Demonic Possession: Spatial and Cultural Accounts of Domestic Violence in Malaysia

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Demonic Possession: Spatial and Cultural Accounts of Domestic Violence in Malaysia

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Despite the vast research globally on the domestic violence, there is a little understanding of the experiences of multiracial women survivors in non-western countries. The overall image of domestic violence that emerges from the literature tends to concentrate on a privileged epistemological standpoint in western theory. Domestic violence is thus only understood in culturally-specific terms, as initially posited by white western feminists. Adopting a qualitative and participatory approach drawing on postcolonial theories, this paper presents the spatial and cultural accounts of multiracial women survivors of abusive relationships in Malaysia. The findings reveal that abused women lived in a form of intimate captivity under the perpetrator’s intimate control centred on women’s psyche and body. As a form of entrapment, every action or sign of resistance from the women is countered with various tactics by the perpetrator. This prevents the abused women fleeing, leading to a coercive relationship and rendering them possessed. As a result, the notion of demonic possession is used by survivors, perpetrators and wider Malay society as a metaphor for domestic violence, and also as a narrative to both help make sense of or excuse it. This story of demonic possession works in this way because of its close fit with the social patterns and individual experiences of domestic violence. Both the behaviour of perpetrators, and the symptoms that women suffering from abuse commonly experience, resonate with societal beliefs about demonic possession. Indeed, what might otherwise be understood as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the cumulative effects on personality and identity of victims of long-term abuse, are identified as either causes or consequences of demonic possession by many of the survivors and perpetrators in this study. Through this focus on the nature and experience of domestic violence in Malaysia, the thesis thus highlights the significance of culturally-sensitive approaches to domestic violence as a counterpoint to western-centric understandings. It also stresses the need for culturally specific approaches to awareness raising and knowledge enhancement in Malaysia.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT...........................................................................................................i

TABLE OF CONTENTS..........................................................................................ii

TABLE OF FIGURES..............................................................................................ix

THE LIST OF TABLES ...........................................................................................xi

DECLARATION .......................................................................................................xii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................xiii

DEDICATION .........................................................................................................xv

CHAPTER 1 .........................................................................................................16

INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................................16

  Research Aims ..................................................................................................19

  Definition and Terminology ............................................................................20

  Thesis Organisation .........................................................................................21

CHAPTER 2 .........................................................................................................23

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ..................23

INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................................23

  A. POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM APPROACH ..................................................24

  B. FEMINISM IN MALAYSIA AND WESTERN FEMINIST ALLIES ...............28

  C. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CULTURE ...................................................32

  D. DECOLONISING ‘TRAUMA’ AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE .........................36
      Public/Private Entrapment and the ‘Normal’ Abuser .....................................39

CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................43

CHAPTER 3 .........................................................................................................44

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY ...................................................................................44
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 44

A. DEMOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MALAYSIA ............. 44
   Demography .................................................................................................................. 44
   Hindu Influence on Malay culture ............................................................................ 46
   Ethnic Division: the British Colonial Legacy ......................................................... 48

B. MATRIMONIAL AFFAIRS ......................................................................................... 49
   Marriage Procedures in Malaysia ............................................................................. 49
   Marriages and Patriarchy ......................................................................................... 51
   Malay Marriage ......................................................................................................... 51
   Indian Marriages ....................................................................................................... 53

C. THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT (DVA) 1994 ...................................................... 56

D. STUDIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA ........................................ 59

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................. 67

CHAPTER 4 ..................................................................................................................... 69

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DISSEMINATION ............................................. 69

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 69

A. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION ..................................................................................... 70

B. SAMPLES AND SAMPLING .................................................................................... 73

C. POSITIONALITY ........................................................................................................ 78

D. DATA COLLECTION .................................................................................................. 80
   Participant observation and Research Diary ............................................................ 81
   Semi-structured interviews ....................................................................................... 82
   Participatory methods ............................................................................................... 83
   Fragmented storytelling ............................................................................................ 84
Appendix 2 ................................................................................................................. 298
Appendix 3 ................................................................................................................. 300
Appendix 4 ................................................................................................................. 301
Appendix 5 ................................................................................................................. 302
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Malaysia (Source: Google Map) ................................................................. 46
Figure 2: "I am a rose" crafting .......................................................................................... 88
Figure 3: Unsatisfactory mural ......................................................................................... 95
Figure 4: Unsatisfactory wordings ..................................................................................... 96
Figure 5: "One step behind as a target” shot by Chumy ..................................................... 107
Figure 6: “Before marriage, my life was like a tree filled with leaves. After marriage, the leaves went away” shot by Chumy .......................................................... 108
Figure 7: "My life now is like an ornamental bell that is stuck hanging on a tree branch” shot by Shalini ........................................................................................................ 120
Figure 8: “Life at Home like a Mousetrap” shot by Ashna ................................................ 139
Figure 9: “He Tightly Closed the Door and My Freedom” shot by Shalini ......................... 140
Figure 10: “A Restricted Life, Locked Inside the Doors of Violence” shot by Harini....... 141
Figure 11: “A Journey with No Ending” shot by Mariam ................................................ 148
Figure 12: “His Empty Promises like Murky Water Streaming in a River” shot by Harini .. 159
Figure 13: “I Feel My Husband’s Shadow Here” shot by Usha ........................................ 205
Figure 14: “I Feel My Husband’s Shadow Here” shot by Usha ........................................ 205
Figure 15: “I Feel My Husband’s Shadow Here” shot by Usha ........................................ 206
Figure 16: “I Feel the Silhouette of My Husband” shot by Shalini .................................... 207
Figure 17: Green is peace. A piece of Islamic mind. I want to spare more love to Allah instead of loving another man! When we love Allah, we’ll have a better future ahead (Faizah) ................................................................................................................ 214
Figure 18: “A 7-months Pregnant Woman Ran Away from a House” shot by Harini ....... 233
Figure 19: The mural location at housing area ................................................................... 236
Figure 20: Mural art wordings .......................................................................................... 236
Figure 21: The mural of "Incarcerated” ............................................................................. 237
Figure 22: “An Increasingly Advanced Life” shot by Rekha .......................................................... 246

Figure 23: “My Confusion and Uncertain Future” shot by Chumy ............................................... 250
THE LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participants' details ........................................................................................................76
Table 2: Perpetrators' details .......................................................................................................77
Table 3: The duration of fieldwork for each participant ..............................................................77
Table 4: Research methods ..........................................................................................................81
DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work. Data from other authors contained herein are acknowledged at the appropriate point in the text.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it may be published without prior written consent and any information from it should be acknowledged.

SIGNED: ..............................................................

DATE ..............................................................

14th December 2018
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DEDICATION

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I hope you’re in better place. Rest in peace.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is the most prevalent violence against women worldwide, which kills, tortures, and harms them psychologically, physically, sexually and economically. It is one of the most fundamental violations of human rights, denying women’s equality, security, dignity, and their right to enjoy freedoms (Innocent Digest, 2000). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) reports that almost one third (30%) of all women worldwide who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. Globally, as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners (WHO, 2013). Yet, domestic violence is “a concealed and ignored form of violence against women” (Innocenti Digest, 2000). As the real statistics are hard to obtain, not least because of underreporting, the term ‘domestic violence’ itself hides the reality of its cruelty and effect. Hammer (2002) rejects the term ‘domestic violence’ as it suggests the violence is something that is easy to overcome and subtle in nature; other terms used today to highlight this issue – ‘conjugal violence’, ‘spouse abuse’ and ‘intimate partner violence’ - all erase the reality of domestic violence as gender-based violence (Hammer, 2002).

In the social sciences, some scholars use other terms based on certain characteristics to describe domestic violence more precisely. hooks (2000) uses the term ‘patriarchal violence’ to highlight the causative factor. This term connects violence at home with sexism, sexist thinking, and male control (hooks, 2000). Patriarchal violence at home is based on the belief that male individuals are more powerful in controlling others via many forms of coercion. In Pain’s (2014a) account, home is the main site of violence. She uses the term ‘everyday terrorism’ to represent the dynamics, severity and impacts of domestic violence. In a separate publication, Pain (2015) uses the term ‘intimate war’ to refer to perpetrators’ tactics, patterns and its effects on women, which can be equated with war because in addition to violence it involves psychological occupation, subjugation, and entrapment. Explanations of domestic violence are often rooted in specific cultural contexts: different societies have popular explanations of domestic violence. For example, domestic abuse is often related to alcohol
and football in Scotland, to dowry and widow burning practices in India, and to foot binding and other patriarchal customs in China. This thesis explores the cultural framing of domestic violence in the Malaysian context.

In Malaysia, there is little known about domestic violence, particularly in terms of how it is experienced and understood by diverse women. The literatures on domestic violence in Malaysia are relatively limited (Mohd Hashim and Endut, 2009; Putit, 2008). Emerging scholarly works on domestic violence are still struggling with fundamental issues such as the prevalence, nature, patterns of the violence and issues of formal intervention from the government and NGOs. Therefore, the existing vocabularies in the domestic violence discourse in Malaysia are not sufficient to explain this issue comprehensively.

Public discourse on domestic violence in Malaysia is made more difficult because it is associated with the fight by feminists against gender oppression and patriarchy and thus informed by and associated with western ideology. This renders the experience and understanding of domestic violence as western-centric and irrelevant in the context of Malaysia. Moreover, the voices of Malaysian survivors in the fight for women's justice are negated. Western feminist critiques of patriarchy meet resistance in Malaysia because they rest on the assumption that patriarchal practice in the Muslim community is rooted in the teachings of Islam. Hence, the fight against domestic violence is often reduced to a fight against patriarchy based on prejudice towards Islam. In response, this thesis argues that a postcolonial feminist lens is important in establishing a culturally-sensitive approach to understanding domestic violence in Malaysia and, in turn, to improve outcomes of attempts to recognise and tackle the problem so that abuse women attain justice.

Young (1990 in Blunt and Wills, 2000:168) emphasizes the need for a postcolonial approach to “challenge the production of knowledges that are exclusively western by not only focusing on the world beyond ‘the west’ but also by destabilising the dominant discourses by and taken for granted about the west”. Western ideology has its origin in the western context based on “white supremacist capitalist patriarchal western culture neo-colonial” (hooks, 2000) and secular thinking. As part of western thinking, western feminism has thus been accused of belittling non-western women as “unsophisticated” (Keller, 2002), “uncivilized”,

17
and “less fortunate” (hooks, 2000). From this, an unacknowledged assumption emerged that western feminists are responsible for teaching non-western women about the notions of gender oppression, patriarchy and the way to fight against violence. In recent decades, however, feminists from different cultural contexts have criticised western feminists for universalising their own particular perspectives as normative, and essentialising women in the south as tradition-bound victims of timeless, patriarchal cultures (Mohanty, 1991). The charge was that western feminists denied the voices and the authority of non-western women to represent themselves, were insensitive to non-western cultures, and disregarded cultural diversity in the western context itself. In recent years, western feminists such as Pain (1997, 1999, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, and 2015), Meth (2003), Hennessy (2012), and Herman (1997 and 1992) have responded to these criticisms and have argued for the importance of sensitivity to cultural difference in analyses of domestic violence. Consequently, domestic violence research has become increasingly sensitive to cultural differences in understanding experiences of and solutions to domestic violence.

This study draws on previous scholarly works (Stark, 2007; Root, 1996; Herman, 1997) to argue that the spatial experience of domestic violence can be understood as intimate captivity, which has common features among women from diverse cultural backgrounds across cultural diversity in Malaysia and women in western contexts. These features include entrapment, coercion, threats, and so forth. However, this study also argues that certain aspects and experiences of domestic violence are specific to the different cultures in Malaysia. It suggests, for example, that there is a need to understand different cultural codings of public and private space that may lead to very specific experiences of intimate captivity that may also contrast to those experienced by western women. The western notion of the private space of the home acquires a “material formality, private (exclusive and separate, sound and vision proof) and a space over which men and women express gendered attachments and aversions” (Meth, 2003: 320). This study explores how the public/private binary that creates the conditions of intimate captivity is determined by perpetrators’ culture and religion. It does so by also exploring the differences between Malay and Indian households, the ways in which Hindu traditions influence the ability of Indian husbands to control wives’ bodies as an extension of control of both private and public spaces, and the significance of Islamic traditions in extending the control of Malay husbands over wives’ bodies into private space.
The thesis explores the different dimensions of ‘private’ space and the significance of understanding this for Malaysian survivors, as well as how the notions of public and private space in intimate captivity are manifested in very specific ways in relation to culture, religion and societal norms in Malaysia.

The original contribution of the thesis is to explore how in the context of Malaysia domestic violence comes to be understood as demonic possession. The demonic possession described in this thesis goes beyond reductionist approaches that solely support the argument that demonic possession serves as a “hidden transcript” (Makris, 2000) or an idiom that articulates a range of experience (Crapanzano, 1977), which can easily be dismissed as rooted in belief in the existence of spirits among the abused women and their societies. Instead, demonic possession is dynamic, used by survivors as a metaphor for expressing the reality of domestic violence. Using this idea, the thesis makes three important interventions. First, it argues that western feminist conceptualisations of domestic violence are not always appropriate in understanding women’s experiences and survival tactics in different cultural contexts. Second, it contests problematic, western-centric depictions of demonic possession as evoking “images of strange and exotic rituals that are utilised by unsophisticated people to make sense of their world, a kind of primitive psychotherapy. That possession occurs predominantly among women is likely to fit comfortably with the image of a dark-skinned body, producing yet another fascinating image of the third world woman” (Keller, 2002: 3). Third, it argues that greater attention needs to be paid to cultural difference in order to have effective interventions aimed at preventing domestic violence, helping women escape from violent relationships and helping women with trauma relief. Through these interventions, this study reveals distinct ways of understanding, experiencing and resisting domestic violence in Malaysia that are quite different to western understandings.

**Research Aims**

This research aims to explore the spatially and culturally specific experience of domestic violence by focusing on women survivors from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. It seeks to capture the ways in which domestic violence discourse and experience are contested in everyday life for Malaysian women. It also aims to contribute towards a better understanding of the nature and experience of domestic violence, as well as contribute
to awareness raising and knowledge enhancement in Malaysia. Thus, the research will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What bearing does trauma have on abusive relationships, as defined by women survivors in Malaysia?
2. How far do these meanings, and associated experiences of domestic violence, differ for women from different ethnic groups and across rural and urban settings?
3. What are the related experiences and differences in help-seeking behaviour and expectations of informal and formal intervention in domestic violence?

**Definition and Terminology**

In western contexts, domestic violence is generally understood as shorthand for male violence against women in the home (Hague and Malos, 2005). Domestic violence is usually regarded as violence between adults who are or have been in an intimate or family relationship with each other most often a sexual relationship between a woman and a man, although other family members may sometimes be involved.

In Malaysia, domestic violence is understood as the physical abuse by a husband of his wife. In contrast, the legal definition of domestic violence in Malaysia includes violence against other family members such as ex-wives, ex-husbands, children, mothers, fathers, or relatives who live together. This type of violence is not gender based and the form of abuse also varies, including psychological, social, financial and sexual violence (Tumin, 2006). However, the relationship between perpetrators and victims and their religion determines which laws play a role in the Malaysian legal system. A case in point is spousal relationships that are governed by Shariah laws for Muslims and family laws for non-Muslims. By taking into account this matter, the working definition of the term ‘domestic violence’ in this thesis is any type of abuse by a husband against his wife. Domestic violence is understood to involve control executed through physical, psychological and/or emotional abuse, rather than one-off incidents of physical violence which may be more widely understood as ‘fights’ (Stark, 2007).
Thesis Organisation

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Having outlined the main arguments of the thesis in the Introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework for the thesis and argues that a postcolonial perspective is important to challenge western-centric notions of domestic violence and its relationship with ethnicity and culture. It also explores the concept of trauma as a framework through which to address the main issues of domestic violence from a postcolonial point of view. Chapter 3 places the research in context by explaining Malaysian demographic structures and cultural diversity, tracing the histories of these differences and some of the cross-cultural frictions (for example, between Hinduism and Islam) that partially affect cultural pluralism in Malaysia. This chapter further elaborates on the patriarchal cultures associated with the Malay and Indian communities, which are the two main ethnic groups involved in this study. Finally, this chapter explains the legal and cultural marital procedures for Muslim and non-Muslim couples, as well as the consequences if the procedures are not adhered to, which have particular consequences for women affected by domestic violence.

Chapter 4 sets out the participatory research methodology and explains how the qualitative data was collected. It also explains the attempts of disseminating the findings through mural art, which takes into account the traumatic events experienced by the Malay and Indian women in this study. In this chapter, I reflect on my own positionality and reflect on my experience in dealing with trauma during data collection and analysis. The ethical issues, limitations and other challenges that emerged during the study are also highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is the first of four chapters that analyse and discuss the findings. The chapter first discusses why the women married their partners. Second, it explores the different social and spatial processes that influence their decisions to marry and how these position them as vulnerable when the relationship becomes abusive. Chapter 6 explores in more detail the spatiality of domestic violence through the notion of intimate captivity. The chapter argues that these settings are under the perpetrator’s intimate control and center violence on the woman’s
psyche and body. This ensures that abused women become entrapped as prisoners. Together, these two chapters suggest that despite socio-cultural differences in shaping the meanings of public-private and how these influence the cultural coding of domestic space, there are many common features of domestic violence that cut across cultural diversity, be that within Malaysia or between Malaysia and western contexts. However, the next two chapters demonstrate that cultural specificity creates important differences in the ways in which domestic violence is experienced, understood and resisted among diverse women in Malaysia.

Chapter 7 examines demonic possession as a metaphor for domestic violence which, in comparison to the term domestic violence, is well understood and common among the Malaysian community, including across diverse ethnic groups. In this study, demonic possession is used by survivors, perpetrators and other family members to make sense of perpetrators’ cruelty, the wider patterns of abuse, and the effects of this abuse as chronic traumatic symptoms. This cultural framing is used to explain both the social patterns and individual experiences of domestic violence. Chapter 8 focuses on survivors’ resistance, escape strategies and ‘recovery’ processes. It stresses the weakness of formal interventions in Malaysia, such that most women are not well equipped to free themselves from violence. Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 9) summarises the research findings, reiterates the importance of context-specific understandings of domestic violence to draw out the nuances in how it is understood and experienced, and makes recommendations for improving domestic violence interventions in Malaysia.
CHAPTER 2

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

There is very little is written about domestic violence in Malaysia. Emerging scholarly works on domestic violence are still struggling with fundamental issues such as the prevalence, nature, patterns of the violence and issues of formal intervention from the government and NGOs. Previous research has concentrated on issues relating to several formal help providers such as the police force (Tucker, 2012), social workers (Chang and Burfoot, 2014), health care providers and refuge provision (Putit, 2008) that connect to the societal values and belief in Malaysian societies. In general, the gravity of domestic violence is still understood quantitatively by looking at the fluctuation of domestic violence statistics over the year and the frequency of physical violence reported by the survivors. The important terms that are often used to understand the cause and effects of gender-based violence, such as patriarchy and trauma, are not well understood in the community itself, especially among the abused women.

In this context, clarifying the nature of domestic violence is far more difficult because there are no vocabularies available through which to communicate across the diverse Malaysian societies. To make things worse, many researchers in Malaysia frame their research according to universalised western ideas which remain hegemonic in providing analytical frameworks for women’s studies. As Lazred (in Bullock, 2010: xxxixii) argues, “[non-western] feminists frequently adopted western feminist ideas without interrogating their relevance first”. Thus, discourses of women’s oppression and the meaning of gender justice developed in the west are not always applicable to non-western women. Western feminists have the power to speak (McEwan, 2003) and frame the concepts of the spatial and cultural aspects of lived experience. These framings should not be simplistically applied to other contexts, while denying the voices and the authority of non-western women to represent themselves; ultimately, this does not help to explain the complex and diverse nature and experiences of domestic violence.
Postcolonial perspectives take on particular relevance with regard to domestic violence studies outside of the west since they help to decentre western theory and recover the voices and agency of the non-western (McEwan, 2003). They challenge earlier western feminist perspectives that generally emphasized only one privileged epistemological standpoint that took account only white, middle-class and educated perspectives. This standpoint is often irrelevant to non-western women, which has consequences for the effectiveness of campaigns against violence against women. This chapter explores the implications of postcolonial theory for understanding and problematising the ways in which non-western women’s experiences, agency and voices have been silenced by western feminist approaches to domestic violence. It also explores the increasing sensitivity of feminist theory and politics more generally to the significance of cultural differences in understanding domestic violence.

This chapter explores the importance of a postcolonial feminist approach for domestic violence research in the context where domestic violence discourse is influenced by patriarchal western thought. The first part critiques the western-centric understandings of domestic violence. Through a discussion of the themes of cultures of possession, entitlement and belittlement, the discussion what follows makes the case for a postcolonial feminism perspective on domestic violence. By referring to Malaysia’s case, the second part of the chapter discusses how western-centric scholarship has come to dominate the ideas shaping the women’s movement in this country. The third part of the chapter then goes on to highlight a number of problems in the way that feminists have examined the issues of domestic violence in non-western cultures. Having outlined the need for a postcolonial feminist approach to research into domestic violence and the problems with existing literatures, the final part of the chapter suggests that the concept of trauma needs to be rethought as related to culturally-specific notions of possession that influence women’s experiences of domestic violence.

A. POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM APPROACH

The voices of non-western women who have experienced domestic violence have been marginalised by two relationships of power: imperialism and patriarchy. The fight against
western cultural imperialism is equally important for non-western women as the fight against patriarchy for women’s justice. The need for postcolonial perspectives within women’s movements has been informed by feminists, especially from the global south (McEwan, 2003). Criticism by non-western feminists have “been significant in breaking down western-centrism” and “has major implications” for feminist thought both in the west and elsewhere (ibid., 2003:1). A source of criticism by western feminism has come from feminist scholars in different parts of the world that see its normative prescriptions as an imposition local cultural and religious traditions in the name of women rights. This section aims to argue why a postcolonial feminist approach is required, demonstrating that any feminist accounts that universalise or are insensitive to other cultures are inadequate in providing explanations of the nature and experiences of domestic violence in Malaysia.

Critics have stressed the need to challenge dominant discourses in western feminist theory. This theory is rooted in European cultures and largely engaged in contesting the Enlightenment and its offshoots in modernity (McEwan, 2003). However, a problem emerges when some western feminists have assumed a commonality in the forms of women’s oppression and activism worldwide (Morgan, 1984), or simply failed to identify that these may be diverse. There has been a tendency amongst some western feminists to universalise their own particular perspectives as normative, and to essentialise women in the south as tradition-bound victims of timeless, patriarchal cultures (Mohanty, 1991). Western epistemological frameworks that are shaped by this assumption fail to understand the cultural and historical meanings of women’s experiences and structural locations outside the west (Mohanty, 1991). A postcolonial approach is thus important to challenge these universalising tendencies of western feminism theory, which is based on “unexamined and unacknowledged assumptions that are profoundly insensitive to the meanings, values and practices of other cultures” (McEwan, 2009:26).

Of course, western feminism is itself diverse, and many strands have now been influenced by postcolonial and Black feminist critiques. It is therefore not possible to critique ‘one’ western feminism. However, criticisms remain of some parts of western feminism which show insensitivity to non-western women. For example, terms used in the past, such as “the Third World”, homogenise peoples and countries and mark other associations such as “economic
backwardness” (Darby, 1997: 2), or “barbaric and uncivilized” in which gender-based violence is portrayed as more brutal than the oppression in the west (hooks, 2000). These practices of naming are part of the process of “worlding” (Spivak, 1990), or setting apart certain parts of the world from others, with roots located historically in imperialism (McEwan, 2009), which maintains hegemonic control over colonized people as well as to produce rhetorically a common belief in the ‘natural’ inferiority and delinquency of native subjects and cultures (Said, 1979). In this context, where women have been assumed to be oppressed by culture, the need to hear the marginalised women’s voice is urgent. Black women and feminists around the world are contesting the authority of western women to represent their lives and are fighting for spaces in which their voices can be heard, and their stories told. A postcolonial approach is important to disrupt western discourses that inadvertently silence the voice of women in non-western contexts. Postcolonial feminist perspectives are thus significant with regard to domestic violence in the global South since they help to open up the possibilities of alternative ways of theorising and understanding the impact of domestic violence (Pain and Staeheli, 2014) and to give voice to abused women in their diversity. As Mohanty (1991) argues, ‘male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it’.

Furthermore, Black feminist critiques have also raised the need to challenge the privileged position of white women within women’s anti-violence movements. As hooks (2000:44) argues:

In white supremacist capitalist patriarchal western culture neo-colonial thinking sets the tone for many cultural practices. That thinking always focuses on who has conquered a territory, who has ownership, who has right to rule…At the end of the day white women with class power declared that they owned the movement…Parasitic class relations have overshadowed issues of race, nation, and gender in contemporary neo-colonialism.

Western feminists’ entitlement within feminist politics is recognisable from their control of women’s movement programs at different scales, which have led to women elsewhere in anti-
violence movements feeling unappreciated and misunderstood (INCITE! 2006). Western-centric feminism is promoting and justifying certain interventions and excluding others, which potentially closes off alternative approaches and solutions that might otherwise arise out of other women’s safety and security needs. Thus, a postcolonial feminist approach is important to explore how domestic violence discourses promote and justify real interventions with real consequences. More context-based interpretations of domestic violence that differentiate as well as connect the abused women’s needs are important. Postcolonial feminism is important to re-align western feminisms, such that they are no longer perceived as universally applicable, but as part of a “plurality of feminisms” (McEwan, 2003:5).

Clearly, the critiques of western feminisms open up exciting avenues for research. As will be fully explained in Chapter 3, the literatures on domestic violence in Malaysia are relatively limited (Mohd Hashim and Endut, 2009; Putit, 2008) from various fields particularly social sciences and domestic violence is not yet a focus of attention among social and cultural geographers in the country. There have been only limited attempts in recent years at linking domestic violence and culture by Abdul Ghani (2014), Chang and Burfoot (2014), and Philips et al. (2006). According to Abdul Ghani (2014), cultural and religious beliefs play an important role particularly in shaping the way that abused women perceive experiences of violence. The survivors in Abdul Ghani’s research, who are mostly Muslim, interpreted violence as an inspiration for submission to God and finding spiritual strength. Abdul Ghani (2014) contends that disclosure of violence is hard when the survivors misunderstand Islamic concepts such as obedience to the male partner, which excuses and justifies the behaviour of the abusive husband.

Chang and Burfoot (2014) corroborate Abdul Ghani’s (2014) findings by stating that cultural difference such as language, religion and gender stereotyping has implications for the survivors’ help seeking behaviours. However, their study shows that the practices of the help provider organisation generally did not consider the cultural background of the client. This is particularly true in the therapeutic services to address post-trauma issues, which are often based on western models. Studies outcome by Phillips et al. (2006) and Che Din et al. (2010) raise an urgent need for further study of residents in Malaysian shelters and the appropriateness of the therapeutic interventions with survivors experiencing post-trauma
issues. This is out of their main concern that not all aspect of domestic violence can be universalised even if, as their study shows, the psychological problems that women face after partner abuse may be similar in many respects, despite political, geographical, or cultural differences.

B. FEMINISM IN MALAYSIA AND WESTERN FEMINIST ALLIES

Western colonisation affected the mindset of colonised people into accepting their subservient role as colonised peoples who should follow all forms of rules dictated by the colonial power. Even after independence, many Malaysians believed that western values provided a role model in many aspects such as economic, social and political development. As elucidated by the Malaysia’s Prime Minister for 22 years (currently serving for the second time), Mahathir, even though the country has long been independent, western influence is still prevalent and dominates the thinking among Malaysians (Daud and Awang Besar, 2016). He and other critics argue that this mentality should be changed because it acts as a barrier for Malaysia to be respected as an independent nation. Independence means being entirely free from any influence of colonialism, especially in terms of mentality. Furthermore, western countries can no longer be regarded as the role model of other countries (Hussain, 2002). Mahathir argues that “the west is no longer an accomplished example. Malaysia is not supposed to be ‘like sheep’ forever” (Abdul Latif, 2001). In 1982, Mahathir announced a Look East Policy which explicitly aims:

...to systematically study the elements that lead to success via Japanese management and business practices, instead of always looking to the west for direction (Mahathir, 1999).

This policy has more implicit agenda of rigorously persuading Malaysians to develop a mindset liberated from the dictum that all from the west is ideal (Daud and Awang Besar, 2016). The ‘Look East Policy’ concept and Mahathir’s stand on western influence affect local perspectives on feminism in Malaysia. According to Peletz (2003:3 in Lee, 2018), “among the specific ills of the west as identified by Mahathir and as expressed in his co-authored book The Voice of Asia, is the women’s liberation movement which has contributed to the
corruption of the western world” (ibid., 2003:3; Mahathir and Ishihara, 1995). With such views, “Mahathir did a great deal to legitimise, disparaged feminism and women’s rights among diverse Malaysians, including, but not necessarily limited to, conservative and Muslim Malaysians” (ibid., 2018:16). Across Asia, feminism is seen as a western notion (Niranjana, 2010) and is “caricatured as aggressively individualistic, anti-male, anti-children, and anti-family” (Roces, 2010:1).

Mahathir’s achievement in attempting to liberate Malaysia from a western-centric mind-set was mixed, as it proved very difficult to wean Malaysians off a long socialization of western values given Malaysia’s colonial history. These tensions are visible in the feminist union that works together to fight for women’s right in the country. The union was initiated by middle-class urban women, many of whom had completed tertiary education in the west. They are almost exclusively academics from influential families, being scholars, lawyers, and journalists, and they are well connected to key actors in politics, administration, and the media (Schröter, 2013).

Feminism in Malaysia is often dismissed in popular and political discourse as a cultural import from the west that is inappropriate in an eastern context. Drawing on the western feminism framework in explaining patriarchy and women’s oppression, it is difficult for Malaysians to relate to this conceptual framing. In fact, women from different ethnic groups are invisible in feminist discourse. Hence, many social movements in this country refuse to be called feminist due to their prejudices towards feminism, which signifies western knowledge, middle-class, urban, English-speaking concerns in Malaysia, which are viewed as ethnocentric. Some would say they are ‘womanist’ rather than feminist. In Lee’s (2018) research, some Malaysians believed that there was a divide in people’s understanding of feminism and what feminism is. The empirical data in Lee’s (2018) study also show that most Malaysians do believe in basic gender equality principles, but whether they see it as feminist is a different thing.

Feminists acknowledge that feminism in Malaysia is influenced by the west. According to Ng et al. (2006: 1),
Some of the concepts may seem detached from our specific Malaysian experience but we cannot deny the influence of western-inspired ideas on the course of the women’s movement in this country.

If Malaysian feminist movements continue to adopt western models as their ideal, their pursuit of gender justice in this country will continue to be ineffective because of a lack of acceptance by the majority of Malaysian women. As Ong (2011 in Lee, 2018:17) argues:

The apparent cogency of the suggestion that feminism is western or foreign has considerable power in undermining support for feminist views [in Asian contexts].

Out of concern that they need to reach the predominant women in Malaysia (Malay-Muslim), Malaysian women activists have initiated Sisters in Islam (SIS). Drawing on, but refining, western-centric understandings of patriarchy, this movement aims to prove that the suppression of women in Muslim societies does not originate from Islamic teachings, but rather from some interpretations of Islamic sources by some men (Schröter, 2013). The notion of women’s rights and equality associated with this group has been deemed by critics to be biased towards middle-class and non-Eastern values. SIS intervenes in issues that have to do with the legal discrimination of women by using their own reinterpretations of the Qur’an and Sunnah, to align with their feminist ideas (ibid., 2013). The alternative interpretations and solutions suggested by SIS are considered by many groups and organisations as too liberal, too ‘feminist’, and controversial (ibid., 2013). ‘Feminist’, ‘radical’, and ‘western’ are terms that are usually used pejoratively by some critics of SIS regarding their methods in interpreting Islamic sources, advocacy, and reform (ibid., 2013).

SIS is particularly critical of the ‘people of God’ who make use of religion by imparting Islamic lessons in a non-contextual, male-biased and sexist manner to retain their privilege as men or husbands in society. However, feminist arguments are not solely directed to these ‘people of God’. The are also critical of a ‘patriarchal Islamisation project’ that is successful in promoting the identity signifier to the Malay-Muslim women (see Joseph, 2014) and ensuring the continuance of Malay-Muslims’ political and cultural dominance through patriarchal practice. Joseph (2014) also claims that in order to be a good woman, the Malay-Muslim women should be gentle, modest, wearing veil, covering awrah, praying five times a
day and fasting. Islam is seen as a solution to the social ills and problems of contemporary society as it protects woman from the male sexual gaze (Joseph, 2014). Women are usually the targets of this patriarchal Islamization project through the control of women’s status, rights, roles, and responsibilities through the family and community (Othman, 2006).

The identity signifiers such as veils and face covers are claimed by SIS as practices adopted from patriarchal tradition and used to good advantage in the name of Islam (Shayan Afzal Khan, 2007). SIS argues that Muslim women are not obliged to cover their heads and chest (awrah) with hijab, since there is no compulsion in Islam. These arguments are associated with critiques in western feminism, which leads to antagonism within the Muslim community. This fails to acknowledge the reality that wearing the veil is an act of worship by a huge number of Malay-Muslims in Malaysia. It is a religiously sanctioned dress that is not seen as oppressive and is part of a religion that is perceived to give Muslim women dignity and respect. Critics argue that western discourses that all Muslim women are forced to cover themselves are what is oppressive. The debate on veil is an example of feminists’ understanding on patriarchy in Malaysia, which informed by western feminism, underpinned by an unconscious adherence to liberalism and modernization theory, compounded by an ignorance of any actual details about Muslim women’s lives (Bullock, 2010).

Many efforts by SIS do not only silence the dominant voice of Malay-Muslim women in Malaysia, they also spark anger among the public for being insensitive to most Muslims. SIS is also perceived as an organisation that portrays a distorted perspective of what really happens in Malaysia. There are many scholars from various fields that call feminist parties in Malaysia for debate, while some of the members of public urge the government to ban SIS (Mageswari, 2017 and Zieman, 2009) or decide to challenge SIS. Apart from the problems that arise between feminists and Islamists, feminists in Malaysia do not try to understand the experiences of multiracial, non-Muslim women. The Indians, Chinese and ethnic minorities in Malaysia are neglected, especially in the discourse of domestic violence.

This thesis argues therefore, that a culturally-sensitive study to domestic violence in Malaysia is needed urgently given the cultural, ethical and political context in which feminist organisation has to operate.
C. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CULTURE

While feminist critiques of domestic violence across different cultures have been written, they are problematic because the connection between domestic violence and culture merges with misleading representations of ethnicity, class and gender cross national borders (Narayan, 1997). The following discussion provides an overview of the critiques of earlier feminist perspectives, which reflected only one privileged epistemological standpoint on domestic violence. It then goes on to highlight the problems with these literatures.

Previous studies of ethnicity, class, gender and domestic violence in western countries emphasize various marginalized communities such as poor women, immigrants and ethnic minorities in different geographical regions. Sokoloff and Dupont (2005:38) describe these as “formerly excluded and ignored communities” whose vulnerabilities to domestic violence are shaped by segregation from the dominant culture. In the United States, much attention of the research is paid to minority groups, especially African Americans, (Benson et al., 2004; Sumter, 2006), who are the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities. This group appears to experience higher rates of domestic violence than white people or other ethnicities (Sumter, 2006). Benson et al., (2004) argue that this phenomenon is the consequence of a history of segregation and hostility from a dominant white culture, which is also reflected in policy and service provision that tend to neglect these groups. In Britain, the focus of study is on women in minority ethnic groups such as African, African-Caribbean, Irish, Jewish and South Asian women. It has been claimed that the vulnerabilities of these marginalised groups (Chantler, 2006) arises from their self-interpretation of being segregated from the dominant culture.

