of Christian students that come together to have fellowship, equip themselves and proselytise. Groups of students at different universities meet once a week to have a meeting similar to the one described above. They also meet for bible studies, cell group or prayer meetings. These different groups are what Beekers (2014, 84) describes as *pedagogies of piety*.

Most of these *pedagogies of piety* are part of a broader network. These networks can be a church or a para-church organization. CSM is one of those organizations and involved with all the communities that our research took place in. CSM has an advising role for the student leaders of the *pedagogy of piety* and supports it by organizing programs and camps, taking part in meetings and mentoring individual students. Jessica is a student at UEMS⁶ and an active member of her CF. In previous semesters, she was part of the group of student leaders who form the committee. Talking about CSM she said: “there are times that our discussion meetings would be really straight to the point. It is going to be like this. But then Michael [CSM Staff] is there to like, “I think we need to take a step back and think about this aspect.” (...) And he would be there to remind us of what had happened in the past. (...) So like what God is trying to do in our CF”. CSM thus guides the students and their *pedagogy of piety*. The actual leadership of the group remains with the students and this makes that the students themselves can give shape to the *pedagogy of piety*.

But how do these groups work? To answer this question I will look at both performances of ritual done in the meetings and its function as a religious community. Bell (1992) argues that ritual fuses action and belief and that shared rituals allow social bodies to relate in a structured manner. This is reflected in how students see their actions. The overall goal of religious performances have been described in different ways such as to equip oneself, to allow others to grow and to encourage each other. But the rituals individually serve a

⁶ UEMS is a public university, as are all university names starting with U for university. Carter is the only named private university. We have altered the names of the universities because of confidentiality.

specific goal as well. Sitting in a café in Carter university Jiahui explains this to me. She is an influential person in her CF and has been involved in the leadership for multiple semesters. She explains:

“ (...) Before anything I think it is very important to pray because we want to make sure that this is what God wants us to be. That we are following His will (...) Praise and worship is equally as important because it takes our focus off from me. It takes my focus off what is happening here, assignments or stress or what not, and it moves my focus to God. To just worshipping Him for who He is and not what is happening in my life. Then there is announcements, this is more just that people know what is going on in CF. What they can and can't do, that kind of thing. Sermon, any sermon is where the word of God is delivered. (...) The sermon is where the word of God is delivered to everyone. And cell group. I think cell group is also good so that we discuss what we have learned and apply it to our lives. Because there is no point just listening if we don't apply it. (...) And also it is where people build relationships, share testimonies.”

These performances of rituals have purpose, they are meant to do something. They start from a belief that there is a reason for a specific action as Jiahui explained, they thus fuse action and belief. In the *pedagogy of piety* the students then perform these rituals together. They build a routine of it and by this form and expectation of what should happen at a meeting. These performances of ritual *do something*, they shape the expectation of students and shape how students behave at their meetings. Through this they also shape an understanding of piety and religious identity (Mahmood 2001). In the quote above from Jiahui it becomes clear that the meeting of the *pedagogy of piety* is a moment where students can choose to leave their daily worries behind and for the moment focus on God. Creating a moment of connection between the students and their religion is also something these performances *do*. More about how this relates to the identity of the students will be said further down.

Another important aspect of the *pedagogy of piety* is the community it forms. While Davie (2013) and Taylor (2007) argue that in the contemporary world, religious communities become less important we agree with Beekers (2014) that these communities are still of great importance for its members. We argue that the Christian *pedagogy of piety* is a very strong community and that this is at the core of what a Christian *pedagogy of piety* is. As said before, the cell group is one of the places where students build community. These are smaller groups in the CF where students pray, encourage each other and discuss together. On the day that cell group leaders were trained by a CSM staff member she gave an assignment; portray what a cell group is with playdough. We started playing with it and one of the cell group leaders had

an idea: “we should use different colours to show people of different backgrounds coming together”. We started making a circle with different colours and one of the committee members placed a heart and a cross in the middle explaining that “Jesus is love and at the centre”. Because of the shared faith of the Christian students they relate to each other differently than to non-Christian friends. Visiting a CF I met Lily. She is a Dentistry student who became a Christian as a child when missionaries visited her village. Now she is a member of the *pedagogy of piety* at UES, a public university. She says:

“In the beginning I joined CF because I wanted to be in a Christian community. To be always reminded of who is the God that I worship. And to always be reminded that His love is shown through His people. Especially in CF, the community where all of us come together because we have the same goal. We want to worship God and at the same time we love each other because God loved us. So I come to CF because I find a security to be in this community.”

Lily is not the only one emphasising the importance of community. Students describe their CF being a ‘family’ or ‘a home away from home’. They see value in having ‘grounded friends’ who can give advice and with whom they can talk about things concerning their faith. With non-Christian friends they mainly talk about ‘worldly stuff’ while with their Christian friends there is ‘a good blend between God and the world’. But having non-Christian friends is also considered important as Jessica told us during a focus group.

“I really agree with Danielle. What she said about how you’re in the same wavelength with your Christian friends and CF friends lah. But I think, I have friends that are just as close to me who are not in CF as well. And it is true that if I always speak with my Christian fellowship friends, then how am I supposed to be salt and light?”

To be ‘salt and light’ is a common used phrase. It comes from the bible and is used to explain the role Christians should have in the world. By doing good others should see something of the Christian God, like a light in darkness. And as Jessica said to be able to be salt and light, one should first be in contact with non-Christians.

So far we have shown that the Christian *pedagogy of piety* is a group of students connected by a shared faith. The group is led by students with the support of an organization such as CSM. The *pedagogy of piety* has shared rituals connecting what they believe with their actions. The *pedagogy of piety* is also a strong community built around the Christian faith. This aspect of the community and having ‘grounded’ friends is at the core of what the Christian *pedagogy of piety* is. Despite the strong sense of community the students are still encouraged to have friends outside of the community.

The Pedagogy of Piety and the Multi-Faceted Identity

In this part we will look at how *pedagogies of piety* shape identity. Answering the question if her community influences her identity Yoko, a student of UEMS, told me the following.

“It does have an influence. I imagine myself not knowing CF from my first year until my final year. I think I would be different from who I am now. I think it somehow shaped me to become a better person. It shaped me to think more about my faith. And it also encourages me to make friends, to not be in isolation. Because a community you cannot be on your own. You have to have people supporting you and encouraging you as well. So I think it shaped my identity.”

The *pedagogy of piety* does something with its members, it shapes their identities. As said earlier Beekers (2014) leaves out this aspect of the *pedagogy of piety*. We however argue that the aspect of identity formation of the *pedagogy of piety* is an important aspects that needs our attention. As “identity is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does” (Jenkins 2008, 5) the actions done in *pedagogies of piety* mean something. Mahmood (2001) shows that the performance of *Salat* creates a pious self for the women of the Mosque movement in Egypt. In a similar way, the rituals performed at the Christian *pedagogy of piety* shape the identity of those who perform them. Hema is one of the few Indian members of the Christian Fellowship at Carter. Before this university she went to a different school and attended CF there. Referring back to this she describes how this CF made her more conscious of her acts.

“I think my CF has quite an influence [on my identity] because I was hanging out a lot with them. We were always doing stuff together and we were always doing stuff like reading the bible together, talking about Christian stuff all the time. So I think we all became very conscious about what you do as well. So why you do it.”

Hema directly connects the things she *does* with her friends from CF to her identity. Doing these things together, and encouraging each other to continue doing them, influences her in who she is. Using Grimes’ (1990) broad idea of ritual these different acts are all rituals. The performance of these rituals *does something* as Hema explains, it builds a manner of relating to each other. This in turn shapes what they do both within the community as well as on their own. These religious acts give shape to the religious identity of those who do them. This is a conscious and reflexive process. Hema comes to the Christian fellowship because she wants

to do those things and wants to be stimulated. Hema thus places herself in a pedagogical setting where she can be encouraged in her faith and in the performance of rituals that express and build this faith. In this way the *pedagogy of piety* helps her, and the other members, to grow in their piety and strengthen a religious identity.

