

## Developing A Multiple Identity Literary Framework For Analyzing Constructions Of Identities In Malaysian Literature In English

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### ABSTRACT

*Studies show that contemporary Malaysian literature provides not only an avenue for creative expression, but functions as a site for identity creation, where writers create diverse identities for their characters. However, most of these studies have focussed on examining specific identity(ies) using specific theory(ies) and tended to sideline the dilemma that most Malaysian writers experience in writing about identities in their works. This is a gap in research and important to be addressed given that (1) researchers have yet to directly examine diverse literary identities in Malaysian literature and (2) currently, there is no existing framework that allows us to integrate elements from different theories to accomplish the task. This paper offers a glimpse into an ongoing research project that seeks to develop the said framework vis-à-vis a multiple identity analysis framework for analysing constructions of literary identities in contemporary Malaysian literature (Malaysian literature in English in particular). It begins with an overview of the current state of research on literary identities in Malaysian literature, followed by the project's aims, objectives, methods, and processes. It then presents some preliminary findings pertaining to the research participants' views on literary identities in selected texts and discusses their impact on the development of the said framework. The results of this research project will help us to understand what is known and previously unknown about literary constructions of identities in Malaysian literature and fill this lacuna in current research on the topic.*

*Keywords: identity construction, literary identity, literary analysis, Malaysian literature, Malaysian literature in English*

### INTRODUCTION

Issues of identity construction continue to be of great importance in the lives of those living in ethnically and culturally plural nations such as Malaysia. Studies have shown that these issues permeate all aspects of the peoples' lives and are a vital part of their identity formation, representation and maintenance processes. For instance, while the debate about the definition and mutual construction of ethnic and national identity is still ongoing, studies have shown that people continue to define their sense of self and belonging to the country based on their strong and often unwavering ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations (Verma, 2002). This is vividly portrayed in the presence of strong religious affiliation among many Malays in present-day Malaysia who identify themselves first and foremost as Muslims and the extent to which "ethnicized identity" has impacted strongly the country's social and political structures (see Martinez, 2006; Holst, 2012).

There is, indeed, a wealth of discourses that have addressed issues of identity construction, particularly their impacts on the ways in which people make sense of their lives and identities in relation to members of other ethnic groups in the country. Malaysian literature or "the literature of the modern Malaysian nation" (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2009, p. xv), for example, has become an important discursal site for writers to explore issues related to identity through, among others, the creation of diverse identities for their characters. Malaysian Malay writers in English, for