Cultural values may restrict intervention for some of the most vulnerable survivors of domestic violence, either the first source of intervention (Bailey, 2010; Liendo, 2008; Pillai, 2001) or legal interventions (Sumter, 2006). First sources of intervention are from family, friends or communities. In most cases, victims of domestic violence try to keep their abusive relationship secret because of their fear of disgrace and bringing shame to the family, and the fear of reprisal from the family, fear of the impact of marriage break-up on other family members, and fear of social isolation (Pillai, 2001). Bailey (2010) and Liendo (2008) state
that the view of intimate partner violence as a private matter is the typical reason for non-disclosure. For instance, for Asian immigrants and refugee women in New Zealand that stay in abusive relationships, the main constraints are that their family and community are seen as the first source of intervention to resolve difficulties within the marriage (Pillai, 2001). In contrast, Mexican American women tend to hide the violence because they fear putting their lives in danger (Liendo, 2008). Hispanic women also tend to refuse any support due to cultural barriers, such as fear of immigration authorities, religious teaching and being unable to take action due to the lack of communication skills (Laura and Simpson, 2003). While ethnicity is clearly a factor in these examples, in other studies it disappears when other factors such as geographical influences are controlled (Benson et.al, 2004).

A study in southwest Virgina suggests that the dominant white and the minority Black ethnic groups who live within rural areas share similar experiences, including having also experienced discrimination from police, being too embarrassed to report their abusive relationship and having less knowledge about shelter provision (Few, 2005). This kind of detailed study suggests that ‘cultural’ or ‘ethnic’ factors are more complex than they first appear for marginalised women in western countries.

In Asian contexts, scholars have argued that there are four important themes in accounts of violence against women: first, the connection between women’s status and family; second, women as male property; third, the social construction of gender and sexuality; and fourth, the role of religious ideology in sustaining violence against Asian women (Bennett and Manderson, 2003). A case in point for the first theme is Bugis Indonesian women, who reveal that family pressure and lack of social support are the main reasons for staying in abusive relationships. Another example is Burmese women who prefer to accept violence such as rape or forced prostitution to ensure the economic survival of their children and parents. Hilsdon (2003) relates this to the culture of arranged marriages among Maranao Muslims in the Phillippines as a form of violence because of the lack of marital and sexual choice. This is also due to the provocation of other forms of violence such as deaths or clan feuds. For Hilsdon (2003), these types violence become worst when the family, cultures and state instrumentalities and structures fail to acknowledge women's right to freedom from violence.
Bennett and Manderson’s research (2003) in India and Bangladesh locates domestic violence within marriage in male dominance and the idea of women becoming men’s property on marriage:

*Domestic violence is commonly accepted as a legitimate punishment for women who fail to meet men's demand and as a means to discipline new brides into accepting the superiority of their husbands and their expected subordination within marriage. Thus, rape within marriage is a legal possibility. In many Asian societies, women’s sexual consent is neglected because their right to bodily integrity is violated in various ways and upholds men's entitlement to sexual access of their wives (Bennett and Manderson, 2003:10).*

This patriarchal control is strengthened by the social construction of gender and sexuality, which reveals how normative and ideal notions of masculinity and femininity are implicated in violence against Asian women. For example, in Asian societies, the expectation that women should remain faithful to the domestic sphere, obedient to male authority and sexually passive is widespread (Bennett and Manderson, 2003).

Finally, in Southeast Asia, Islam is discussed in the context of marital relations for Bugis Indonesians, and in terms of Malaysian women's status and ability to agitate for an end to violence against women. In Islamic law, it is totally prohibited for the husband to abuse his wife and vice versa. Islam strongly forbids anyone who is certain to oppress one’s spouse from getting married (as discussed in Chapter 3). However, in Maranao Muslim societies, Islam is locally interpreted to deny women's right to sexual autonomy within marriage. For Buddhists in Burma, religious ideology is actually the platform of women's perceived weakness within their culture and links this with their subordinate social status. In many studies (for example Idrus and Bennett, 2003; Bennett and Manderson, 2003) religious and cultural ideology is seen as creating an enabling environment for marital violence, which makes it extremely difficult for women to resist such violence. These scholarly works demonstrate the complexity of domestic violence for non-western women shaped by their culture, ethnicity and religious ideology. Therefore, it is important to deal with the ways in
which domestic violence is influenced by the complex interweavings of gender and ethnicity (Maj, 2013).

Despite their sensitivity to cultural difference, there are, however, a number of problems that are raised by the literatures reviewed above. The way that research has examined these issues raise two problems. First, the previous literatures on domestic violence specifically focus on certain ethnic groups in South and Southeast Asia (Bennett and Manderson, 2003) tend to overemphasise "cultural" practices that are synonymized with ethnicity and religion. For example, Hinduism to widow burning (Bennett and Manderson, 2003) and dowry death (Shamim, 1992), China to foot-binding, Islam with polygamy and genital mutilation. The problem with these associations, is that they disregard the factors underpinning domestic violence, and the experiences of women, that may be shared across cultures.

Second, generalisation on the basis of ethnicity in the research due to incomplete and imprecise data is highlighted by some scholars as problematic. Dobash and Dobash (1992) for example, argue that the stereotypes about gender and violence against women in the Southeast Asian region are similar worldwide. There are several assumptions made about the abuse of wives in all cultures:

“Only poor and uneducated men Batter their wives, no one should interfere in the domestic affairs of man and wife, unhappy families are better than no families, alcohol causes battering, she must have enjoyed it, otherwise she'd leave, husbands have every right to do what they want with their wives, women who are beaten obviously deserve it, it's just the odd domestic quarrel” (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 11).

They argue that these assumptions are also made in studies of domestic violence in Malay culture. However, Dobash and Dobash (1992) ignore the fact that the “Malay” region might include references to Malay, Indian, Chinese or even other ethnic minorities in Malaysia. Besides, some of the characteristics such as alcohol that Dobash and Dobash (1992) discuss in relation to Malay that cause domestic violence are not associated with violence for among ethnic Malays in rural areas (Abdul Ghani, 2014). Therefore, Volpp (2007) argues that current research on ethnicity can be problematic when diverse ethnic groups are often
collapsed in a single category such as Asian, or the patterns of a single group such as Mexican Americans are overgeneralized to refer to all Hispanics. Because of this, the data on partner violence among minority populations are incomplete. According to UNICEF Innocent Research Centre (2000), domestic violence data are also poor as women under-report domestic violence. Thus, the data preclude meaningful generalizations.

D. DECOLONISING ‘TRAUMA’ AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In this study, domestic violence is framed by a postcolonial feminist understanding that rejects western-centric approaches. This involves a respectful recognition of specific cultures, ethnicities and the religious perspectives of unheard women’s voices. Along these lines, this research seeks explanations of domestic violence that are sensitive to the meanings, values and practices of multicultural women. Having outlined the need for a postcolonial feminist approach by critiquing the previous scholarly works and learning from critiques of existing literatures, this study argues that trauma is a concept that needs to be decolonised in order to enable multicultural women’s voices to be heard, covering both spatial and cultural themes in domestic violence.

Rothberg (2008) suggests that decolonised trauma theory provides the best framework for thinking about the legacies of violence in the postcolonial world. Trauma helps us better understand the impact of cumulative and prolonged traumas acquired from the devaluing of the statuses that women of colour within western ideologies. Decolonising conceptions of trauma in this study aims to provide a means for recovering the actual experiences of diverse Malaysian women of domestic violence. Thus, it provides a more nuanced cultural explanation of domestic violence.

Psychological trauma is a western concept derived from culture-bound theories of the roots of mental disorder within scientific studies. Contemporary understandings of psychological trauma are varied and are based on the history of mental health problems developed from traumatic events in western countries. Many theories of psychological trauma have emerged in western societies to explain the effects of the violence experienced during wars (e.g. shell-shock in WW1 and the trauma experienced by US soldiers returning from Vietnam).
Historically, and certainly up to the 18th century, the kinds of symptoms exhibited by those experiencing mental ill-health due to trauma were often understood as demonic possession. This was very common in European societies in which witchcraft and demonic possession were common explanations for traumatic syndrome and any kind of unusual behaviour.

The notion of demonic possession that connect to psychological responses of abused women remains widely expressed in many societies. Somer et al. (2014) point out that some abused women such as Arab women use possession as idioms of mental illness and healing in abusive relationships. Based on the existing literature reviews on Black couples and violence in the Caribbean, Brice-Baker (1994:35) argues that demonic possession is a powerful explanation to let the society pay attention of man’s abusive behaviour with the healing belief that the demon in perpetrators can be lifted. In this study context, demonic possession provides a framework of domestic violence through which to communicate across the diverse Malaysian societies. A majority of women from different ethnic groups in this study use demonic possession as a metaphor for abuse which unpacking into detailed descriptions of perpetrators’ cruelty (demons), male domination and abuse (the cultures of possession) and trauma (possessed bodies) as the finding suggests in Chapter 7.

Without an in-depth understanding of other cultures, scholars have too often assumed that western models of trauma can be exported and applied to non-western cultures (Root, 1996). The global representation of western trauma theory sometimes “overestimates its ability to diagnose, simply overlaid on a culturally different group and even solve the world’s problems” (Craps et al., 2015:204) by linking the ‘scientific’ trauma treatment in western societies with ideas of modernity, progress, civilization, the west sees itself as superior to the non-west. As Marshall and Sousa (2014) argue, this has led to imposing trauma treatment and models of intervention in different parts of the world that merely perpetrate another form of violence and further colonization on another community. Therefore, non-western women experience “double violence” when diagnosis and treatment of trauma potentially reinforces the isolating effects of violence that triggered the trauma in the first place. This is due to western models of trauma relief that disregard the specific political nature of violence (Marshall and Sousa, 2014).
Trauma theory has largely failed to recognise the suffering of non-western others (Craps et al., 2015). Western models of trauma obstruct entry to meanings that underlie indigenous rituals and cultural practices that may be attributed to the fact that present theorization in literary studies is characterized by a neglect of religion and spirituality. As Rothberg (2008:8) has highlighted, it is “trauma theory’s Eurocentric, event-based conception of trauma and its deconstructionist approach that closes off other approaches to trauma”. The failure to understand the complex causes and consequences of trauma frequently fails to represent the range of traumas experienced by western subjects within western societies themselves (Craps et al., 2015) and is problematic in ignoring differences that might arise in postcolonial contexts.

Culture is an entrance to understand trauma from the accounts of the traumatised. “Trauma and recovery are messy, non-linear and subject to different retellings” (Bondi, 2013; Tamas, 2009, 2011 in Pain 2014a: 541). Generally, humans have an inherent need to make sense out of and explain their experiences (Smith et al., 1993:38). This particularly applies when they are experiencing suffering and illness in an abusive relationship. “In the process of finding the meaning, culture and beliefs play a vital role in determining whether a particular explanation and associated treatment plan will make sense to the patient” (Smith et al., 1993:38). The relationship between trauma and culture is important especially in response to the recovery processes that encompass healing, treatment, interventions, counselling and medical care (Wilson, 2007). Cultures provide alternative ways in mental health care to recovery and integration of extreme stress experiences which can be provided by shamans, traditional healers, culture-specific rituals, and community-based practices that offer forms of social and emotional support for the person suffering the maladaptive aspects of trauma (Moodley and West, 2005 in Wilson, 2007). “Numerous studies in medical anthropology have documented that indigenous system of health beliefs and practices persist and may even flourish in all societies after exposure to modern western medicine…These belief and practices exert profound influences in patients’ attitudes and behaviour” (Smith et al., 1993:38). Therefore, the awareness of the need for knowledge, sensitivity, and innovation when it comes to mental health treatment in non-western cultures has emerged from the scholarship on cultural competence (White and Marsella, 1982 in Wilson, 2007). Craps
(2013) also argues, the traumas of non-western populations should be acknowledged for their own sake on their own terms.

Public/Private Entrapment and the ‘Normal’ Abuser

Trauma arises from specific conditions including being trapped in a setting from which escape is difficult from an abuser who may appear normal (Herman, 1997; Pain, 2014a). Everyday abuse and entrapment work through psychological as well as physical domination. Understandings of domestic violence also rest on a distinction between public and private space that is assumed to be universal, hence a further need for a postcolonial approach.

The term ‘private’ is often intertwined with the notion of ‘privacy’, which implies a right to exclude others from intrusion (Schneider, 1994). The public sphere refers to a sphere considered as more general or justifiably attainable and accessible (Okin, 1998). In addressing the issue of underreported cases of domestic violence, the private sphere is understood as the sphere of marital life in which husbands have freedom to abuse their wives on the grounds that what happens in domestic spaces remains private and a wall of silence exists between individuals in private spaces and society more widely. In the private sphere, the members of the immediate family (husband, wife and children) retain their personal privacy by concealing the violence and excluding others from intervening. Beyond the private space, extended family members, friends, neighbours and those who have interaction with the individuals tend to not interfere as they fear to ‘trespass the private boundary’ (Schneider, 1994). Therefore, individuals and societies generally play salient roles in maintaining the boundary between the private and public sphere. This often results in incarceration and disempowerment for women experiencing domestic violence, which prevents them from seeking or receiving help from the legal authorities.

While the politics of gender equality grew in western countries from the 1960s onwards, there was a tendency for gender to over-ride differences in ethnicity, class, religion, age and so forth. As a result, the criteria which determine what is ‘private’ or ‘public’ in different social situations from various cultural backgrounds were assumed to be the same everywhere (Buitelaar, 1998). It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that mainstream western feminism became influenced by a more intersectional approach in response to critiques from Black and
postcolonial feminists. The universalizing process of this idealization through the transformation period of the industrial revolution, colonialism, the renaissance in thinking in the west and the formation of the basis of ideological modernism were the most important “vacuums” (Buitelaar, 1998). However, universal ideas about gender oppression do not apply to non-western countries. This universalizing perspective has created conflict in women’s social lives in many countries. This secular development of “awareness” of gender inequality also suggested that religion is one of the major impediments to the revitalisation of women’s rights in society. In this way, multiracial societies with different translations of public/private space have been overridden by western feminist ideologies, particularly where it comes into conflict with existing conceptions of public/private sphere, which have long been in place in many countries (e.g. Islamic conceptions of public/private sphere have existed in many regions since the sixth century).

The public/private dichotomy has long been the object of analysis among feminist geographers seeking to understand violence against women. Until recently, geographical research into violence against women tended to ignore the private sphere (Rose, 1993) and focused on the gender coding of public spaces (Koskela, 1999). Much of this early research was concerned with women’s fear of public space in relation to the risks posed by strangers (Valentine, 1989). More recently, as the knowledge base in geography of violence against women has expanded, research has revealed that often the real threat to women is from male acquaintances in the domestic sphere (Warrington, 2001; Pain, 1997). In fact, the majority of the worst crimes of violence are committed within the confines of the home. Thus, a growing body of work in geography examines domestic violence against women in private spaces. Most of this research, however, has been in western contexts (for example, Bowstead, 2017; Cuomo, 2013; Pain, 2015, 2014a, 2014b, 2012) with occasional exceptions such as Brickell’s study (2017, 2008).

Increasingly, geographical research on domestic violence is critical of the use of generalizations about home as private sphere in either the west or non-west (Meth, 2003). The private space of the home in western countries acquires a “material formality, private (exclusive and separate, sound and vision proof) and a space over which men and women express gendered attachments and aversions” (Meth, 2003: 320). Through the example of
homeless and insecurely housed women in South Africa, Meth (2003) argues that not all domestic violence is experienced in private spaces in the physical sense. Similarly, Bassadien and Hochfeld, (2005) argue that the notion of ‘private’ has complex spatial dynamics that might not refer to ‘private space in which violence takes place’, but rather is considered as ‘public’. Three criteria in ‘private’ space (Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005) determine whether or not violence is witnessed by ‘others’: firstly, the structure of the house and number of people sleeping under the same roof; secondly, the nature of family structure and if several family members live in the same house; thirdly, whether or not houses are closely built. In addition, domestic violence also occurs in public space. Therefore, it seems clear that ‘private’ lives are also public in multiple ways, both in contexts such as South Africa and elsewhere.

Moreover, Herman (1997) and Pain and Scottish Women’s Aid (2012) also argue that the setting of spatial entrapment is determined by a perpetrator. In fact, abused women’s trauma is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrators (Herman, 1992). In the book How He Gets Into Her Head: The Mind of the Male Intimate Abuser, Hennessy (2012) provides a comprehensive description of the abusers’ tactics and beliefs in domestic violence. Perpetrators work deliberately at targeting the prospective long-term partner, setting up the abusive relationship and grooming before committing offences against their partner (ibid., 2012). These tactics when used in the context of an intimate relationship can clearly be described as a kind of brainwashing; Jones (2000:186) points out that ‘successful brainwashing enables the interrogator to exercise extraordinary mind control of the subject’.

Hennessy (2012) introduces terms such as skilled offender, careless offender and psycheophile for perpetrators. Psycheophile is coined to emphasize the deliberate tactics of befriending the woman’s mind that all abusers use. It is by befriending the mind of the woman that the perpetrator can establish, intensify and maintain his control to his wife. Skilled offender is a terminology to describe the perpetrator who can successfully target, set up, and groom his partner. Meanwhile, careless offender is a term for the perpetrators who are also abusive and

1 As with the majority cases from the empirical data, perpetrators in this context refers to those who were targeting a long-term partner.
violent towards their wives, but the abuse often results in the fracturing of the relationship because their control tactics are not in place or have been ignored.

Nevertheless, the abused women or the community are not being aware of perpetrators’ tactics, which explains why the abused women become entrapped, the violence continues even when the issue becomes known to the community, and that most efforts to intervene fail to stop the behaviour. Perpetrators are not easily recognizable because they are not obviously deviant or disturbed (Herman, 1992): “He is contemptuous of those who seek to understand him and he does not volunteer to be studied” (ibid, 1992:75). Scholars from various fields who have many years of experience in domestic violence such as Herman (psychiatrist), Hennessy (counsellor), and Pain (human geographer) contend that perpetrators are considered normal. Following Arendt (1964:276), Herman (1992) reports, “a man who committed unfathomable crimes against humanity, had been certified by half a dozen psychiatrists as normal”. Hennessy (2012:163) further explains about the normality of perpetrators that they;

\[
\text{Do not suffer any mental disorder and that they have a specific intent that permits them to use a whole range of tactics, including violence, to achieve their aims...The sense of entitlement and evil...is beyond the diagnosis of mental science.}
\]

Working with diverse women for many years, Hennessy (2012) believes that the tactics of perpetrators are universal, and the effects of their behaviour are the same for women worldwide. Culture enables perpetrators to justify abuse, deflect blame to his partner and avoid sanctions. Hennessy (2012) adds that culture also influences the speed of violence by which the initial steps of targeting, setting-up, and grooming happen. For instance, in some cultures, the woman may already believe that her voice is not important and that she should keep quiet (ibid, 2012). Therefore, it seems obvious that perpetrators’ tactics and beliefs are able to hide behind the culture, which results in further trauma for the victim.

Clearly, trauma is a reflection of spatially and culturally specific experiences of domestic violence. Thus, decolonization of trauma in this study also means to decolonize space and culture in domestic violence studies. This research suggests that the concept of trauma does not receive adequate examination in discussions about domestic violence, particularly by geographers in multicultural countries such as Malaysia, because most of the research on
trauma has been focused on the western experience. The public/private entrapment from a normal abuser that creates traumatised accounts in western countries is fundamentally based on the physical dimension of gender roles, which feminists have long contested. Meanwhile, notions of public and private space are predominantly contextual. By exploring these conceptual and contextual issues, this research aims to understand how trauma works specifically in the empirical setting of Malaysia for women from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who have experienced domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that there is an urgent need for a postcolonial feminist perspective to understand the cultural specificities of domestic violence in different places. It problematises the western-centrism of much feminist debate about domestic violence and argues that in non-western societies the fight against western cultural imperialism is equally as important as the fight against patriarchy for women’s justice in postcolonial feminist approach. A postcolonial feminist lens is important because even where feminist critiques of domestic violence in other cultures have been written, they are sometimes problematic because they tend to overemphasise ‘cultural’ practices that are synonymized with ethnicity and religion, and diverse ethnic groups are often collapsed in a single category. This study calls for a decolonised trauma theory as a suitable framework for representing accounts of domestic violence by diverse women by focusing on their spatial and cultural experiences in abusive relationships. Domestic violence studies need a more nuanced understanding that neither generalises about all women everywhere and ignores cultural specificities, nor reduces explanations of violence in non-western societies to stereotypical depictions of culture. While there are some common dynamics and global consistencies in the experience of domestic violence, there are also numerous cultural specificities and differences, and this applies to western as well as non-western settings. The next chapter supports this contention by explaining further why contextualising trauma is important.
CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter argues that a postcolonial approach seeks to decolonise the non-western women’s experience in domestic violence. This is done by critiquing western feminists who assume their solutions can work to fight for women’s justice anywhere. This thesis thus focuses on Malaysia, a geographically fragmented and ethnically divided country with complex cultures that are hard to generalise. This chapter clarifies the specificities of this context, focusing in particular on the two ethnic and religious groups involved in the study. The first part begins with an overview of demography and history with regard to the religions of Hinduism and Islam in the study area, and also the British policies in colonial period that shaped and continue to shape cultural complexities in Malaysia. The chapter then explains local customs relating to marriage, patriarchy, and marriage procedures for Muslim and non-Muslim couples. These are important as foundations for the findings presented in relation to domestic abuse later in the thesis. Improvements to legal protection in the form of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA 1994) are described in the next section. This description includes those who had input into the DVA’s drafting and amendment, such as Women’s Aid Organization, the Social Welfare Department, and others. Finally, this chapter reviews previous studies of domestic violence in the study area, justifying the choice of Malaysia as a study site on the grounds that there is relatively little research on domestic violence, especially in-depth qualitative studies, and from the perspective of human geography in particular.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MALAYSIA

Demography

“Malaysia is a fragmented country” (Weightman, 2011:391). It is located on the south-eastern edge of the Asian continent, comprising a peninsula formerly known as Malaya, and two
states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo in the South China Sea (see Figure 1). These were all part of British colonial territory until the end of the World War II (Lee and Ackerman, 1997). Malaysia is a highly diverse country in terms of ethnic and religious composition. The Malay ethnic group forms the majority with 2,754,826 people (51.5%), followed by Chinese with 1,410,690 people (26.4%), Indians with 664,591 people (12.4%); there are also indigenous minorities (61,331 people or 1.15%), ‘others’ (41,257 people or 0.8%) and non-citizens (about 412,759 people or 7.72%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Malays are Muslim, whilst most Chinese are Buddhists combining Taoist and Confucian practices, with a small number identifying as Muslim and Christian. Indians are mostly Hindu, with a small minority of Sikhs, Muslims and Christians. Various ethnic groups form minorities, such as different indigenous groups who are mostly situated in the Borneo region, and Eurasians and migrant workers most of whom are Indonesian.

Malaysia has a plural society as geographers Mark Cleary and Brian Shaw (in Weightman, 2011) observed;

*Ethnic pluralism in Malaysia might be more accurately represented as a series of overlapping Malay, Chinese or Indian ethnic dimensions (language, business practice, occupation, and religion) rather than lines of rigid demarcation. They represent socially constructed rather than ‘natural’ difference.*

In terms of religions, Lee and Ackerman (1997:x) point out:

*Malaysia is a crossroad of the world’s religions exemplifies many characteristics of religious multiplicity. Modernising yet traditional, secular yet religious, Malaysia has by no means become so disenchanted that only institutional religion reigns supreme in the interests of the state.*
It is important to look back at history to study the cultural complexity as well as political and economic circumstances in Malaysia. The following sections will explain the history of Malay culture, including the influence of Hinduism. It then goes on to explain the ethnic segregation that remains since the colonial period.

**Hindu Influence on Malay culture**

Historically, Hinduism exerted a profound influence on Malay culture before the coming of Islam and with the arrival of Hindu Kingdoms (Zain, 2017). Many parts of the region were under the Kingdom of Srivijaya that was greatly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. The influence of Indian cultures in the Malay world between the fourth and seventh century had two main aspects: the idea of kingship and the belief of divinity in creation which is known as pantheism. According to The Indian Book of *Manu*\(^2\) (*Manu Smitri*), kings are vastly superior to other created beings because they are made of the essences of the Gods. The kings become a God-like leader that holds absolute power with the tendency of one divinity under their ruling (Ishak and Abdullah, 2012). The king is the sovereign and

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\(^2\) Generally, Hindu law is divine in nature and this is evident from the words of Manu, “the most prominent smriti (a body of Hindu texts) writer” (Jhavala, 2009:3)
exercises the function of the executive, judicial and legislature. This marks the hierarchical systems of the traditional Malay concept of political power, in which a monarch eventually comes to assume ultimate authority for human affairs. In fact, the Hindu influence on the idea of kingship and the belief of divinity in creation still survive in modern Malay society whereby the institutions of monarchy and some aspects of feudal values remain part of the Malay norms and are considered sacred (Abu Hassan, 2009).

Hindu influence on Malay culture is the most unique part of this history. According to Zain (2017), “the political influence of old India is today at an end, but the cultural influence of India is still very much alive, and it will be alive for many, many centuries to come because it has become part of the life of the Malaysian peoples”. This can be observed in the Sanskrit words in Malay daily life, for instance, “Yang Dipertuan” is “Sang Yang Tunggal”, or the most divine one. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong is the head of the country under the government of Malaysia that currently exercises a constitutional monarchy with a system of parliamentary democracy. The influence of India cannot be treated as something belonging to the past in Malaysian culture. Despite the strict monotheistic restriction of the Islamic faith, Hinduism’s influence has survived to the present day (Zain, 2017). The formation of a multicultural society in this country, with different ethnicities and beliefs, is illustrated throughout Malaysian history.

The spread of Islam began from about the 13th century (Zain, 2017) and was welcomed as liberating Malays from the oppressive stratification of Hinduism and absolute power of the ruler. Islamic law was implemented and changed the local beliefs (Abu Hassan, 2009). This was the era when Malacca developed as the main trading port of Asia when valuable commodities such as spices became readily available (ibid., 2009). Malacca attracted European and other foreign traders who desired those commodities. Asian traders sought foreign commodities in return for their goods. Due to its prosperity, colonial countries such as Great Britain and Portugal had a growing interest in Malacca during the 1800s and in the 19th century, Malaya became one of the British colonies. Malaya gained its independence from the British Empire on 31st August 1957 and was reconstituted into a new country named Malaysia in 1963 (ibid., 2009).
Ethnic Division: the British Colonial Legacy

*Social harmony could only be attained through an equal society (Aristotle in Abdul Khalid, 2014)*

In Malaysia, the issues of ethnicity and religion pose challenges to social harmony due to inequality. There are various aspects that have existed since the colonial era, causing continued disunity. Ethnic division is one of the biggest challenges to the fight for social justice in Malaysia. As Faaland (2013, in Abdul Khalid, 2014) points out:

*The British Imperial colonial left Malaysia divided politically and economically. Politically, they left the country with ethnic politics. Economically, they left the economic activities divided along ethnic lines, with the Malays, who form the majority of the country, left far behind and marginalized in the low productivity sector.*

During the colonisation period, the British brought other ethnicities and religions to Malaysia. The arrival of Chinese and Indians to the peninsula changed the demographics of Malayan society. The Chinese were involved in trade and commerce or as workers in tin mines that were concentrated in urban areas. The Indians were mostly confined to rubber estates (Abdul Khalid, 2014). The Malays were mostly worked as paddy farmers, fishermen and rubber smallholders who lived in rural areas (*ibid.*, 2014). At that particular time, the British let the indigenous Malays remain in villages to work in the agricultural sector. As in India, educated Malays were co-opted into governance and the civil service as means of maintaining British hegemony and reducing the possibility of rebellion (Mohammad, 2012). This ‘divide and rule’ ethnic policy strategized by the British had tremendous social and economic impacts and ethnic groups were divided according to economic needs and demands (*ibid.*, 2012). This policy of creating uneven economic distribution between ethnic groups further destabilised the stability of the country because ethnic groups like the Chinese were perceived as being wealthier than others (Yeoh and Rodney, 2006).

The geographical segregation based on labour function kept the Malay community and the immigrant communities (particularly Chinese) apart. The majority of the Malays resided in
rural and less developed east coast states. Meanwhile, the Chinese were concentrated in the urban and more developed west coast states. As Abdul Khalid (2014) points out:

*The segregation of different ethnic groups...reveals the gap as well as differences among the ‘races’. Because development during the colonial period focused on the urban centres, it was the Chinese who benefitted the most from development. The rural inhabitants, mainly the Malays were handicapped by poor educational facilities, poor medical and other social and economic infrastructure, which were better provided in the urban areas.*

This inequality led to unrest and bloody riots in May 1969 as the peak of dissatisfaction with poverty, inequitable economic arrangements (Mohammad, 2012) and ethnic segregation. Despite the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) forty years ago to seek growth in the hope of closing the gap between ethnic groups in Malaysia, the ethnic division remains until today.

**B. MATRIMONIAL AFFAIRS**

**Marriage Procedures in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, there are two categories of marriage procedure, namely the Islamic procedure for Muslim couples (governed by Family Law and Sharia Law) and the civil procedure for non-Muslims (governed by Family Law). The formal process for registration may differ under the state government. Muslims are required to follow the marriage administrative procedures according to Sharia Laws as well as undergo a marriage preparation course and HIV test. Among the main topics discussed in marriage course are: the foundation of human development (*aqeedah*[^3], *ibadah*[^4], *akhlaq*[^5], marriage and procedures), family management (family relationships, family resource management, health management and communication between a husband and wife) and family conflict resolution (pressure/stress management, pressure/stress management,

[^3]: Aqeedah is refers to belief in Allah or principle of faith.
[^4]: Ibadah is refers to or the religious duties of worship.
[^5]: Akhlaq is the practice of virtue, morality and manners according to Islamic scriptures.
conflict management, counselling services in the Islamic Religious Department and divorce procedures).

The marriage ceremony is a sacred event, which is very strictly a religious matter. It involves the Imam\(^6\) and the Wali\(^7\) as well as the family members. Islamic Law does not recognize cohabitation, and neither does it recognise same sex relationships. In some states, unmarried Muslim civil servants are evicted from government-owned housing if they are caught with their partners alone in a private place (The Telegraph, 2010).

For a non-Muslim who wants to marry a Muslim, the former must convert from his/her religion to Islam. He/she must refer to the State Religious Department or seek help from an Imam at the nearest mosque in the area. After this, the same marriage procedures for Muslims apply. An application for marriage in Malaysia needs to be forwarded to the authority concerned. There should also be confirmation by the relevant authority regarding the marital status of the couple. If the marriage itself is not registered in Malaysia, such as in an elopement or cross-border marriage, the married couples are not protected under Family Law (Zubir et al, 2016). While a formal process of marriage registration is required, wedding ceremonies are also conducted in accordance to the couple’s culture, tradition or religious customs. For Muslims, a wedding ceremony is an important event to inform the public about the new status for the groom and bride. In contrast, Hindu couples are solemnized when the marriage has been registered by a Registrar (Section 2 (1) of Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976). There is no legal requirement for Hindus to undergo customary rites and ceremonies before they may register their marriage. The only requirement for Indian couples in marriages is registration. It can be concluded that even though Hindu Customary Marriage does not take place, registration is sufficient for a marriage to be solemnized (Rajamickam, et al., 2012).

\(^6\) The Imam leads prayers in a mosque.
\(^7\) The Wali’s duty is to ensure that the proposed groom is a reliable and a trustworthy person
Marriages and Patriarchy

Culture and traditions play an important role in social stratification in Malaysia. The belief that male status is superior to female status still exists in some communities, especially Malay, Indian and Chinese. This value defines the gendered relationships in a marriage or intimate relationship. According to Che Soh (2010), a husband is acknowledged to have absolute authority over his wife including the right to abuse as a way of disciplining her. Women continue to be recognised only in terms of their relationship with others. For instance, in the Chinese culture, which is profoundly influenced by Confucian teaching, a woman has to obey her husband once married and to obey her son when she is widowed. When a girl is married, she traditionally belongs to her family-in-law. As a wife, she is not supposed to act against her husband’s will and should uphold all of his demands (ibid, 2010). Che Soh also adds that this pattern of belief exists in Indian and Malay cultures, particularly the values that associated with marital affairs such as those concerning the purpose of marriage, dowry, and spouses’ roles in the family.

Malay Marriage

Marriage is a contract between a man and a woman, whom he can legally marry following Islamic Laws. The Arabic term ‘zawaj’ (marriage) stands for association and coming together (Laluddin, et al., 2014). Islam strongly advocates marriage and there is no room for extramarital affairs in the Islamic social framework (Mohammed, 2012 in Laluddin, et al., 2014). Marriage is a sacred covenant that signifies love, mutual respect and understanding, and legalizes sexual intercourse between two individuals. The choice of bride or groom rests with the individuals. The ideal criteria to choose for a groom or a bride are relayed by Islamic scripture. According to the Prophet (in Ismail and AR., 2017):

Do not marry only for the sake of beauty; maybe the beauty becomes the cause of moral degradation. Do not marry even for the sake of wealth; maybe the wealth becomes the reason of insubordination. Marry on the grounds of religious devotion.
As for the Malays, their culture is rooted in the religion of Islam. Hoesni et al., (2012) investigates how urban Malays give meanings to love within marriage. According to their study, participants attending a compulsory premarital program reported that love in a marriage as having a strong relationship with God. Love within marriage and faith are therefore inseparable.

Mahar (dowry) in Islamic Law refers to the gift that must be given by the husband to the wife at the time of the wedding. According to the 1984 Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories), mahar refers to a payment from the husband to the wife that is legally due by Islamic Law at the solemnisation ceremony (akad nikah), either in the form of money or something that has monetary value such as gold. The giving of dowry is a symbol of the husband’s seriousness in marriage. It also reflects the love and willingness of the husband to live with the wife, and to sacrifice for the welfare of his family. It is also a sign of respect from the husband to the wife. Islam does not set maximum or minimum rates for the dowry, as it depends on the circumstances of the time, place and society. Nevertheless, Islam recommends moderation and not setting a rate that is too high or too low. Some families in Malaysia make the solemnisation process hard by raising the value of mahar for the bride. Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department (JAWI) urges both the bride and groom to discuss and agree to reduce the amount of mahar in order to allow the couple to start their married life in peace (Malaymail, 2016).

Both husband and wife have a distinctive role to play and hold equal rights in the family after marriage. The husband as a leader of the household is responsible for protecting and maintaining his wife, which is one of her basic rights. The wife is responsible for taking care of the husband and being obedient to the husband in marriage. The husband’s headship in relation to his family does not imply dictatorship over his wife (Naseef, 1999).
Malaysia is overemphasizing the punishment of a disobedient wife (Che Soh, 2010:617).

In Malaysia, religion is used and interpreted to justify a system which oppresses women. Patriarchal enforcement in this country is often maintained through the religious teachings and institutions that are taught by men and interpreted in particular ways (Che Asmah in Ging, 2016). Certain religious ‘teachers’ also manipulate the public understanding towards the notion of ‘obedient wife’ in Malay society. A case in point is the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) council that recently called for women to be allowed to fulfil their true function as homemakers, claiming that Malaysian family institutions were getting weaker due to rising number of divorces (Ging, 2016). Moreover, Sharia reforms in Malaysia also overprivileged a version of patriarchy which praises a new Malay-Muslim masculinity as an end to Islamization rather than as a condition of achieving family wellbeing. Sharia reforms of the past ten years in Malaysia reveal the excessive liberty and entitlements given to men within the rules of marriage, divorce and polygamy. In contrast, restrictive stipulations have been enhanced for women in their exercise of rights in marriage and divorce. What is being fashioned is a new Malay-Muslim masculinity which is based on conferred entitlements rather than responsibility-based, earned authority. Therefore, Fadiah (in Ging, 2016) argues:

The root cause behind the oppression of Muslim women in Malaysia lies with patriarchy and how Islam has been used as a tool by men to maintain power over women.