Another way identity is formed at the *pedagogy of piety* is through the community with its boundaries (Barth 1969). The *pedagogy of piety* is thus an example of a boundary system (Cohen 1969). By being a part of boundary system a distinction is made between those inside and the *Other*. While the *pedagogy of piety* is a strong community, the boundaries are not very clear. This because there is a core of active members that comes to all meetings and often see each other outside of them. There are also ‘members’ who only come sporadically and for whom the *pedagogy of piety* plays a less important role in life. Because of this, boundaries are blurred. Another reason is that the *Other* is always welcomed to be active in the community. Being ‘salt and light’ is not only among non-Christian friends, it also means being an open community for people wanting to join and get involved. In this, legal reasons do play a part in the sense that the Muslim Malay are excluded as in Malaysia it is prohibited to proselytise to Muslims. Despite the fluidity of the boundary the *Other* still exists, the *other* being the non-Christians on campus. This religious *Other* is seen as someone to ‘be salt and light’ to. Through this process of exclusion and inclusion a religious identity is also given shape as by identification with a boundary systems identity is formed.

However, the *pedagogy of piety* is not the only boundary system a Christian student takes part in. All members of the *pedagogy of piety* are also members of a broader Christian boundary system that also influences them in their religious identity. Apart from this they are members of many other boundary systems such as various ethnic boundary systems and the national boundary system. What makes the *pedagogy of piety* different is that it is a pedagogical setting and that the students make a conscious decision to be a part of it; they want it to affect their religious identity. It is also a different because students can give shape to it themselves. This is of course a lot more difficult with for example the ethnic boundary system.

The *pedagogy of piety*, being this space of conscious religious pedagogy, does however not only influence the religious identity. It also influences other facets of identity such as the ethnic facet. We use the ethnic facet of identity rather than ethnic identity because we argue that these facets of identity are strongly connected. The different facets of one’s identity continuously interact and shape each other and can therefore not be fully separated. More about how this works will be said in chapter two while we will now look at the

connection between the religious and the ethnic facet of identity made in the *pedagogy of piety*.

Christianity is the only major religion in Malaysia without a synchronicity between ethnicity and religion. Diversity in the *pedagogy of piety* is perceived as something positive. People are different, but there is one God for all people. This diversity is seen in both ethnic diversity and the interdenominational character of the communities. Jasmine is one of the staff that started working with CSM recently. She says:

“Coming together as students you are from the same university, but from different faculties and also different denominations coming together to worship. It’s really beautiful. You imagine that heaven will be like that as well. That one day if you go to heaven we are all the same, we don’t care about denomination, we don’t care about race.”

While diversity is always viewed as something positive, it is not always reached. CSM has as one of its core values to build bridges across boundaries and sometimes they teach at CF meetings about the important relation between being Christian and accepting the *Other*. One of these meetings was at UES, a CF with mainly Chinese-Malaysians and some Indian-Malaysians. There used to be more diversity but many east-Malaysians left, as did the Chinese speaking and the Catholic students. A CSM staff came to this CF to speak about crossing bridges motivated by faith. “Loving God and loving your neighbour come hand in hand.” The speaker continues and asks a question; “Who is missing in our Christian fellowship context?”. The groups that left are mentioned as are roommates for who it is possible to come. “There is a gap of language and race that needs to be crossed.” As shown by this example unity among ethnicities is strived for but made harder because of ethnic boundaries and language. So far we have looked at *pedagogies of piety* as being rather homogeneous. While this is true for the core of what they do and are, *pedagogies of piety* take various shapes and every community is unique. In the next part we will look at these differences, one of them being language. Language is strongly connected to an ethnic group and the ability or inability to speak a language is a strong force of inclusion or exclusion to the ethnic group. The main languages in Malaysia are *Bahasa-Melayu*, English, Mandarin and Tamil. In the English-speaking community students of Chinese, Indian and different east-Malaysian ethnicities come together.⁷ The Mandarin group is all Chinese and the Bahasa

⁷ Most of the *pedagogies of piety* CSM works with are English speaking while other organizations work more with for instance Mandarin speaking groups. CSM does however work with *pedagogies of piety* in English, Bahasa and Chinese and both public and private universities

community are mainly east-Malaysians. There is no Tamil CF as there are less Tamil speaking Christian students. Because of the strong connection between language and ethnicity we see language as a performance of the ethnic facet of identity. Following Grimes (1990) the performance of ritual is not necessarily religious; it can be anything one *does*. As the performance of a religious ritual shapes the religious facet of identity, so can the performance of ritual related to ethnicity shape the ethnic facet of identity. Using a language is something that one *does*, and it is strongly related to one's ethnic identity. It also creates social bodies as it makes communication possible when people speak the same language. This way people who perform the same 'ritual' in speaking the same language form a cultural scheme (Bell 1992). As language is strongly connected to ethnicity this cultural scheme is also strongly connected to the ethnic boundary system. This is why we will use language as a performance of ethnic identity.

As the diversity of ethnicities and languages is bigger at public universities, mainly public universities have *pedagogies of piety* in different languages. The different communities at one university have a different language but that is not the only difference. Jessica, who is a member of the English community describes this.

“But for me I feel like the Chinese ministry they cater to the Chinese. Like they reach out more to the Chinese speaking people. So for our university there are quite a lot of Chinese speaking people as well. A lot of Chinese people lah. So these people their mission and their personality, their characteristics lah. It is different as compared to ours. So there is a gap, a divide already, because they cater to different people.”

Through the different *pedagogies of piety*, boundaries between ethnic communities stay intact. Religious facets of identities are shaped within the boundaries of ethnic groups. This seems not to be the case in the English community since students from different ethnic backgrounds speak English. They are however identified as a new kind of homogeneous group as Joshua told me in the cafeteria of his university.

“They [non-Christians] think that Christianity is a Western religion. They think that many of us [members of English CF] can only speak English which is technically true. They think that we [Chinese members of English CF] do not, that I don't celebrate Chinese New Year and I actually do. They think that just because I'm a Christian. So CF has actually even portrayed an image of being where all the English speaking Malaysians go to. The Chinese who cannot speak Chinese go there, Indians who cannot speak Tamil will go there. So our identity is technically very English centred. (...) Because as a Chinese many people have asked me before, how can you be a

Chinese and not speak Chinese? So I feel very comfortable in CF. We bring our sorrows of people persecuting us to CF where we complain about people laughing at us. We bring our sorrows of not feeling like we belong elsewhere on campus because we don't speak our native language.”

Not all people in the English *pedagogy of piety* are unable to speak their native language, but it is a place for those who are. This way a different boundary system is created of those whose identity is more English centred. While they do belong to different ethnic groups, not being able to speak one's vernacular language makes them different. The English *pedagogy of piety* is a place where these students form a community not only based on a shared religion, but also a shared ability and inability to speak a language.

There are thus different *pedagogies of piety* catering to different groups. Students are enrolled in different pedagogical settings in which they create a view on both religion and ethnicity. They learn that because of their Christian religion boundaries between ethnic groups should be crossed. They also learn that an ethnic facet of identity is important even in the religious setting of the *pedagogy of piety*. This is seen in that the religiously motivated strive for diversity is temporarily broken for the belief in the right of a person to speak one's own language and be in a community in which one feels like they culturally belong. The strive for diversity remains in that all *pedagogies of piety* should be in good contact with each other, despite the different languages that the communities speak. This is for instance seen in the committee that Jessica was a member of. They made an effort to visit the Mandarin CF at their campus while they themselves are a member of the English CF. This importance given to a performance of the ethnic facet of identity shows that the *pedagogy of piety* does not only contribute to the religious facet but also an ethnic facet of identity. These two facets cannot be separated from each other, they are however given different levels of importance. While the shaping of the religious facet is a conscious pedagogical process and the goal of students, the shaping of the ethnic facet of identity happens because of existing ethnic boundaries in the broader Malaysian society. We will now look at more ways in which the context of *pedagogies of piety* influence these groups.