Until recently, many Malays believe that “heaven for a wife lies under her husband’s feet” is from Islamic teaching. In fact, the origin of this notion is unknown (some Malaysians believe it derives from Indian culture), but it rests on an assumption that the role of a husband is to be God for his wife. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, this assumption enables oppression of women that is perpetuated by societal beliefs.

Indian Marriages

Following Hindu Law (that has been implemented into Indian society in Malaysia after the arrival of Hinduism), Indian marriage is a sacrament and not considered a contract. In a
nuptial tie under Hindu law, a woman is not regarded as playing an active part and their consent is not a requirement of a Hindu marriage (Zahur, 2014). Marriage is perceived as the gift of the bride by her father to another guardian. The primary duty of giving a girl in marriage is the responsibility of the father. A woman was to depend on her father in childhood, on her husband as a young adult and on her sons in her old age (ibid., 2014). In fact, in strict observance, Hindu marriage does not only deny the women’s right to determine their spouse, but also makes them vulnerable to domestic violence. As Rajamickam, et al., (2012:151) argues:

*Hindu marriage tradition recognizes seven different types of marriage, ranging from the popularly known arranged marriages to the extremely rare and forced marriages through abduction. Arranged marriages are common with the consent of the bride and the bridegroom and the blessings of the elders. This is done by taking into some important considerations such as; caste, natal charts, kinship or family lineage, family background, financial status of the groom, appearance and character of the bride and the bridegroom, and the willingness of the parents.*

Meanwhile for Indian men, marriage puts them in a more noble position. The religious fundamental of Hindu marriage are referred to *Vedas* and *Manu Smriti*. In *Vedas*;

*a man is complete and is capable of performing a sacrifice only after obtaining a wife and having a son* (Young, 2001:29).

According to *Manu*;

*though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife* (Bhuiyan, 2010:161).

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8 “*Vedas are the compilation of ‘Shurti’, literally meaning what is heard and is believed to contain the very word of God*” (Jhavala, 2009:3)

9 Refer to footnote 3.
In a marriage the husband is perceived as ‘God’ whom a virtuous wife must always worship irrespective of his unruly behaviour. A wife cannot reject a husband for his infidelity (Zahur, 2014). As such, in domestic violence cases, this belief has kept abused wives in the violent relationship for a longer period of time than might be expected. Marriage signifies the end of maiden life for Hindu women and the relationship with their own parents becomes formal and minimal (Rajamickam, et. al, 2012).

*The bride normally moves from her parental home to her marital home after marriage, most often belonging to her parents-in-law. The normative Indian household follows a patrilocal and joint system, where parents, brothers, wives and children live together, but with strong gender segregation (Gangoli and Rew, 2011:422).*

As a son, a Hindu man is extremely valued, while a daughter-in-law can be seen as a threat to the strong maternal–son relationship (Derné, 1994):

*As young brides, women are considered insignificant within the marital household unless they bring dowry to ease their passage into the marital home. Dowry has traditionally been understood to be gifts by parents to daughters in upper caste Brahmin weddings, but is now an almost universal aspect of marriage negotiations in different communities and castes, and can take the form of jewellery, cash, property, household goods and a myriad of consumer items. In popular discourses, much mother-in-law violence against daughters-in-law has been understood as dowry related, with mothers-in-law projected as harassing and torturing their daughters-in-law, either to punish them for bringing in an inadequate dowry, or to pressurise them into asking their parents for more dowry (Gangoli and Rew, 2011:422).*

Besides being threatened by the culture of taxing dowry and harsh treatment by the mother-in-law, Indian women in traditional marriages are trapped in an ‘eternal’ marriage bond. Marriage in Hinduism is believed to be the most important ritual in a Hindu’s life, with an indissoluble bond, and continues even in the next world (Agarwala, 2000). Therefore, a married woman is expected to wear the *thaali* until her husband’s death (Rajamickam, et al.,
Thaali is a sacred thread which the bridegroom ties to the neck of the bride during the wedding ceremony (Rajamickam, et al., 2012).

The word thaali literally means an auspicious thread. It symbolizes the inseparable bond between a husband and a wife and also considered as a protection from any evil. It is usually a gold pendant strung from a yellow thread prepared with turmeric, a string of black beads or simply a gold chain. Three knots symbolize three different aspects of a married woman. The first knot represents wifely obedience to her husband, the second to her parents and the third represents her respect for God (Rajamickam, et al., 2012:152).

Empirical findings and debates about the nature of Indian patriarchy in Malaysia are rarely heard, and may be inaccessible in Malay or English. The extent to which Hindu patriarchy works as a medium for domestic violence in Malaysia will be elaborated further in Chapter 7 of this study. In other marriage arrangements, legal outcomes around Muslim-non-Muslim family litigations (through either civil or Sharia courts) have evidenced the inability of the state to protect the welfare of the family.

C. THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT (DVA) 1994

In Malaysia, the legal protection against domestic violence is stipulated under the Domestic Violence Act 1994. Before the DVA was drawn up, most cases pertaining to domestic violence for non-Muslims in Malaysia were placed under the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act (AMU) 1976, while domestic violence cases for Muslims were placed under the Islamic family law (Tumin, 2006). Besides the two laws, there are other laws that are used to address domestic violence, but they do not regard domestic violence as crime (Tumin, 2006). The DVA aims to standardise and accommodate other existing laws, which are applicable for Muslims and non-Muslims, while establishing domestic violence as a crime. In other words, domestic violence is not a private matter, but it is a public issue.

DVA was implemented after a decade of campaigning by a feminist coalition of women’s NGOs along with partners in government. According to Amirthalingam (2003:16), the root of
this movement is the establishment of the Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) in 1982 and
the setting up of the first shelter for abused women in Malaysia. Within the first year, WAO
had given refuge to 57 women (Josiah, 2003). Since 1999, WAO shelters 100 women,
handles 1,800 counselling calls and renders face-to-face counselling to 50 women annually
(ibid., 2003). The movement became more powerful in 1985 when various NGOs and
individuals came together to form a Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), which
organised a workshop on issues related to rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment,
prostitution and the negative portrayal of women in the media. This initiative created a
greater climate of awareness and a further workshop was organised in collaboration with the
National Council of Women’s Organisations (NCWO).

A Joint Committee was initiated by the Association of Women’s Lawyers to draft the
proposed domestic violence act in 1989. It was prepared in 1990 and submitted in 1992 to the
Minister of National Unity and Social Development as well as the Attorney General. After
further negotiations, the Domestic Violence Bill was passed in Parliament in 1994 but was
unable to be implemented due to concerns over its application to Muslims. The Act was
finally implemented on 1 June 1996 after the Pusat Islam (Islamic Centre) declared that the
Act did not conflict with Shariah law (Amirthalingam, 2003). The definition of domestic
violence in the Act means the commission of any of the following acts (Domestic Violence

a) wilfully or knowingly placing, or attempting to place, the victim in fear of physical
injury;
b) causing physical injury to the victim by such act which is known or, ought to have
been known would result in physical injury;
c) compelling the victim by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or
otherwise, from which the victim has a right to abstain;
d) confining or detaining the victim against the victim’s will; or
e) causing mischief or destruction or damage to property with intent to cause, or
knowing that it is likely to cause distress or annoyance to the victim, by a person
against; i) his or her spouse; ii) his or her former spouse; iii) a child iv) an
incapacitated adult; or v) any other member of the family.
Section 2 under Laws of Malaysia: Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act (521), (1996) refers to the term *spouse* as a person who has gone through a form of ceremony which is recognized as a marriage ceremony according to the religion or custom of the parties concerned, notwithstanding that such a ceremony is not registered (Laws of Malaysia, 2012). Thus, the definition of “spouse” in this Act does not include informal relationships including dating relationships and unmarried sexual relationships, and thus does not offer legal protection to those women.

The Act was then amended twice in 2012 and 2017. In 2012, the revised Act included mental abuse in the definition of domestic violence and means that offenders involved in domestic violence can be detained and arrested without warrant (Laws of Malaysia, 2012). An investigation will be conducted and the Interim Protection Order (IPO) is issued to protect the survivors. (Laws of Malaysia, 2012). The IPO is a crucial document that protects domestic violence survivors from further abuse as it notifies the alleged abuser to refrain from any acts of violence, including threats. Police can help obtain an IPO for a domestic violence survivor within 24-hours of a police report.

The Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill 2017 was also passed by the Parliament. The Bill significantly improves protection for survivors of abuse, expands the definition of domestic violence, and improves provisions on counselling (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, 2017). The expanded definition protects against: misappropriating property, which causes distress; threatening, which causes distress or fear for safety; or communicating (including electronically) with the survivor to insult modesty (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, 2017). These amendments also enable some Welfare Department (JKM) officers to issue an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) to provide immediate protection to victims of domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence could get the EPO directly from the department’s offices or they could also contact the 24-hour hotline. EPO would provide protection to domestic violence victims by preventing the perpetrator from hurting the victim, inciting others to commit domestic violence or the perpetrator from entering a safe place, shelter, residence, joint residence or alternative residence. EPO is effective for a period of one week and if the perpetrator commits violence against the protected person, he could be liable to a fine of RM4,000 or jail of not more than one year, or both (Patho Rahman et al., 2017).
According to the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (2017), much work remains to be done to improve the Act, particularly several aspects such as: criminalising stalking in the Penal Code and recognising stalking in the DVA; recognising abuse between unmarried intimate partners; extending the maximum duration of POs to protect survivors when the court proceedings are over; enabling survivors to get long term protection without needing to press criminal charges against the abuser. In addition, law efficiency depends on the enforcement agencies particularly Royal Police Malaysia, public hospitals, the Welfare Department, the Attorney General’s Chambers, and the court system that must receive sufficient resources, training, and supervision to implement the law (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, 2017). Chapter 8 will explain how the enforcement agencies intervene in domestic violence based on the empirical findings.

D. STUDIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA

While research on domestic violence in Malaysia has been scarce, many of the studies that do exist are not able to be included in this review because they have a different working definition of referring to violence within the family. The limited study of domestic violence as gender-based violence in Malaysia is demonstrated below. Previous studies struggle to account for and explain fundamental issues such as prevalence, nature, patterns of violence and formal intervention from the government and NGOs. These studies were contributed by researchers in the field of medical, global studies, social work, psychology, health sciences and policy studies. The following first explains problems with data in Malaysia, before giving an overview of domestic violence studies in Malaysia.

Statistics on domestic violence in Malaysia have long been the subject of debate due to several issues with data. Unlike other countries, the definition of domestic violence in Malaysia not only refers to women and the spousal relationship, but also includes a child, an incapacitated adult or any other member of the family as victims. Therefore, the statistics do not only include gender-based violence. Addressing violence against women based on such statistics is therefore problematic. Moreover, there are other factors that contribute to the problematic national data on the prevalence of domestic violence (The National Report on
Violence and Health Malaysia, 2006). First, the statistics only take into account cases of violence against women in a legal relationship. Second, this type of abuse is hugely underreported. Third, the data collection from different institutions such as police departments, hospitals, and welfare agencies is disorganised (Shuib et al., 2013). Reliable statistics on domestic violence prevalence in Malaysia are thus unavailable.

Some scholars are striving to address this issue with data on domestic violence in Malaysia in order to respond to what is known as “a dearth of comparable data” by WHO (2005 in Shuib et al., 2013). Researchers such as Abdullah et al. (1995) and Shuib et al., (2013) undertook research on prevalence on domestic violence in Malaysia, while Jahanfar et al., (2007) explored the prevalence of domestic violence among pregnant women. There were 1221 respondents nationwide involved in Abdullah et al.’s (1995) study. The result shows 36% percent of women over the age of fifteen had experienced physical abuse at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends. Since then, no prevalence study on domestic violence has involved such a large number of respondents (with exception Women’s Development Research Centre or KANITA research) (Shuib et al., 2013).

The study carried out by KANITA involved 3440 female respondents with 1409 (40.9%) respondents from the rural areas and 2025 (59.1%) from urban areas areas (Shuib et al., 2013). The results suggest that 205 respondents (7.8%) experienced emotional abuse, physical violence was suffered by 132 (5.0%) while only 46 respondents (1.7%) reported that they suffered from sexual abuse. Shuib, et al. (2013) point out that these low prevalence figures, particularly for sexual abuse, are not surprising because intimate partner violence is known to be underreported. This can be clearly seen to contradict the research findings in 1990 that an estimated 847,000 people in the country knew of at least one close female relative such as a mother or a sister who had been abused (Abdullah et al, 1995 in Mohd Hashim and Endut, 2009). Therefore, it seems obvious that the low prevalence of domestic violence in some studies does not illustrate the real number of cases.

Similarly, the research carried out by Jahanfar et al., (2007) found low prevalence (4.5%) of domestic violence among 134 pregnant women who came for medical treatment at Ipoh General Hospital in Perak state. By using a cross-sectional research design, there were 70
participants from a prenatal clinic and 64 participants from a postpartum ward. A face to face interview in three different languages (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) was conducted randomly, and all pregnant women who attended the prenatal clinic or postpartum ward were included in the study. However, for those who were dealing with mental illness, severe pain or where there was a language barrier, they were excluded. This study also found a relationship between domestic violence and unplanned pregnancies. Jahanfar et al. (2007) therefore suggest that health-care providers should be aware of the high prevalence of abused women seeking an abortion.

Moreover, there are two studies that explore the nature and patterns of domestic violence for the victims or survivors who sought treatment at hospital (Mohd Hashim and Endut, 2009) and obtained support from the NGO such as WAO (Awang and Hariharan, 2011). A study carried out by Mohd Hashim and Endut (2009) analyses the nature and patterns of violence against women in Malaysia based on data from One Stop Centre (OSCC) at three different states of hospitals in Pulau Pinang, Melaka and Kuala Lumpur. OSCC is a collaborative organization between governmental agencies and NGOs that is linked to most of the hospitals in Malaysia. This agency helps survivors or victims to fight against any forms of violence such as domestic violence, rape, sodomy, and child abuse. Two datasets were analysed that consisted of brief statistics of abused women patients who sought hospital treatment, and the particular details of 206 patients. The study shows that survivors of domestic violence came from various ethnic, religious, age and academic backgrounds. In terms of ethnicity, most of the victims are Malay and abused by their husbands. The most significant finding of this study is that only the victims with severe physical injuries that require immediate medical attention came to hospital. Hence, Mohd Hashim and Endut (2009) suggest, it is possible that many more abused women with non physical injuries or not severe “enough” out there do not come for treatment or disclose the incident. Implicitly, this finding suggests a reason for the low prevalence of domestic violence among pregnant women (Jahanfar et al., 2007) who came to hospital for medical treatment.

In relation to the ethnic composition of those who sought help from refuges, the highest proportion is Indian, followed by Malay and Chinese (Awang and Hariharan, 2011). These figures come from analysis of 164 WAO case files in 2002 to 2005. Indian survivors
constitute 61% of the total cases, while the proportion of Malay and Chinese survivors is 22% and 17% (Awang and Hariharan, 2011). It is important to understand the reasons behind the help seeking behaviour for each ethnic group in Malaysia. For Hashim and Endut (2008), there are two possibilities for these findings. First, a certain culture contributes to more pervasiveness of help-seeking for Indians compared to other ethnic groups. Second, restricted support from family members or friends makes these women more dependent on support from formal help providers. For the low reporting trends among Chinese survivors, Hashim and Endut (2008) argue that there are three characteristics that are associated with Chinese, such as having a better economic background than other ethnic groups, a better family support system, and that revealing family problems in public is culturally taboo for the Chinese. Moreover, religion plays an important role in shaping the comparable pattern between Malays that are predominantly Muslims, Chinese that are predominantly Buddhist and Indians that are predominantly Hindu (Hashim and Endut, 2008).

On the other hand, Awang and Hariharan (2011) examine the determinants of domestic violence in Malaysia by looking at demographic and marital capital factors. Based on the analysis of 164 case files from WAO in the period 2002 to 2005, they found three significant determinants of the level of domestic violence: the age of the perpetrator, the income status of the survivor, and the number of children. For the age of perpetrator, the data demonstrate that the older men tend to commit daily abuse more than younger men, whereas younger men commit it one to three times per week. In terms of the level of income, length of relationship (marriage or cohabitation) was found to have no correlation with the level of violence. Conversely, the number of children increases with the level of violence. These findings are therefore helpful to understand the underlying circumstances of violence such as social, cultural, and legal aspects (Awang and Hariharan, 2011:464).

Furthermore, Abdul Ghani (2014) realised the major problem in the prevalence of domestic violence in Malaysia is obscured by the under-reporting of cases. Therefore she examines in-depth lived realities of Malaysian women in abusive relationships by listening to their stories and understanding their domestic life situations. This research then suggested ideas, strategies and information to prevent domestic violence in Malaysia. The qualitative study was carried out to understand the survivors’ views on the impacts of domestic violence, obstacles that
prevent their disclosure, and useful support resources. In relation to this, semi-structured interviews were administered with 25 women who identified as victims and survivors of abusive relationship by their husbands/ex-husbands. Almost all of the participants were Muslim women from five different states in Malaysia; Kedah, Pulau Pinang, the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. The agencies and professionals who work with abused women served as mediators to recruit participants. The research findings show that many of the participants are reluctant to disclose their abusive relationship and tend to keep their experience of violence private from others. This is due to several reasons such as the fear of negative perceptions, concern about children’s well-being, feeling responsible in provoking violence and realising insufficient knowledge on the support services available for domestic violence victims in Malaysia. Therefore, this research concluded that cultural and religious beliefs play an important role, particularly in shaping the way that abused women perceive experiences of violence. The survivors interpreted violence as an inspiration for submission to God and finding spiritual strength. Hence, the disclosure of violence is even harder when the victims misunderstand Islamic concepts such as disobedience to the male partner. This research suggests further investigation is needed into the provision of resources to domestic violence survivors. This study shows the nature of domestic violence in Malaysian families, and that cultural values as well as religious beliefs upheld by the Malaysian community are greatly associated with its occurrence.

Along similar lines, Chang and Burfoot (2014) view cultural barriers as an important influence on provision of help to victims, from the perspective of social workers within a domestic violence care organisation in Kuala Lumpur. This qualitative study conducted interviews with social workers to learn from their personal experiences of working with domestic violence victims from different cultural backgrounds. The data was analysed using an ecological model and intersectional theory. The ecological model serves as an analytical tool because of the need to view people and environments as a unitary system within a particular cultural and historic context, while intersectional theory argues that people have multiple and layered identities. Five main areas are identified which acted as barrier to the provision of services (language, the client’s religion or set of beliefs, isolation, gender stereotyping and laws and regulations), and a further two themes were added after analysis (ethical dilemmas and client-based needs). The study found that despite the effect of culture
on the abused women’s help seeking behaviour, the practices of the organisation generally did not consider the cultural background of a client.

Some empirical studies have explored the relationship between experiencing domestic violence and developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Malaysia. Phillips et al. (2006) argue that relatively little data exist on post-trauma reactions among abused women in non-western countries, despite the emergence of a cross-cultural perspective on family violence and trauma globally. Therefore, Phillips et al. (2006) conducted a study that represents a preliminary effort to assess the psychological impact of partner abuse in a sample of non-western women with reference to the symptom criteria that define PTSD. Semi-structured interviews and standardized measures to assess post-trauma morbidity were administered to abused women. Their responses were compared with a sample of US women who also reported partner violence. The majority of women in both samples reported severe levels of distress and met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These findings suggest that psychological problems that women face after partner abuse may be similar in many respects, despite political, geographical, or cultural differences. This study raises an urgent need for further study of residents in Malaysian shelters and the appropriateness of the therapeutic services to address post-trauma issues.

Che Din et al. (2010) conducted a cross-sectional survey study of 40 women in two shelters in Malaysia from 2007 to 2008, which includes measures of the detailed Assessment of posttraumatic Stress. The aim of the study is to examine the prevalence and factors influencing PTSD among a sample of help-seeking women experiencing domestic violence. Results showed that 60% of subjects exhibited patterns of symptoms consistent with the diagnosis of PTSD. The most prominent posttraumatic symptoms reported were re-experience, avoidance, dissociative responses, and symptoms of increased arousal. Post-trauma risk factors seemed to play important role in determine on how they adapt to the abusive situations. Both negative appraisals about themselves and self blame for the abusive situations were positively associated with increased tendency to develop PTSD. The greater use of an optimism coping style and the higher quality social support appeared to lead to a significantly reduced tendency of developing PTSD. Negative appraisals about themselves were found to be the strongest positive predictor of PTSD. However, type of intensity of

64
abuse did not indicate any significant relationship with PTSD. The findings highlighted the need for service providers to screen and educate survivors of domestic violence with respect to PTSD. The study also emphasized the importance of negative appraisals as a factor that contribute to the maintenance or persistence of PTSD. The current findings suggest that service providers should continue to assist the survivors in developing positive coping skills and improve their social support networks. Cognitive-behavioural treatment approaches seem to be particularly relevant for the cognitive distortions commonly presence in survivors of domestic violence.

Putit’s (2008) qualitative study investigates women’s experiences of being abused and staying in refuges from service users’ and providers’ viewpoints. This research used case studies of two refuges in Malaysia that voluntarily participated. This study integrates a human ecological system model and ‘Women in Crisis 3 Stages Intervention’ concept that was developed from the women’s experience in the refuges. Interviews were undertaken with residents and workers at the refuge, and with professionals, individuals, organisational activists and other social workers who deal with domestic violence. Field notes and secondary data from the refuges that took part and other relevant organisations were also compiled. The results show that contradictory conflicts and constraints faced by abused women arise from societal values and beliefs in Malaysian society. Therefore, there is a critical need to address wider interconnected support within the women's ecological systems.

In contrast with Putit (2008), Chooi’s (2013) study focused on abused women who had not sought refuge from the domestic violence shelter in Malaysia. This study aims to explore Malaysian women survivors’ experiences of leaving an abusive relationship, particularly how they were able to overcome the obstacles of leaving and how they utilized resources that enabled them to leave. This qualitative study conducted in-depth interviews with seven women survivors from middle class and diverse ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indian and Punjabi). It claims that these middle-class survivors mostly are ‘free’ from violence and able to leave for good at the first attempt through their courage and awareness, their ability to draw upon the available resources, their dependency on religious beliefs and their focus on rebuilding plans. Chooi (2013) further concludes that middle-class women were able to support themselves and generally had support from their family and friends once they
disclosed the abuse. This study suggests, the experiences of leaving domestic violence are different, mainly structured by the ethnicity and class of abused women.

Some researchers, such as Tucker (2012) and Othman and Mat Adenan (2008), have highlighted that negative practices of formal help providers in dealing with domestic violence are also connected to societal or personal values and beliefs embedded more widely in Malaysian society. Tucker (2012) examined specific problems and potential solutions for the Malaysian police force that has historically been poor in responding to domestic violence and has never been the subject of academic research. Interviews were conducted in 2012 with Malaysian domestic violence victims, local women’s rights NGO leaders, social workers, lawyers and police officers. The women interviewed were current residents of WAO’s shelter and were all survivors of domestic abuse. The problems found were based on the lack of understanding of domestic violence, and a common unwillingness to respond to the problem by the police force. Victims of domestic violence felt they could not rely on the police, seeing them unwilling to help, which in turn meant that victims were less likely to seek help. Overall, this study concludes that the police force’s attitude is actually leaving victims more vulnerable.

In 2002, Othman and Mat Adenan (2008) conducted a survey of 108 clinicians and nursing staff of the outpatient, casualty and antenatal clinics at the University of Malaya Medical Centre using a self-administered questionnaire. These clinics are where patients make their first contact with health care providers. All health care providers who were working at any of the three clinics during the survey time were invited to participate. The survey aimed to access the knowledge, attitudes and practices of primary health care providers on how they identify and manage the domestic violence in a hospital based primary health care setting. The results found that 62% of the clinicians and 66.9% of the nursing staff view domestic violence among their patients as very infrequent or infrequent. More than half of the clinicians (68.9%) ask their patients about domestic violence, whereas 26.2% never bother to ask their patients. For clinicians, there are several constraints on asking their patients about domestic violence, including time factors (66%), concern about offending the patient (52.5%) and being unsure of how to ask (32.8%). In terms of attitudes, victim-blaming responses were found to exist in 28% of the clinicians and 51.1% of the nursing staff. These results appear to
be connected to knowledge of the participants: it was reported that less than a third of the participants were aware of any written protocol for domestic violence management, while only 20% of the clinicians and 6.8% of the nursing staff had participated in an educational course linked to domestic violence. Therefore, this study concludes that the uncommonness of positive attitudes and practices among health provider with regard to domestic violence identification and management could probably be connected to their lack of knowledge and inappropriate personal values regarding domestic violence.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the public sphere of Malaysia in which culture and religion are highly politicised and the society are divided by ethnicity. Besides the geographical location of Malaysia, this chapter has specifically described the ethnic composition, religions and culture with particular focus on two ethnic groups (Malay and Indian) that are involved in this study. The explanation of the influence of Hinduism on Malay culture is complex. In fact, some of the patriarchal aspects of Malay society are connected to these Hindu influences. Patriarchy among Malays is also embedded by misuse of Islam, whereas patriarchy among Indians is deemed to inhere within traditional religion. The chapter explains the issue of matrimonial affairs and specifically the procedures to resolve marriage conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim couples, which are stipulated under different judicial systems. Muslims are governed by the Shariah Law whereas non-Muslims are governed by the family law. In the case of domestic violence, Muslims and non-Muslims are stipulated under the Domestic Violence Act 1994.

It is clear that cultural complexities due to ethnic diversity in Malaysia need to be taken seriously to fight for women’s justice. Generalisations cannot be made about all Malaysian women and cultural specificities cannot be ignored, nor can explanations of violence in Malaysia be reduced to stereotypical depictions of culture, as discussed in the previous chapter. In this context, therefore, the need for postcolonial perspectives in theory and practice that focus on cultural differences are apparent in contextualising the domestic violence discourse that have been proposed in the west. Central to this approach is the recognition that diverse women survivors possess valuable knowledge with regards to their experiences and the decisions that affect their safety. Postcolonial approach of domestic
violence is pivotal for understanding how interventions with diverse women survivors in non-western context can be re-worked with diverse women survivors themselves, through an understanding of domestic violence in non-western contexts.

Furthermore, recent studies on domestic violence in Malaysia still focus primarily on getting to the bottom of problems pertaining to domestic violence statistics, the frequency of physical abuse and the ineffective interventions of service providers. Most studies do not discuss the spatial and cultural experiences of domestic violence by women across different cultures. Domestic violence with a feminist postcolonial approach has never been a focus of study by the social and cultural geographer in the country. Theoretical debates concerning postcolonialism has been totally ignored by domestic violence researchers in Malaysia. The debate on this topic has been disappointingly muted due to the complexity of diverse cultures in Malaysia. This make things worse when the voices of the women are already neglected in their own culture (such as in traditional Hindu culture). Through innovative use of participatory action research, the voice of the diverse and traumatised survivors is foregrounded, and the spotlight is turned on the unspeakable nature of domestic violence, for the first time in the context of Malaysia in an effort to address significant researches gaps. The next chapter explains the process by which the research attempts to hear the voices of diverse women survivors through a detailed discussion of the research methodology and dissemination of the findings.
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe the need to give voice to the women’s experience through participatory research. The research adopted participatory methods in order to explore the spatially and culturally specific experiences of domestic violence among survivors from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. For this purpose, the fieldwork was conducted with abused women who had sought refuge from the Women’s Aid Organisation’s (WAO) shelter in a large urban area over a period of three months between 1st July to 8th October 2015.

This qualitative study used participatory methods such as fragmented storytelling, in-depth interviews, photovoice, participant observation and crafting with ten women survivors from different class and ethnic groups, which will be discussed in this chapter. My position as a researcher is also discussed in terms of its impact on the data obtained in this study. I explain also share my own experience of complete immersion of the researcher and dealing with traumatic data repeatedly over a long period of time, which has been described by Coddington (2016) as leading to contagious trauma. This experience has led me to see the severity of the trauma experienced by abused women, and also gives me an insight into existing domestic violence policy and its limitations. Research dissemination is therefore a crucial aspect of the study, which seeks to represent women’s experiences and raise awareness of the nature of domestic violence via mural art. Dissemination aims to highlight awareness among service providers and to shed light on the reality of domestic violence among the local community. I discuss the process of completing the mural, as well as the challenges in producing it. In addition, issues regarding ethics, inappropriate methods, and the sample limitations are also discussed in this chapter.
A. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Prior to the fieldwork, ethical consideration involving four major parties was conducted. First, I obtained the approval from the Research Ethics Geography Sub-Committee (REGS), Durham University. I also completed a Departmental risk assessment form, a University fieldwork authorisation to determine the level of risks associated with the destination where the fieldwork is to be undertaken. Researching sensitive topics on violence against women raises important ethical and methodological challenges (Pain, 2014b). There are issues of safety, confidentiality and problems of disclosure. This research applies a feminist methodology for researching intimate violence, following Pain (2014b) and World Health Organisation published guidelines for addressing ethical and safety issues in domestic violence research (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005).

According to Ellsberg and Heise (2005), interviewers' skills and training are very important to deal with women who have experienced violence. Before the fieldwork, I was trained by Professor Rachel Pain in the principles of interaction that consist of empathy and congruence to protect the psychological well-being of both participants and researchers. I learned how the researcher (or interviewer) should know how to give appropriate responses verbally or non-verbally. For example, in some cultures and religions, any body contact is very sensitive or rude, while for others, body contact is the symbol of empathy.

Second, I sought approval from the refuge centre. It is important to adhere to the Women’s Aid Organisation’s (WAO) confidentiality advice, so that the survivors’ security is guaranteed. WAO had given me the opportunity to conduct the study via internship from 1st July 2015 until 8th October 2015 after obtaining verbal consent from the advocacy manager and executive director and writing official letter by mail (see Appendix 1). The social worker in the shelter also asked me to sign the confidentiality forms to guarantee that I would keep clients’ names and addresses confidential. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study, also for confidentiality purposes.

Third, and most importantly, is ethical consideration of my engagement with the participants. I approached all the participants during volunteering works. After the survivors gave verbal
consent to participate in this study (and approval from the services manager of the shelter discussed in section G), I made an appointment with the women to have face-to-face interviews. The participants were briefed about the research’s aim, the study procedures, potential risk for the participants, rights to confidentiality and to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without the need to give any explanation. They were then given a copy of informed consent sheet (see Appendix 2), which outlines their consent for the interviews to be recorded and allow the researcher to gain access to their records held by the WAO, before signing the sheet. Most of the survivors had signed the consent form (see Appendix 3) that allows WAO to use their records to educate the public regarding domestic violence and improve the Domestic Violence Act 1994.

During the fieldwork I was provided with a quiet, private room for the interview sessions. Some survivors were more comfortable being interviewed in other ‘private’ places, such as outside the shelter, because of a more informal atmosphere. Through my observation, the survivors tried many ways to hide their true feelings in the informal setting, by laughing wholeheartedly or making a sad story into a funny one. I told the participants that I am aware that the interview would touch sensitive issues, but it is important for them to share their experience through this study so that the community will better understand issues on domestic violence. Since we had built up rapport over a period of weeks, the survivors were comfortable with the situation, and with me as their interviewer. I did not feel awkward about asking them questions and felt able to communicate with empathy and a non-judgmental attitude. I had never worked with abused women before, but as a neighbour, I had prior experience of helping an abused in-house maid who had almost become a victim of rape. Also, I had full support from the WAO director and manager, and I was able to get help from the trained staff in the refuge in any aspects that were beyond my ability as a researcher.

There are also some ethical considerations in the use of photovoice, such as the risk of privacy invasion. Prior to the photovoice project, I explained to the participants the objectives of the project, which are to gather material through which to discuss and provoke conversation about domestic violence, and I also described the specific methodological techniques that would be used to minimize participants’ risks and to maximize benefits to them. Because the photographs in the photovoice exercise (see below) would be shared with
others, I reminded them to not take pictures of faces or places that others could identify. I then obtained signed permission from the participants to release the photos (see Appendix 4), so that their photos could be posted or used in the exhibition, digital stories, or the website.

Finally, ethical considerations also informed the work on the mural art project, which aims to highlight awareness among service providers and to shed light on the reality of domestic violence among the local community. This project involves collaboration of various parties such as the local authority, the non-governmental organisation (WAO), academic (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris) and Nippon Paint Sdn. Bhd. I sought approval through WAO and from the Shah Alam City Council (SACC) local authority for the mural art project in Shah Alam. After submitting the proposal, sketches, timeline and feasibility of the project, SACC granted approval to run the project. In fact, SACC had recommended a number of locations within the area of administration that are relevant with the purpose of this mural project. Because the project is part of the participatory research, this study always prioritises the participants’ view. The mural project involved a local artist, so I acted as the mediator between the participants and the artist. There was no direct communication between the artist and participants due to confidentiality. I discussed and presented the ideas before and after the creation of mural sketches by the artist with the participants in order to acquire their feedback comments and approval.

In regard to data protection, no outside party has access to my data. Diary and notes taken during the fieldwork were typed in Microsoft word files. I made sure all the hard copy data are scanned and the soft copy data are stored in encrypted form. Meanwhile, the original copies in the form of hard data were destroyed prior to my return to the UK. I carried all the data in a password-protected hard disk via a laptop, which was transported in hand luggage upon leaving and returning to Durham. In Durham, I transcribed the tapes on my own and stored the data in secured files.
B. SAMPLES AND SAMPLING

The women survivors participating in this research project were recruited through Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO), a Malaysian non-governmental organisation located in a large urban area, which provides shelter to abused women and their children.

There are only 6 refuge centres for domestic violence victims in this country (Putit, 2008). The WAO was the first refuge ever built in Malaysia in 1982. Taking into account its experience in assisting abused women and its openness to research, as stated in its website, I chose the WAO refuge as the study site and got a positive response from them. The initial contact with WAO in Malaysia started in early 2015 through emails and social media with the internship management and social workers at the refuges. They suggested that I apply as an intern in the WAO refuge by filling out the application form and submitting my CV with a support letter from my two supervisors. The application form requests information such as the reason for applying as an intern at WAO, my intention to learn through the internship and offer volunteer experience relevant to my position as an intern and additional skills that I may offer to WAO during my internship.

On the first day of the internship, I had explained the purpose and method of study to the Executive Director and Advocacy Manager. After detailed discussions, they agreed to support my study in terms of accessibility to resources at the WAO shelter, in the hope that my research will improve their effort to have effective interventions for the abused women. The social workers gave me the chance to become a volunteer. This process made it easier for me to approach the refuge occupants. I was able to discern their readiness to become a participant in this study, especially in terms of their ability to speak Malay (for the Indians) and the effects of psychological abuse on them before selecting them as the study sample. There were some occupants who did not wish to interact with anyone due to the effects of psychological abuse, such as amnesia. Most of these women have difficulty sleeping and are so traumatised that they cannot get up early in the morning. At this point, the participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The sample includes 10 married women who were residents of the WAO refuge. Participants are of Malaysian nationality, their ethnic groups include 4 Malays and 6 Indians, they were aged between 21 and 41 at the time of the research.
and were from varied socio-economic backgrounds. In general, participants have a high educational level and had held good jobs (see Table 1). As the participants’ backgrounds show, domestic violence can happen to anyone, transcending different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels. The common view that domestic violence is largely a consequence of poverty and low education level is not accurate in relation to this sample.

The majority of the Malay participants in this study are Muslim. Of the Indian participants, one is Christian and the rest are Hindu. In terms of religion, some women, such as Usha, did not declare their religion because the information about religion in her identification documents is contradictory with the one that she has been practising. Usha was forced to change her religion to Islam after marrying the perpetrator. In fact, she was a pious Hindu. On the other hand, Shalini did not declare her religion because she has lost her faith in Hinduism, after experiencing total helplessness in the abusive relationship. The interviewees went through different processes of marriage including arranged marriage, elopement and deception (discussed in subsequent chapters). Most have children with the perpetrators, except Mariam and Ashna. During the fieldwork, Harini and Fazlin were pregnant. In terms of the duration of violence taking place in their relationships, this judgment is subjective; most women only take into account the times that perpetrators had committed severe physical violence, so emotional, psychological and ‘milder’ forms of physical violence tend to be discounted as violence.

Like the abused women, the perpetrators also came from diverse culture and socioeconomic backgrounds (see Table 2). Table 2 also shows that domestic violence is not necessarily related to alcohol consumption, as widespread popular belief would have it; in fact, some of the Malay perpetrators do not consume alcohol, partly because it is prohibited in Islam. Neither is domestic abuse necessarily related to perpetrator’s criminal history. In case of Faizah and Fazlin, both perpetrators had no previous criminal record. However, factors such as occupation, criminal record and substance abuse determine the space of violence, which is described in Chapter 6.
Finally, Table 3 shows the time spent with each participant in the shelter. This varied between participants. All participants contributed to the data every day for more than a week, throughout the fieldwork. However, I could only meet Fika and Fazlin over two days before they left the refuge.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Working experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Length of violence</th>
<th>Pregnancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Lab assistant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2 sons and 1 daughter from the first marriage (8,7,5 yo)</td>
<td>Elopement</td>
<td>1.5 year</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fika</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Estate clerk</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2 sons (7,5 yo)</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fazlin</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Full time university student</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1 daughter (1 yo)</td>
<td>Elopement</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faizah</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2 sons and 1 daughter (12, 7, and 1 yo)</td>
<td>Elopement</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harini</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>SPM (equal to GCSE)</td>
<td>Homemaker by force</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1 daughter from the first relationship (5 yo) and 2 daughters 1 son (3,2,1.5 yo) with the abuser</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chumy</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3 daughters and 2 sons (17, 15, 14, 13, 11 yo)</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Registered (Cohabited for 2 years before registered 2/7/2015)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rekha</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Quit university</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1 month son</td>
<td>Arranged marriage</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1.5 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalini</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Administration Assistant</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2 daughters, 1 son (4,3,1month)</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashna</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>No child</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usha</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>SPM (equal to GCSE)</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1 daughter (4 yo)</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participants' details
Race | Malay | Indian
---|---|---
Perpetrator of | Mariam | Fika | Fazlin | Faizah | Harini | Chumy | Rekha | Shalini | Ashna | Usha

Occupation | Jobless | Own the estate | Land surveyor | Jobless | Car wash helper and safety guard | Lorry Driver | Jobless | Own business | Military officer | Taxi driver

Criminal record | Drug addict (Marijuana and Ice) | Drug addict (Syabu) | No | No | Drug addict Snatch theft, Pimp, gangsterism | Drug addict | Drug addict Gangsterism | Drug addict Corruption | Kidnapped a woman Gangsterism | Drug addict (Syabu) Kidnapped a woman Gangsterism

Substance | - | - | - | - | Alcohol | Alcohol | Alcohol | Alcohol | Alcohol | Alcohol

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
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<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Total weeks</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Chumy</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Faizah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*2nd week of July 2015 was public holiday for Eid

Table 2: Perpetrators’ details

Table 3: The duration of fieldwork for each participant
C. POSITIONALITY

During the fieldwork, the staff in the shelter introduced me to the survivors as an intern. This position created a barrier between me and them. This is because interns in WAO are often stereotyped as ‘feminist’, middle class, from overseas universities, and preferring to use English as the first language. Most women (regardless of ethnicity) at that moment were rather awkward about starting a conversation with me. Then, the management of the shelter gave me a task assignment to facilitate engagement with the volunteers, and I was asked to teach them computing. The process of building rapport was easier once participants recognised me as a volunteer, as it made it easier for them to approach me and for us get to know each other.

As a Malay-Muslim woman, I am an outsider to the Indian participants, especially in terms of culture and religion. Besides, being a wife to a non-abusive husband, this means I have different experiences from all of the women. However, some of the Islamic values that have been instigated in me since childhood, such as avoiding pride, have shaped my character, and this has helped me to connect with and understand my interviewees. Pride is an egoistic trait that includes characteristics such as being self-conceited, looking down upon and underestimating others, as well as being censorious or fault-finding. Among the causes contributing to this characteristic are property, position, knowledge and lineage. Avoiding pride is important because some survivors feel inferior when they are communicating with other survivors, who claim that their case is “not that bad”, and this can be worse when they are communicating with other women who have never experienced domestic violence.

In addition, the researcher's empathy is a key requirement to gain trust from survivors. According to Herman (1997), in any relationship that exists after separation from a perpetrator, in every encounter, trust becomes the ultimate question. Traumatised women, once free, often share their stories with one another (ibid, 1997). For women, there are limited numbers of roles that reflect their life in captivity: one can only be a perpetrator, ally, passive witness, or rescuer. Some women choose to keep their problem a secret, even from social workers:
So, we can trust no one, so for any decision you take... suit yourselves. It’s your life, you know how to deal with it, what is better for you, that’s it. You don’t need to listen to anyone, ignore them (Chumy).

Lieya: Why did you hide about this thing?
Harini: I couldn’t recall whether I had told someone about this or not. Yesterday I let it fall during a conversation with Meena (other survivor), then she pushed me to inform the social workers.
Lieya: So if you don’t let that slip, no one will know until now?
Harini: You know, in this world, I only trust God and myself.
Lieya: But they (social workers) want to help you.
Harini: She nodded.
Lieya: So last two years, you didn’t see a doctor after giving birth?
Harini: It’s hard for me to go out. When I checked my body with my husband, he knew that I have the disease (breast cancer), he said it’s not his business so why he need to bother?
Lieya: But do you feel any pain?
Harini: Yes. But if I told him I’m hurting, he would press my breast until my tears flowing down my cheek. It was so painful.

Many of the survivors admitted that they started sharing stories once they trusted me, because I showed them empathy. Usha, like other women in this study, tended to define most people she encountered as passive witnesses who she felt often manipulate her. Experiences of ‘sudden outbursts’ led her to have trust issues with other people, leaving her with feelings of shame and of being manipulated. She has internalised this by thinking that her mind had stopped functioning and that she has become mentally ill due to the psychological pressure. As in Tamas’ (2012 in Coddington, 2016:4) account, trauma studies are thick with survivor testimony, to the point where survivors ‘feel pressured to give voice to unspeakable events again and again’:

Usha: We cannot tell (our story). But our mind is not working. I’d experienced that. You know, I become psycho, “even when I don’t know a person, I’ll still tell them my whole life story”. After that, I’m wondering why I’m humiliating myself. “No, they don’t understand, it’s useless! They ask a bit, but I’ll tell everything! Why do we want to tell them? If we tell them, can they do anything for our life? After what I’ve done, I do this stupid thing. Then I realise, they may just mock me, after knowing what I’ve been suffering.
Lieya: For fun?
**Usha:** Yes, Lieya!

**Chumy:** Some people, they have that kind of character. Because you care, you can accept what we tell you, you can understand, even you’re not in our shoes, you can feel us. But for some people, they use that for their own advantage. So they just smile at you, but behind, they’ll tell others about us and our issues. There are people like this, we tell them stories, but they cause us problems. In fact, we want to vent out our feelings, but they abuse that.

According to Haraway (1991: 193), positioning is ‘the key practice grounding knowledge’ because ‘position’ marks the kind of power that enables a certain kind of knowledge. Therefore, I asked the participants about their purpose in sharing their stories with me. According to them, I am a researcher, so they trusted that I have no bad intentions when I wanted to listen to their story. Other people may manipulate their story and use it to look down on them, but I was trusted. I gained this trust by always making myself accessible to them when I was in the shelter. I mingled with them when they were taking care of their children, or while cooking, having lunch and afternoon tea. Most of them start the day quite late because they could not sleep due to the effects of psychological abuse. They never asked for anything from me, they just needed a listener who can understand them. However, they also realised that I was just there only for a while, but that I would, in fact, continue to think of them.

**D. DATA COLLECTION**

Not all methods in this study involve all participants. As depicted in Table 4, most of the participants were involved in interviews and fragmented storytelling. Other methods did not involve all participants due to time constraints, as some of them were only in the shelter when a particular method was conducted. For documentary analysis, I depended on the WAO client report prepared by the social worker, which set out the circumstances of each women’s abuse, its effects and why the ended up in the shelter. If the report was still not completed, I could not proceed with document analysis on a participant.
### Table 4: Research methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>No. of Participant</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Photovoice</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
<td>Usha, Harini, Shalini, Chumy, Mariam, Rekha and Ashna</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;I am a rose&quot; craftwork</td>
<td>4 participants</td>
<td>Rekha, Usha, Faizah, Chumy</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>All participants</td>
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<td>Fragmented storytelling</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td>All participants</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>6 participants</td>
<td>Fika, Shalini, Usha, Rekha, Harini, Ashna</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participant observation and</td>
<td>July - Sept 2015</td>
<td>On all matters during fieldwork: all participants, photovoice project</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Diary</td>
<td></td>
<td>mural project, ethics problems and etc.</td>
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</table>

**Participant observation and Research Diary**

In this research project, participant observation was used to get to know participants, and to identify culturally sensitive aspects of women survivors’ stories. This observation was employed for three months by undertaking an internship scheme with Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO). Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999:91) define participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting”. The researcher often immerses him or herself in an unfamiliar culture through participant observation. As Atkinson and Hammersley (1995 in Silverman, 2006: 68) highlight, “in a sense all social research is in a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it.” In this way the researcher can study a different way of life, in part by living out or at least closely observing daily life. The proximity of the researcher to the specific details of cultural life ideally enhances the level of understanding the researcher acquires (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, 1999). Through the internship programme, I engaged with a group of women who live in the shelter located in the study area. I recorded the research observations in notes taken at the time and kept a research diary as a means of reflection on the research process. One potential limitation is that the presence of an observer or the awareness that the subjects are being observed can also affect the phenomenon under investigation (Darlington and Scott, 2002).
Semi-structured interviews

The research also involved conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect information on a diverse range of participant experiences (Longhurst, 2003), in this case abused women’s experiences according to their ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews involve the flexibility of an open-ended interview. Not all questions are designed and phrased ahead of time, but the interview guide is arranged according to the flow of important phases, to be referred to throughout the interview. I initiated the interview by asking participants to talk about some of the key phases of their relationship with the perpetrator, from the first encounter with their husband to marriage, the time when the first violence took place, other episodes, and subsequent episodes that bring them to the shelter. Their responses capture the ways that domestic violence discourse and experience get contested in everyday life of Malaysian women. The interview is also to get a comprehensive answer regarding domestic violence experience, help-seeking behaviour and expectations of intervention, that are specifically described in the cultural and spatial context by the participants, as intended via this study. If there is an important aspect that is not touched on by the participants to achieve the study goals, I used the interview guide. For example, if the spatial aspect is not explained by the participants, I cut in by asking such questions; where does the violence happen? What type of space during violence? Who witnessed the violence or who are the participants within these spaces during violence? How did it make her feel about being in ‘public’ or ‘private’ space? The interview guide helped to ensure that I didn’t miss any important points.

Nevertheless, in-depth interviewing and observation can be highly intrusive (Darlington and Scott, 2002), especially in this study where interviews focused on the highly personal matter of trauma. Face-to-face interviews were therefore important to build rapport, as compared to the group activities which were part of my original plan. This is because;

*It is about talking but it is also about listening. It is about paying attention. It is about open to hear what people have to say. It is about being non-judgemental. It is about creating a comfortable environment for people to share. It is about being careful and systematic with the things people tell you (Krueger and Casey, 2000:xi).*
Thus, interviews were an opportunity to show personal concern and care, in a similar way to social workers did when the survivors entered the shelter. The interview session was initiated after I had informed the participants about the study in detail. The duration of interviews was between 1 to 2 hours in private areas of the shelter selected by the participants so that they felt safe and comfortable. The interviews were conducted in Malay, and were informal and conversational in tone. This allows for an ‘open response in the participants’ own words rather than a ‘yes or no’ type answer” (Longhurst, 2003:119). They were recorded after the interviewees granted permission to use a voice recorder. In addition, as Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) argue, in-depth interviews allow interviewer and participant maximum flexibility in exploring any topic in depth and in covering new topics as they arise. But the researcher needs to be alert for inconsistencies, pieces of the story that seem to be missing, and new angles that might provide additional information, and then probe accordingly (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005).

**Participatory methods**

This research project did not involve full Participatory Action Research (PAR), but uses participatory methods to help explore the issues. It also seeks to influence action by suggesting changes to policy and practice that are helpful to participants. The main issue is misrepresentation of domestic violence in Malaysia, which triggers undesirable responses from the community and formal interventions regarding the issue. Therefore, both researcher and participants examined the complexities of space and culture in domestic violence, and the ways in which interventions might be made. According to Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007), Participatory Action Research is a cyclical and collaborative research process. The cyclical process is from the stages of identifying issues, initiating research to precipitating relevant action until proceeding to a new cycle of research/action/reflection (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby, 2007). Breitbart (2003:164) highlights, “PAR is about sharing power and involves commitment to see that the outcomes benefit the community”. The context-specific methods take into account the different cultural and religious backgrounds of the multi-ethnic participants. These include the adaptation of several participatory methods such as fragmented storytelling, photovoice, and crafting.
**Fragmented storytelling**

Some face-to-face interviews were initially challenging because of the dilemmas posed by the question of: how can you build a trust relationship during a one off interview? How can people tell you their experiences and problems during an interview? Since I was still in the shelter after most of the interviews were conducted, these issues became less problematic because the information from the interviews did not stop there. All of the participants spontaneously created another method in this study, which I refer to as fragmented storytelling\(^\text{10}\). This emerged as part of the participatory approach and took place at any time, whenever the survivors wanted to share anything with me during my three months there conducting the fieldwork. The duration of each moment of storytelling ranged from two minutes to one hour. Each session was recorded with their consent, and I was able to ask further questions to get more in-depth information. This might involve one or several participants at a time. Most of the women I met every day are the same women, with some newcomers in the middle of the three months period. Furthermore, they had the urge to tell their stories because the objects or their actions in the shelter reminded them of their past. An old newspaper page featuring a bottle of wine and a knife used for cooking prompted them to share their story about a particular aspect of abuse. Some participants invited me to their room to share the story in private. This desire for privacy resulted from specific reasons arising from relationships with other participants and social workers, or because their stories are too personal to be heard by others. Therefore, as a researcher, I am well aware of the privacy guidelines and ethical agreement both for participants’ anonymity and confidentiality (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), in which a researcher should avoid making things public, or being aware of conversations that should be had in private.

The fragmented storytelling does not only involve feelings and values, but also information and ideas. According to survivors, there was some information during the interviews that they had to be ‘nontransparent’ with or more subtle about, for fear of embarrassment and awkwardness, especially when it was the first conversation they had with the interviewer about personal matters. For example, during the interview, they used the word “husband”,

\(^{10}\) Credit to Cheryl McEwan who initiated the name of this method.
which most survivors despised using, as most of them do not address perpetrators as ‘husband’. Words like ‘this fella’, ‘father of my daughter’ and the perpetrators’ name were used throughout the storytelling. Moreover, the women also shared ideas about more effective intervention plans, by taking into account space and culture in abusive relationships. The story-telling allowed the women to express their feelings more openly than in interviews.

Fragmented storytelling frames my understandings of the ‘chaotic’ nature of trauma and its impacts due to the non-linear narratives that emerged in the women’s accounts. As Herman (1997:2) reiterates; “it is difficult for an observer to remain clearheaded and calm, to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together”. From their stories, there is some information from the face-to-face interviews that are enhanced or altered by them from time to time. Among them is their feelings towards their perpetrator, which changed from love to hate, after their struggle to understand the domestic violence. At first, they were inclined to blame themselves; however, they later started to appreciate themselves. According to Herman (1997), “the survivor’s initial account of the event may be repetitious, stereotyped, and emotionless”. Snider (in Herman 1997:175) describes “traumatic memory as a series of still snapshots”. The action of telling a story signifies the recovery stage or a normal memory (Herman, 1997). This is when the survivors tell their story completely, in-depth, and in detail. “Because the truth is so difficult to face, survivors often vacillate in reconstructing their stories. Denial of reality makes them feel crazy, but acceptance of the full reality seems beyond what any human being can bear” (Herman, 1997:181).

**Photovoice**

Photovoice as a tool for investigating people’s lives helps to produce a “culturally relevant lens” through which to view the relationship between place and the everyday lives of women (McIntyre, 2003: 47). According to Latham applying Pred’s (1989 in Crang, 2005: 233) experiments, researchers may “use pictures, text and time diaries to convey a sense of practising places”. Rose (2003 in Crang 2003) also highlights that the visual and the verbal are interrelated and speak to different ways of knowing rather than just being treated as different kinds of evidence. Photovoice also opens up discussion on domestic violence. Most participants gave their ideas about the pictures they would take, or planned to take, but some
could not fulfil them, sometimes because the necessary items were not available. The ideas for the photovoice sessions related to their real experiences, which could not be explored with other research methods.

I held a briefing session with all occupants in the shelter at that time. Those who agreed to be participants were required to sign an approval form, thus giving their permission to the researcher and WAO to use their photovoice pictures. In the meeting, I talked about the purpose of the photovoice process and I gave them a deadline by which to complete it. Each participant was given materials including a disposable camera labelled with their own name, a copy of the template question and a photo ownership sharing agreement form. The template question only serves as a guide to the participants in identifying meaningful photos to them. In general, the participants had total control to determine which image to take. Below are the template questions given to the photovoice participants:

- a) What is the picture that represents your marriage life from the beginning of the relationship/marriage until you are here?
- b) What are the pictures that illustrate the degree of domestic violence that you have endured?
  i. Location of the incident
  ii. Who had witnessed or heard about the incident
  iii. Time of the incident
- c) What are the pictures that illustrate your attempts to seek help (and efforts to get out of danger)?
- d) What are the pictures that illustrate the kind of intervention that you would wish to have yourself to make things easier for you?

Participants were given two weeks to take pictures in this project and return the camera to me. I set up a countdown towards the deadline and put a notice at the shelter entrance so that they were always aware of the deadline. Once I got back the cameras, I sent the films to be processed. Upon completion, I asked the participants to choose the best 6 photos that represent their experience, which they wanted to share. Participants completed a reflection sheet (see Appendix 5) for each selected photo to explain and justify their choice. The reflection sheet contains such questions as a brief description of photo, why do you want to
share this photo, what’s the story behind this photo, how does this photo relate to your life, the life of people in your community, or both.

‘I am a rose’ crafting

Many participants wanted to take pictures that describe themselves as abused women and as survivors. However, not all could be realised due to time constraint or lack of resources. I therefore created another participatory activity, which is called as ‘I am a rose’ crafting, to achieve this goal. Part of the idea for the handicraft activity came from discussion between me and the participants during photovoice activities. When I was in the shelter, most participants expressed an interest in capacity-building activities because they are thinking of ways to earn money after leaving the shelter. However, most participants have small capital to start a business. Thus, roses made from felt fabrics were chosen because making them is simple, does not require much time, and the cost involved is low. It aims to understand how the women see themselves. Each participant was given the freedom to make as many roses as they wanted, choose a colour that was significant to them, and write tags on the roses, to be associated with themselves and domestic violence. The tags were then analysed along with other research data (see Figure 2).

I created “I am a rose” crafting in this study to open up space for them to present a discourse about the woman, wife and survivor represented by rose in different colours of their selection. This information is important to understand the specific views of women who have sought help in the shelter. It includes a description of what is expected to change in their lives, what they want to prove to the community, their source of strength and dependence on God as a survivor of domestic violence in Malaysia. Most women associate rose flowers with the spirit of a woman to fight in making sure they are free from domestic violence for good. Through this activity, the reality of being a survivor of domestic violence has been explored.
Documentary analysis

In this study, documentary analysis is important because some participants were not interested in re-telling their traumatic experiences over and over again. Some of the women had just been interviewed by local journalists about domestic violence or were too sad to recount a violent incident, so I was referred to their WAO file record for further information. This part of the research analyses the participants’ records provided by the WAO, which involves data such as participants’ profile, interventions received prior being in the WAO shelter, information regarding the abuse and the perpetrators, and details of their children.

According to Bowen (2009), documents are in the form of recorded texts or images by other parties without a researcher’s intervention. Documentary analysis is similar to other analytical methods in qualitative research which require data to be examined and interpreted in order to “elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008 and Rapley, 2007 in Bowen, 2009: 27). However, “the perusal of case files or official records can constitute a serious violation of privacy. It is important to think through the ethical questions involved such as who should have access to this material? Is
client permission necessary or will agency permission suffice?” In this case, I received both permission from clients and WAO. On the first day in the shelter, I had signed a privacy and confidentiality compliance form with WAO. The majority of the women also gave their permission to WAO to use their case reports in the area of work, to educate the public on domestic violence and improve the Domestic Violence Act 1994.

E. DATA ANALYSIS

The research used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to analyse the qualitative data. The choice of software for this research project is Atlas.ti version 7.5.2. All the data from the field research are in the Malay language. Once sections or quotes are selected to include in the thesis, these were then translated into English. The data were then triangulated with other data sources such as interviews and storytelling transcripts, my research diary in which I logged details of the informal aspects of the research including encounters and observations, and photovoice reflections using Atlas.ti software. This is to answer the research aims to explore the spatially and culturally specific experience of domestic violence by focusing on women survivors from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. Triangulation also seeks to capture the ways that domestic violence discourse and experience are contested in everyday life for Malaysian women. The data then were coded through open coding and then narrowed down by merging the codes under the same themes. ATLAS.ti provided the ability to make chains of multiple codes and linking of quotations to create networks diagrams. These qualitative visual representations of the data were used as a guide to write in empirical chapters.

F. DEALING WITH TRAUMATIC CONTENTS RESEARCH: STORY FROM THE FIELD

The argument in this section elucidates my experiences of encountering other people’s traumatic accounts of violence as a researcher, which is repeated when processing the research data. The main challenge for any kind of domestic abuse advocate is when the researcher has to listen to traumatised women’s experiences; according to Caruth (1995):
Certainly, one challenge of this listening is...the danger - the danger...of the trauma's contagion.

Coddington (2016) argues:

Contagious trauma spread, compounding and binding together sometime unrelated life traumas.

In my experience, contagious trauma occurs due to repeated handling of traumatic data over a long period of time, which is experienced as witnessing the traumatic events repetitively. The effect of trauma increases as the researcher tries to empathise with domestic violence survivors by completely immersing themselves in the experience, which allows the researcher to work ‘from within’ (Moss 1995: 84) in order to develop their own reflections. However, as Moss herself adds, this is impossible because the researcher is different from the research subjects.

Throughout all the stages involved in handling the research data, I was overwhelmed with emotions. The earliest phase of the fieldwork was for me to conduct interviews, to listen to the women’s experiences. At that time, I did not fully understand some of the stories, their feelings towards their husbands, how they perceived domestic violence, and their decisions to leave. However, my understanding grew the more I listened to the women’s accounts of their experiences. At the end of the fieldwork, the next process involved transcription of the interviews and storytelling transcripts. During this phase, I managed to deepen my understanding by listening again to things I may have missed in conversation at the time. The transcription process requires me to repeat the voice recording over and over again, so that every word spoken by the participants is properly transcribed. During this period, I started to feel depressed and often wanted to stop the process because I was listening to accounts of violence, oppression, injustice, complaints, as well as extreme feelings such as fear and loss of hope, which were all related to the abuse the women and their children had experienced. At times I found it very hard to comprehend the fact that the incidences had really happened. As Shopes (2013) argues, listening the voice of participants can be distressing for the researcher, and their voice tends to spark a higher emotional reaction through repeated listening. I stopped myself several times during the transcription process because I felt
depressed and could not bear to hear the stories any longer. However, I eventually finished transcribing the entire 25-hour voice recordings. I had not recognised that I too was experiencing trauma second-hand and it was only when my supervisor asked me whether I was okay or not that I was able to process the fact this kind of study can put enormous emotion pressure on the researcher. While I was conducting the research, I was able to seek the counsel of the staff at the refuge, who are trained in encountering trauma, but I was not fully prepared for the consequences of processing the data.

I switched to the next process, which was encoding transcript interview and storytelling, along with visual data from photovoice and others. Broadly speaking, this is the third time I had to repeat the process, by reading and looking at the transcripts in detail. I took courage in both hands, to continue the process, with the confidence that this project can empower the women, thus helping them in the long run. Once the encoding process began, I realised that the impact of trauma was even greater. My job is to complete the fragmented, unconstructed or half-constructed stories by connecting them altogether with certain themes. For example, at first, I just realised the desire of the abused women, who are mostly mothers, to have a happy life once they are out of the shelter. Part of their wish is to ensure their children receive a good education and to grow up as decent human beings, unlike their fathers. However, these desires are related to the need for them to having greater support and proper intervention. In the case of Shalini, for instance, she has a dream to provide a decent education and shower her children with so much affection, so that they can live free from a culture of violence from her husband’s family. However, she was not able to act on this. The only option available to her was to surrender her children to their father because of economic constraints, threats against her life made by the perpetrator, and the lack of efficient support once she left the refuge. The example from this complete story led me to emotional distress – hearing the heartfelt dreams of women and knowing about the less than happy outcomes was at times hard to bear. At this point I was totally immersed in the research data, and my sleep was disrupted with nightmares and flashbacks.

In most of the nightmares, I have a role as a savior to all the participants. I can clearly recall the situation, in which the survivors stood behind me to seek refuge from evil force. The dreams seemed to imply that I am responsible for fixing the terrifying situation. Feelings of
empathy and innocence really struck me because I could do nothing to help alleviate the women’s situation even though I had witnessed how totally helpless and powerless they are. As Coddington (2016) argues, witnessing accounts of traumatic events render researchers creates contagious trauma, and the absence of support and effective interventions leads to a feeling that I eventually recognised as ‘guilt’.

At this stage, I started to share my experiences with my supervisors and we discussed the idea of contagious trauma. As stated by Herman (1992), to find a way out for trauma is to know the root of the problem. One of my supervisors also recounted a story about a colleague who studies human trafficking and coped with similar trauma about repeatedly hearing accounts of male violence by regularly spending time with male friends. Since my case is related to domestic space and intimate partners, my husband played an important role in reassuring me that not all husbands are cruel.

Furthermore, I seemed to act out the experience of the abused women, in different space and time while having flashback. In other words, I got so involved with the participants’ experiences, that I related them to my own life, especially in my relationship with my husband. One morning, after I finished preparing coffee that was unusually weak, he jokingly remarked “that’s it, you just did this without caring”. My husband is a nice man and never uses harsh words, but I interpreted this as a form of aggression because those words were precisely the same as those Mariam recounted were used by her perpetrator. In my mind, my husband would beat me after drinking the coffee (as happened to Mariam). This got worse after I gave birth to our third child in July 2017. And, because Shalini once mentioned that “my husband began to torture me after I gave birth to the third child”, I also began to experience fears that the same thing could happen to me.

For many Malaysians, trauma and other mental illnesses are not taken seriously by those who have yet to understand or experience it. During this stage of the data analysis, I never made any attempt to share my problem with family members or Malaysian friends in the UK (my closest circle). Having a ‘conviction’ that I was currently in an abusive relationship, I was ashamed to talk with the friends who know me and my husband. This became worse after giving birth, and was exacerbated by the fact that I could not fully tell my husband about the
abused women in my study due to confidentiality issues. Fortunately, my husband was supportive and did not stop me from getting external help.

I then sought counselling through friendship networks from a Muslim lady, who runs an NGO that provides support to minority ethnic female survivors in the UK. She knows about trauma among humanitarian workers and was able to listen to my problem, and I was free to tell my feelings without shame and guilt. I was also better able to communicate with my husband about the trigger factors that could put me under stress, anxiety or fear, all of which go back to the survivors’ accounts of life in an abusive relationship.

From this, and other forms of support I am now better able to share with other researchers about what to expect, and when to pause during data analysis. Their input is very useful because I realise that I am no different than others. My supervisors also made sure that I acknowledged that my research was worthwhile because it could benefit the participants and other survivors. The key outcome is a recognition that it is important to have support group around researchers who are handling traumatic data in their study to help them cope in each stage of their research. Support groups should be comprised of researchers at different stages of research: researchers who have just returned from fieldwork, some who are just beginning data analysis and others who are starting to write research findings and discussion.

This experience does not indicate that I am ‘taking on’ the trauma of a survivor of domestic abuse. However, experiencing the trauma is contagious in that traumatic content in the research data is a trigger; it is kept long in the memory, continues to ‘haunt’ researchers, and can affect them emotionally and psychologically. However, it is important to acknowledge that this secondary experience of trauma does not equate with the participants’ actual experience (Coddington, 2016).

G. RESEARCH DISSEMINATION: PUBLIC WALL ART

In the context where the studies on domestic violence are relatively limited (as discussed in Chapter 2), public understandings of domestic violence are limited. This condition does not empower women who are still in abusive relationship to obtain safe intervention. Mural is a
way of telling abused women and the public about Women's Aid Organization (WAO), an organisation that provide effective physical liberation for survivors (as the finding suggest in Chapter 8) by displaying their informations. This research considers the benefit of mural art in maximising public engagement with the findings. The mural is closely informed by the qualitative research with survivors in a refuge in the city during 2015. This mural project is intended to illustrate the life of abused women who experience domestic violence. According to Marschall (2006), murals not only function as a medium of communicating educational messages, but also raising social awareness. Hence, this research project aims to transform the research finding into mural arts. This is as an attempt to bring the “private” space of domestic violence into the public as a way of increasing social awareness with the hope of weakening the perpetrators’ control.

One participant with a background in art and experience in making murals initially agreed to paint a mural for this project. It was a bonus for me because I did not have to deal with issues in terms of communication with the artist. In the meantime, the woman had affirmed that no security issue would arise because the proposed mural location has nothing to do with the perpetrator. Having located a suitable site, I contacted the local authority in charge of the area. They gave me their approval, as long as the mural would be completed at a designated time. However, participant/artist could not meet the deadline because she was busy with her new job. Therefore, the local authority revoked approval. This meant repeating the whole process, from looking for the right artist, finding a new mural location, and getting official approval from the local authorities to implement my mural project.

There are some things that I discovered while trying to get the right artist for this project. First, many Malaysian mural artists are male, which would obviously create some challenges, including ethical challenges, in having abused women’s experiences represented by a man. Second, famous artists with good portfolios are expensive to commission to do this kind of work and because social awareness of domestic violence in Malaysia is quite low, it was difficult to find someone to do this pro bono. Eventually, I managed to get an artist recommended by the Faculty of Arts, in the university where I am employed (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris). Hizmy is a man and offers a reasonable fee. I met him and we discussed the findings of my study and the purpose of the mural. In less than a week, he sent
me three mural sketches. I asked all the women involved in my study to vote for one of the best sketches. A sketch with the highest votes were chosen because it indeed captures closely my research findings. When the mural was painted, I was in the UK, but the selection of a new location and official affairs with the local authority had been settled before I left Malaysia. Due to time the difference, I was not available online the whole time when the mural was being painted. Once it was finished, the artist sent the pictures to me, as depicted in Figure 3 and 4, and I consulted on their suitability with the women participants at the refuge.

Figure 3: Unsatisfactory mural.
The initial outcome was unsatisfactory for both the participants and me: the mural was unlike the sketches he had sent us before and there had needed to be a change of plan, with the mural being painted in two parts of the wall, as opposed to one part as per the original design. So, the existing sketch had to be changed to fill the space on those two walls. Besides, the colour selection that I proposed changed a bit, the artist justified this by saying it would look more ‘beautiful’. When I showed the draft murals to a resident via social media, her interpretation was that it was unrelated to domestic violence and some people would find it scary. Because of this, I asked the artist to redo the whole process of mural, with a sketch that fits the wall size. This time the artist was able to understand that every element, including colour and wording, was intended to describe the emotion of the abused women. On the other side of wall, there are the wordings such as the tagline, WAO hotline and logos of the parties involved (refer to Figure 20 and Figure 21 in Chapter 8 of the final mural image). The mural has been in place since July 2016 and was approved of by the research participants. It has not proved possible so far to gauge its impact on public attitudes, but future research, perhaps using focus groups, could be used determine the impact on the public.
Besides this mural, I also launched Facebook and Instagram page of *Cinta Bukan Penjara* (Love is Not a Prison) for the purpose of getting response from the public. The *Cinta Bukan Penjara* (Love is Not a Prison) campaign is delivered in Malay, as suggested by the majority of participants in this study. However, it takes a lot of effort to promote this campaign, especially through my own funding and commitment as well as cooperation with the Women’s Aid Organization.

**H. ETHICS, CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS**

In this case of research, I’m focusing in dealing with the possible taboos surrounding violence against intersectionally subordinated women. A case in point are different vocabularies that the researcher might use to interview participants, which potentially will generate difficulties and risks for the participants. In fact, during the fieldwork, I faced difficulty in understanding common words such as ‘goods’, which is used by the Malay and Indian participants, that refers to sensitive and embarrassing things. For some Malay participants, goods mean ‘drugs’. In contrast to Indian women, ‘goods’ mean sex. So when I asked about the meaning of the word, this made them ashamed or angry. Training ensured that I was properly prepared for the inevitability of such misunderstanding.

In addition, I experienced dilemmas in adhering to ethical guidelines as a researcher. I wondered if, in cases where information was disclosed that suggested the women might be at risk, respecting privacy could lead to unintended negative consequences for the women. Is violation of privacy is considered unethical if it is intended to prevent them from any harm? Keeping privacy intact can cause some women and their children at risk of being trapped in human trafficking. Some things that are considered ‘private’ by survivors had to be reported to social workers without them realising it. For instance, some women told me that they had encountered strangers who volunteered to take care of their children for free and others who offered to buy the children from the survivors via social media. Due to the major socio-economic constraints for survivors as they try to rebuild their life, they are unable to send their children to childcare, so some survivors do consider the offer made by the strangers. They dare not tell this kind of thing to social workers, but they told me with a request that I
keep it as a secret. On one hand, I had promised them confidentiality, but on the other hand I might be putting them or their children at risk by if I did not breach confidentiality. In the end, I decided that the survivors and their children should be protected, even if this meant divulging their secret to social workers. In this way, social workers are alert with the fact that certain survivors needed to extend their stay in the shelter or look for other feasible alternatives. In these situations, one set of ethics (i.e. an ethics of care) trumps a set of ethics that guarantee confidentiality.

‘Intrusive’ Methods

In Malaysia, social understanding pertaining to social geography is poor. This was a bit of a problem for me when I wanted to start fieldwork at the WAO shelter. Some staff in the shelter did not understand about the relevance of me wanting to study domestic violence. Furthermore, the services manager of the shelter who manages interns at first did not allow me to start the data collection process, with the reason that my research methods are intrusive and I have no counseling background. In other words, my research was perceived as potentially disturbing the survivors despite the justification that I have been given proper training as an interviewer in Durham. After being in the shelter nearly two weeks without any progress, the services manager finally allowed me to start the data collection process, with the condition that I needed to undertake a mock interview before an undergraduate intern in psychology. If I could answer their questions, then I would be granted permission to proceed with the data collection process. I went through the mock interview, but most of the questions touched on things such as why I do not use the word battered woman instead of survivor. Finally, the services manager decided that I passed the mock interview and I was allowed to start the interview process.