The Interaction Between the Pedagogy of Piety and the World Outside

Identity of a person is never formed in isolation, neither is the social identity of a *pedagogy of piety*. The conclusion of Beekers' (2014) article states that "rather than negating concerns with authenticity and self-reflection, communal and institutional engagement effectively supports these young believers in acquiring the reflexive and personally dedicated faith that helps them cope with the challenges posed to their religious engagements in contemporary Dutch society" (Beekers 2014, 92). As the Dutch *pedagogy of piety* shapes the students in the way they cope with their broader context, so does the Malaysian *pedagogy of piety* help the Malaysian students cope with their context. Because of the many different universities in Malaysia, these contexts vary for each *pedagogy of piety*. The strongest differences are found between the communities in public and private universities. I will here add to Beekers' understanding of the relation between the *pedagogy of piety* and its context. I will argue that this is a relationship of mutual influence. The *pedagogy of piety* helps students cope with challenges posed by their context and shapes an understanding of their context. In turn the context also shapes the *pedagogy of piety*. This because the students who make up the *pedagogy of piety* are influenced by their context and give shape to their community. I will show this mutual influence using an examples from a public university.

It is dark outside as we walk from the Islamic faculty back to where the meeting started. The plans for tonight were changed last minute since the university did not assign a venue to the group again. That is why I found myself walking around campus at night to pray for unreached people in the world, for Malaysia and for our own lives. Around me people are speaking in *Bahasa-Melayu*, the language of this Christian Fellowship and the main language of the university's classes. As we walk back I talk with one of the students named Emily. She is from east-Malaysia and her first-language is *Bahasa-Melayu*. This is the same language that her Malay friends, who are the majority in her class, speak. "Sometimes I feel attacked by them. Not attacked, they ask question" she explains in her best English. These questions are specific questions to show inconsistencies in Christianity and asked to make her doubt her faith. She tells me that she doesn't always know the answer and that when she doesn't she reads the bible or talks with her Christian friends about it to find an answer. This example shows many things that are discussed so far. It shows that language connects people as Emily has more interaction with the Malay in her university because they share the same first

language. This friendship led to a difficult situation for Emily when she was asked hard questions about her faith. Her context of going to university with, and being friends with, Malay challenged her. She then decided to bring this into her CF. This influenced what was discussed at her CF when she asked it. This doesn't change the whole culture of the *pedagogy of piety* directly but through many of these kind of conversations, coming from challenging situations of different individuals, the overall community is given shape. This way the context of the students shapes the *pedagogy of piety*. In this it is important to keep in mind that while students shape the *pedagogy of piety* there are also many other factors that shape it such as the structure of the community that is already in place, CSM and national laws. The students do however have a significant influence. That the context had already shaped the *pedagogy of piety* is seen in the fact that one of the topics of prayer planned for that evening was Malaysia. In this we add to Beekers' understanding of the relationship between the *pedagogy of piety* and the outside world. While Beekers argues that the *pedagogy of piety* helps its members cope with challenges of the outside world we add that the outside world, the context of the students, also shapes the *pedagogy of piety*. Apart from this the students also express a desire to change their context in their CF. Prayer is a religious performance where the students' belief in an all-powerful God, belief that something should change in Malaysia and the action of asking this God to change the situation come together. In this religious performance being Christian and being Malaysian meet, the religious facet and the Malaysian facet of identity interact. In this the *pedagogy of piety* becomes a pedagogical setting for being Malaysian as well as being Christian. What this Malaysian identity entails for the Christian students will be discussed in the next chapter.

Prayer is not the only time Malaysia is mentioned in the *pedagogy of piety*. While it is a religious pedagogical space it is also a pedagogical space which teaches the students a perception of the national identity. This is done in multiple ways such as a meeting in which being Malaysian is central. This was the case in the English community of UEMS as Danielle, a *Bumiputra* student from east-Malaysian, explains.

“There was one guy, one pastor who came to speak about the nation. And I was like why is he so passionate about Malaysia? What is so great about Malaysia with all this corruption going on? I didn't appreciate my country then. And after that he was so passionate about how we should make a difference, especially as Christians. And how we should see the good in Malaysia instead of magnifying the corruption and what is going on. So then I was like: okay, if he can be so passionate of Malaysia and he is a Chinese. (...) If he, a Chinese who is not a native, what the country institutionalised as

a native, loves Malaysia, than what more to say to the rest of us. So I think it really inspires me.”

Through a message delivered at her *pedagogy of piety* Danielle’s view on Malaysia changed and she was influenced in her perception of the national identity. This happened because a Chinese Christian did love his country and shared about this in a meeting.

Throughout the different language *pedagogies of piety* and the different contexts these communities are connected by CSM. One of the points they emphasize is living as a Christian student in the context of Malaysia. This is why they organize a conference with students from both east and west Malaysia to come together and learn about their nation. They see the need for Malaysia to have a Christian influence and discuss this with the *pedagogies of piety*. This way the *pedagogy of piety* does not only influence the students in their religious and ethnic identities, it also influences their identification with their nation. The *pedagogy of piety* is still a religious community in the first place, but as its members live in a specific context they cannot leave behind their other facets of identity when entering the religious space of the *pedagogy of piety*. This way all facets of identity are engaged in the *pedagogy of piety* and these different facets are also influenced by the *pedagogy of piety*.

Adding to Beekers’ understanding of the *pedagogy of piety* we have argued that this space not only helps the students cope with their context but that the context also shapes the *pedagogy of piety*. We have also shown that the *pedagogy of piety* contributes to the formation of a multi-faceted identity. We introduced the term multi-faceted identity to show that the different facets of one’s identity cannot be separated and influence each other. This is seen in how the different facets, the religious, ethnic and national facet, are given shape in the *pedagogy of piety*. The religious facet is consciously given shape by performances of religious rituals and being a member of a religious community. The ethnic facet is shown by the different *pedagogies of piety* using different languages. The national facet of identity is formed by the religious performance of prayer for Malaysia or more directly through a message of loving their country. More about the national facet of identity will be said further down as the next chapter will give an in-depth discussion of the Christian students in relation to the multicultural nation-state.

2. CLAIMING A PLACE IN MALAYSIA

Multi-Faceted Identity in a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Society

Marten van den Toren

It's late in the evening and the busy Malaysian roads have by now quietened down. I am in the car with a CSM staff worker named Rebecca, and a student named Hema. Hema studies communications at a prestigious and wealthy private university. She's Indian-Malaysian and therefore a clear minority in her university where most of the student body is Chinese-Malaysian. She is telling me about a course she has to follow which is called Malaysian studies. In this course, she tells me, she studies race relations in Malaysia and how they all came together under Islam. Not many students care however, it's a course that all Malaysian university students need to take if they want to get their degree, it's a government requirement. Hema laughingly tells me that many students sleep in the class. Rebecca interrupts the conversation arguing that Hema needs to be very careful in these classes, they could be used to convert people to Islam. Rebecca shares a story of when she was a public university student when there was a government program called the 'Love Project'. In this program single Muslim Malay youth were encouraged to have relationships with non-Muslims in an attempt to convert them to Islam. Rebecca claims that these types of programs have been very successful especially in east-Malaysian province of Sabah, which has very much Islamised in the past 20 years. She also claims that in these programs especially Christians seem to be targeted. Hema seems really shocked and surprised after hearing this. She gets all riled up and exclaims that "God has called us to step up for our country!" She tells me that indeed many of her Christian student friends are wanting to leave Malaysia in search of a better future, many therefore leave to study abroad. All this in an attempt to escape a government that they see as corrupt and biased. She argues that as a Christian they need to be present in Malaysia, that Christians are here for a reason, which is to witness. If everyone is leaving who then is going to be a witness in Malaysia.? Suddenly, without realising it, we arrive at Hema's apartment complex, the guards see Hema and let us pass. We say our goodbyes. As me and Rebecca arrive at our adjacent homes she shares with me that this conversation is also close to her heart as her sister is also about to leave for Australia.

This conversation with Hema and Rebecca reflects many important themes that will be discussed and elaborated upon in this chapter. How various identities, such as religious and national identity, take shape and interact in universities in Malaysia will be explored. The role of the nation-state in defining a certain national identity in universities, and how this affects

students' identity and sense of belonging will also be explored. Since the research was done in and around universities, this will however be the starting point.

Contrasts between Malaysian Universities

It is important to note why the university is such a good place to see how religious identity and national identity come together. In the education system the state can create some sort of political unity, it can create a national consciousness in the students (Collet 2007). This clearly is what happens in Malaysia. By the Malaysian state making it compulsory for all students to follow Malaysian studies at university, it is trying to instil a certain national consciousness, or identity. But as has become clear with Hema, these courses are often very biased due to a strong focus on Islam and the Malay ethnicity . Despite this, we see that students also have some form of agency in defining their own understanding of the Malaysian national identity. Many Christian students find this agency in their faith.