Study Limitation

In terms of study limitations, the research initially intended to target women from three of the main ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely Malay, Indian and Chinese as samples. However, over the course of three months when I was conducting fieldwork at the WAO shelter, there were no Chinese refugees. According to a social worker, it is rare for Chinese women to seek protection there. The social worker offered to help me contact former Chinese occupants, but
warned that the women cannot speak Malay and they might refuse to be interviewed because they are very concerned about privacy. I tried to contact the nearest police station to get additional information. According to police records, there were reports of domestic violence from Chinese women in the year in which I was conducting the study (2015). However, the women all still lived with the perpetrator. For security reasons, I cancelled my intention to find Chinese participants, and this consequently presents a gap that future research might consider. Furthermore, I talked only to women who had been able to leave and disclose their domestic violence. There are hundreds or thousands of women who are stuck in abusive relationships and unable to leave, who also need urgent attention in further research with a particular focus on how their experiences might be similar and/or different to those who do manage to leave.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained the methods by which I was able to consider the traumatic experiences of survivors of domestic abuse by recruiting women as participants when they were in the shelter. This required that some methods that were modified from the original plan and new methods was also adopted during fieldwork. The participatory group activities which were proposed in the beginning with the aim of building rapport proved ineffective. This is because most women are not interested in any group activities due to the effects of abuse such as chronic trauma. Some of them were only interested in skills-building activities because they wanted to prepare themselves to be independent once they are out of the shelter. However, most were eager to share their experiences verbally and visually once rapport has been built via participation at the refuge and face-to-face interviews. Therefore, interviews proved an effective method in establishing rapport with traumatised women involved in domestic violence. In addition, the participatory fragmented storytelling method created by participants during the fieldwork significantly contributes to research methodology. The ‘fragmented’ nature illustrates their difficulty in understanding and talking about trauma in a single, linear narrative. Capturing fragmented stories requires endurance by the researcher and in-depth engagement over a long period of time, which also helps build trust. Photovoice as participatory method was also important to convey the women’s spatial experiences of living in abusive relationship and their feelings after they had escaped. This provided another
way for the women to speak about domestic violence discourse, which is often difficult in the conservative social climate of Malaysia. Despite facing problems in data collection, research dissemination, and dealing with contagious trauma, participatory action research proved to be a powerful and effective method that results in solid empirical data regarding domestic violence.
CHAPTER 5

SPATIAL AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present the reasons why women in Malaysia marry men who become violent, and the social and spatial processes by which they are rendered vulnerable to violence. Spatial and social vulnerability themes in this chapter are familiar from research everywhere on domestic violence, but they emerge from very specific and diverse cultural contexts in Malaysia. In this context, marriage is still a very important institution for both Muslims and non-Muslims and the basic rights of a wife and children flow from a valid marriage (Mohd Awal, 2009). Understanding the nature of the marital relationship is crucial to understand how it is inextricably intertwined with domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1979).

Most of the women talked about the things that led them to marry the abuser. However, when they get married they very often know very little about their husbands-to-be. Even in the case of women who have co-habited or had a long engagement, and who know more about their spouse’s problems, a combination of being convinced they will change or that marriage will make them good men means that they make a poor decisions. Some of women cannot choose their own husband because the decision to marry is influenced by their family.

This chapter argues that across cultural difference, abused women usually have experienced marriage emerging from one of three sets of circumstance: eloping, arranged marriage, or deception by their husbands-to-be or their families. It is then suggested that these conditions that lead to marriage also create the conditions in which domestic violence takes place. This is compounded by the legal and wider societal patriarchal control and procedures that imbue the husband with impunity. The expectation that women should remain faithful within the domestic sphere, obey male authority and be sexually passive is widespread. If the wife fails to comply, they are liable to punishment and thus abuse. However, these women are not protected by law, thus it is difficult for them to get family assistance, and there is no place to
escape. Protection is only provided to the couples who go through a valid marriage process, a marriage that follows a lawful procedure. Likewise, in terms of family acceptance, if a couple does not perform marriage according to the customs and cultures of an ethnic group, the family normally does not interfere in any marital problems that arise. Some women in this study are threatened with the most extreme forms of domination by their husband, such as being trafficked for prostitution.

There are two sections in this chapter. Section A considers in more depth the reasons why the women in this study married their partners, which most considered a poor decision. Section B explores the effect of the women’s decision to marry the abusers and the social and spatial aspects of their marriages that shape their experiences. The empirical findings are connected to more serious vulnerabilities of abused women and entrapment in marriage.

A. WHY WOMEN MARRY MEN WHO BECOME VIOLENT

Social Pressure and Women’s Views on Marriage

The decision to marry for some interviewees is influenced by social pressure. Age is a particular social stigma, particularly where a woman’s age has exceeded the expected average marrying age of other women:

Lieya: How old are you when you marry him?
Faizah: Twenty seven. At that time, it was an issue for a twenty-seven-old woman, you know, in my hometown, people kept asking when I’m going to get married, so I was stressed, it became worse with the unfaithful fiance. However, both of our families don’t know about our relationship status.

When Faizah got married in 2000, the mean age at first marriage for Malaysian women was 25 years (The Chief Statistician Office, 2013). In Malay society, a woman aged 25 or older but still single is considered unusual and can be subject to stigmatisation and abuse, such as being referred to as an "old virgin" (HanXiao, 2016). This places pressure on women to sometimes make hasty decisions about their marriage partners and to not know them well enough before making a commitment to them.
In other cases, it was common for interviewees who did have a sense of the character of their future husbands to consider marriage as an opportunity to change their husband into a better person. For example, Mariam and Fika already knew the crimes committed by their future husband prior to marriage, and this was not an issue for them. Their decision to get married was with the hope that their partner would stop taking drugs and a refusal to accept that the criminal behaviour of the man who will become their husband is beyond reform. Mariam explains that she knew her partner was a drug addict before the marriage.

“Yeah I already knew that he took marijuana” (Mariam)

Mariam began a relationship with her partner after being introduced by her friends when she was a widow. Meanwhile, her partner was a divorcee with no child. Without realising that he was divorced because he had perpetrated domestic violence, she had affection for him because he told her he wanted to become a good person. Marriage is perceived by Mariam as a transformation process and she accepted her husband in her life because:

“He used to tell me about his past and how much he wanted to change” (Client file, Mariam)

Fika’s situation is similar to Mariam’s in that the marriage was expected to be a starting point and that her husband would change from being a drug dealer who has also taken drugs for many years. She explains:

Fika: At first he was quite ok after we married.
Lieya: Do you mean first as the beginning of marriage?
Fika: Yeah, I knew he still took that stuff, some people call it cocaine.
Lieya: Did you know about this before or after the marriage?
Fika: Ermm I did know it way before, but I thought he can change. Because he kept saying he will leave drugs, however it was too late for him too change. Some people say they can’t put their habit on hold. Someone told me, it had been long that he took that stuff. I don’t think he can stop that, perhaps he has no hope at all.

These examples highlight the fact that women are often willing to take risks, unwittingly sometimes with their own lives, for the sake of marriage. Very often, these are women who are specifically targeted by abusers because they will put their partners’ need above their own
(Hennessy, 2012). Thus, while the woman expects marriage to change the man into a good husband, she herself becomes the target of domestic violence.

**Protection and Security**

Some survivors decided to marry their husbands to seek emotional and economic protection and security. Those involved in this study are women who had problems with their family before they met their spouse. In Fazlin’s case, she had been adopted by a family that had been abusive since her childhood. Marriage was a quick way for her to escape. Emotional rather than economic security was more important for Fazlin. She sought security from having a man care for her and promising to protect her. Her husband has a good profession and is economically privileged, but this was less important to Fazlin because she needed to live independently and earn her own money since school days. Her decision to marry was motivated more by avoidance of adultery and the need for emotional security. However, she was unaware that her husband had actually been a divorcée for more than a year. Moreover, her partner was less keen on marriage, but went along with the decision. His reluctance to marry, however, later became an excuse for his abuse.

Marriage was a means to obtain emotional protection and security for other women in the study. Faizah, for instance, tried to avoid marrying a divorcée because of the social stigma concerning failed marriages in Malaysia and the possibility that the failure of the marriage was because of him. However, Faizah ended up marrying a divorcée because he often gave her support and encouragement when she was depressed and struggling with many problems. Being the youngest child and the only daughter of foster parents, she saw marriage as life transforming because it is a means for her to get away from the fact that she was fostered and to obtain protection from her husband. As the following transcript records:

*Faizah: Actually, my life is complicated. Indeed, I am only an adopted child. I knew this when I had already grown up. It was when I pursued my study. I was twenty six years old at that time. That’s why I was a bit distressed. I was wondering why my late mum (foster mum) didn’t tell me the real story? Once I knew it I demanded the truth. That is because I am a bit rebellious. Yeah, because this is my life, right. Why there’s no one bother to tell me? It is a big deal for me. I started to rebel. After that, my fiance also screwed up.*
Lieya: Does that happen in the same year?
Faizah: Yes! That year everything happened all at once. So, when we feel that someone cares about us, we feel safe. Even when he was still married at that time. Although he was getting a divorce, he was still someone’s husband. In fact, I don’t want to be involved with a married man since I was small, God forbid, I don’t want to end up with a married man. But it was my fate. Even when they are in divorce process, his wife wants to build their relationship back. But my husband told me that he didn’t want to make amends. That was fine for me. I was not so sure that if he still loves his wife. At that time he thought me as his second partner. But, I was really tense (sighing), there were so many problems, so I just went on with the relationship.

The relationship with her husband was more of a process to gain mutual benefit because each of them tried to find a way out of their problems. In fact, Faizah was initially sympathetic towards her partner and his marriage problems because she was unaware that he was actually the perpetrator of violence against his first wife:

Faizah: In fact, I’m not stuck with my current husband; both of us had our own problems. That’s why we always shared our problems; we just went ahead with our relationship without realising it.
Lieya: Did it happen in a short time?
Faizah: Not really. We’d been friends for a year. For a year we had been chatting with each other. We met just once, that was in a gathering.

According to Hennessy (2012), abusers listen to and evaluate everything that the woman discloses about herself from the first encounter. This is not because of his concern or his intention to give support to her, but to explore ways for challenge her view both of the context of her life and her ability to deal with it (Hennessy, 2012). Abusive husbands also become expert in covering up the domestic violence and turn it into a story of misfortune to gain sympathy. Therefore, some women are not aware of the reality of what is going on when they make the decision to marry violent men.

**Marrying at a Young Age**

Age at marriage appears to have an important effect on the decision to marry men who become violent. This seems to be based on the popular expectation for youthful marriages to fail. Some of those interviewed acknowledge that they were probably too young and immature to marry, and their decision to do so was thus unwise. Chumy is one example:
Chumy: Actually after SPM (equivalent to GCE O-Level) I can further my study but my life had changed. That time I’d made a mistake. I took a wrong decision. Prior to SPM, my husband wanted to tie me to him, then we got engaged. At age of eighteen, before I finished SPM, I was engaged. Six months after engagement, I went to school because I wanted to sit for the exam. I was ashamed for being engaged while I’m still at school, everyone else knew about that. I do regret this.

Lieya: Did he have any job?

Chumy: He was twenty, I was eighteen. He was two years older.

Lieya: Was he working?

Chumy: He had a job, he worked next to a factory operator. At that time he was well-behaved. Although his family was not really nice, I assumed he loved his parents so I thought when we get married he can take care of me and our kids. I was eighteen when I was married, what do I know? I was still young. I was too naive. But now I’m wondering why I made this mistake. Why can’t I realise it at that time.

Lieya: Everyone makes mistakes...

Chumy: Yeah but this is a matter of life so I should be selective. His lifestyle, he can carry on with it throughout the ages, all day, do we have to deal with it? So we cannot simply rush things, we must be wise and selective in our choice. If he passes as a nice person, then we can go ahead to be with him.

Lieya: Do you know how to screen a guy?

Chumy: I don’t know, but now I bear this in mind. I should evaluate him first, and we need to get to know each other, find out his strengths and weaknesses. Is he ok or suitable for me? So, it should be the time for me to think thoroughly. I can’t simply accept if other people told me he is a nice man, and trusted him blatantly. This ruined me, I truly love him as my first love. Just in a single look I realised that I had feeling for him. We loved each other. He proposed to marry me, and I impulsively agreed like a fool. If at that time I thought wisely, I would have ended up with a nice person. Now I was ashamed. I had done it wrong. This is my life, I need to be smart, there must be a clear explanation why I choose my husband. He is for us to live with throughout our life, not within one or two months. Not within ten years but until our death! So I must be careful! Too bad I did not realise it at that time.

Lieya: Maybe it’s because of love?

Chumy: Being eighteen, it’s hard for a person to make a decision. For a twenty-six-year-old man (the perpetrator) to get married, he was aware of the situation because he had a lot of experience. Being twenty-six, he can think. I mean his plan was devised carefully. Having an age of eighteen or twenty, we’re still young. He did not think. He was only concerned with sex. That’s it. That makes him content. That’s all that he could think about. He did not think of his future. But for me, he was a 26-year old man who is going to get married, I thought he was perfect. So he should have known better.

Chumy: That was because she had been persuaded by her father into marriage.

The age gap between her and husband, combined with marrying too young, was also clearly important for Chumy in explaining how she ended up in an abusive relationship. However, Shalini points out that despite getting married at that an older age, she too had to deal with domestic violence, with other factors being more of an influence. Chumy also explains that while she regretted getting married when she was still at school, her husband’s drinking was also a factor:

\textit{You see, being a father, he totally changed, the family was ruined. If he does not drink we must be ok. Because of alcohol this family was a wreck. I told this to the kids. All of them shouldn’t be like their father. When he changed we couldn’t do anything. We couldn’t follow his ways. We need to get on our own path. I told this to my children often, too.}

Using photovoice, Chumy expressed her regret in an image of scattered books on the floor (Figure 5). She had a promising future because she was bright, but she married too soon.

Figure 5:”One step behind as a target” shot by Chumy
At the shelter, there are many selected novels available, but Chumy chose two books namely ‘One Step Behind’ and ‘Target’. This has significant meaning for her life, elucidated in her photovoice analysis, in which she regretted her marriage and the feeling that she was a one-step-behind processes in life, before becoming a target of domestic violence by her partner. As Jensen and Thornton (2003:9) argue, “women who marry young tend to have less education and begin childrearing earlier, and have less decision-making power in the household. They are also more likely to experience domestic violence”.

Chumy also explains how an abusive marriage changed her life. She describes her life before and after marriage as being like two different trees, as illustrated in Figure 6. After marriage, Chumy sees herself as a dry tree with no leaves, as if she is waiting to fall. Meanwhile, the tree that is filled with fresh green leaves indicates her life prior to marriage. According to her:

“Before marriage I can do anything, after marriage, my husband was in my way for me to do something according to my needs. We should have a happy family either before or after marriage. As a husband, he shouldn’t crush his wife’s hope.”

Figure 6: “Before marriage, my life was like a tree filled with leaves. After marriage, the leaves went away” shot by Chumy
B. THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL PROCESSES AND VULNERABILITY

Marrying without the Family’s Approval

Lack of Protection by Malaysian Law

In the absence of a family blessing, some of the Malay women in this study eloped to Thailand. Eloping in this context refers to secret unregistered marriage and does not accord to the Islamic Family Law Enactment in Malaysia (Nasohah, 2014). The findings show that eloping is not only due to the wife’s family disapproval, but also by the family-in-law, and foster family. In Mariam’s case, she eloped because she had no blessing from her own family.

\[\text{Lieya: Why did you get married in Thailand?}\]
\[\text{Mariam: Because my mother did not allow me to marry him.}\]
\[\text{Lieya: You mother didn’t agree?}\]
\[\text{Mariam: Yes. That’s why we got married in Thailand.}\]
\[\text{Lieya: So the marriage is not registered?}\]
\[\text{Mariam: Yes. I did talk to him many times to register the marriage, but he (the husband) did nothing.}\]

In Faizah’s case, both sides of the family did not approve of their relationship due to her husband’s prior marital status:

\[\text{Faizah: We don’t register our marriage. We got married over there (Thailand).}\]
\[\text{Because we don’t have the permission, we went there.}\]
\[\text{Lieya: When you’re married, did you meet your father?}\]
\[\text{Faizah: Yes. Once we’re married, we met my father. We met my biological and foster fathers. But we don’t have their blessing, because of my husband status (as a divorcee).}\]

The husband’s family also disagreed with his decision to divorce his first wife, who is a muallaf (Muslim convert). They were worried that there would be a religious issue in Faizah’s marriage.

\[\text{Faizah: His family, only his mother knows (consents) at first. But his father did not accept our marriage. His father was unwell at first. But, he (the father -in-law) is now}\]
always supporting me (source of empowerment). They were hesitant in the beginning because of my husband’s ex-wife’s condition as a Muslim convert.

In Fazlin’s case, she eloped to Thailand with her partner due to her foster family’s high social status and their hostility to her choice. Fazlin and her partner had the wedding twice because the first time they had been duped by a syndicate in Thailand, so they had no marriage certificate. After going through the marriage process a second time, they then received the letter after resolving the issue in Malaysian sharia court:

Fazlin: Yes, right now we have our marriage registered. But our child’s status is illegitimate, due to no marriage certificate.
Lieya: But you guys had a marriage certificate in Thailand right?
Fazlin: That’s right. Illegally, we did not know that being married in a village house will not entitle us for a marriage certificate in Thailand. But we had to get it from the office there. So, on March 23rd, we got married again over there to get the certificate.
Lieya: So you’d had the certificate?
Fazlin: It is now processed in court.

Eloping puts women at greater risk than men (Abd Kadir, 2003), particularly in the event of marital problems because it is then difficult for the wife to get justice via shariah law and to receive support from her family. The wife cannot make a legal claim because the court has to determine the marriage status before resolving any claims. The wife will face a problem in demanding fasakh (marriage dissolution), edah nafkah (provision of living after divorce), muta’ah (alimony granted if the wife is divorced without any reason) and also nafkah (maintenance) for the children. This is because the marriage itself is not registered. Moreover, the wife is susceptible to other high-risk consequences because eloping does not go through the marriage course or require an HIV test as other couples receive in Malaysia. Some interviewees whose husbands are already drug addicts at the time of marriage thus have a higher risk of HIV\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{11} I am not aware of whether the HIV status of the research participants. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I did not ask them about their HIV status. The social workers in the shelter may be aware of the participants’ HIV status because the former have to ask and record the latter’s medical history upon their arrival at the shelter. However, most survivors often keep their illness (such as breast cancer) a secret from social workers.
In the case of Indian women, the absence of family’s approval leads to cohabiting relationships, which some of them perceive as being equal to marriage. Rekha’s case is one example:

*Lieya: When did you know him?*
*Rekha: 2012*
*Lieya: So you get married on 2012?*
*Rekha: In 2012, we’re not married yet. But we registered our marriage in July (2015). It was before my baby was born (her son). July 2nd, exactly. My son was born on July 3rd (chuckling).*
*Lieya: I don’t really understand, you’re considered married once you’ve registered it?*
*Rekha: Yes.*
*Lieya: After registration, the next process is the wedding?*
*Rekha: Yes.*
*Lieya: So you did it in temple?*
*Rekha: Not yet. We only had it registered, but I hadn’t had a thali (in temple).*
*Lieya: So you’re truly married once you’ve thali around your neck?*
*Rekha: Yes. We just had it registered, they (marriage registrar) knew that we’re already married.*
*Lieya: If we refer to the status...*
*Rekha: We’re already husband and wife. If we don’t register and just get married, it’s ok. Our neighbors already knew about our status, so why do we need a ceremony for that (the neighbours have recognised them as a married couple). Once we register our marriage, we’re in fact a husband and wife. It’s like that.*
*Lieya: So you’re married once you’ve registered your marriage or have a thali around your neck?*
*Rekha: Yes.*

Marriage registration for Rekha was important to reinforce the community perception of the couple’s status as husband and wife. In fact, her legal status is still unmarried because she did not follow the legal marriage procedure for a particular culture or religion. In Malaysia, there are two categories of the marriage procedure, namely the Islamic procedure for Muslim couples and the civil procedure for non-Muslims. While a formal process of marriage registration is required, wedding ceremonies are typically also conducted in accordance to the couple’s culture, tradition or religious customs. Malaysia does not recognise extra-marital relationship or cohabitation. Hence, parties from such relationships do not have any rights whatsoever under family law. Even the Domestic Violence Act 1994 does not extend to
cohabitants (Mohd Awal, 2009). Therefore, the lack of protection for unrecognised relationship under Malaysian law also makes women vulnerable to abuse.

In Malaysia, domestic violence is not gender based. This is due to the interpretation of what constitutes “domestic violence” in judiciary of Malaysia from the cultural view of “domesticity”. In this context, the relationship between the offender and victim is the main denominator in order to constitute a domestic violence offence (The Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2013). Domestic violence not only refers to women and the spousal relationship, but also includes a child, an incapacitated adult or any other member of the family as victims. Likewise, other jurisdictions such as France, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam also provide that the cohabitants must be members of the same family (ibid., 2013). The relationship required between the offender and victim in order to constitute a domestic violence offence varies between jurisdictions. For a number of jurisdictions including Cambodia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Rwanda and Ukraine, the only requirement is that the offender and victim are cohabiting at the time of the abuse. Meanwhile, a wider approach can be seen in England and Wales, Kenya and South Africa where domestic violence can occur where the victim either is or was previously in a domestic relationship with the offender (ibid., 2013).

Social Isolation from Families

Those interviewed found that eloping affects their life after marriage. The women who decided to elope suggest that they assumed that they did not need their family’s support because their partner was more important in their life. These women also felt strongly that their family does not have the right to determine their spouse. Hence, eloping leads to strained family ties. Parents are unable to accept that their child has gone against them. For this reason, the family tends to isolate the couple after marriage. Life after marriage for the women is thus like losing a family. As a social worker records from her conversations with Ashna:

*Their relationship was not approved by her father. There was an incident when her father was angry with the relationship and he banged her room door. At that time, her husband was very caring and supportive and asked her to leave the house with him to*
The client agreed. The client did not receive any support from other family members due to the incident (Client file, Ashna).

This isolation from family puts the women in a vulnerable position, which they only realise after being abused. However, the couples tend to feel guilty and wish to carry on family relationships as normal. They thus attempt to seek forgiveness. As explained by Mariam, she went to meet her parents-in-law from her first marriage to help her seek forgiveness from her mother:

“It’s okay, I would later ask my former mother and father-in-law to help me to persuade my mum. My husband and I want to seek forgiveness for everything.” (Mariam)

For a few women in this situation, the mother’s blessing and prayers are important to obtain happiness in marriage. However, this was impossible in Faizah’s case because her marriage was not blessed by her mother, who died after few years of her marriage:

My mum (foster mother) had taken care of me, she knew that I fight with my husband a lot and was always being beaten. She got sick thinking of me until she passed away (Faizah was crying in sadness). In fact, I felt a bit guilty because I didn’t listen to her. Hence, without her prayers, without her blessing, it turns out to be like this (abusive marriage) (Faizah).

Such experiences reflect those of other Malay women in Malaysia who experience marriage without the family’s approval. Marriage for the Malay participants has a strongly cultural and religious element, which is associated with the blessing and prayers of their parents. As Dobash and Dobash (1979) argue, the family assumes they have the right to engage in and ensure their daughter’s happiness in marriage.

Marriage without family blessing also leads to greater vulnerability for women to threats from her in-laws, who are abusive if they do not accept her presence in the house. For example, in Rekha’s case, everything changed after she decided to quit her studies and run away from home to live with her husband:
Rekha: When we were in love, he was a loving person, he didn’t hit me. If I got sick or felt unwell, he would look after me. Once we’re married, he had been drinking a lot and being cruel. He didn’t respect me; he didn’t treat me well. Do you know why? I ran away from home.

Lieya: So, when you went out of your parents’ house, you did it in secret?
Rekha: Yes. When I went to my mother-in-law’s house, his mother, his brothers and sisters tortured me really bad.

This experience is similar to that of Chumy, who had to deal with in-laws who did not accept her presence and abused her. Some women failed to provide accurate information of when the violence had taken place. Most of them only referred to physical violence after few years of marriage even when they had suffered episodes of psychological violence earlier than that. For example, Chumy referred to experiencing abuse when her husband started to be violent, but it is clear from her account that she was subjected to psychological violence much earlier than this because the family-in-law did not agree with their marriage:

When I got married, I was not their (family-in-law) preference. It’s just because of my husband's stubbornness, in which he insisted to marry me. He told me that he loves me. He loved me since I was eighteen. At that time my husband really wanted to marry me, but his family did not like it because my mother-in-law actually planned to marry my husband to his relative (Chumy).

The loss of contact with family also plays a role in isolating the women and allowing the husband to assert that he is the sole owner of his wife. It is viewed by those interviewed as a path for their husbands to be more possessive.

**Homelessness**

Eloping causes the survivors, particularly Malay women, to lose any rights or access to their family’s house (in the physical sense), which makes it much more difficult for them to leave violent husbands. In Mariam’s case for example, the only place for her to stay after marriage was by the husband’s side. This led her to stay longer in a violent relationship because there was no place for her to escape. She confides that she has repeatedly attempted to flee, but these attempts failed because she has no direction:
Lieya: At that time, did you plan to run away?
Mariam: I did think about that a few times but I didn’t know how to get away. I felt a bit scared of my family’s lack of acceptance, of whose house I should go to, where can I stay. I thought of running away... because my mum is mad at me for marrying him.

Lieya: Did you ever contact your family throughout your marriage?
Mariam: Not really. I used to, just in the beginning for a few times.

Lieya: Maybe your mum had lost her heart.
Mariam: It’s true, because at that time my mum didn’t like my husband...
When I thought about running, I don’t know where I should go to. At that time, my mum was still mad at us but now she has forgiven our slip-ups.

Lieya: But the relationship hasn’t settled...
Mariam: Yeah, it’s not yet fixed.

Of course, family rejection does not necessarily apply to all Malay survivors who had eloped and some families do just accept the presence of their children. In Faizah’s case, her family can still accept her and her children. However, her father does not allow the husband to come to his house. This causes the husband to feel despised by Faizah’s family due to difference between them, which creates further marital conflict and abuse:

Faizah: My dad didn’t allow him to come. If I want to return home, it’s only me and my kids.

Lieya: Why can’t your dad accept your husband?

Faizah: There’s an issue there. My husband told me that if his father can accept me, my father should do the same. He said it may because my parents are educated, that my dad used to be an education director, and when my dad was formerly a director, he (my husband) was nothing (an uneducated son-in-law). There were many things he said.

Lieya: Was he working when you start knowing him?

Faizah: At that time I knew he had a furniture shop. After that, he was on the verge of bankruptcy.

In a letter to her husband during an activity in a shelter, Fika wrote:

"I know my family does not like you, but please don’t involve my family in our problem” (Client file, Fika).

Despite some exceptions, eloping tends to cause some of the abused women to be more vulnerable and more dependent on their husband for family and home. This further threatens
the women because their family is the first source of intervention should there be marital problems (Bailey, 2010; Liendo, 2008; Pillai, 2001). Mariam, like other Malay survivors in Malaysia who had eloped, had to stay longer in an abusive relationship because of this, and this inability to leave is compounded when women do not have any information regarding external sources of formal intervention and support, such as Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO). On the other hand, if the survivors’ family can still welcome them after they had eloped, this does not necessarily mean that the abuser will not exert psychological pressure on the survivors, as the accounts by Faizah and Fika demonstrate. Therefore, eloping in the context of Malay society creates particular vulnerabilities for the women, particularly in the case of domestic violence.

**Obedient Wife Grooming**

Eloping gives the husband the opportunity to manipulate the women to be an ‘obedient’ wife via grooming. Grooming is seen as a deliberate attempt to persuade the survivors to do something according to their husband’s wishes. It can happen once the husband starts being abusive (Hennessy, 2012). The husband uses the fact that they eloped as a tactic to render his wife ‘obedient’. For the husbands, eloping is presented as a challenge and claimed as a huge sacrifice from them. Marriage is seen as a kind of gift which a wife should appreciate and recompense her husband for. This becomes the root cause of fights between them and my research suggests that husband’s blame their wives for a loss of social respect, which emanates in contempt for his wife. This manipulates the women into believing they are responsible for bringing shame on the marriage, that they are insufficiently grateful or appreciative of their husband’s sacrifices and thus that their husbands’ attitudes are justified. The result is that survivors blame themselves for the fact that their partner has become abusive (Hennessy, 2012:103). The husband often brings up the nature of the marriage when having an argument or prior to hitting his wife. Mariam explains:

“Look, you’re not being honest with me!” he said. “I’m the one who accepted you, being sincere by marrying you. I met your mum to convince her, asking her for your hand in marriage. Yet you don’t care about me anymore,” he said. After that he kept beating me... that was the worst (Mariam).
Fazlin recalls a similar experience:

*Lieya: Did he say anything when he’s hitting you?\nFazlin: Often he would say, “Look at yourself in the mirror, I'd done my part by marrying you”... that’s it.*

During the grooming process, survivors do not realise that their husbands are manipulating them into becoming an ‘obedient' wife'. They focus their attention solely on their own mistakes in the marriage and believe that the abuser must love them because he was willing to marry without family approval.

**Economic Exploitation**

Some interviewees in this study become a target of the abusers for the purpose of economic exploitation. In Ashna’s case, her husband married her solely because of inheritance money following her mother’s death. He was always there for her to provide advice and support while she was grieving and at the same time convinced Ashna to marry him. Ashna met her husband through a mutual friend on Facebook and they became a couple for four years. Their encounter in cyberspace sparked a love interest, and the perpetrator was able to present himself as a nice and loving person, especially when Ashna had lost her mother. He knew that Ashna would receive her mother's inheritance money as she is the only daughter in the family. Information from the client file confirms that he manipulated her, pretended that he really loved her and threatened to commit suicide if ever Ashna left him.

*The client shared that she was lied to twice about her husband’s real age (25 years old). She mentioned that she did not want to be with him because of the age difference (she is older than him). However, the husband threatened to commit suicide and persuaded Ashna to resume their relationship. She said she knew that he married her for money. One day, he asked her to get the inheritance money, but she refused. He then remarked that he had a relationship with her only because of money (Client file, Ashna).*

Ashna regretted the marriage when she realised she was in danger. Her husband’s behaviour towards her started to change and he became more controlling when he realised that his intention to extract money from his wife was not going to happen:
The client said that when her husband wasn’t angry, he is a very nice person. He likes to talk about a lot of topics and asked her out on trips. The client admired his ‘maturity’. She recalled his ‘advice’ i.e. asking her not to go out with other people, or have friendships with strange people, as a symbol of his love. This started to change after marriage and he became more controlling. The client felt guilty because she ignored her father’s advice (Client file, Ashna).

Ashna’s case is thus another example where marriage without consent from family contributes to women’s vulnerability.

Arranged Marriage

As discussed, social and spatial processes that render women vulnerable to violence often emerge from their own decision to choose their husbands. However, arranged marriage is no guarantee against domestic violence and can also often be linked to violence against women because they are unable to choose their own husband. For example, arranged marriage orchestrated by the family-in-law changed Shalini’s life. Shalini explained that the marriage took place 3 months after meeting the husband’s family:

*Lieya: Are both of you related?*
*Shalini: No, we met in a temple. His sister and family like me. After 3 months we had to get married because his family wanted to hide his alcoholic behaviour. If I knew about him prior to marriage, I would not marry him. He always drinks.*

Her decision to marry was influenced by Shalini’s father. As discussed in Chapter 3, the primary duty of giving a girl in Hindu marriage is the responsibility of the father. A woman was to depend on her father in childhood, on her husband as a young adult and on her sons in her old age (Zahur, 2014). Shalini’s father persuaded her to accept the proposal by the husband’s family. This was because the abuser went to the temple to pray, giving the impression that her future husband is a nice man. Shalini was trapped in the marriage after being deceived by her partner’s outwardly pious behaviour, as described in the client file:

*At that time, the client was 26 years old. Her parents were old and did not really care about the decision. The client married her husband at that time because she thought he was a nice person. This was because he used to go to temple and pray. Her brother had already warned her about his temperament. However, her father said he might*
have changed, that’s why he went to the temple. Hence, they proceeded with the marriage (Client file, Shalini).

For Shalini, the motivations for the arranged marriage were obscured because her family-in-law intentionally sped up the process. Thus, her husband’s true nature could be concealed from Shalini and her family. The deception was discovered at the early stage of her marriage, when Shalini realised that her husband was an alcoholic. Shalini again expressed her frustration:

“I did not know about his habit because my marriage was arranged. If I knew his true colour before marriage, I would not marry him. He likes to drink.”

However, rather than blame either the families or her husband’s drinking, Shalini felt most regret in agreeing to the marriage and blamed herself, describing the decision to marry her husband as a “foolish” act. Using photovoice, she describes being his wife as feeling like an ornamental bell, hanging on a tree branch (Figure 7). According to her:

“My life now is like this ornamental bell. I got caught in the relationship of husband and wife, and my life gets worse like this bell.” (Shalini)

Shalini sees herself as like the purple ornamental bell. It is beautiful, and the colour does not fade, but it is left hanging on a tree branch, isolated and alone. Exposed to the hot weather, it cannot function well. Shalini explains that she used to be a bright, cheerful, smart woman and a great mother. Her loneliness and sense of vulnerability is symbolised by the decorative bell.
Figure 7: “My life now is like an ornamental bell that is stuck hanging on a tree branch” shot by Shalini

Her regret at being married to the perpetrator is also expressed in the photovoice analysis:

"We should not do something stupid like this so that we ended up being stuck. Until recently, I could not get away from this." (Shalini)

It was only when she fled to the shelter that Shalini felt that she had escaped the trap she was in as a consequence of her arranged marriage. Arranged marriage occurs among those with higher education, such as Shalini. In arranged marriage, both parties have the right to refuse or accept a partner who is introduced by parents or relatives. However, the husband and wife-to-be are expected to accept their parents’ decision to avoid unconditional marriage, extramarital relationships, separation, and remarriage. So, while technically Shalini could have said no, in reality socio-cultural expectations meant that she never really had complete freedom to make her own decision.
Deception

While Shalini felt deceived into marrying her husband, other forms of deception in marriage also put women at risk of abuse and sexual exploitation. In this study, several women were deceived into exploitative marriages by men faking genuine relationships. In some cases, abusive men targeted women from a different culture. Coercion into changing religion is one part of a pattern of behaviour through which abusers totally obliterate survivors’ previous identity and enforce her submission to a new order, and in extreme cases this can be related to organized sexual exploitation (Herman, 1997). Usha’s case provides an example:

_Usha: I had a strong faith; I put this (pottu\textsuperscript{12}) on. I was so strong in religion. But when it happened (falling in love), my husband totally looked like an Indian man._

_Lieya: Is your husband an Indian?_

_Usha: He is an Indian Muslim. He has a black complexion, so he looked like an Indian. All of his friends are Indians. I thought he was a Hindu, so after knowing him for a year, I felt love pouring in whenever I looked at him in the eyes, just like that. He didn’t need to say anything. In the early stage, I told him, “Nadim, I thought you’re Hindu”. He then said his first name is Nadim. I thought all of his Christian friends have a nickname, so he was giving the impression he might be Christian. When he later started to confess (that he is a Muslim), the first word that came out of my mouth after he told me was, “I can’t change my religion. I can’t convert to Islam. “Nadim replied, “I don’t ask you to convert to my religion (Islam).”_

Usha lived with her partner for four years before converting to Islam prior to their marriage. She claimed her partner deliberately deceived her to force her to convert to Islam:

_Usha: After four years of going there (living with him), then I converted (to Islam). I became a Muslim, then we got married._

_Lieya: You mean you stayed with him for four years?_

_Usha: Yes. So, within the period I already knew what kind of person he is. I knew his true colour, when I asked him of what he said before, “You told me I didn’t need to convert to Islam, why do you force me now?_\

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\textsuperscript{12} Pottu, a religious red marker on the forehead is a religious symbol of a Hindu woman and indicates her status as belonging to her husband. Hindus normally wear pottu every day, and the women at the shelter also wore it throughout their stay (except Shalini who she has lost her faith in Hinduism). According to Joseph (2014), pottu is a marker of Indian femininity, which is disseminated via traditional teachings and cultural practice in the Indian community, but a Christian Indian survivor did not have pottu, which suggests that this is a religious symbol associated with Hinduism.
Lieya: He forced you to convert?
Usha: I had no choice! I love him, there’s no hope. He answered my question, “I don’t marry 10 times, to know that it’ll be like this”. That’s what he said.
Lieya: He doesn’t marry 10 times right?
Usha: What I mean is, he’d never married before.
Lieya: So this is his first love?
Usha: I couldn’t remember it vividly. I think I am the 12th. I was his 12th girlfriend. But he just responded, “I’ve never been married”. The matter whether I need to convert to Islam or not, he’s 28, was he stupid to have no idea about this? I loved him at that time. So, I didn’t have any choice. There’s no other solution. Even though I still love him.
Lieya: At that time, did he actually have a clue about that?
Usha: How can’t it be! He's not a 16-year-old boy. He was 28. His brother is married, his Indian sister-in-law converted to Islam to get married, and how clueless can he be? After that I just figured it out. It’s so troublesome.

The husband trapped her into a relationship with him by not disclosing that he was a Muslim and pretending to be Hindu or Christian and, having fallen in love with him, Usha had no choice but to convert if she wished to marry him. However, as a devout Hindu woman, not only was her religious identity destroyed, but she lacked any awareness of rights and laws in Islam, making her a vulnerable target of abuse. Women like Usha find themselves in a situation where the options become very limited and there is no other real alternative than to agree to the deceptive marriage.

Different types of deception were used to entrap other women in even more abusive relationships. Harini, for example, had no idea about Hinduism and was easily tricked into believing she had entered into a Hindu marriage with a perpetrator who claimed to be Hindu. She was raised as a Christian and did not practise Hindu-related traditions. She did not realise that her ‘marriage’ was a trap to turn Harini into a prostitute. She recounted the beginning of her relationship with her partner and her realisation of the danger she was in after being married as follows:

It had been one year and a half, I didn’t love anyone, I didn’t look for anyone. I had a job in Kuala Lumpur. Then, ‘a guy’ (abuser’s brother) came to me and directly asked, “Hey you’re so pretty, let’s go to the hotel”. I didn’t like it. It’s weird that he just wanted to sleep with me like that.
After that, I responded, “Ok, can you wait? I'll respond later”. Then I told him I would finish my work at either seven or five (a trick), I dallied over while doing my job, he kept waiting for me until night and became irate (because Harini didn’t turn up).

He (abuser) is a pimp. So he knows how to ‘kowtim’ (handle or settle) women’s problems. He does know the way to talk about things and made me fall (in love) with him. Then his brother said to him; “Ok, bring her (Harini) back, ask her to come here (Kedah), I’ll give you money. “The guy (her abuser) wanted money, so when it comes to money, he’ll do anything. Then he told his brother, “Ok, for this person (Harini), I’ll charge you five thousand”. His brother replied, “Ok, ask her to come first”.

I just wanted to see who the person was that I was going to meet so I went to Kedah with the perpetrator. Then he (the abuser) said, “Your problem is sort of different”. I asked him, “How? Can you explain please? Then he said, “My brother had twelve people to rape you because you’d done all sorts of things to him. He was livid”.

After that he told me, I was the one who asked for his help, and he’d saved me. Actually that’s the only good thing that he’d done. Then he fought with his own brother because of money, because of me. After their fight, I stayed with him.

The perpetrator told her that her brother wanted to buy her for sex with other men and that he was saving her. Harini lived with the perpetrator to protect herself because she was worried of the threat made by the perpetrator’s brother. The perpetrator who was thought to be a nice man eventually pimped her:

I thought he is nice. Then I started to trust him and stayed with him. When we had a child, he tied me a thali. He put turmeric on me. While tying the thali, he said, “This is a thali”.

Lieya: Is the thali is a symbol of marriage?
Harini: Yes, it is a symbol of marriage. But actually it’s not real. He gave me that just to make me believe him.

Lieya: Harini, what does the ‘thali’ mean?
Harini: I don’t really know. There’s one time Chumy and Shalini just smiled. They told me the thali that I have has similarity to the real one, with the gold colour. But the thali that they have is accompanied with beads, and it is tied around their neck, that’s the real thali. They told me that the thali that was given by my partner is fake.
The marriage initially felt like a genuine one for Harini. Only after staying at the shelter and having an explanation by other Hindu survivors did she eventually realise that her marriage was fake because it was not conducted according to tradition. Only then did she understand that her marriage was a facade to make her trust the abuser. In addition, Harini was also aware that the marriage was entrapment to manipulate her into being a prostitute. As Harini told a social worker (reported in the client file):

*It was a real relationship, it involved marriage and registration. She was cheated when she started to stay with him 4 years ago. After living with him, she realised that he trapped her to be sexually used by others (human trafficking).*

Survivors such as Harini and Usha encounter various forms of exploitation and control, such as psychological, financial, physical, and sexual violence. However, trafficking is the most extreme form of exploitation that arises from marriage deception. Forcing women to change, and very often lose, their religious identity through marriage is one of the tactics that abusers use to entrap the women. The women involved are often reluctant to seek help because they may have broken the law themselves or gone against social and cultural taboos after deciding to convert to other religions.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued that survivors of domestic violence in Malaysia have usually married their abusive husbands either due to poor decisions or under the influence of their family. However, this does not mean that a wise decision in choosing a husband can guarantee that any women could escape the risk of domestic violence. This is because the perpetrators appear nice in the beginning and there is no specific or obvious indicator to indicate that a man will become a perpetrator. For example, the perpetrators in this study come from a range of different educational, socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Most of the women are unaware of any problematic characteristics of the perpetrator before they decide to get married. This chapter has demonstrated that all women experience vulnerability to some extent but the reasons for this differ between women. Across cultures, the reasons behind the decision to get married and the type of marriage do often determine the level of threat and vulnerability faced by women who encounter domestic violence in Malaysia.
The lack of protection for unacknowledged relationships such as married couples who elope (often Malay-Muslim couples) and cohabitants (often Indian couples) under Malaysian law makes women vulnerable to abuse. The women become helpless when the family tends to isolate the couple who marry without the family’s approval (particularly Malay). In Hindu tradition on marriage, the relationship between Indian women and their family changes, with the relationship with parents becoming less familial and more and contact more minimal. This signifies the the end of maiden life for Hindu women, but it also creates conditions in which an abusive husband can claim that he is the sole owner of his wife. The research has shown that social isolation due to strained family ties often leads abused women to become homeless and to stay longer in violent relationships because there is no place for her to escape. In relation to this, some husbands tend to use the circumstances of the marriage, such as elopement, as an excuse to render his wife ‘obedient’ and grateful. Some women are also targeted deliberately by abusers for the purpose of economic and sexual exploitation.

Clearly, all women survivors of domestic violence have experienced vulnerability to some extent, but with different causes between women. Legal factors and cultural norms are influential because they protect only those who are married in accordance with established procedures. Hence, it is important to have cross-cultural education of women about their rights under different forms of marriage and enhanced legal protections irrespective of religion or culture is essential in Malaysia. This would stop women being trapped in marriages because they do not understand cultural expectations, what constitutes a legal marriage, or their rights as women. This chapter has presented the common dynamics and global consistencies in the experience of the social and spatial processes by which the women are rendered vulnerable to violence. When viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory, there are various cultural specificities and differences that provide insights to assist in the overall framing of trauma in this research.
CHAPTER 6

INTIMATE CAPTIVITY

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters have explored how diverse Malaysian women end up married to abusive husbands. They have shown that many women are at risk of domestic violence because the perpetrators initially appear to be nice and there is no clear-cut indicator that can reveal their true colours. However, the reasons influencing the decision to marry and types of marriage, which are often shaped by culture and religious differences, determine the vulnerabilities faced by women in Malaysia. In this chapter, I explore the spatial aspects of domestic violence. As Acaron (2016) argues, marriage is a spatial choice, which results in the transition process from an individual space to a shared space. In the case of domestic violence, I argue that this shared space becomes a space of intimate captivity. All abused women experience some form of intimate captivity, but it takes different forms according to the background of the individuals involved, where they lived, the circumstances of their marriage, cultural and religious expectation and so on. This argument can be viewed locally, and also applies globally. As Pain et al. (forthcoming) corroborate from their study of violence and trauma, the tactics of abuse that form intimate captivity can be very similar across cultures, but cultural explanations and frames of understanding of abuse differ.

The spatial captivity that shapes domestic violence has been the subject of discussion by scholars in the fields of human geography and psychology. Warrington (2001) highlights spatial entrapment that is experienced in the space of the home so that survivors in abusive relationship are unable to leave. Domestic violence makes the home a prison in which perpetrators exercise strict control over women’s activities inside and outside the home, isolating them from normal social contact. Likewise, in Root’s (1996) account, captivity in domestic violence is beyond the limits of visible space, such that the woman’s house itself or even the neighbourhood in general can be spatialised in such a way as to render women vulnerable and unable to seek help. Many abused women experience captivity or limitation to the degree that they are restricted from moving in their daily lives (Root, 1996). Stark (2007)
also discusses captivity in theorising coercive control, using the term “cage”. The cage as the site of violence is made up of bars that imprison (either physically or psychologically) women who are subjected to abuse. For Herman (1997), domestic captivity occurs in a space in which:

‘...the opportunity to escape physical barriers is rare. In most homes, even the most oppressive, there are no bars on the windows, no barbed wire fences. Women are not ordinarily chained...The barriers to escape are generally invisible and powerful. Women are rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination, as well as physical force’ (Herman, 1997:74).

Beyond the limits of visible space, the space of the home creates physical and other invisible barriers (such as those created by psychological, economic, social, cultural and legal subordination) that render domestic abuse hidden and make it difficult for women to escape. These settings are under the perpetrator’s intimate control, and this exertion of control is centred on the woman’s psyche and body. The women become the targets of violence and are entrapped as prisoners. Every action or sign of resistance will be countered with various tactics by the captor (perpetrator) in return. This incapacitates the abused women from fleeing, leading to a coercive relationship and rendering them, literally, possessed (Herman, 1997). This setting promotes domination, as well as resistance across practices and places (Pain and Staeheli, 2014).

In what follows, I examine how the spaces of intimate captivity encompass various aspects of entrapment. In Section A, I begin by examining how the public/private binary works in intimate captivity, arguing that the abuser’s culture, ethnic and religious background are important determinants. In Section B, I then examine home incarceration as the main scene of domestic violence that involves physical and psychological dimensions of abuse. Section C explores another aspect of captivity that concerns geographical isolation, and argues that there are different experiences of captivity for women who live in different geographical locations such as rural areas, military camps, and urban areas. Section D, however, argues that within different spaces of domestic violence experiences of social isolation and captivity are common. Due to the perpetrator’s control, abused women lived in solitary confinement and lose the connection to their outside world. Finally, this isolation and the ways in which it
A. ‘PRIVATE’ CULTURAL SPACES

The public/private binary in intimate captivity works in various ways, depending on the culture, ethnic, and religious background of the perpetrators. This dichotomy has complex spatial dynamics that are centred around the politics of ‘private’ space in multicultural societies. This is influenced by cultural factors, which often define the husband’s role through two specific tropes: as a God-like man and as a pious husband.

In this study, the Indian women describe their abusive husbands as asserting themselves like ‘Gods’ to reinforce their domination over their wives, almost as a form slavery. As discussed in Chapter 3, an Indian husband is perceived as ‘Gods’ in Hindu marriage whom a virtuous wife must always worship irrespective of his unruly behaviour and a wife cannot reject a husband for his infidelity. The God-like man’s exercise of captivity extends from the immediacy of enslaved bodies into both private and public spaces. The abuse very often continues in public space as part of a manifestation of his God-like power to humiliate his wife into compliance and submission. This happens through various kinds of abuse, especially psychological abuse, which is often followed by physical abuse, as mentioned by the Indian survivors:

Ashna: He tortured me, even at the workplace. He continued to do so once I came home.
Lieya: At the workplace?
Ashna: He would call me, if I didn’t answer for the third time, he would call the office number, letting out streams of abuse. It was so disturbing. I couldn’t be at ease. Once I finished my work, everyone was happy to be home, but I was not. I would drive my bike or car as slow as a snail.
Lieya: You’re afraid to go home?
Ashna: Yes, I had no mood to go home.

Lieya: Did he use to hit you outside, in front of others?
Rekha: Yes (replied quickly like she is used to this).
Lieya: Where?
Rekha: On the roadside, nearby shop lots...Sometimes he did it at my workplace. I was working, then he came to my place in his drunken state.
Lieya: Was that because he wanted to ask for money?
Rekha: Yes... because of money. He knew it when I had my salary. When I got my salary, he was drunk, after that, he came to my workplace, snatching my money.
Lieya: What was the money for?
Rekha: To drink...Liquor...drugs.

Harini: When I was working, he came to ask for thirty ringgits. I shouted at him, telling him I had no money. The he said, “I wanted to stay at a hotel, there’s a woman (prostitute) waiting for me, I had no money. Now give me money, otherwise, I would really beat you at your workplace”. He did smack me here (points at her head), using a helmet. Then I said, I just accepted what you did to me. Take this money, go away. Don’t make trouble anymore. That’s what I told him.
Lieya: Then when he hit you, was it in front of other people?
Harini: CCTV has recording for a guard like us (she worked as a security guard in a factory), if we’re not safe, how?

Usha: He did it several times in front of the clinic; he punched me to the door few times already.
Lieya: At the clinic where you were working?
Usha: Yes. I don’t know why. He made a fuss, but I don’t know why we were fighting. After the national exam, I used to work part-time at Hotel Bintang as a waitress in the ballroom department, while waiting for my results. He used to hit me at the hotel’s lobby. Even the security guard fought with him. It’s embarrassing. There is free food for us in the cafeteria. When I passed by, the security guards over there said, “Hey, her boyfriend is a gangster”. I was ashamed.
Lieya: That was before the marriage?
Usha: Yes. I was ashamed when people kept talking about me.
Lieya: But did they help you or just talk about you?
Usha: They said, whatever I do, it’s my own business. But don’t make a scene there. When I worked there, if I was hit, those in the reception area would go outside. Then they saw what happened, I was really embarrassed.
Shalini: Even when I went to the prison (to visit her husband), he yelled at me, in front of other people. There’s telephone at the prison for visitors to hear the prisoner’s voice. He was mad at me, even there where there were people around us. Then when I went to visit him another time, he took off his slipper and threatened me with it. And there were wardens, and visitors watching us.
Socio-cultural understandings of abuse as an intimate family matter are very often used as a justification both for the abuse and for not intervening. The God-like command of domestic space exercised by perpetrators, and the extension of this beyond the house, means that any space that women occupy becomes accessible to and controlled by their abuser. In other words, as long as survivors are in spaces that are known by perpetrators, the women are under their control. This imaginary ‘private’ space is so powerful, stretching to public domain, and restricting intervention by the community. The term ‘private’ is intertwined with ‘privacy’, which is recognised as a right to exclude others (Schneider, 1994) to justify abuse in public:

_Usha:_ When I was working at a clinic, he went to meet a doctor. There’s a specialist doctor (my boss) was there. Didn’t you think how humiliating it is? I lost face with my colleagues, when we received our salary, I couldn’t go out, because he used to hit me many times. In other places it’s ok, he didn’t change at all, anywhere I went, he always made a scene. Not only that, when I worked for this one boss, the company supplies equipment for a Malaysian airline, he used to go there and beat me.

_Lieya:_ Did anyone help you when you’re abused?
_Usha:_ It’s family issue, no one dare to intervene. He caused havoc, hurling filthy words, I felt humiliated. I was as cheap as dirt. He insulted me.
_Lieya:_ Did you still continue to work there the next day?
_Usha:_ Yes, what should I do then? He did all sort of things at my workplace, including when I worked as a waitress at Hotel Istana after my SPM (equivalent to GCE O-Level). He did the same thing.
_Lieya:_ Do you why he acted like that?
_Usha:_ That’s how he is.
_Lieya:_ For no reason at all?
_Usha:_ Yes.
_Lieya:_ How did he managed to find you at your workplace?
_Usha:_ He was the one who took me and picked me up.

_Lieya:_ Was he mad at you when you talked to the neighbours?
_Chumy:_ The neighbours knew. They knew about him. When he got drunk, he was crashing about the neighbourhood. But no one could help me. Because, when the neighbours asked him to stop making a noise, he shouted back, “this is my family, I’m the head of the family, my wife and my kids, I can do whatever I want. You’re just an outsider, mind your own business”. So my neighbours could just watch even though they knew what was happening. They couldn’t offer their help.
Lieya: Did you expect other people to help you when you were abused by your husband?
Chumy: No.
Lieya: What did you think at that time?
Chumy: I just thought about one thing, to save my life and my kids. That was my focus. I was thinking of ways to get out of this house.
Lieya: That means you wanted to do it by yourself, instead of relying on others?
Chumy: I did bide my time, wondering was there anyone to help me. But no one wanted to help.

In fact, violence against women persists due to the risk faced by the community if they intervene. The men use physical harm, threats or brute force so that witnesses are terrified to take action. A few of the women said only police intervention can put a stop to the perpetrators’ abusive behaviour:

Lieya: So, he just came from nowhere and hit you?
Harini: Sometimes when he had problems outside, he would lash out at me.
Lieya: He just hit you outside the house?
Harini: Yes. Yes, he seemed to be mad non-stop. Once he was mad when we were outside, he just let out his anger to me. I did nothing to him. But all of sudden, he was angry. He was shrouded with a mixed of feelings. And he raked up everything that happened in the past, rubbing it in my face.
Lieya: Didn’t he think the neighbours may hear you scream when he hits you? Doesn’t he feel scared at all?
Harini: No... He’s not scared.
Lieya: He doesn’t mind if others know about the abuse?
Harini: Not really.

Lieya: Do the neighbours know?
Rekha: Yes, but they just stayed silent. If they complained, it will affect them later on. One of them already faced it. He (the perpetrator) shattered and broke my neighbour’s house. Later he was caught by police. However, he didn’t repent. And he still did the same thing.
Lieya: How did your neighbours help you?
Rekha: One of them lodged a police report once. However, my husband knew it was her. Then when he was drunk one night, he picked some stones and broke the window, and hurled derogatory words.
Lieya: Now he disturbed the neighbours.
Rekha: Yes. When it became like that, no one wanted to help.
Lieya: They are afraid of your husband?
Rekha: Yes. He’s not alone... he got many people in his gang. When they had their share of booze, they made noise in that area.

He even picked a fight with the neighbours who sided with me. Then he told them, they should mind their own business, rather than being involved. Then when I got back with him, he became bolder. He was cocky, because whatever he said is try, I would go back to him (Usha).

He was only scared of police. The commoners do not affect him at all, except the police (Shalini).

There are often other people present when the abuse occurs at home. The witnesses are usually family members, including children, in-laws and siblings. They do not only act as onlookers, but sometimes support the perpetrators’ actions and also abuse the survivors in many ways. This situation worsens the survivors’ emotional and psychological state because they are forced to deal with humiliation and being trapped in a prison with more than one abuser:

Lieya: When you lived with your in-laws, did your husband bring you into a room to hit you?
Shalini: No. Sometimes he did it in front of our kids. If you’re the mum-in-law, would you let your son beat his wife in front of you? You won’t do that, right? We would warn him, right? But his mother is not like that.
Lieya: She did nothing.
Shalini: No, never. She just sat quiet, watching us.
Lieya: Was she mad or not?
Shalini: No. Worse, I think she felt happy.
Lieya: Happy? Why?
Shalini: Because her son hit us... that made her happy. My mum-in-law, his mother was like that. That’s how they are. His family members are a bit psycho. Everyone, they are psycho. I can’t say what to do with his family. Every day they made a noise and picked a fight between each other.
Lieya: Did his father hit his mum?
Shalini: Many times. His father is an alcoholic old man. He’s also a wife-beater, every day he hit his wife.
Lieya: How about his older brother?
Shalini: He has five siblings, including him. One is a wife-beater, every day he took to drink. The other three, they also drink but they didn’t hit their wives. His oldest brother, he used to beat his wife to a pulp and do all sort of things, until the kids had grown up. When the kids had grown, he stopped hitting his wife. The second brother,
it’s not that he never hit his wife, he used to do that, but not anymore. He just had a bad temper, but he doesn’t really hit his wife. The third one is the same, he only beat his wife once in a while, he didn’t get mad easily, and seldom hit his wife. The fourth is a piece of shit, my husband is the fifth, he’s also the same. They share similar trait.

Rekha: They (family-in-law) taught him (my husband), “Just beat her, haiyooo, just ask her for money”, that’s what they said. He was jobless. Anything that he asked, I provided him with money. That’s how it worked.

Lieya: Who does ‘they’ refer to?
Rekha: His mother-in-law, brothers and sisters.

Lieya: How many people in the house?
Rekha: Eight. His mother has 8 children. But two are working in Singapore, there were only six of them in the house.

Lieya: Are all six married?
Rekha: His younger brother, younger sister, 2 older sisters, and 2 older brothers were unmarried.

The sense of captivity and exposure to abuse within the family is not simply enabled by the nature of households and domestic spaces, but also by technology. For example, the phone is used as a powerful weapon (Hennessy, 2012), to enable the abuse to be witnessed by the perpetrators’ family members, which worsens the effect of intimate captivity.

Her mum-in-law will do anything asked by her son. His own mum encouraged Ashna’s husband to assault/kill her. For instance, when they argued in front of a Sergeant, his husband called his mum in a loudspeaker mode. She said, “tell the Sergeant that you’ll send your wife to bus stop and she’s free to go anywhere, do it nicely. But once you send her outside, slash (kill) her and leave her there”. Her husband’s family is full of lies and swear a lot and they used to intimidate her through phone when her husband slandered her (Notes from field diary).

Abusive men in such situations are God-like because they can behave with impunity and their intimate possession of their wives is beyond reproach. This is a particular experience of Indian women in abusive relationships. Their abusive husbands’ power stretches from private to public spaces via the enslaved bodies of their wives. Thus, the meaning of “private” and “public” is blurred by social and cultural assumptions of what is valuable and important and this assumption in Malaysia as elsewhere is based on gender (Schneider,
In this context, the exercise of private power extends into public space because of the assumed entitlements of God-like men.

In the context of Malay culture, domestic violence is spatialised in different ways, with the imposition of a form of domestic slavery by God-like men taking the form of an ‘obedient’ wife controlled by ‘pious’ husband. The spatial area of captivity by pious husbands’ extends from their wives’ bodies into private space as defined by Islamic tradition. Islamic notions of public and private space are predominantly contextual (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001), determined by the physical dimensions of space, which includes a wider context of networks, activities and territorial behaviour. In Islam, privacy is defined as the need that individuals or groups have for safety and is expressed territorially. There is a requirement of asking for permission before entering into other people’s private territories. For example, women are required to ask permission from their husbands when they plan to go out of the house (Zuhrah, 1950). However, this is only applicable to a good and pious husband who can protect his wife. Malay Muslim perpetrators manipulate this requirement, by presenting themselves as ‘pious’ husbands, upholding the requirements of their religion and culture, and using this as an excuse to control their wives’ bodies and mobility (this is discussed more fully in Chapter 7).

Therefore, abusive husbands masquerading as pious husbands emphasise ‘privacy’ in establishing intimate captivity. Characteristically, most of the abuse takes place in a room, often sound proofed, in which there are no witnesses or in few cases, only the children and family members see what happens. As long as the abuse is in private, it avoids social sanction. In this way, the perpetrators do not feel ashamed of themselves, maintain their image as a pious husband in the community, and are able to exert their dominance in the ‘safe space’ of the home:

Mariam: He always did that in a room. Even when we’re downstairs, he would drag me to the room upstairs. Or ask me to go to the room. At his village, when we’re just arrived and stay at living room, when we had a heated argument, he hauled me from kitchen to a room, to rain blows on me.
Lieya: Why?
Mariam: Maybe he didn’t want me to run. So that others couldn’t hear what he’d done.
Lieya: But it’s harder for you dodge him when you’re in a room.
Mariam: Yeah, I had to go through many doors. That’s what I think. I’m not sure what he thinks. But it’s possible he doesn’t want others to know, because it is a closed room.

A sound proofed setting is often sought by the abusers to avoid others realising it is taking place. The perpetrators will warn survivors to be quiet, or use other methods such as turning on the radio to high volume:

If I was screaming, he asked me to keep quiet, saying “you, stop screaming!” especially when I’m bawling like a child (Mariam).

Then, when he was so furious (became abusive), he’ll increase the radio volume to the max (Fika).

In many cases, no one notices the abusive behaviour by ‘pious’ husbands:

Lieya: During the abuse, was there anyone at home?
Mariam: There’s no one. Those who usually stay there were attending a feast.
Lieya: Where were you at that time, in living room?
Mariam: I was at the kitchen. Then he asked me, “Hey you, come here.” He dragged me upstairs, and pushed me into a room.
Lieya: Did his brother-in-law hear?
Mariam: No. He was downstairs, so didn’t hear a thing.
Lieya: So there’s only one room upstairs?
Mariam: There are three rooms upstairs
Lieya: How about the other two rooms?
Mariam: Those rooms are occupied by my sisters-in-law and my mum-in-law. They went outside at that time. My mum-in-law stays with her daughters.

Lieya: How about the kids, where are them?
Fika: Two days before I ran away, the kids had their school holidays. So, my mum (mother-in-law) took them to stay at her place. Within those two days (when the kids were not around), he was infuriated. During maghrib (dawn) he was fuming, and became outraged by the time it was midnight, up to a point that he began to hit me.
Lieya: So, he waited until the kids were not around to let out his anger?
Fika: Yes, it’s always like that. Sigh, it’s always like that. Otherwise, he did it in a room, while the kids were outside watching TV.
Sometimes, the perpetrators’ abusive behaviour is witnessed by their children or family members. If the violence took place in public space, it is regarded as ‘not-so-bad’ abuse by the survivors.

*Lieya:* Does your son know that you’re abused?
*Fika:* Not really. They used to see it. But it’s not so often. They’re already terrified even if it rarely happened. So, they just kept quiet. So, he (her husband) did nothing and remained calm.
*Lieya:* When he aimed to hit you, did he do it in a room?
*Faizah:* Yes, but people outside the room could hear us.
*Lieya:* He did it inside because he’s ashamed?
*Faizah:* Not really, the abuse took place in a room, and sometimes it continued elsewhere. Even in the kitchen, depending on his mood.
*Lieya:* So he doesn’t mind if your parents see what he did?
*Faizah:* Yeah.
*Lieya:* Did he use to beat you outside the house, or on the roadside?
*Faizah:* No (while thinking) ... Hmmm if he couldn’t control his anger, sometimes he bashed me in car. But it’s not as bad as when he did it in a room.

The abusive behaviour by these husbands may stop if the private area becomes public, when non-family guests came to visit them at their house.

*Lieya:* So, when he assaulted you, did you ask for help from others?
*Fika:* Yes, I was shrieking but when his friend came over, abruptly he stopped what he did. So, I just hurried up and went upstairs.

On the other hand, extended family members, friends, neighbours and those who interact with the individual in the spaces of the home tend to not interfere with the matter for the fear of ‘trespassing other’s private boundary’ (Schneider, 1994):

*Faizah:* Hmm, at first, he’s barking at me from the windows.
*Lieya:* Where were you at that time?
*Faizah:* I was outside, from the shouting, I felt that I would get his share (of abuse).
*Lieya:* Did anyone hear you?
*Faizah:* I think so, but because we’re in the house, no one could do anything.

Perpetrators may draw on other aspects of patriarchal culture that permit the abuse of women or society norms that allow them to exert control. For example, the conditions for intimate captivity by God-like and pious husbands may be used interchangeably or work
simultaneously, regardless of cultural background. In Usha’s case, her perpetrator is an Indian Muslim. Intimate captivity emerges from a cultural combination of assuming men are both God-like and pious husbands. After pressuring Usha to change religion, for example, her husband used Islamic religion as a tool to imprison her. She was wholly under his control because she had no knowledge regarding Islam:

   Usha: He quoted the Quran every time…. then, he wouldn’t let me to go to my mother’s house, then, he told me that…he knows where am I, where I’m going… he knows all. …He won’t let me out like that, so where is my freedom? He came and ran amok at my mother’s place; it was a catastrophe.
   Lieya: He misused the Quran?

This research finding corroborates Meth’s (2003) argument that not all domestic violence is experienced in private space, in the physical sense. The notion of ‘private’ has complex spatial dynamics that might not refer to ‘private space in which violence takes place’, but rather is considered as ‘public’. The notion of private space, then, can extend into public space, with the result that women feel unsafe and other people do not intervene, because the relationship between a husband and wife is seen as a private matter, wherever it is being enacted. Therefore, even if the abuse is in public space, it is considered a private matter. What constitutes ‘private’ space can also vary according to socio-cultural norms, which have different meanings and produce different consequences (Crenshaw, 1991). The crucial part in many cases of abuse I heard about is not the fact of the categories, but rather the particular different values tied to them and how those values uphold and shape “simultaneous, multiple and interlocking oppressions of individuals” (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005:39). In multicultural societies, cultural values are very powerful in shaping responses among women and community members, rendering a never-ending pattern of domestic violence in hidden captivity. This is because the perpetrators exploit this as a tool to speed up the process of establishing abused women’s captivity (Hennessy, 2012).
B. HOME INCARCERATION

Home is the main site for domestic violence (Pain, 2012). As Herman (1997:74) argues, “a man’s home is his castle; rarely is it understood that the same home may be a prison for women and children whereas often unseen”. Across different cultures, home is regarded as ‘private’ space. For abused women, this spatialisation of privacy creates the conditions for intimate captivity, which has both physical and psychological dimensions. The women of this study, for example, perceive their house as oppressive and as a kind of hell:

*Ashna:* It was so upsetting; my career was affected because he treated me like this. He tortured me, even when I was at the workplace. Even when I was home, he inflicted pain on me. I felt so disturbed. When we finished our job, everyone was happy, but not me. I would ride my bike or drive my car so slow, because I had no desire to be home.

*Lieya:* Can you describe your home?

*Ashna:* My hell. It’s always like that; it’s hard for me to be there (home).

Some of those who have lived in captivity often relate feeling as if they were reduced to a nonhuman life form (Herman, 1997). Through photovoice analysis, a survivor illustrates her life in captivity as being like a mouse being trapped within the four walls of a mousetrap. She describes the trap as symbolising the space of their house (see Figure 8):
As her husband asserted, this space of violence is secret to public:

“He (husband) said, whatever happens in these four walls, don’t you dare to tell other people’” (Ashna).

In addition, physical barriers are often in place that compound the oppressive space of the home. Barriers such as fences form a prison and some of the women reported that their husbands build such barriers so that the neighbours would not hear when the abuse took place. In such cases, the women are trapped as prisoners, in a total helpless state:

*Shalini: My barrier (fence) is up to the high enclosure, then he (her husband) put the fence up behind the house (to be higher). Behind my house, and the neighbours around us are Chinese, all of the wives are kind. When he smacked me, no one would notice. My neighbours at this side, they won’t go out of their house, they just spoke between them.*

*Lieya: Did he tell you why he raised the fence?*

*Shalini: He said he doesn’t want other people to see us. That’s what he said. One time, he was just being released from prison; he wanted this place (home) to be*
prison as well. This is one of the things he learnt in the prison. Once he was out, he knew many things.

Shalini describes her feelings of being trapped behind the prison-like barrier via a photovoice (see Figure 9):

I shared the picture when I stayed with my husband; I felt entrapped in this place, unable to go out the house freely, locked inside the house. The true story is - some of the women in this world experience this kind of life. We have to pass this door, which was tightly closed. My husband always locked me inside. He did not only lock the door, he also restricted my freedom.

Figure 9: “He Tightly Closed the Door and My Freedom” shot by Shalini

Harini added her photovoice (see Figure 10):

I want to share this photo, because it shows an enclosed and dark space. This depicts my life, which is constrained in the house (Harini).
These physical barriers are associated with survivors’ feeling of being in solitary confinement via their photovoice analysis; *I felt entrapped in this place, unable to go out the house freely, locked inside the house, locked inside the doors of violence.* The space is locked, tightly closed, and secluded. It is also under the control of violent husbands. The survivors affirmed that this kind of life is real for some women. Besides physical barriers, in some cases women are also trapped in home captivity by visible surveillance. Middle class captors install CCTV and spotlights in their prison:

*There’s CCTV in the house, monitoring her movement, forbidding her from going out. The only time she can go out is on Tuesday, when she goes to the temple with his family members. When she was outside, he would call to check-up on her movement. She needs to buy groceries together with her husband, with his permission. Client does not have any friends to talk about her problem; she only has one best friend (Client file, Shalini).*

*The house is equipped with spotlights. There are spotlights in front, back, on the right and the left sides of the house. My husband is a drug addict and a dealer. Maybe the spotlights are for his safety purposes (Fika).*
In some cases, the perpetual presence of the perpetrators within the home, usually because of unemployment or criminality, adds to the feeling that women are under constant surveillance:

_They (police) always conducted raid in Sungai Salak area, that’s why my husband didn’t go out of the house. Apparently he was afraid to do his work or have a chit-chat outside; he just went out for a while. And then came home. Maybe he was scared of being caught. So it was hard for me to flee, because he’s always at home (Mariam)._ 

Even when women are able to leave the home, they are watched. As Mariam told me:

_Mariam: Husband’s relative called Aunty Som sympathised with me, because I had no job, no money. Then she asked me to take care of her grandchildren. Then she asked her daughter to pay me._

_Lieya: So you help her to babysit her grandkids?_

_Mariam: Yes. I just helped to babysit them for a few days, he (husband) loitered outside Aunty Som’s house, there’s a hut next her house._

_Lieya: Why didn’t he go somewhere else?_

_Mariam: I’m not sure... he sat there waiting for me._

_Lieya: Was he scared that you run away?_

_Mariam: Yeah, I’m not sure why. Maybe he’s worried that I’m gone or meet my friends because sometimes I went to follow Aunty Som's daughter. He told me, “What if her house is close to your friends? Then he said, “Or what if the Aunty Som’s daughter goes out, will you be alone with her husband”._

All of the participants in this study report feeling that were trapped, physically and psychologically, both within and beyond the home. They are physically confined in a house that is locked, tightly closed, and secluded. In some cases, the house is also equipped with surveillance systems that create prison-like barriers: CCTV and spotlights, and the women feel watched and guarded by their abusers as if they were in prison. The spaces of surveillance shape the survivors’ psychological state as constantly being watched, without freedom, and thus feeling controlled and terrorised by their abusers.