The interaction between the power of wealth and the power of the state cannot be forgotten within the university. This interaction becomes visible in the contrasts between public and private universities. The differences between public and private universities influence how students' various identities relate, but also how students relate to the Malaysian nation-state. Christian students in public universities are constantly reminded that they are a minority and that Islam is the dominant religion, for example due to the fact that there are Islamic prayers hanging around the university, or the fact that it is a lot easier for Malays to get a place in these universities, due to the quota system. These students therefore have more of a sense of exclusion from the Malaysian nation-state. This however is a completely different story in private universities. Here students, due to their power of wealth, manage to escape the influence of the nation-state. They function on a global plateau above the locally rooted context. This can be seen in their interest for many global Christian bands such as Planet Shakers and Hillsong. They can live their whole life in a bubble in which the state has little influence. Here, Islam is a lot less visible, and there are very few Malay to be seen. Because of this, Christian students are not really aware of the fact that they are a minority, neither are they aware of the political developments that could have an influence on their lives. These dynamics will become visible throughout this chapter, and therefore need to be held into account. After having reflected on the dynamics between public and private universities, the boundaries that exist in universities will now be explored.

Internal and External Boundaries

In a country such as Malaysia where many cultures live side by side many boundaries are drawn. One of the clearest and most prominent boundaries is language. Each ethnicity has its own language, be it Tamil, Mandarin, or *Bahasa-Melayu*. As was also shown in chapter one, language as such becomes a performance of ethnic identity. In both universities in which I was most active, students would have lessons in English, it was the common language. Despite this all Malaysians, regardless of their ethnicity, have to learn *Bahasa-Melayu* in school as it is the official national language. A recently graduated public university student who in my opinion spoke good Malay, as he used it daily at his new job, told me over dinner about speaking Malay: “it’s just a bit difficult, sometimes we feel that in general when we speak the Malay language we feel that it is not our language which is a bit sad. Because we feel like we’re speaking someone else’s language”. I was also told by another student that: “the main language we use is *Bahasa-Melayu*. You get a sense who is superior, who is the subordinate, that kind of thing.”. Despite the fact that *Bahasa-Melayu* is supposed to be the national language which binds all groups together, in reality it creates a sense of exclusion. Many students, especially in private universities, were not comfortable speaking *Bahasa-Melayu*, it didn’t feel like their language. They would rather speak English or the vernacular language of their ethnicity, be it Tamil or Mandarin. Most students would have gone to schools in these vernacular languages before going to university. James would tell me that because of this linguistic divide in pre-university education: “everybody is already divided, and everybody is already moulded into the form they are in”. He claims here that because of these preferences in language students generally stick to their own ethnic group in university, all this because of the lack of a unifying language with which everyone feels comfortable and equal. What makes these language barriers stronger is that they are not only seen as external expressions of ethnic identity. Some would also say that these languages bring with them certain mindsets. This was explained extensively in the previous chapter. This becomes very clear through the Malaysian slang terms for Chinese-Malaysians and Indian-Malaysians who don’t speak Mandarin or Tamil but rather English. These people are called ‘bananas’, because they are yellow on the outside but white on the inside, or they are called ‘coconuts’ because they brown and hairy on the outside but once again white on the inside. Not speaking the vernacular language excludes them from ethnic specific social groups, not only this but many Malaysians would consider that these ‘coconuts’ and ‘bananas’ see the world in a different

way, that they are less rooted in their ethnicity's culture. Language therefore is not only a boundary because people physically cannot speak certain vernacular languages, it is also a boundary because these languages bring with them certain mindsets and worldviews. As was argued in the previous chapter, I would therefore say that language in the broader Malaysian context could be considered a performance. Just as Bell (1992) claims, this performance of language shapes how people relate to each other by creating boundaries between ethnicities. At the same time language shapes a certain mindset, a certain way of viewing the world and society (Mahmood 2001).⁸

Not only does society itself create boundaries between the various ethnicities through for example language, the nation-state also plays a big role in this. Despite the fact that in the history of Malaysia the nation is portrayed as a place where all 'races' live in harmony, in reality often the Malay have been prioritised. The making of *Bahasa-Melayu* as the official national language could be considered an example of this. Another way in which the state is doing this, which strongly affects university students, is through a quota system. Through this system it is a lot easier for the *Bumiputra*⁹ to get a place in public university, they get prioritised. This makes it in turn very hard for Indian-Malaysians and Chinese-Malaysians to get a place in public universities. Consequently, a boundary is drawn between *Bumiputra* and *non-Bumiputra*. Indian-Malaysians and Chinese-Malaysians would often see especially the Malay as lazy as they have to work less hard to get a place in public university. In the basement of a private university where most students are Indian- or Chinese-Malaysian I was told: "Most Malay go to government schools as I told you right. It doesn't matter if they didn't do well in secondary school, lah. This causes them to be stereotyped as lazy, lah". These external factors imposed by the government therefore, in many ways strengthen the boundaries between various ethnicities. This shows, as Jenkins (2008) suggests, that identity boundaries are not only due to internal factors but that they are also imposed by external factors.

Despite these processes of exclusion, Christian university students are very fearful and cautious in resisting these pressures. Christian students are fearful to actually get involved in the political process to bring about change. Especially public university students are very aware of the political context in Malaysia. A CSM staff worker told me that in the 70s there was a lot of religious and political persecution. Parents of the current university students lived

⁸ Ethnic phenotypes in some way play a similar role in creating boundaries. Despite that phenotype is more flexible, quite often people get identified as the wrong ethnicity due to their skin colour.

⁹ Meaning 'Sons of the Soil', refers to the Malay and the indigenous population groups of Malaysia.

in the midst of these times. These parents therefore often discourage students to get involved politically. There is also the sedition act whereby people can be held for speaking against the government. On top of this there is the *Akta Auku*. This is a law whereby public university students are not allowed to be politically engaged due to the fact that they are under government protection. In private universities however, I found that most students were very unaware of the political situation in Malaysia. Often when asking anything about politics or something in that direction I would get an answer like: “I really don’t have an idea. I’m not much into politics, I’ll be honest”. In a more negative sense, many public university students, who are politically aware, would just say that most Malaysians are too ‘comfortable’ to do anything against the discrimination and racial divisions. Having looked at the broader context in which Christian students live, and how this context is experienced, I will now look at how within this context various identities take shape.

Multiple Identities

As we have seen in the context, Malaysia is very diverse. Universities are also very ethnically diverse. In the private university where our research was done, the clear ethnic majority are the Chinese-Malaysians, the Indian-Malaysians are therefore a minority. Unlike the rest of Malaysia there are also nearly no Malay, here they are the minority. In public universities this is very different. The student body is slightly more representative of the ethnic diversity in Malaysia. The Malay are a clear majority in these universities, even more so than compared to the rest of Malaysia. The Chinese-Malaysians, Indian-Malaysians and also the indigenous are a clear minority. This ethnic diversity is very important for being able to understand the Malaysian national identity. When asking students what they considered to be the Malaysian national identity they never straight away had an answer, eventually they would say something like: “I think this is very unique when you call us Malaysians. It’s not just Malay, but it’s three races, all live in the same country. Even though I don’t consider myself a Malay, I don’t mix a lot with Malays. But it is still my country. Malaysia, it’s not just Malaya, it’s all three, Chinese, Indians, Malay.” This I was told, ironically enough, by a Chinese-Malaysian student who was about to leave for Germany with no clear plans to return. As we see here central to students’ understanding of the Malaysian national identity is diversity. One thing that expresses this diversity of the Malaysian national identity in daily life is food. Food is central in all social interactions, discussions about food and the best places to eat is the basis

for small talk. Because of ethnic diversity there is also a culinary diversity where each ethnicity has its own kitchen, these culinary traditions in turn also influence each other. One student told me: “food brings people together, whenever there is food there are people. [That is] Being a Malaysian”. Food in some ways expresses an ideal image of the Malaysian national identity. But what does such a national identity do for a Barthian understanding of identity, where the creation of boundaries is key to understanding identity?¹⁰ What seems to be at the centre of this expression of national identity however is the crossing of boundaries and the enjoyment of diversity. It cannot be forgotten however that the reality is very different, clear boundaries are drawn dividing Malaysian society. This becoming particularly clear through previously explained examples of the university quota system and the language barriers that exist in Malaysian society.

The Christian faith is however also very important for many students whom I have gotten to know in Malaysia. When asking students at the start of an interview what is most important to them most will directly answer something about God or their faith. One of the more dramatic answers I got was: “The most important thing in my life is to know God, to really grasp him better, so that I can move forward. Not only hoping for blessings but I’m really looking forward towards my afterlife, enjoying His presence.” This was said in one of my first interviews by a student in a public university. Throughout my time in the field I came to realise that there also might be some social pressure to give such an answer in a Christian context. However, apart from saying that the Christian faith is important to them, students also visibly display their Christian identity. Many of the students, in both public and private universities, would wear a cross, or a hat with a Christian band name on it, or have a mobile phone case with a bible verse on it. This reflects the fact that they are not afraid to show their Christian identity to the people around them, in a context where they are a minority regarding their faith. What then is this faith? What makes it so important to these university students? One afternoon I was told by Chauxiang, a first year English student, in the university café:

“God is my father lah. In the sense that I can relate to him whenever I feel lost. And I can learn from him, when I make mistakes. I know that he is there to fall with me. Because I never had a father figure, so the most important thing I learnt as I walked with God was, God is my father.”

¹⁰ With ‘Barthian’ I refer to an understanding of identity in which boundaries are the most important, which arose out of Barth’s study on ethnic identity.

God and their faith is something very personal for these students, they often refer to their faith as a relationship with God or Jesus. In so doing they relate their Christian faith strongly to their personal lives. Despite the Christian faith being very personal, it also looks outwards, it's not only about a 'personal relationship' with God. James, a very devoted Christian who would later publicly pray for me at the train station before parting ways, told me: "It's about living out a faith, it cannot just be head knowledge, it has to be lived out". This fact means that this faith shapes and influences Christian's relationships with the people around them, most of whom are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or what they call free thinkers¹¹. This means that often in these relationships and friendships with non-Christians they try to show something of their faith and God. They do often say, though, that they don't want to "shove it in their face", rather they hope to show their principles with a "friendly attitude". Despite these attempts to put on a good face to people of other faiths and ethnicities, there is sometimes a tendency to have prejudices towards the *Other*, especially Muslims who are also mostly Malay. One Chinese-Malaysian law student told me once during an interview that: "For the Malay we also don't like them because they are lazy. (...) So when we see their brown colour lah. I'll be honest, lah, I just think of laziness." Even though this is an extreme example, it does reflect an attitude that many Christians have towards Muslim Malay. This seems to create a boundary between Christians and non-Christians, but also between Christians and the Malay ethnicity.

Till this point we have seen how the Christian faith of university students is very personal, yet at the same time Christian students hope to project a positive image of their faith in daily life to the people around them, most of whom won't be Christian. It has also become clear that there is this harmonious idea of a diverse Malaysian national identity. Despite this the reality is very different. The reality is that there are many factors that divide Malaysian society into ethnic fractions which makes certain groups susceptible to discrimination. We clearly see here how ethnic and religious diversity bring a level of complexity to the Malaysian nation-state (Habermas 2006). We also see how this diversity in identities is performed through various vernacular languages which also bring with them various mind-sets. The following section hopes to bring national identity and religious identity together.

¹¹ Individuals who don't adhere to one faith, but see the good in all faiths.

Stepping Up for Malaysia

One student who became quite important for my research was Jessica. She studies at one of the main public universities in Malaysia. She is half-Chinese and half-Kelabit¹², because of this she has the Bumiputra *status*. This made her quite unique because she looks Chinese, is a Christian, yet also has the privileged status of being *Bumiputra*. Because of her being in between many identity categories, that don't necessarily come together often, she had very interesting insights. One afternoon in the university café she told me about an instance where an opposition political leader came to visit her university while she was in a meeting with other Christian university students. She said:

“And he [DAP political leader, Anwar] came to give a talk in our university. But it's a governmental university, so we're kind of under the government protection lah. Because the government sends government care and all, so we're not supposed to let him into university. So he's against the government. So what happened was, everyone was rallying to meet him. But what happened was, we were having our committee meeting just up here. And we were thinking whether we should join them, instead of having a meeting. We started having a lot of, we started really thinking about it, about how we all as a Christian body, how we are supposed to not just keep silent, like, like silent Christian when political things happen. You know. Because these are things that are related to our nation as well, and we should have a say. Yeah, we are part of the nation, we are not doing anything about it. That is the thing that has been happening in Malaysia for quite some time. We've all been sleeping. Yeah, so, a few years ago we started like being more aware, really thinking about our role as Christians in Malaysia and also in our university. And uhm, a few of our members are also student body in the opposition team in the opposition party in our university.”

Jessica is explaining how a few years ago an opposition political leader came to her university for a speech. This was illegal due to the *Akta Auku*. This event created lots of commotion in the university. This event also made her, and other Christian students, think about what their role as Christians is in Malaysia, how they should have a say and should therefore be more politically engaged. This quote gives a clear insight in the tensions that many, particularly public university students, experience when they try to let their religious identity influence their national identity. On the one hand, just like Hema, these students have the feeling that as

¹² One of the indigenous people groups present in Sarawak, east-Malaysia.

Christians they have a role to 'step up' for their country, yet at the same time they are very doubtful to do so due to the consequences of combining these two identities. One clear expression of this doubt was that it was not uncommon when discussing these themes, specifically with students in a public space, that they would start to whisper and look around to see if there were any Muslims students sitting near, who might be able to listen in. This was much less of a worry in private universities where there were a lot less Malay students and where the government influence was a lot less strong or visible.

"I've always had a passion for my country. I always feel that Christian Malaysians have a responsibility, I mean sometimes we do criticize. But that is not the way to go. I feel that although we are all different and come of different backgrounds, and whatever, we are still Malaysian. I feel a Christian Malaysian has more responsibility to be the difference in the country, to be Christ's reflection in a country."

Once again this was said by Hema. She clearly has a passion for her faith, this faith in turn also gives her passion for her vision of Malaysia where all ethnicities can live together. Her faith shapes her understanding of Malaysia. In that sense many Christian students have the understanding that as Christians it is therefore important to not only stay within their ethnic group, but that it is important to cross these boundaries and build friendships with people of other ethnicities. In so doing they are hoping to be good examples and influences, or as it was put in chapter one, to be 'salt and light'. Hema's passion and awareness is in strong contrast to most of her private university course mates and friends. When asking about these kind of themes with many private university students they would not really have an answer. This was due to the simple fact that the state and a national identity were a lot less relevant for them.

In the same way the Christian faith of many Malaysian university students is strongly influenced by the diversity of Malaysia. This becomes very clear through a statement made by Chauxiang, a Chinese-Malaysian, 'banana', public university student. He stated:

"I guess it [ethnic diversity in the Christian community] is good, because it shows that we embrace people from different cultures. And in the end we are serving one God. And then the beautiful thing is this, we have English churches for Bananas, you have Chinese churches and you have Tamil churches. And I have been to a Tamil church and a Chinese church before, I don't know, I feel my insides, this is so beautiful that they worship and praise God, that they, when you hear God's word being preached in their language, it's actually very different from English. Even though you don't understand, you just know there is something special behind it. That is what I find is a gem or a jewel in this different ethnicities, but all in one faith."

He was clearly moved and passionate while making this statement. Chauxiang sees the performance of ethnic diversity, through language, as something beautiful within the Christian community. As was shown in chapter 2, this performance of language is a very powerful way in which ethnic identity boundaries are drawn. These boundaries however do not bother Chauxiang. He argues that the Malaysian Christian community must be diverse, all united under “one faith”. Having seen the interaction between national, ethnic and religious identities among Christian university students, I will now focus on what these interactions mean on a theoretical level.