**C. GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION AND CAPTIVITY**

Different geographical settings, such as rural and urban localities, shape the experiences of and responses to domestic violence. Sandberg (2013) differentiates urban and rural localities
as the place or context of violence. She argues that there has been limited research in rural settings, which has limited understandings of domestic violence in these places, and which leaves rural victims of domestic violence unheard and unseen. Fika and Ashna’s cases illustrate the particular forms of isolation that are a feature of rural life and that can make it even more difficult for women to escape domestic violence. Fika lived in a palm estate in West Peninsular Malaysia.

**Lieya:** Was the house located in estate?
**Fika:** Yeah, there are many estates over there. Our lower level house was newly constructed, made from bricks.
**Lieya:** So, it was two-level house?
**Fika:** Yeah, the upper level is made by wood, while the lower level...
**Mariam:** It’s like traditional house, it’s the big two-level house, the lower level is renovated by using bricks.
**Fika:** Yes.
**Lieya:** So was it village tall house?
**Fika:** Yes, it is. Our house is secluded, distant from the neighbours. It was in estate area, so in that place, there are palm trees planted over there.

Meanwhile, Ashna lived with her husband in an isolated army camp.

**Ashna:** It’s hard for me to flee because I lived in a remote army camp. Besides, everyone was at my husband’s side. The place is manned by security guards. All military policemen, and another unit, they are subjected to ordinance. There were not many people in the place. All the occupants in the camp were Malay, except me and my husband (Indian).

It was difficult for Ashna to leave the camp because she had no social connections there and the community was hostile to the camp. The dangers outside is worsened the sense of isolation within it:

**Ashna:** That place is bad. If you wanted to see how worse the place is, have a look at Batu Intan’s history. There are many Indians living there.
**Lieya:** Do you mean the residential areas outside the camp?
**Ashna:** There are Indian villages outside the camp. I was scared when I looked at them, they looked like serial killers.
**Lieya:** Are they from India?
Ashna: No, they are Malaysian. I saw them always picking a fight. I had no friends there because I was afraid of them. Besides, my husband did not mingle with them, he was scared as well.

Ashna and Fika both describe living in rural and isolated houses that were at a distance from the neighbouring houses. They also describe feelings of being imprisoned because of this physical isolation, which made it difficult for them to leave. Limited access to public transport services also isolated them. The geographical isolation and entrapment relate to the husband’s activities as military officer (in Ashna’s case) and drug dealer (in Fika’s case) who are, in different ways, both concerned about security. For Ashna, being in an army camp, surrounded by fences and security guards, compounded the sense of imprisonment when her husband became violent. For Fika, her husband’s criminal activity as a drug dealer meant that he enhanced the physical security of the house (quoted above) to protect him and his network of drug addicts, drug dealers and corrupt police officers, which also enhanced her feelings of entrapment in the home when her husband turned violent. Within a small rural community, Fika also feared the surveillance by members of her husband’s networks if she ever tried to escape:

“It’s tough for me to stay at this place (in West Peninsular Malaysia). I couldn’t, because he has many friends. There are many people know him. How could I leave? What if my husband goes out to find me, or his friends? My sis-in-law told me, it’s good if I move out the place. And then move to other state. It’s safer (Fika).

In Malaysia, geographical location is thus a factor in making it difficult for abused women to leave their violent husbands. Women from urban areas also relate experiences of geographical isolation and captivity. In cases where women started to resist their husband’s attempts to control them, the perpetrators often relocate to distant locations to further isolate their abused partner from the women’s family, friends, and co-workers. Many participants in this study told of experiences of being moved to a new house after attempting to leave their husbands or showing other signs of resistance. Moving to a new house was often used by the husbands to convince their wives of their commitment to ‘build a new life’ and atone for their previous abuse. Through this means, women are persuaded to go back to their husbands:

Faizah: He contacted me via yahoo messenger, asking for apology and cried a river. I committed mistakes too, because I didn’t listen to him. Then he persuaded me to get
back to him. But I said I don’t want to stay in the same house as him. I don’t want to
stay with my mum in law, staying outside is better. Both of us should change
ourselves. We need to start a new life, so we need to change. Then we rekindled our
relationship during iddah. The imam let us to do so.

Lieya: Why you didn’t want to stay with your parents?
Faizah: I felt sorry for my mum in law. Sometimes when we argued, she shat herself.

Lieya: She was scared?
Faizah: Both scared and shocked. My mum in law couldn’t handle loud sound. She
couldn’t hear shouting sound. I realise whenever we had a fight, she went out the
room.

Lieya: How old is she?
Faizah: Sixty-seven. I do realise, when we’re in a heated argument, she must go to the
loo... Then she brought the kids (her children) out.

Relocation occurred several times throughout the abusive relationship and also had a
profound impact on the children:

Faizah: It was exhausting, I’m tired to start another new life, pity them (the kids)
because we had to move many times.

Lieya: How many times?
Faizah: Three times, including this one.

Lieya: When was the first time?
Faizah: When my kid was at Standard 1, I had registered him at a school in Sungai
Salak. Then, I applied for fasakh (divorce) in Ipoh, and we came back here.

Lieya: Was it in the previous school?
Faizah: No, it was a school nearby the house that we rented.

Lieya: So it was a different school?
Faizah: Yes, four schools in total. He changed his school so many times.

Some women were forced to travel back and forth between two houses located in different
states. In Mariam’s case, this appears to have been a deliberate attempt by the husband to
control her by disrupting her routine because both houses are within close distance of
neighbours, close to family members who would intervene, with physical factors that make it
easier for women to escape. Throughout the abusive relationship, Mariam travelled to and
from these two houses. She describes the first house:

Mariam: It is his grandparents’ house in Pulau. His relatives live opposite of the
house, his mak long (oldest aunty) and pak long (oldest uncle) live in a shop lot, while
Tok We (grandma’s sister) lived next to mak long. Tok We’s house is in village area, near paddy-field.

Lieya: Was it in a remote area?
Mariam: No, it is just at the roadside, next to the main road. There are buses passing by, stopping near his house.

She also described the second house:

Lieya: Where was it? Is it in a remote area?
Mariam: No, it was in Sungai Salak. Bandar Baru Sungai Salak.
Lieya: So the house is in a new township area.
Mariam: Yes, the place is developing.
Lieya: So it is easier to have access to police?
Mariam: Yes, near to our house. It’s easy, the roads are well-connected. Not in a remote area.
Lieya: Is it close to hospital?
Mariam: Yes. I can reach there in less than five minutes. Mum and Dad (in-laws) don’t live there, but his elder brother sells things there (he always intervened when Mariam was abused).
Lieya: That means at the house, there were two families (Mariam and her brother-in-law’s family).
Mariam: Yeah.

In most cases where the perpetrator is Malay, there appear to be concerted efforts to keep the abusive relationship a secret for fear of disgrace and shame (as discussed earlier). Constant relocation takes place because the perpetrator needs to avoid being shamed when his violence becomes known. In Mariam’s case, it was also intended to cover his activity as drug addict:

Mariam: Mak Long (oldest aunty) said, “Otherwise, he won’t change. If he isn’t embarrassed, he won’t know”. I don’t really understand. Maybe he was remorseful for what he’d done. Because of that he wanted to go back to Sungai Salak. He didn’t want to stay in Pulau any longer. I told him, “it’s ok, even if others know about us, we just stay here”. I gave him an idea to start business ... I thought he was afraid to do bad things, because Tok Tam and Pak Long (grandma’s brothers) already knew about his behaviour. But then he turned down my idea. He said he was ashamed. All the villagers knew about him. So he insisted to go back at that time. The next morning, he set out to leave the place because three days previously I was beaten by him and I had gone across the village to seek help. For those three days he had remained inside the house (because he was ashamed). He insisted we needed to go away from there. He
said we should go back to Sungai Salak. he said I needed to follow him because if we still stayed there, he would feel tense and I might be beaten again.

Lieya: So when he decided to go back to Selangor, were you ok with that?
Mariam: Yes, that was I wanted. I agreed because of him. Rather than letting him stay there and do nothing.

The process of commuting between the two places is a lengthy and recurring journey:

Mariam: Did you know that we travelled from Sungai Salak to Pulau with bike? That’s how much I’m willing to follow him.

Lieya: How long does the journey take?

Mariam: Maybe six. Five to six hours. If we travel by car, it would take four to five hours. Oh my God, my waist was saddle-sore when we’re reaching our destination. Not only my waist. My backside was numb. Near to Pulau, we stopped many times, two or three times because we couldn’t stand to be on the bike any longer. We stopped quite frequently. I couldn’t go on.

Mariam describes this pattern as arising because her husband had lost direction in life, but it both fuelled and was a means to hide domestic violence:

Mariam: When he was in Pulau, he did nothing, with no job. The, in the middle of fasting month, we returned to Sungai Salak again. So our job was to travel back and forth between Sungai Salak and Pulau (giggling), commuting between these two places.

Lieya: From Pulau?
Mariam: Yes, then we headed to Sungai Salak (sighing), twiddling our thumbs.

The process was explained by Mariam via photovoice, which describes her emotion and resistance towards the ongoing violence (see Figure 11):
Figure 11: “A Journey with No Ending” shot by Mariam

*I share this photo so that others will not experience what I had faced. The photo depicts my experience in domestic violence. The crowded street illustrates my mentally challenged condition, because of what has been happening. I need to go on with my life, no matter how difficult it is. My life is still long and I should overcome my past (domestic violence), regardless the challenges and obstacles (Mariam).

Other women experience relocation due to the problems with other households, especially family-in-laws. For example, Shalini explained that the decision to move was because her husband suspected that she was having an affair with his brother. Thus, moving to another house is a way to isolate her from meeting his brother. However, the house relocation process involves a complex emotional dynamic for survivors, with a mixture of feelings of hope of building a new life free of violence and opportunities to increase their safety. Where they have a role in decision-making about the new house, the house design and proximity to surrounding support that might protect against domestic violence are important for abused women. For Harini, for example, it was important to choose a house that she can easily escape from when the physical abuse was unbearable:

*Harini: He (abuser) handed over the task of finding a house to me. So, I looked for a house for my safety. At first we moved to double-storey house.  
Lieya: So you chose the double-storey house?  
Harini: Yes, I had a look at its features.  
Lieya: Did you plan for this while surveying the house?  
Harini: I looked at the situation. First I looked at the location, then its height, whether it’s easier for me to jump from it or not.
Lieya: So did you have this in mind while looking for the house?
Harini: (Chuckling) I had thought about that first prior to our moving. Without the plan, we won’t move yet.
Lieya: What else did you consider?
Harini: The height of the house.
Lieya: How about the fence structure?
Harini: No. When I planned to jump, it doesn’t mean that I want to jump over the fence, I wanted to jump from the upper room window, and walk towards the house at the corner, then I would jump down from there.
Lieya: So you planned to go out via roof, walked to the corner and jumped to the ground?
Harini: Yes.
Lieya: I thought you wanted to jump over the fence.
Harini: No, if I did that, I knew he would catch me.

For Malay woman such as Faizah, relocating to a new house that is close to the family-in-law, public transportation, and a sharia court are important to make her feel safe:

Lieya: After revoking the fasakh (divorce) application, how long did you stay with him?
Faizah: Four years. We lived in the house for four years.
Lieya: That means when you got back together with your husband, you stayed in your own house?
Faizah: Yes, my house.
Lieya: Did you move from previous place?
Faizah: Yes.
Lieya: Was it far?
Faizah: Not really. It was ten minutes from my mum-in-law’s house. If we use a short cut, it’s closer. I didn’t want to stay far from her, at that time (while giggling), I realised there was a sharia court opposite the house.
Lieya: Oh, did you choose the place?
Faizah: Yeah, we had sharia court opposite our house. Then, the place has the first and last transit for buses. Then I was wondering, “If anything happened, I could run away easily”. I’d thought to that level.

These women were strategically and cleverly resisting their husbands’ attempts to isolate them, but for other women it took longer to realise what their husbands were doing in asking them to relocate. Mariam (Malay) and Chumy (Indian) shared their experiences of being persuaded to move by promises of their lives and relationships being better, only to find their captivity worsened:
Mariam: He wanted to bring me away from my friends. So he brought me to travel to Kedah, Pulau (commuting between two states) with him.
Chumy: He only said, “I love you, I want our kids, I want to be with you.” Then he also said, “If you stay here, people will be nosy, I don’t want them to pry our family, we won’t live happily, it’s better for us to get out and stay there, no need to let others know.”
Mariam: But my husband did tell me. After we argued at his mum’s place, he asked me, “let’s move, we build our own life”, that’s what he told me.
Chumy: Wow it’s similar to my case (comparing her case with Mariam’s).
Mariam: Yeah, I remembered it after listening to your story. He said, “let’s rent on our own”.
Lieya: Did the abuse gets worsen?
Mariam: Indeed, when I shouted for help in from of the house (in Pulau), they couldn’t help me. He said, “You’d humiliated me”.
Chumy: Did you know what else did he tell me? “Ok, I’ll follow your rules, I’ll stop drinking. I won’t drink but you and the five kids have to be with me, let’s move somewhere, we can go somewhere that is far from here. Then, both our sim cards, discard them”.

The experience for each woman in domestic violence is different, depending on their geographical location. This is due to the factors that make it easier for them to escape such as house design, accessibility to public transportation, and distance between their place and the neighbours or help provider. The women who live in urban areas find these factors very helpful for them to escape. However, the perpetrators often relocate the family to another area to further isolate the abused women. In contrast, the abused women who live in remote areas such as oil palm plantations and army camps are marginalised by the rural location. In both cases, living in isolation made it harder for these women to leave their violent husbands and escape the abuse.

D. SOCIAL ISOLATION AND CAPTIVITY

As explained earlier in this chapter, intimate captivity emerges from the control exercised by abusive husbands and centred on women’s psyches and bodies. As long as human connection is maintained by the women, the perpetrator’s power is limited (Herman, 1997). Most participants in this study describe that they were held captive in many ways; they were prevented by the perpetrator from contacting family, from going out, from taking care about
their appearances, and their movements were also controlled and curtailed. In some cases, children and denial of contact with other family members were used to control the women. For example, Chumy recounts:

After giving birth, I stayed at my mum’s house; he (husband) came and took my son away. He didn’t let me see my kid. “I can’t give him to you, if you want him, you must come back”, that’s what he said. That was the first time he committed abuse, because they (husband and in-laws) disapprove if I get closer with my mum. They despised it.

Chumy added:

I couldn’t speak to no one, even my mum. He disliked it. He disapproved me from talking to my siblings, parents...because he assumed that I would divulge a secret (about domestic violence) to them. So, he didn’t want others know what he did to me at home. So that’s why he didn’t let me to talk to others, even my mum, or my siblings. Besides, if they held something, such as wedding, I couldn’t attend it. One day, my sisters were getting married. I went to the bridal store with my daughters to have a make-up done for us. I spent two hundred of my own money, my husband waited at home. I told him, “ok, we’re ready, let’s go to the wedding”. “I don’t want to! I’ve told you, you can’t dress up. Why do you wear a sari? I won’t allow you to go there”. I cried the whole day. It was about half an hour. I kept crying, because I couldn’t attend my own sister’s wedding. I was sobbing and closed my eyes. The next day I went to work. Even in the office, he sets rules for me. He told me, “you can’t smile at other people”, even if they are Malay, Chinese, or Indian, whatever they say, don’t respond. They can smile, but not you. I don’t want to see a smile on your face, I dislike it.

Faizah: When he knew that I was adopted, he tried to torment me. He said, “you’re adopted, you’re dumped by your parents, so why do you need to go to your house or hometown during Eid?” But he told me he felt sorry for me and loved me so I was ok with that. He said that I needed to make the sacrifice. He said that when I went back to my (adopted) parents, I changed a bit.

Liya: So he didn’t allow you to go back to your hometown?

Faizah: Yes, he didn’t let me. Because I am adopted. There is nothing (no relationship) between me and my parents. Because he loved me, during the first Eid after we got married, I cried because I couldn’t go back.
Lieya: When you’re at home, did he control you? Restricting you from going out or doing something?
Shalini: Yeah, he liked to control everything. I couldn’t go out myself. If I wanted to go out of the house, to go to the clinic or buy groceries, I had to take his older sister with me. I also had to bring his sister if I wanted to pray in a temple. I couldn’t go out alone. I couldn’t even go to my parents’ house. He didn’t allow me to do so.
Lieya: Did he give you a reason for that?
Shalini: He just didn’t approve of me meeting my parents. He said If I go there, my dad would take me to see a shaman, like that.

In some cases, the husband’s social isolation is also used as an excuse for the women to be abused, despite the fact that their abusers had brought about the isolation:

The night (prior to abuse), he asked for five hundred. Then I replied, “where can I get the money, who can I ask? I had no friends too. Because I had stopped working, so I have no friend. Even my Facebook’s account was terminated, so who can I ask? How? Even if I ask someone, do you think they’ll give the money easily?” (Mariam).

These circumstances create forms of solitary confinement, in which the abused women are required to sacrifice her social connections (Herman, 1997). The abuser also attempts to control the social response to avoid him from being challenged about his abusive behaviour (Hennessy, 2012). In fact, some community members act like the perpetrators when they side with the husbands, due to the latter’s positive image in the society:

Harini: He acted like an angel outside. He told others that I hit him. Do you know how he managed to pull it off? When others asked him why he bashed me, he would make up the past (dragging up stories). When I responded that what he said was different from what I did, he ignored it and found excuses for why he hit me.
Lieya: Oh he knows the way to make up stories. So the others trust him?
Harini: The others believed his story, and there are two couples who blamed me for his action.
Lieya: Who are they? Are they your friends or neighbours?
Harini: Not the neighbours, but his boss.

He liked to create stories, saying that I made him stressed and embarrassed. And his mum buys his stories. She always thought I’m guilty. When my brother-in-law heard about his made-up stories, he threatened me, “if you do something to my brother and don’t treat him nicely, I’ll kill you” (Ashna).
Chumy: Once I left with the children, he locked everything and called his father, siblings, telling them I wronged him, even the kids were wrong, I was the one who broke any rules and did all sort of things.
Lieya: He made up stories?
Chumy: Yes. Because of his stories, all of them dislike me.

For a few, the social isolation is worsened as a consequence of physical abuse:

Ashna: I used to work for Chinese. It lasted only three weeks. When my boss saw the bruises, he said, “you don’t need to work here anymore. I think you have problems with your husband. I don’t want any trouble”. I told my husband about that but he didn’t believe me. He said, “oh you did something wrong, that’s why you got fired”... And I was smacked for that. Anything I did was wrong.
Lieya: Your boss didn’t help you? What was your job?
Ashna: I worked in sales. He didn’t help, but let me resign. He didn’t want to deal with employees’ family issues.

This pattern is reinforced as some survivors alienate themselves due to feeling ashamed of the effects of physical abuse:

I was embarrassed if others could notice bruises on my face. I was abashed to speak to others if the bruises hadn’t faded away (Ashna).

Mariam: It had been that a week I didn’t go downstairs, until my mum-in-law came to see me. She went upstairs. I covered my face. My face was swollen, it was obvious. Especially my eye. So, I wore glasses. Then she asked, “why, did you have a fever?” I said yes. Then she asked me to go to hospital. She spoke to my husband. “It’s ok”, he replied. “She already took the medicine, its ok now. Let’s see then, if we want to go to hospital, we can go tomorrow”, he said. Then she went downstairs.
Lieya: Did she notice the bruises?
Mariam: No, because I got my face covered. I felt ashamed at that time. But it was the worst abuse; I got bruises here and there. He beat me with a wooden stick.

Many of the abused women do not go out as frequently as they would like and slowly cut themselves off from others. They fear the abuse that results from social events and they are also vulnerable to social embarrassment:

Shalini: When we went out or attended any function, I couldn’t be happy. Even if all his family members were happy, I just sat still. I was terrified. Everywhere we go or
anyone we meet, if we came across his brother or others while walking, I’m dead. He said, “oh, you looked at him”.

Lieya: Would he beat you then?
Shalini: Yes. He started it, and then he struck me. “Oh, you had a feeling towards him right? I know you’d slept with him, I knew it” … He’s so disgusting, keep spitting filthy words.

Usha: Even in family gatherings, everyone ostracised me. They said, if I came my husband will do something to me, they would be upset, me too. So it’s better if I didn’t show my face. They said it directly. How would you feel when everyone shuts you out?
Lieya: Their upset about you, is it more out of hatred or pity?
Usha: Pity. That’s why they said it directly. “If you come here you can’t be happy; your husband will pressure you”.

According to Herman (1997), this ostracism by family members because of the social embarrassment of abuse destroys women’s sense of social freedom. Abused women are physically and socially entrapped because they lose the connection to their family and the community. This is also disabling by cutting them off from any source of information, material aid, or emotional support (Herman, 1997). It then creates conditions for demands by the husband for absolute obedience and loyalty from abused women, which they often feel compelled to give because of dependence on their husbands.

E. PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE

Love and Sympathy

The psychological force of love and sympathy refers to the intermittent rewards an abuser uses to control the target of their abuse (Herman, 1997), or the refined processes that are known as benign grooming and re-grooming (Hennessy, 2012). Often, the force is established when the captors see the possibility of their wives escaping, or if there has been any attempt by the survivors to seek help, or after they have tried to leave for good. As observed by Walker (1980) in different context, the reconciliation phase is a crucial step in breaking down the psychological resistance among abused women. The use of this psychological force binds the survivors to their perpetrators to be submissive in the long term. The woman is often coerced into returning by apologies, promises to change, expressions of love, as well as
appeals to compassion and loyalty (Herman, 1997). As highlighted by Mariam, persuasion by perpetrators is part of what ensures abused women’s captivity:

*His persuasions indeed become a prison. A wall. (Mariam)*

The persuasion occurs in various ways. In most cases, it is filled with expression of love, fear of abandonment, promises to reform, and a guarantee that the abuse will not occur again. These tactics really work in dissuading the abused women from leaving:

> When he dragged me, he cooled me down, but I kept quiet. Then I told him, “I want to go back”. We’re heading to Selangor. “Wait a moment”. He drove the car, “let’s head into the car.” He drove and stopped at the edge of the highway. He began his sweet talks, “It’s not that I wanted to do that, it’s not that I don’t love you”, he carried on, “every time I hit you, I’ll hug you, I love you”. That’s what he said. “I won’t do this anymore” then he wrote on a piece of paper. I told him, “I’m scared, I can’t go through this any longer. I don’t want this (life) any more. I was afraid to be back with him. I asked him, “what can assure me that you won’t hit me anymore”. Then he wrote the date, and continued, “from today I won’t lay a hand to you anymore. If I do hit you, you can tell anyone, and you can get out of my life”. That was his promise. He tried to win me over. To calm me down. My face was all swollen (Mariam).

Perpetrators exert a manipulative force in gaining survivors’ sympathy by using phrases like – ‘I cannot live without you’. The perpetrator acts like he’s suffering and threatens to commit suicide. This is fake because the abuse accelerates, and to make it worse, survivors set aside their intention to leave and end up back in situations of intimate captivity:

*Lieya: How many times you tried to leave?*
*Harini: I think five or six times.*
*Lieya: Did he call to coax you? Did he persuade you?*
*Harini: At first he just called me. When he knew that I was at my mum’s house, he came, not shaven with his hair unkempt. His face looked troubled, he was not in his right mind. I felt sorry for him, he was quiet after I left him for two, three days*
*Lieya: Was he trying to be nicer?*
*Harini: Yes....Then I thought he was ok. When I thought everything was good, he started it again.*
*Lieya: He started to be mad?*
Harini: Yeah, he started interrogating me with questions. He asked whether I really stayed with my mum or not when I left him. Did you meet any one? That’s how he started. He pumped me for details, then he became his old self.

Lieu: What kind of questions did he ask?

Harini: He thought about those questions and he answered them based on his assumption. Then, he directed his anger to me.

I was wondering was it my fault, did I make any mistake, why does he treat me like that? I kept thinking non-stop. And think again. I thought after going out the house, I did make a mistake. A huge mistake, then I went to him. Because he told me and promised “I won’t repeat this, I’ll change my style”, so when he was crying while saying that, he let out his hand, “ok, give me a poison for me to drink, then you’ll know how much I love you”. Just empty promises. So I believe his tittle-tattle, I was like an idiot, but I still returned to him (Chumy).

Similar stories were told by a majority of the women. They describe their confusion about feeling like they were to blame and being susceptible to their husband’s apologies and promises to change. Some perpetrators offered a privileged life to the abused women if they returned to home, promising to help with household chores and prioritising the sake of their children’s happiness over their own needs:

Yeah. Then he ordered me to not stay with my mum. I told him, “You have no right, to say anything! If you really change, you can’t depend on me ok. Then he requested me to stay with him. He said, “I don’t want sex, just for the kids, if you want to say anything, you’re allowed to do so. You can talk to me any time. You don’t need to cook for me, no need to do laundry, I’ll wash myself, make myself neat”, that’s what he said. Before this, I was the one who ironed and prepared his attire. Socks, undergarments, I’m the one who kept everything (Usha).

This persuasion is also used to convince survivors that the happiness of the family is her responsibility. This is because the perpetrators emphasise the importance of a wife in a creating a happy family, placing the abused women back in captivity. According to Hennessy (2012), this sense of responsibility, which abused women feel keenly, is compounded by the erosion of their self-esteem by the abuse, giving them a sense that they cannot cope living alone due inadequacies, with a belief that her children needs a father:

Chumy: Even when I went to my mum’s house, he still came to me. Then after a week he came again. He looked for me at my mum’s house. He told me, “Chumy, please
forgive me, I want to focus on my wife. I want to prioritise my kids. Even though I committed mistakes, please forgive me. I won’t repeat them; it won’t happen again. Please forgive me”. He pleaded, holding my foot. He looked sincere, so I thought, this is my family, I don’t want the kids to be separated.

Lieya: From their father?
Chumy: Yeah, their father. In fact, to be a happy family, everyone has to be there for each other. Indeed, it was my house, well actually it is his house, my kids need a home too. I also need a home, that’s a fact. I realised that. So I thought, it’s ok, I’ll follow his orders, but he can’t change his promise. So I went back to him.

Lieya: So you stayed with him?
Chumy: Yes, in the same house with him. He was ok, but it only lasted a week, that he acted nicely. After that, he slowly started to behave like his old self.

Lieya: He started it again?
Chumy: Yeah. Time and again, he made me horrified. One day I was thinking, “am I incapable of doing anything? Do I have no strength? Can’t any woman do something on her own?”

In December he went to India to pray. Then he called me, saying that he planned going to India to pray, no one will take care the kids at home. They’re my kids, so I decided to go back to his house (Shalini).

Hennessy (2012) argues that none of these methods are designed to soothe the women. They are used to put the abused women back in intimate captivity, ensuring that the perpetrators’ position as captor remains unaffected. Even when women have managed to leave, their husbands still use the psychological force of expressions of love to try to bring them back:

Chumy: My husband used to send me a message, “Darling, please call me back”, because he knows that I used the same number, he contacted the number.

Lieya: When did he text you?
Chumy: It was recently. He sent me a message just now, “Darling, please call me, text me please, reply to my message, please call me now”. When I didn’t respond, he called me an idiot. Pig! Whatever happened, he thinks that he’s not guilty. “He said it’s not his fault. I should be blamed for everything”.

Hence, the force is also used to avoid sanction and recover the relationship, as if nothing has happened (Hennessy, 2012) or to conceal the husband’s behaviour (Bancroft, 2002). For example, in Chumy’s case, the perpetrator used the opportunity given to him by a police officer of attempting to reconcile to avoid sanction:
Chumy: At that time, he cajoled me, he even held my feet.
Lieya: In front of the sergeant?
Chumy: No, the sergeant had given us five minutes. He already went out. He coerced me, “please, please, don’t tell him about the abuse. I won’t hurt you any longer, give me a chance. This is the last. Do give me a chance”. So, when he asked that, I was like an idiot, so I let him go. And I gave him a chance then. However, he didn’t appreciate it, and he later dare to use a machete.

Mariam added, the expression of love is also intended to eliminate the effects of abuse:

Mariam: When I was hurt, aching with pain, I tidied up the house. But he prepared warm water for me to shower.
Lieya: So he tried to persuade you?
Mariam: Yes, he noticed the bruises. He prepared the warm water... I realised once it touched my skin, it went away real fast, the bruise quickly faded away.

The perpetrators often find it difficult to maintain these tactics because the expression of love is not genuine. Many researchers often misunderstood these tactics as the ‘honeymoon phase’, as if the attempt to soothe and mend the relationship is genuine, but it never takes place. As time goes by, the perpetrators never appreciate the women. Once the cycle of abuse is set, the husband is less likely to attempt to soothe or show regret through expressions of love:

Lieya: After the abuse, did he compliment you?
Shalini: When we were just married, he did that (sweet talking). But then, once he beat me, even if I’m dying, he won’t give a hoot.
Lieya: If you’re in pain?
Shalini: He did nothing.

Lieya: Every time he bashed you, did he act nice after that?
Mariam: No. Not really. But at that time (when he acted nice) err, it’s because he’d had his fix (drug), I can vaguely recall.
Lieya: Was it because he felt guilty?
Mariam: Maybe a little bit. But there was one time when he smacked me that bad he prepared warm water, asking me to shower with it... but as time went by he did nothing.
Harini illustrates this through her photovoice (see Figure 12):

*Every promises made by my husband seem like murky water streaming in a river. Nothing is fulfilled. We shouldn’t be fooled by his empty promises.*

![Image](image-url)

Figure 12: “His Empty Promises like Murky Water Streaming in a River” shot by Harini

After the woman leaves, perpetrators often attempt to exert psychological control through the use of mobile phones, instant messenger, and information provided by family members. Perpetrators use various methods and manipulate their children as a subject to initiate the feelings of love and sympathy from survivors. In addition, they try to revive significant memories between them and their partner or, in some cases, use threats of suicide. Usha shared how the perpetrator persuaded her in having contact with him by phone:

*I didn’t respond to him (perpetrator). He texted me, “If I’m guilty, making lot of mistakes, I want to ask for your apology. Please ask the kids to buy white cloth for me (a threat of suicide). Usha, I love you too much. As final words, I want to leave this world, my heart is empty, please tell mum, my sister, your mum. I asked for their apology, I plan to leave this world (Usha).*

Here, the abuser performs apparent repentance and a threat of suicide are used to cajole his wife into not leaving him. Similarly, Shalini added:
Shalini: The first time I was mad, he asked my father to meet me. My father told me he said, “I do miss my kids a lot, I want to meet them.” He did call, asking if he could come and saying he didn’t want to hit me again. Like that. (My father said) “Even if he hit you, it’s ok if he repents. From what I heard, he has reproached himself and changed, he doesn’t drink any more” So, I’m wondering whether he has changed for the better, but I won’t go to him. I’ll be ok. I’ll tell him “if you want, you can take the kids”. He can take care of them, but I won’t go to him.

Lieya: So you don’t believe him anymore?
Shalini: In fact, I despise him.

Love and sympathy provide opportunity to the perpetrators further victimise their wives. The feelings of love and sympathy, as well as family values, prompt them to allow perpetrators to exercise this kind of force. According to the WAO report (2015), the main reason women return to their abusive partner is due to their decision to “forgive”, the perpetrators besides other factors such as fear of the perpetrator (discussed below), financial and housing issues, as well as concern for children’s wellbeing. In 2014, of 110 domestic violence survivors who sought refuge with WAO, 25 (23%) returned to their abusive partner. All of them said that they wanted to give their respective husbands or partners another chance. Psychological force is thus inducing the survivor’s second thought to flee in response to expressions of love or claims of having changed. Subsequently, abusers appeal to their wives’ love for their children or other family members. The result is that women become chronically entrapped by their abusive husbands and unable to escape due to the psychological force he is able to exert.

**Fear**

Fear is often the main reason for survivors to remain in an abusive relationship; this fear is rational and justified (Pain, 2012). The women in this research have left their relationship because of the fear of abuse, which gets worse from day to day while they are in captivity. Nevertheless, there is often pattern of repeatedly going back to their perpetrators because the violence is unceasing and escalates after a few leaving attempts as Pain’s (2012) research shows in a different context. In fact, some women who do manage to leave violence relationships are murdered after separation, according to the social worker in the refuge. Perpetrators trace survivors and assault them as punishment or as a tactic to bring their wives back into captivity. For example, Usha recalls how her husband found her at her mother’s house and used violence and threats to make her return home:
Usha: At ten in the night, he (husband) demanded me to go down. My mum’s house is at the first floor. He ordered me to go down but I didn’t listen to him. There is a Chinese coffee shop and karaoke; he crashed around, drawing people’s attention. He didn’t try to lower his voice. Like picking a fight, he shouted, “I’m down here, come here now”. He used filthy words, saying that he trusted me, but I did wrong in return. He kept repeating the same thing over and over again. How should I respond? He’ll just propose the same question to me.

Lieya: Was he mad at you for making police report?

Usha: No, at the time, he didn’t know. This is because he told me to come down, but I said I didn’t want to. He was shouting. I know he is ill-tempered. So I called the police, but there was no response at that time. During the call he was already there (in the house), he held a steering lock in one hand, and my kid in another hand. I was in a different room when I saw them. Then I asked him, “why are you like this? We can discuss, why? What happened?” His eyes were dilated, his mouth was filled with uproar, even my brother was shocked. All our things were thrown onto the floor, even the microwave oven. Aiyyoo, even the water container was thrown about. I was wearing a butterfly pyjama, the sleeves were torn off, yet I didn’t care. I wanted to flee, crying. Then he used the steering lock, and beat against my hands, there were bruises and scratches.

The abused women fear for their own safety and that of others, including the children and family members. After leaving, the pain is unbearable because the risk gets intensified. They face different kind of threats, such as threats of murder, kidnapping, property damage, and the death of their children, family members, or anyone who provides them with support. If the survivors stick with the decision to stay out of the relationship, the intimidation can escalate into murder attempts and violence against children and family members. Most of those interviewed desperately crave to leave:

Lieya: What made you stay for so long Usha?

Usha: It’s not that I really love him... I couldn’t stand it any longer. He threatened me. He said, “if you want to run away, go ahead” You can do that. But you have to beware, your mum will die, it’s in our custom to burn our mum’s body right? He said, “You’ll see, your two brothers, one of them will also die soon”. That’s what he said. “You can go! I used to be away, I used to live in jail, I’ll be out eventually”. He kept intimidating me like that. For me, I didn’t want other people to die.

I actually made a cover report, saying that I went out the house and stayed in a safe place at the moment. I felt our house was not safe for me to stay. Then one day, he called my elder brother and intimidated him. “Oh you’d brought my kid and wife out.
Watch out, your family will disappear one by one, I’ll take your kids.” And he issued all sort of threats. Then, he went to my parents’ house, bringing a machete with him. That was the second time I went out of the house and he brought the machete to my parents’ house. Then he wielded a knife to my father, threatening to kill him. He did many things. Then my elder brother lodged a report because my husband kidnapped his son (Shalini).

The threats of violence against family members are often used to prevent women reporting abuse or leaving violent partners. For example, Usha explains that her partner made threats of physical violence towards her family. He also threatened her mother with sexual violence. In Chumy’s case, her husband issued an implicit threat of sexual violence against his own daughters to ensure his wife went back to him. Similarly, Fika’s violent husband risks their children’s life to make sure she returned to him:

_Fika_: He knew I was at my grandma’s place, so he went there. He asked me to return. I defied him, so he brought our kids, using his car. Then, he deliberately involved the car in an accident. I told him I don’t want to go back to him, then he told the kids, “your mama doesn’t want to come home with us, why do we need to wait for her any longer...”

_Lieya_: Did they survive the accident?
_Fika_: Yes, obviously, but he drove so fast and when it came to the corner, after going down the hill, he swerved the car and had an accident. My son (older child) had nine stitches on his head and three at the eyebrow while the younger son didn’t have any stitches. He just had stomach bruising. The older brother had it worse. It was quite critical. There damage to his head. I went back to my husband because of my sons (sighing). When I visited them at the hospital, they were in a serious condition. His mouth was badly swollen and had bruises, with stitches... My elder son said, “Mum, please come home”.