Identity as a Multi-Faceted Entity

The national identity and the Christian identity are clearly both very present in the lives of these students. These two identities are very different, the national identity being on a lot bigger scale compared to the Christian identity in the Malaysian context. Nevertheless, both end up sharing a similar purpose which is to bring all the cultural and ethnic diversity together under one ideal, be it the ideal Malaysian national identity, or the one Christian faith. It is important to recognise however that the national identity in many ways is more about domination than inclusion, if it were up to state. Both these boundary systems function side by side, often fulfilling the same purpose of unifying diversity, in a country where this seems to be lacking. From Cohen’s perspective on identity this seems confusing. He states that conflicts of allegiance arise when two boundary systems with the same function exist side by side (1969). This is clearly not the case. As we have seen, for Christian students their religious identity and national identity in some aspects only seem to positively influence each other. In some sense the core of both these identities is to transcend ethnic boundaries, creating a social space where the diversity might still exist but where the boundaries are now less relevant. What does this do to a Barthian understanding of identity to which boundary making between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is key? I would argue that more can be added to Barth’s understanding of identity. It could be implied that people only have a sense of belonging with people who are within the same boundary system. This is clearly not necessarily the case. As we see with Christian students, they clearly can have a sense of belonging and unity with students who are a different ethnicity to them. Christian students can therefore have a sense of belonging with the *Other*, they can have a sense of belonging with someone across a boundary. This is of course only the case if there is a larger overarching boundary system such as the Christian

faith or the Malaysian national identity which allows this. I would argue that this implies that boundary systems are often less clear and definite as they would seem through a Barthian approach to identity. I would argue that identity boundaries have the potentiality to create the *Other*, but that this does not necessarily need to be the case. The intensity or clarity of a boundary rather depends on what connects people across boundaries, to which extent people consider the *Other* as a danger to their identity, and to what extent there is another overarching boundary system.

Considering all this I would argue that boundary systems are not necessarily enough for being able to understand identity processes in multicultural and multi-religious societies. It is clear that all boundary systems created by religious, ethnic and national identities function together, they are interwoven and therefore constantly influence each other. Can various boundary systems therefore really be approached as separate entities? I would argue that this is not possible. I would argue instead, as was done in the previous chapter, that identity should be approached as a multi-faceted entity. Various boundary systems come together in the individual to create this entity. Each individual has an identity that has various facets, be it religious identity, national identity, ethnic identity etc. All these facets being part of the same entity constantly shape and mould each other. When wanting to understand one facet all other facets of the entity need to be held into account. By understanding identity as a multi-faceted entity we allow a holistic approach where all aspects of an identity in a multicultural society can be considered. I would however not want to argue, that boundaries cannot be made and are no longer relevant. Rather I would say that if too many facets between two groups clash then there might be the potential for a boundary to form.

This can be seen in what I was told by James one evening over dinner in a shopping mall. He is a mix of many ethnicities, including Thai, Burmese and Singhalese. He therefore physically does not fit in any of the recognised ethnic categories in Malaysia. He explained that because of his 'brown' skin tone many people would mistake him for being Malay. This fact allowed him to cross ethnic and religious boundaries, allowing him to befriend many Malay in university, simply because he looked like one. Due to an overarching physical identity he was able to cross various identity boundaries. This fact however cannot be considered in isolation, his religious identity also needs to be held into account. The reason he wanted to cross these boundaries in the first place was because, as a Christian he considered it important to build friendships across ethnic and religious identity boundaries. With this example we see how identity boundaries exist, but how they can also be crossed when there is an overarching identity. Most importantly we see through this example that the various facets

of James' identity cannot be considered in isolation, but need to be seen as all part of the same entity.

With this new approach we can now also better understand how students' Christian identity relates to their place in, and understanding of a multicultural nation-state. The Malaysian nation-state in many ways is prioritising Islam and the Malay ethnicity. In so doing they are excluding the minority Chinese-Malaysians and Indian-Malaysians, but also the Christian community. The Christian identity however does not seem to become a hindrance for this minority. Instead they use it to empower themselves, they consciously use their Christian identity to shape their national identity. In so doing they in turn are legitimising their place in the multicultural nation of Malaysia. In much literature we see how religion is used to exclude minorities from a national identity. This is shown very clearly by Appadurai in his description of the *Hindutva* movement in India (2006, 66-77). For Christian students in Malaysia however, we see from a minority perspective how a religious identity can also be used as a form of agency, to create an inclusive identity that breaks down boundaries. Within the interactions between various identities the dynamic between public and private universities cannot be forgotten. The contrasts between public and private universities add another level of complexity. In so doing it only strengthens the argument for seeing identity as a multi-faceted entity because once again the public or private university student identity influences all other facets of an individual's identity. Public university students, being more locally rooted, and therefore more within the state's influence, experience more exclusion from the Malaysian nation-state. They are therefore even more inclined to using their Christian identity to legitimise their place in the multicultural nation-state. Private university students function in this global context, in so doing avoiding the control of the state, all this due to their wealth. Their Christian identity is therefore also a lot more globally focussed. Their place within the nation-state as Christians therefore becomes a lot more taken for granted as they don't feel the need to legitimise their place in the multicultural nation.

By approaching identity as a multi-faceted entity in which various boundary systems come together we can gain a better understanding of Christian students' place in, and understanding of the Malaysian nation-state. It becomes clear how certain identities can be engaged not only to create boundaries, but also to cross identity boundaries. Christian students can therefore express agency by engaging their religious identity to cross ethnic boundaries and even religious boundaries to in turn legitimise their place in the multicultural Malaysian nation-state by envisioning an inclusive Malaysian national identity. This could be considered to challenge the power of the Malaysian nation-state which aims to create an identity of

domination and exclusion which favours the Muslim Malay. In reality however, it becomes clear that Christian students among themselves and as individuals are very able to combine their various facets of their identity, by for example envisioning an ideal Christian Malaysian national identity. These combinations, however, cannot be lived out fully. This because they are often not accepted in the broader context, for example by the nation-state, who as the most power in defining a national boundary system. Consequently, as individuals, Christian students don't have much agency to change the reality of exclusion and domination.

CONCLUSION

Iris Bruijn and Marten van den Toren

In this section we will bring together the previous chapters. We will begin by giving short summaries of both chapters. After this, various aspects of both chapters will be compared and contrasted. In this section we will start by looking at the religious identity, then continue with ethnic identity and close of with national identity. These identities will then be brought together through the term multi-faceted identity. We will use this term as a bridge between the formation of identity formed in the boundary systems of the *pedagogies of piety* and the way this identity takes shape in the Malaysian nation-state in order to answer our research question.

In many universities in Malaysia, Christian students gather together in groups, which we recognise as what Beekers (2014) calls *pedagogies of piety*. These are religious spaces that shape multiple facets of one's identity. In this research we have shown how the *pedagogy of piety* is not only a pedagogical setting that shapes religious identity but it also shapes the ethnic and national identity of its members. This is done by doing certain performances in meetings such as prayer, worship and the use of language. Identity is also given shape in the communities that people inhabit. As the *pedagogy of piety* shapes the identity of the students, the students give shape to the *pedagogy of piety*. In this way there is a mutual influence between the *pedagogy of piety* and the context in which the students live.

In the second chapter it was discussed how there is an important contrast between public and private universities. In these different contexts there are different power structures. In the public universities the nation-state is able to exert its control and power. In private universities however wealth plays an important role, students are able to partially escape the influence of the nation-state through the power of wealth. In all these universities there is a mutual influence between the Christian identity of our research population and their understanding of national identity. Therefore, when trying to understand one facet of an identity we cannot ignore the other facets. For this reason the term multi-faceted identity was introduced. These various facets influence how identity boundaries are created and crossed. The Christian identity can therefore be engaged to cross various ethnic boundaries, which legitimises the Christian community's place in the multicultural nation-state. The various power relations in public and private universities add another level of complexity. Just as various facets of identity can be engaged to create and cross boundaries, so can power

relationships. These, becoming visible in the contrasts between public and private universities, also influence how boundaries are created and crossed.

Religious, Ethnic and National identity

Let us begin by looking at the religious identity of students. Through many discussions with students it has become clear that their religious identity is something very personal. Students often describe their faith in terms of a relationship with their 'Father'. Despite the personal characteristic of the students' faith, the religious community also plays a big role. In a religious community such as the *pedagogy of piety* students form deep connections and encourage each other in their faith. This community is therefore important in creating a religious identity. In the community performance of ritual is also very important in the formation of identity. In the *pedagogy of piety*, certain rituals are performed together and students are encouraged to also do certain things outside of the meetings such as reading their bible and prayer. In the community, students encourage each other to 'be salt and light'. This is an often used phrase in meetings and it encourages students to live according to their religious identity hoping to inspire others by being different. Chauxiang, a first year English student in a public university, explained:

“the best way [to show I'm a Christian] is just by lifestyle, by example. And then you be the change in the place where you are, in the community you are in. So right now I'm learning this in university and I thank God for it. For opening me up and becoming more friendly. I just connect with people, be their friend, it doesn't matter how bad they are, I just be their friend.”

This identity becomes integral to the whole being of an individual, it becomes intrinsic to their whole life, it shapes how they relate to others. The religious identity is thus not confined to religious spaces but important in all aspects of life. Adding to Barth (1969), this statement reflects that identity is not only about creating boundaries, but that it can also be about crossing boundaries. Consequently an identity can permeate all aspects of life. Ethnicity, to which we now turn, also plays an important role in Malaysian society, it is also visible in all aspects of life.

When wanting to understand ethnic diversity in Malaysia, language is very important. Language could be considered a performance of ethnic diversity (Bell 1992, Grimes 1990). This diversity of language is also reflected in the *pedagogy of piety*. Ethnic diversity becomes

especially clear in public universities due to the existence of multiple *pedagogies of piety* based on language. Language is not only about an external expression of ethnic identity, it is also seen to reflect a certain mindset and worldview (Mahmood 2001). The *Bahasa-Melayu* speaking *pedagogy of piety* for example has many cultural traits of east-Malaysian ethnic groups. In the *Bahasa-Melayu* speaking communities, hierarchy and respect for elders is a lot more visible. A CSM staff worker here will always be referred to as ‘Ms.’ or ‘Mr.’. Similarly *pedagogies of piety* that are in English or in Mandarin also have their own cultural traits and atmosphere during meetings. Despite this diversity of language and culture, the *pedagogies of piety* always aim to cross ethnic boundaries. The example used in chapter one of a meeting at UES in which diversity stood central, makes this very clear. After students were asked by the speaker which groups were missing, students answered that east-Malaysians, Chinese-speaking and Catholics were missing. The reason for this being that there was a gap of language and race. CSM plays an important role in this by bringing students of linguistically, and therefore culturally diverse, *pedagogies of piety* together in (inter)national conferences, encouraging these various groups to cross boundaries and to learn from each other despite the ethnic boundaries. Outside of the *pedagogies of piety* this ethnic diversity expressed through language is also visible. Many students before going to university attended schools in their own mother tongue, be it English, Tamil, Mandarin or *Bahasa-Melayu*. Once these students come to university where most ethnic groups are present, the divisions created in pre-university education persist. Particularly in public universities it is visible how students socially stick to their ethnic group due to a shared language. Mei Hui, a Chinese-Malaysian medical student at UES, expressed how, when she came to university, senior students encouraged first years to stick to their ethnic group. It was important, they argued, for the Chinese-Malaysians to support each other. It was only possible to be part of this social network if the student spoke Mandarin well. This shows that the performance of ethnic identity, which language is, creates boundaries between different ethnic groups (Barth 1969). When comparing how ethnic diversity takes shape inside and outside of the *pedagogies of piety* it seems to be that the boundaries are stronger and more definite outside of these religious spaces. The reason for this is that within this space, students encourage each other to focus on the overarching Christian identity that binds them together rather than the ethnic boundaries that divide them. This reflects what Guadeloupe (2008) would call a *metalangue* of inclusiveness. Outside of the *pedagogies of piety* this is much less the case as the overarching Malaysian national identity is a lot less well defined and hegemonic. The state

has one idea of a national identity where the Malay, and Islam are prioritised, while Christian students have another idea of what the Malaysian national identity should be.

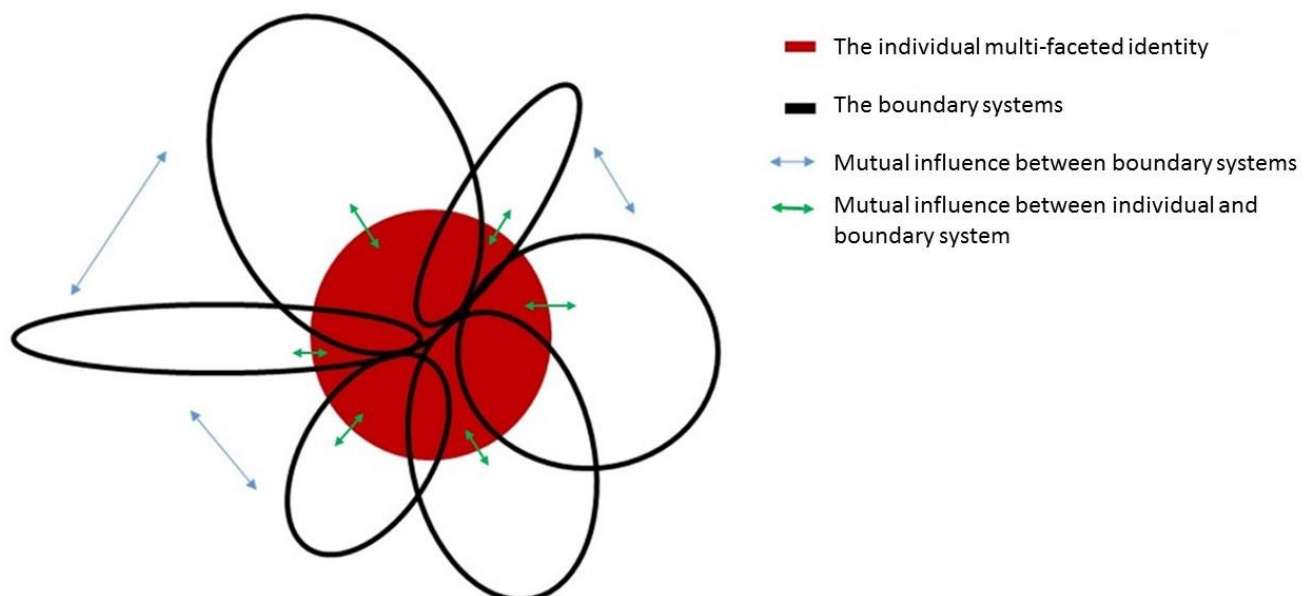
In understanding the Malaysian national identity, this ethnic diversity is of great importance. In the ideal Malaysian identity, as envisioned by Christian students, the ethnic boundaries are crossed making it an inclusive identity. There is a strong synchronicity between the ideal Malaysian identity as envisioned by Christian students and the Christian inclusive identity. In this, the reality of the context of the Malaysian nation-state should not be ignored. This reality is often marked by exclusion, discrimination and domination. Living in such a context of exclusion while having the ideal image of inclusion gives the students more reason to engage their faith in envisioning the inclusive society. As shown in the second chapter, this often stays with envisioning this inclusive society as in reality the boundaries between ethnicities remain strong. This is especially visible in public universities as exclusion there is clearer, due to a stronger influence of the nation-state. The *pedagogy of piety* is a place where students can share the struggle experienced between the exclusion from the nation-state and the inclusion in their Christian faith and ideal Malaysian identity. It is also a place where students are encouraged by each other and CSM to be aware of what happens in Malaysia and to pray for their country. In all of this it becomes clear that for the Christian students their Malaysian identity and their religious identity cannot be seen as completely separate. They mutually influence each other. The Malaysian nation-state also connects religion with the national identity. However, they connect the national identity with Islam. This creates a tension and power struggle within Malaysian national boundary system. Further down we will connect this friction and power struggle with debates surrounding identity boundaries (Barth 1969, Cohen 1969).

So far we have looked at multiple identities that are important for Malaysian students. We looked at the religious identity and have shown how this is a personal faith while at the same time the community remains important. The students strive for this faith to be visible in their daily life. Language is very important for ethnic identity and creates boundaries between different ethnic groups. These boundaries are stronger outside of the religious community of the *pedagogy of piety* than within these communities. The Christian identity as well as the ideal Malaysian identity are both inclusive identities of multiple ethnicities. This is however contrasted with the more exclusive reality of the Malaysian nation-state. All these identities, as we have shown in the previous chapters, can be considered boundary systems (Barth 1969, Cohen 1969). In the next chapter we will argue how these boundary systems come together in the multi-faceted identity of the individual.

Multiple Boundary Systems and the Multi-Faceted Identity

There are many different boundary systems, such as the national, religious and ethnic boundary system. Through our research among students involved in *pedagogies of piety* it has become clear how these boundary systems influence all other facets of identity, particularly the religious facet of identity. We have visualised this influence in Figure 1. This figure will be explained further throughout the chapter.

Figure 1:



As shown in Figure 1, the different boundary systems come together in the individual who is a member of the different boundary systems. Because of this we introduced the term multi-faceted identity. The various aspects of one's identity do not stand on their own but continuously and mutually influence each other. An example of this can be seen in Theo, a Chinese-Malaysian PhD student in biomedical engineering at UEMS. He was very conscious in always attempting to cross ethnic boundaries within his faculty, aiming to not only have a social network within his own ethnicity. The desire to have this multi-ethnic social network came from his Christian facet of identity. This shows that the different facets of one's identity cannot be separated. We will now show that due to this the different boundary systems also mutually influence each other.

In the first chapter it was shown how the *pedagogy of piety* is influenced by the context of the students. In turn, the *pedagogy of piety* influences the perception of students on this context. The example was given of Emily, a student at UBS who Iris talked to during a prayer walk. She explained that many of her classmates are Muslim, and sometimes ask difficult questions about her Christian faith. To answer these questions she sometimes asks her Christian friends, such as her friends in the *pedagogy of piety*, for help. In this way the context of the nation-state, within which the majority are Malay Muslim, influences her and through her the *pedagogy of piety*. The answers she gets she then brings back to her Muslim friends. The *pedagogy of piety* thus also influences how she perceives her place within the nation-state.

An individual's identity is made out of many facets that influence each other. These multiple facets place them in multiple boundary systems in which one or more facets of their identity are shared with others. Because the individual has these multiple facets of their identity, each one referring to a boundary system, the different boundary systems can mutually influence each other. This can be seen in Figure 1 with the blue arrows. This is for example shown in the mutual influence between the *pedagogy of piety* and the context of the Malaysian nation-state. Students take part in both the boundary system of the nation-state as well as the boundary system of the *pedagogy of piety*. This in turn creates a personal identity within the individual. These individuals then bring their personal identity into a boundary system and this shapes the identity of the community, as shown by the green arrows in Figure 1. A Christian student is more able to shape a *pedagogy of piety*, compared to shaping the Malaysian national boundary system. The ability of the individual to influence a boundary system reflects a potential for agency. This happens through the mutual influence of the various facets of identity, through which they break previously considered identity categories (Collet 2007, 150). It should not be forgotten that the potential for agency is of course influenced by the scale of, and power relations within the boundary system.

In chapter two it became clear that there is much variety in how the national boundary system is defined. Christian students envisage their ideal Malaysian national identity as an inclusive identity in which various ethnic and religious communities can find their place. The reality is different. The nation-state, that has more power in defining the national boundary system, encourages a national identity that is more about domination and exclusion. There is therefore a power struggle between various groups in trying to define the national boundary system, or identity. The agency of a Christian student in defining the national boundary system is to some extent limited. In other boundary systems this is not necessarily the case.

Smaller boundary systems, such as *pedagogies of piety*, offer more agency to the individual due to the simple fact that they are smaller and that therefore less individuals need to be held into account when defining this boundary system. The power struggle and the ensuing friction between Christian students and the Malaysian nation-state reflects the incongruences that can exist within a boundary system. Both parties have different ideas of what a national boundary system entails. Despite the different perceptions they still function as one boundary system. Our approach to understanding how various boundary systems influence each other helps us to grasp some of this friction and power struggle. However, the explained incongruences make us realise that there will always be complexities that cannot be grasped through one theoretical approach alone.

To conclude, how can this understanding of the relationship between various boundary systems through the individual help us to understand the relationship between a multi-faceted identity formed in Christian *pedagogies of piety* and Christian tertiary students' place in, and understanding of the multicultural nation-state of Malaysia? Throughout this thesis we relied heavily on Barth's approach to study identity by looking at boundaries and boundary systems (Cohen 1969). While Barth, and Habermas, recognise the inherent complexity of society we used Barth's approach to gain more insight in how boundary systems actually relate to, and function within these complex societies (Barth 1992, 19, Habermas 2006). As we have seen, it could be said that *pedagogies of piety* as well as the national identity can both be considered boundary systems. Consequently it can also be said that identity is not only learnt in *pedagogies of piety*. Rather the *pedagogy of piety* is one example of how a multi-faceted identity is shaped in a specific boundary system. The *pedagogy of piety* is a special kind of boundary system in that it is a pedagogical setting, meaning that students consciously take part in this space to learn and give shape to their identity. Christian students as individuals function in various boundary systems. These students are both Christian, as well as Malaysian. Through the concept of the multi-faceted identity it becomes clear how through the individual there is a mutual influence between various boundary systems. This can be seen in how *pedagogies of piety* influence Christian university students' understanding of the Malaysian national identity in that they see themselves as being 'placed' in Malaysia with a purpose to be 'salt and light'. In so doing they are claiming their place as Christians in the Malaysian nation-state and identity. Another example is how Malaysia's ethnic diversity, which plays an important part in the Malaysian national identity, influences the *pedagogies of piety*. This is seen in that *pedagogies of piety* are also ethnically diverse and that this diversity is seen as good and beautiful from a Christian perspective. These examples show clearly how

various boundary systems such as religious and national identity can mutually influence each other. There is a nuance however, sometimes there is a direct influence between various boundary systems. An example is how the Malaysian nation-state influences and shapes religious identities through legal structures.

As was just mentioned, *pedagogies of piety* are in some sense a unique boundary systems in that students consciously take part in it to shape their identity. The identity shaped in this space is therefore not taken for granted, there is some sense of reflexivity. This became clear through the example given in the first chapter of Danielle. A Chinese-Malaysian man came to speak at her *pedagogy of piety* about loving their country. Reflecting on it she said: “So then I was like: okay, if he can be so passionate for Malaysia and he is a Chinese. (...) [who] loves Malaysia, then what more to say to the rest of us. So I think it really inspires me.” The speaker that came was invited by the committee of the *pedagogy of piety*. These members therefore consciously invited someone to speak about this theme. The focus is mostly on shaping a Christian identity within these spaces. In reality they choose it to be in a pedagogical setting to shape not only their religious facet of identity, but all other facets of their identity as well. In this we add to Beekers’ understanding of the *pedagogy of piety* in that it is much more than a space of religious transmission given shape to by young people (Beekers 2014). It is a space where consciously multiple facets of identity are given shape. Most facets of identity shaped in other boundary systems are often a lot more taken for granted, this because they often offer less agency within this boundary system. This became clear in how Christian students have very little agency in shaping the national boundary system. As students take their multi-faceted identity into the *pedagogies of piety*, they cannot help but also become reflexive about their other facets of identity. The national facet being particularly important because, as Hema expressed so beautifully: “God places us here with a reason. As youth we should not leave the country and leave it to its fate. God calls us to step for our country! We should have faith to stay and pray.”

The research for both empirical chapters was done in a specific context, from the perspective of Christian tertiary students in a multicultural nation-state. This context led us to see how various boundary systems influence and shape each other through the multi-faceted identity of an individual. This allowed us to also see the role individuals and the community play in shaping multiple identities in diverse and complex societies. Malaysia is a very important case-study in the sense that a growing amount of other nation-states are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. In this context of growing complexity and diversity it is becoming increasingly important to be able to understand how various identities influence,

shape and mould each other and how communities and individuals shape and experience these complexities. Because our research was done in this context, it will be interesting to see how an understanding of identity as a multi-faceted entity in which various boundary systems come together can be applied in different complex and diverse contexts. We hope however that through this approach to identity we can gain a better, and more holistic understanding of individuals' and communities' place in, and understanding of complex and multicultural societies.

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