_Mariam_: He was conscious at that time?
_Fika_: Yes, but he could barely move. He was not wearing any clothes (in the ward), only diapers.
_Mariam_: How about your husband?
_Fika_: He had nothing, only minor injury. The car was totally ruined.
_Lieya_: When you’re at the hospital, did your husband say anything?
_Fika_: He said, “You see what happened.” It’s me (being blamed). Then he said “you see whose fault is that?” I could say nothing, I was so petrified from what I saw (sighing, think of her son in a critical condition).
This pattern of violent acts and then blaming the women is, according to Hennessy (2012), a common outcome where intimate captivity makes abused women feel stupid and to blame themselves for the fear and pain suffered by them and other family members affected by the violence. The perpetrator keeps repeating that the abused women should know better because it is her behaviour that dictates his reaction. In planning her photovoice, Shalini attempts to describe this situation and how it made her feel like a candle burning itself out:

*Shalini: Actually, I want to have a picture of a candle.*
*Lieya: A picture of a candle?*
*Shalini: A candle that is burning itself out... (melting).*
*Usha: Suicide.*
*Shalini: It’s not suicide!*
*Usha: Finishing herself off.*
*Mariam: Sacrificing ourselves.*
*Shalini: Yes, sacrificing ourselves like a candle.*

Despite similar experiences, there is a difference of opinion between Shalini and Usha. Shalini and Usha had both been convinced by their perpetrators to protect their children, and to protect their family members from being threatened. Usha had the experience of being trapped in intimate captivity for twenty years, which she desperately wanted to leave. She felt that there was only one way out for her to protect her children, which was to commit suicide (discussed in Chapter 8). Shalini, however, had no suicidal thoughts in mind, even though she was similarly trapped in an abusive relationship. However, she suffered chronic fear and severe psychological depression, which she illustrates as a form of self-destruction, like a candle burning out.

Love and fear work in complex ways to render abused women captive. As Herman (1997) highlights, the desire to escape is powerful, but the psychological forces that prevent this are not easily broken because they are ‘developed and refined’ (Hennessy 2012) by the perpetrators, who use their intimate knowledge of their wives’ personalities and circumstances to exert their control over them.
CONCLUSION

This chapter explains that some women in Malaysia and other contexts are entrapped in complex, but very common, relationships of intimate captivity. However, it takes different forms according to the background of the individuals involved, where they live, the circumstances of their marriage, cultural and religious expectations and so on. The study found that the perpetrators’ culture and religion determine how far the public/private binary works in intimate captivity. This chapter has demonstrated that Indian husbands often assert themselves like ‘Gods’ to reinforce their domination over their wives as defined by Hindu tradition. These husbands’ exercise of captivity extends from the immediacy of wives’ almost slave-like bodies into both private and public spaces as part of a manifestation of his God-like power, and this persists due to the risk faced by the community if they intervene. On the contrary, domestic violence is spatialised in different ways in Malay culture. The Malay husbands assert themselves as a ‘pious’ husband to reinforce their control over their wives in the form of the ‘obedient wife’. The spatial area of captivity by pious husbands extends from their wives’ bodies into private space as defined by Islamic tradition. This chapter has also argued that perpetrators may draw on other aspects of patriarchal culture that permit the abuse of women, or on societal norms that allow them to exert control.

Having outlined the ‘private’ spaces’ boundaries that differ across culture and religion, this chapter has illustrated the ‘private’ space of home, which has both physical and psychological dimensions. The home as a space of abuse is walled by visible and invisible barriers that make it difficult for abused women to escape. In such circumstances, they also find it hard to get any source of intervention, as the perpetrator has usually severed the relationship between the women and their families and the wider, community, geographically and socially. This becomes more serious with the use of psychological force, such as love and fear, which causes survivors to be bound to the perpetrators, thus making them submissive and unable to escape, often for many years.

Therefore, this chapter has made clear that domestic violence is influenced by geography, external to the home (rural or urban locations, the extension of the private sphere into public spaces), within the home, and upon both women’s psyche and their body. Together, these geographies create the conditions for intimate captivity and understanding this is important in
tackling underreported cases of domestic abuse. The chapter has used the idea of intimate captivity, which works across public and private spaces, to explain how abused women are both subjected to violence and unable to escape. Such women find themselves under the perpetrators’ intimate control, which is exerted upon both their psyche and their body. Most of the tactics for entrapment are well-developed and refined, allowing the perpetrators to counter attempts at resistance by the women and intervention by others. This makes it hard for the women to escape and, even if they do manage to escape, they often end up returning to the perpetrators afterwards. In extreme cases, escaping intimate captivity can lead to their own death, as well as that of their children, or other family members, and the fear of this is also another coercive feature of intimate captivity. Clearly, intimate captivity is common for abused women everywhere. Only the features of intimate captivity are manifested in very specific ways in the context of Malaysia in relation to culture and societal norms. These findings are very important in the context where there is little known about domestic violence. In Malaysia, understandings of how domestic violence is spatially experienced by diverse women are often influenced by western accounts, which only link the physical sense of home to the private sphere. Meanwhile, the subject of space in domestic violence grounded in the experience of multicultural women has been absent both in research and wider debates. This chapter has argued the common dynamics and global consistencies in the experience of intimate captivity. It has also explored the importance of viewing domestic violence in Malaysia through postcolonial lens, in particular the importance this place on the representation of abused women with numerous explanations on cultural specificities and differences that contextualising domestic violence frames of understanding in this study.
CHAPTER 7

CULTURES OF POSSESSION: DEMONIC, PATRIARCHAL AND TRAUMATIC

INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters have suggested that many of the characteristics and experiences of domestic violence are common across cultural differences. We have seen that there are similarities in the experiences of domestic violence between Malaysian women of different ethnicities or religion and, as the literature suggests, between Malaysian women and women elsewhere in the world. However, in the next two chapters I argue that despite these similarities, the ways in which domestic violence is understood and experienced in Malaysia can differ quite markedly from western understandings. An appreciation of the cultural specificities of domestic violence is thus required in order to work towards its prevention. This chapter aims to explore the ways in which cultural notions of possession, including the idea of demonic possession, are used by survivors, perpetrators and wider Malay society to understand domestic violence. During interviews, many women in this study talked about religious and societal norms and referred to notions of demons in the context of their abusive relationships. Demonic possession is not only used as a metaphor for domestic violence, but also as a narrative to help make sense of or to excuse it. Along with the invocation of religious and societal expectations about the role of women and wives, it often has the effect of directing attention away from the perpetrator’s abusive behaviour, to place the blame either externally or, just as commonly, on the woman who is experiencing it.

In the discussion that follows, it is made clear that this story of demonic possession works as a worldview that forms a very close fit with religious ideas and patriarchy that lead to individual experiences of domestic violence. Both the behaviour of perpetrators, and the symptoms which women suffering from abuse commonly experience, are very close to societal beliefs about demonic possession. Indeed, what might otherwise be understood as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the cumulative effects on personality and identity of victims of long-term abuse, are identified as either causes or consequences of demonic possession by many of the survivors and perpetrators in this study. There has been
relatively little previous research on this phenomenon in relation to domestic violence, and the chapter maps out the different ways in which beliefs about demonic possession and experiences of domestic violence relate in the Malaysian context.

The chapter suggests that the notion of possession is not necessarily specific to Malaysia, but may exist elsewhere given that spirits are a widespread cultural belief in many societies. The chapter also argues that, in western contexts too, cultural beliefs about women’s roles and culpability for violence against them are often mobilised by perpetrators, wider society, and even by women themselves. The result is to minimise the actual importance and severity of violence, and perpetrators’ responsibility for violence. In particular, such beliefs divert attention from structural explanations for violence that highlight societal gender inequality. Demonic possession, therefore, in common with other cultural stories that are told about abuse elsewhere, becomes part of the widespread culture that sustains domestic violence. Therefore, greater understanding of domestic violence in this way might lead to more effective interventions with women survivors and make it possible to raise wider public awareness of the problem within Malaysian society.

The chapter first offers an overview of demonic possession. It then explores a type of demonic possession. Demonic possession is how the women themselves make sense of domestic violence, and it also resonates with how wider society often makes sense of it. A majority of women in this study use demonic possession as a metaphor for abuse. This focuses on the brutality of the abuse, and the behaviour of their own husband, who to them resembles a demon that possesses its victim. Sihr (an Arabic word used in the Qur’an to refer to black magic or witchcraft) has long been a debatable issue in domestic violence since it is hard to prove. It can be used to imply that domestic violence is the responsibility not of the perpetrators but of malevolent outside forces (i.e. beyond the married couple). Here the husband is seen as bewitched by malign influences to brutalise his wife, as if he is possessed by a demon. The effect of domestic violence understood as a form of demonic possession is very similar for the majority of women in that it makes it even more difficult for them to get out of the relationship.
In the first part of the chapter, the main beliefs about demons, and love *sihr* as a form of demonic possession in this study context are discussed, in which the working definition based on the women’s experience as domestic violence is proposed. Section B comprises a discussion of perpetrators’ cruelty, which is associated with demons. The empirical findings are linked to wider abuse patterns, and compared with demonic possession patterns in Section C. Finally, Section D explores the effect of abuse on the ‘possessed’ wife, and the processes by which the survivors interviewed for the research eventually left the relationship.

**A. DEMONIC POSSESSION**

**The Demons**

In Malaysia, a person who is furious or vicious is known as *naik syaitan* (rising demon) or *naik hantu* (rising monster). This is due to the notion that humans still have humanity and certain limits in them, as if the vicious person is too ruthless because of being under the control of demon or monster. Ghost stories act as reflections of interconnected cultural perspectives around race, class, religiosity, sexuality, and gender for Malaysians (Nicholas et al., 2012). Belief in demons is deeply rooted in Malay and other cultures in Malaysia, which is known as evil jinn by Malays, or drustha sakhti (bad energy) by Indians, and widely expressed as a belief in the existence of spirits in accordance with their respective culture and religion scriptures. Many Indians believe in evil spirits based on information disseminated by their ancestors over generations. Malay belief in spirits is often derived from a variety of influences, including religious scriptures of Islam, aspects of the indigenous world views woven from strands of animistic cosmology (Saparudin et al., 2014), and Hindu and Muslim cultures (Osman, 1989). The term for evil spirits or jinn originates from the Arabic verb ‘*janna*’, which means to hide or conceal (Ibraheem Ameen, 2005), suggesting that these spirits do not exist in physical form. Jinn are understood as the living beings that stay in this world, parallel to humankind on earth. They are very similar to humans, especially because they have gender, free will (Hulusi, 2006), form marriage partnerships, have children, build societies, have love and hate feelings, and can experience death (Sakr, 2001). The primary difference between the jinns and humans is their ability to move between their world and ours and to travel across long distance in a matter of seconds (Rothenberg, 2001). They are also
believed to be incarnated in various forms such as human, human souls who have died, and animals such as dogs, snakes, and scorpions (Hulusi, 2006).

Lim et al., (2015) pointed out that malignant jinns often refer to devils, and there are those that are considered to be even worse, known as demons. Demons are the most evil and, as claimed by Boddy (1994), the powerful types of jinn are those who can possess human beings, since they have the quality to deceive the latter (Hulusi, 2006). In other words, demons are in contact with humans and are able to possess human minds and bodies (Hulusi, 2006), with the purpose of harming humans (Abdullah, 2008). They closely control the human mind by dominating the thoughts, perceptions and ideas about reality, instilling fear and anxiety in the minds of those possessed (Hulusi, 2006). Against the body, demons can harm humans as they please, by raping, beating or causing illness.

Most of the women in this study use the demon as a framework of reference for their husband. The demons, in demonic possession, reflect the husband’s cruelty. The women feel their husband has been possessed by a demon or becomes like a demon to inflict atrocities. This will be further explained using empirical data in Part B.

**Demonic Possession: Sihr**

The study of demonic possession can be found across different cultures worldwide. It exists in line with religious tradition, cultural essence, and its practice has seemingly always existed within the historical record. Demonic possession has long been a controversial subject in various fields, especially psychology, anthropology, theology and philosophy. However, its relation to domestic violence has never been discussed from a geographical perspective. This study mainly looks at possession as a form of oppression that harms both the body of possessed individuals, and wider society. Thus, this perspective is very different from previous studies that view demonic possession as beneficial and empowering (as in shamanic possession), particularly when the possessed women themselves are venerated as healers (Rausch, 2000) capable of utilising their spiritual capacity (Pool and Geissler, 2005).

Most of the western scholarly works on demonic possession deem it a single form, with a one-size-fits-all definition (Cohen, 2008). However, as Cohen (2008) argues, it needs to be
viewed as widespread, but with different cultural manifestations which are unique, in other
words research needs to focus upon culturally-embedded qualities of possession phenomena
in their local contexts. Scholarly work makes sense of possession-based symptoms such as
the absence or presence of trance behaviour (i.e. Bourguignon, 1976; Boddy, 1994) as
mentioned in medical and sociological theories (Cohen, 2008). In Malaysia, sihr practice is
not alien among the local community. Most of the Malaysian population consists of people
of different races and religions who accept that sihr does exist and is practised by certain groups
in their social life (Nasri, 2015). The issue of sihr has been a concern in the country's
jurisdiction and shapes legislative practice in various aspects such as the institution of
families, careers and business, the entertainment industry and criminal activity.

Sihr refers to possession by demons, associated with the bad intentions of human beings and
known as ‘terkena buatan orang’ (human’s scheme). Sihr is a set of knots, incantations and
words written or uttered, carried out in a way so as to affect the body, heart or mind of the
victim (Ibraheem Ameen, 2005). It involves at least three parties in the possession: usually
a shaman, a client, and a demon. Without the use of a demon, the sihr sent to a victim has no
effect (Suleiman, 2014). In the literal sense of the term, sihr is oppression whose causes and
origins are unknown, subtle, mysterious, supernatural and incomprehensible. The cause of
sihr is hidden and appears in a form other than its real one with the intention to distort the
reality of things and to deceive.

In the context of this study, the understanding of sihr depends on the person’s perspective.
From the victim’s standpoint, sihr is a justification of violence as a weird 'illness' that is
difficult to comprehend and where there is no reasonable explanation behind it. It can also be
a spell (love sihr) that they are put under by their malevolent husbands. For those who
believe they are sending sihr (for example, the perpetrators, or malicious family members
who call on the services of a shaman), it is the only act of viciousness that allows them to
escape from being liable to punishment, because there is no proof that points to the crime of
using a demon. The community's response to sihr is diverse. People are often confused about
whether to believe it or not. In general, some will sympathise with the victim. On the other
hand, there are also those who deem the victim to be either deliberately making up a story or
to be under the influence of corrupt shamans. This view is partly due to fraud cases involving
shamans, which have become widespread in Malaysia. Based on reports issued by the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), statistics of cases of victims being tricked by shamans who allegedly offer an exorcism service have increased since 2012 (Sinyang, 2012).

Many Malaysians believe that there are many types of *sihr* and it can affect anyone regardless of gender. Each form of *sihr* has a distinctive function, purpose and effect, depending on the motive of the client and shaman. In this study, demonic possession is mainly understood in relation to women’s experience of *sihr* or witchcraft. This study discusses only the love *sihr* experienced by the wives, based on the data from the interviews. Thus, the demonic possession in this study refers to love *sihr*.

*Love sihr* or charm is a method used by a husband who aims to possess, master, and make his wife remain faithful forever. This causes some communities to regard it as an act of ‘love’, thus influencing their response by abetting, inducing or not preventing the actions of the husband. Husbands who send love *sihr* are often jealous and do not trust their wives. A wife is regarded to be possessed by a demon of love *sihr* if she gets low-spirited, as well as being in a state of tension and anxiety (Hashim Awang 1990; Mat Saat Baki 1993). It has its own ethnographic symptoms, which are based on the desire of the party that inflicts the possession (the husband) besides common symptoms that are associated with madness and mystics. The love *sihr*’s incantation includes a spell made from a photograph, clothes, hair, nails, anything that is related or belonged to the victim and also to intimate materials such as those used to washing private parts, water that has been spat in or used to soak underwear, or a meal that is prepared to be served to the wife. Love *sihr* is believed to enable husband to possess or overpower the wife by shackling the victim’s spirit, causing the wife to have a restrained mind instead of being free to think, so that the wife will bow down, obey, and not object to anything desired or wished by husband. Love *sihr* is often used by the husband to render his wife with unwavering obedience or so that the latter follows his wishes even though it might have deadly consequences.

In this research, domestic violence is also often experienced and understood by the women as demonic possession. While this study uses demonic possession themes, based on the empirical research, it also highlights the underlying meanings of this association with
domestic violence. It is a common story in Malaysia, and an easy medium through which the local community comes to understand domestic violence, which involves very complex dynamics that are often misunderstood in many cultures. The tendency to relate domestic violence to demonic possession also detracts from the idea that the perpetrators have ultimate responsibility for their actions. This will be further explained using empirical data in Part C.

**Possessed Bodies**

The possessed body of a wife is the space for demonic occupation; the demons mount, play, pounce, wield, empty, enter (Keller, 2002), inhabit (Rausch, 2000), wear or infiltrate (Rothenberg, 2001) human souls. “The demons either use the host body like a hammer, play it like a flute, or mount it like a horse, in which the possessed body is an object or instrument in the possession” (Keller, 2002:74). Boddy (1994) characterises possession as a broad term, which refers to an integration of matter and spirit, power or force and corporeal, where the boundary between an individual and her environment is to be permeable, negotiable or flexibly drawn. Possession leads to the lost soul or disconnection between psyche and other spaces, which refer to the physical body and the world. The psyche struggles in finding a home to place their entity, to experience the social and spatial world. The possessed body senses and acts like the physical being, and the psyche is closely controlled and replaced by the demon (Boddy, 1994). For the psyche, this is done via domination of thoughts, perceptions and ideas regarding reality, besides instilling fear and anxiety in the minds of those possessed (Hulusi, 2006). The actions may comprise some divergent behaviours in a body, which encompass sudden outburst of aggressive behaviour, laughter, crying, apathy and emotional unrest (Rausch, 2000). In cross-cultural practice, the shaman plays the role of finding the lost parts of the psyche and casting off the occupying demon. Therefore, the host psyche can reconnect with other spaces in the world.

The alternative and traditional method of treatment depends on the victim’s religious belief or society’s (dominant) beliefs in the particular place (Callan, 2012). This method relies on two types of shaman in treating the victim; first, the shaman who worships demons, and treats them as a good spirit or God. This shaman uses exorcism methods by fulfilling the demon’s requests through the victim’s possessed body or offers some meals such as roasted chicken or lamb, blood from slaughtering, and yellow glutinous rice (Callan, 2012; Rausch, 2000;
Boddy, 1994). This request is rendered to the accompaniment of a spell that involves demon worshipping. In Malaysia, this kind of shaman will request an incentive from the client, causing many people to be fooled into losing large sums of money. The second type of shaman is a healer who does not collaborate with the demon because he goes against any forms of cruelty (possession). Instead, the healer uses religious verses as treatment, which are believed to harm or cause pain for the demons which possess the victim’s body. In this way, the healer can direct the demons to leave the victim’s body forever. However, there is a risk that the victim will be possessed again.

Nevertheless, possessed bodies are not perceived as passive and are capable of ‘fighting off’ the demon that occupies the host body. In this context, many people believe that besides seeking help from a shaman, the practice of local religious ritual or the drinking of water, or taking a bath, or washing the face with water blessed with religious verses can cast off a demon. A possessed body is therefore seen as a site of struggle to its owner. Many Malaysians believe that the possessed body often suffers in the long term and some of them undergo this for life, leading to their death. In their belief, this happens when demons have occupied the body for a long time, so it is hard to get rid of them from the host. Even after being removed from the victim’s body, demons often try to repossess the same victim again. Hence, demonic possession is viewed as a silent killer that stretches through time because its power can prolong the possession and repossess the victim’s body.

In this research, many of the abused wives feel they have been possessed by a demon after the abuse had continued for some time (discussed in more detail in Part D). Several scholars have discussed the association between gender, domestic violence and possessed bodies. In particular, the association of experiencing trauma and exhibiting behaviour that might be understood as being possessed by demons is common across cultures, but this is understood in very different ways in different societies and at different times. For example, Davey (2014) in his comprehensive coverage of psychopathology, a scientific study of mental disorders, explains western accounts of this field. According to him, a historical perspective on psychopathology reveals that this was understood historically in many western societies as demonic possession. The individual exhibits psychopathology symptoms of being possessed. That is, the behaviour has changed in a way that the human personality appears to have been
taken over and replaced by someone or something else. Such behaviour is unpredictable, harmful, irrational, or simply deviates from acceptable social norms and looks odd (Davey, 2014). ‘Possession’ is a form of explanation to describe this behaviour in those who have been suffering from debilitating and distressing psychological problems over the course of history. During the Middle Ages, abused girls and women with severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms were assumed to be witches or possessed by demons, and they were then put away, burned on stakes, or hung (Herman, 1992 in Matsakis, 1996:14). Davey (2014) argues that persistence of these beliefs meant that historically it was difficult for sufferers to gain proper support and treatment and, in fact, generated more trauma if demon excoriation ritual ceremonies involved physical attacks on the sufferer’s body such as torture, flogging and starvation. However, today those exhibiting PTSD symptoms are often treated in a more humane way in western societies. He adds that in many less developed areas in the world where belief of demonic possession is strongly held, such beliefs are a consequence of intense traumatic experience and a way to explain the dissociative symptoms that often accompany trauma.

In contrast, Somer et al. (2014) point out the relationship between violence, possession and psychological responses of abused women. Following Boddy (1988), they propose that some abused women in conservative, male-dominated cultures, such as Arab women, use dissociation as a coping strategy to manage gender discrimination, chronic traumatization, threatening environments, and physical abuse in domestic violence. This dissociative phenomenon is broadly defined as possession by Arab women (Somer et al. 2014). The women affected use possession as idioms of illness and healing in abusive relationships. The coping strategy through dissociation signifies the capability of fighting off the violence of a possessed body that is bodily hidden, intimate and diagnostic as well as ‘damaged’ in this reason. I use the idea of a possessed body as an effect of abuse without neglecting the ‘active’ roles it also has in fighting off the violence. A possessed body in this study is therefore a struggle of both a physically and psychologically ‘damaged’ body, but is also ‘active’ in fighting off the violence.

In human geography, Pain (2015) connects both domestic violence and ‘possession’ – or occupation of body, emotion and the psyche – through the framing of intimate war, applying
it to both western and non-western contexts. She does not refer to domestic violence as demonic possession, but highlights a close parallel: the central effectiveness of domestic violence that is as much through emotional and psychological registers as incidents of direct physical harm. Through the use of military themes, her work analyses the private experiences of violence in the home from the traumatic accounts of what women’s bodies are made to experience. Many participants in her research reported the mental health impacts of domestic violence as directly comparable to those of terrorism and war, such as confusion and dissociation, or bodies and minds being possessed. Following Herman (1997), Pain (2014a) points out that fear and trauma work beyond spatial entrapment, as the result of perpetrators’ intimate control. As Thien and Del Casino (2012:1151 in Pain, 2014a) state, trauma is itself a condition that is ‘spatially confounding… a vertigo-like placing of the sufferer into another time and place’. The vertigo-like placing and dissociation are similar to hypnotic trance states in demonic possession. The possessed body in this study is therefore a culturally specific local term used to describe women who are subjected to domestic violence and develop chronic trauma or PTSD. Abused women are possessed by abusive, demonic husbands, and they consequently exhibit mental health symptoms that are sometimes explained as a form of demonic possession. However, in the context of Malaysia, while most of the abused women articulated a sense of being held captive or possessed in this sense (see previous chapter), they made sense of their husband’s behaviour through references to him being demonically possessed.

**B. PERPETRATOR AS DEMONS**

Demonic possession as a metaphor through which the perpetrator’s atrocities are understood is prominent in the accounts of most of the women in this study. This is based on the conclusion that the only explanation for the abuse is the husband’s viciousness: the husband is the perpetrator who resembles a demon.

The factors that lead to a husband being abusive to his wife have long been a debatable issue in studies of domestic violence. Likewise, for the survivors in this study during the three months I spent with them in the refuge, the debate about this issue continues. It becomes
more complex because almost all perpetrators were involved in criminal activities prior to marriage. Crime in the context of this study includes crimes that are reported or otherwise. The crimes that were known and taken into account by the survivors are used to explain their experiences of domestic violence. In particular, survivors highlight factors such as alcohol and drug addiction, human trafficking and abduction. However, because most episodes of physical abuse are triggered by alcohol or drug-related consumption, most of the women believe that alcohol and drug abuse are the key factors in the violence. As noted by the following survivors, drug and alcohol dependency plays a large role in domestic violence:

Ashna: *If he’s drinking he would start a fight. Otherwise he came to kitchen to argue with me. He started by muttering something, then he said, “I am not satisfied with you”. After that he would start (physical abuse).*

Chumy: *My husband, he can’t survive a day without alcohol. Just in a moment, when I returned (after she left the house), he may make it for a week. He looks all right, didn’t have the urge to drink, that’s what he said, like he had changed. After a week, he would start drinking again. Once he started it off, I was done (being abused).*

Shalini described the beating usually starts after he drank alcohol (Client file, Shalini).

Mariam: *He kept beating me because he ran out of Ice [drugs], no supply anymore. He didn’t have money. That stuff is expensive to buy. I was afraid when he didn’t get that thing. I did know it when he looked annoyed.*

Lieya: *When you saw him taking that stuff, did he look calm?* 

Mariam: *Well, indeed he was ok. He talked to me nicely, pleasantly, treated me well.*

Lieya: *After he got the drugs, how long he would be well-behaved?* 

Mariam: *As long as he’s taking the Ice, when he had that thing.*

Other women, expanded to put the explanation of abusive behaviour down to mental problems associated with drugs and alcohol, such as: ‘the thoughts of those who are taking drugs is a bit different’ (Fika), mental illness (Chumy), or calling the perpetrator a ‘psycho’ (Ashna and Usha). This is revealed in the various discussions with these women:

Lieya: *Did he hit you when he doesn’t drink?* 

Ashna: *If he doesn’t drink, he won’t beat me if he’s happy.*

Lieya: *If he doesn’t drink, he’ll beat you when he felt tension?* 

Ashna: *If he’s stressed, he hit me. He went for work, and it’s normal for soldiers. There’s so much strain, the way they talk is rude, so he’ll be stressed. When he’s at home, he lashed out at me. He said, “in my workplace there are problems”, later on
he struck me. Then he said sorry, because he’s really stressed. I felt that my husband is insane. I was stressed too, But, I didn’t hit anyone. I feel that he is a psycho.

Fika: Those who’re taking cocaine, their thought is a bit different. What’s in their mind is ludicrous. It’s always started from him, whenever we argued, he must pick a fight. Then he kept telling that I’m dragging up the past. Even when I denied it (the perpetrator’s accusation), he kept saying “indeed, indeed.”
Lieya: So that’s the reason of you being hit? Or is there another reason?
Fika: Actually, it’s always like that.
Mariam: Did he haven’t have drugs at that time?
Fika: He did take that thing, the cocaine. It’s always like that every day.

Chumy: “Did you take drugs, or ice, have you ever take drugs?” That’s what I asked him (the perpetrator). He said “I swear I didn’t take drugs.” But when he wielded a machete, I assumed, I could guess that he had taken the drugs, otherwise, he wouldn’t do so. Because of drugs he had mental problems. Those who drink alcohol knew what he was doing, what he’s saying.

Usha: It’s hard to tell, he smokes marijuana permanently. He’ll take cocaine when he’s mad. Suddenly he got mad. You know, he abruptly halted the car in middle of highway. It was in the middle of highway. Haiyo, luckily there’s no car at our back. I just sat like this, he’s looked like he gonna punch me.
Lieya: It happened all of sudden?
Usha: Yes. He punched the steering wheel, aiyo. Like an insane person. I went through a lot. I want to live by myself Lieya. I know he is a psycho.

Hence, mental illness cannot entirely explain the perpetrator’s behaviour. In the field of psychology, cruelty is associated with conditions such as psychopathy and narcissism. However, a psychopath does not necessarily act violently and a narcissist does not necessarily hide their cruelty. According to scholars like Hennessy (2012), who have many years of experience in domestic violence counselling with perpetrators, the terms ‘skilled offender’ and ‘psychephiles’ are more appropriate, while Bancroft (2002) uses terms such as ‘angry and controlling men’. Hennessy (2012:163) argues that:

Much of the psychology and psychiatry sub-fields have developed without acknowledging the existence of fundamental struggle between good and evil.
In the context of this research, defining the perpetrators through the cultural theme of evil or demonic possession comes closest to reflecting how the survivors of their abuse perceive them. Perpetrators are deemed by the participants as being demonic. For example:

- He (the perpetrator) is like a demon with human mask (Ashna)
- The devil made a spectacle of himself... (Harini)
- The bogeyman (a mythical, malevolent spirit) applied for child custody the day before I came to court for fasakh (Usha)

Perpetrators also claimed that they become demons in the form of dead human spirits as an excuse for their abuse. Dead human spirits are demons that are thought to have the power to possess, hunt and strike terror into humans. When demons have targeted their victim, it is hard for the latter to escape. The perpetrators become the demons who seek to possess their victims and manipulate their mind. According to Chumy, her perpetrator said:

- “Ok, once I've died, my spirit will come after you, so you're gonna die too. I'm dead, then I'll drag (kill) you as well.” He said, “whatever happens, I can fight any hurdles, even the shamans, I'll finish you off so that we're both dead” (Chumy).

Demon is a grandiose term (Baumeister, 1999). However, for the women of this study, it captures something of how they experience the terror of domestic violence and abuse, and also of how they make sense of it through specific cultural lenses. For these women, abusers physically exist, but operate like demons. The cultural themes highlighted by survivors in Malaysia further explain the ways in which they use the idea of demons as a metaphor for the ways in which their abusers manipulate them. This is experienced by a group of women with certain similarities. They usually seek protection in the shelter voluntarily, and had almost finished counselling sessions and a three months period in the shelter. Therefore, their awareness of their husband’s responsibility for violence had increased. They at first addressed their abuser as their 'husband' in this study. Once they had built a rapport with the researcher, they then used the terms that refer to demons such as satan, devil, and bogeyman. Some of them think that the term 'husband' is not suitable to be used because the perpetrators acted so outrageously towards them. If they use that word, it is just a sham or an attempt to cover their real feelings. They are sure of their decision to leave the abusive relationship because the perpetrators have no future potential to change because they are cruel like
demons. The women survivors managed to clearly address their problem and identify both the abuse patterns and the deceit by the perpetrators.

Nevertheless, another woman sees her husband as a victim of *sihr* who behaves as a demon. This is based on symptoms such as the husband seeming not realise his behaviour is abusive. As *sihr* could be sent by family members, friends or an ex-wife who are also abusive, and it is then used to blame others and to make sense of the otherwise unfathomable abuse by the husband, who appears ‘normal’ (Herman, 1992 and Pain, 2014) and innocent. Rekha believed that her husband unconsciously became brutal due to *sihr*:

*Lieya:* If he brought you to hospital, did he mind if you tell the doctor about the abuse?
*Rekha:* I said nothing about the abuse. I just said that I fell down (lying).
*Lieya:* Why?
*Rekha:* Because I know that he's not guilty. He didn't even realise what he had done. He was wrong but he didn't know why he did that.
*Lieya:* He was unconscious?
*Rekha:* Yes. I think his friends put something in his food.
*Lieya:* Something? Like *sihr*?
*Rekha:* Yes
*Lieya:* The one who'd met a shaman?
*Rekha:* Yes, that one. It's either his house or his friend.
*Lieya:* Does he have vicious friends?
*Rekha:* Yes. I had brought him to the worshipping area, the people there said, "he has been affected by the spell casted by a shaman"
*Lieya:* So if he's not affected by *sihr*, he looks ok?
*Rekha:* Yes. He is nice. He went out for work, gave me money and asked me to eat.
*Lieya:* But if you asked him to get a medication, was he ok with that?
*Rekha:* He was ok with that.
*Lieya:* Did he realise that he has a problem?
*Rekha:* Yes, he knows that. But he couldn't control it.
*Rekha added:*
*Lieya:* From your opinion, what made him change?
*Rekha:* I thought maybe it's because his mum, siblings, I have no idea. Maybe his friends gave him something (*sihr*). Telling him, "if you torture you wife, then you'll get money".
It is difficult for abused women to accept the fact that the person they love is abusing them. Most of the women in this study went through this stage. This is when they try to find an excuse for their husband’s abusive behaviour by blaming themselves or other people. Economic dependency by women on their husbands also influences their understanding of their husband’s abusive behaviour. They are more inclined to make excuses for them by attributing their behaviour to *sihr* if they are more economically dependent. This also makes it very hard for abused women to leave the violent situation they find themselves in. It is not surprising that these women stay in the shelter and only leave the abusive relationship due to others’ initiative such as family and friends. During the interviews, this group of women were still in a state of denial, and their awareness of their husband’s responsibility for violence was still limited.

**C. WOMEN BEING POSSESSED**

In the previous section, we have seen how women of different ethnicities have a belief of demons to make sense of the perpetrators’ cruelty. No woman can ever anticipate or endure that a human being (the perpetrators) can be that cruel. In Malaysia, the understanding of issues pertaining to gender-based violence such as patriarchy are unheard of among the community members, especially among the abused women. The perpetrators propagate the ideas of patriarchy in the name of religion, that most of the Malay and Indian women in this study are not aware of (discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

This part of the chapter further discusses the cultural understandings of the role of women as possessed by their husbands that lead to the used of demonic possession by survivors not only as a metaphor for domestic violence, but also as a narrative to help make sense of or to excuse it. The cultures of possession describe the systematic male domination and structural procedures designed to possess the women. This aims to create obedient women and can be used to force them to break their own moral principles (Herman, 1997). A case in point is sexual humiliation that the women describe as immoral or disgusting.

Western domestic violence scholars also use terms that are synonymous with possession such as ownership and entitlement (Bancroft, 2003 and Hennessy, 2012), or captivity (Herman
1997) to refer to domestic violence. The most common pattern is to attack the woman's sense of identity. Possession is the intention, as stated by Hennessy (2012: 85), to ensure that the woman “lives her life based on the perpetrators’ pitch and plays by his rules”. The woman’s original identity is deliberately reviled and distorted through the abuse. Bancroft (2003) adds that the perpetrators are regarded as having evil intent because their abuse is kept secret, and they inflict enormous damage on the woman’s sense of identity because they are being deliberately targeted. The perpetrators’ talent is not only in being evil, but in their capability to conceal their wickedness (Hennessy, 2012).

Therefore, the domestic violence that is experienced by women becomes increasingly severe and it is only when they can recognise their relationship as abuse – to recognise the demon that seeks to control them – that they can consider the possibility of escaping from it. The following discusses patterns of abuse, which include the cultures of possession and the subjection of women to violence such as assumptions of entitled rape, belittlement of women, and unprovoked and deliberately severe physical abuse.

The assumption that a husband possesses a wife is an established feature of patriarchal cultures that often relates to other assumptions, such as ‘a woman’s place is in the home and a man is the head of the family’. According to Hennessy (2012), this patriarchal culture can provide legitimacy to the perpetrator’s belief that he is permitted to abuse his wife. Of patriarchal norms, wives are positioned culturally as possessed, which can give rise to and justify violence by husbands who might then be thought of as demonic. The perpetrators justify their abuse by referring to existing cultural norms or expectations (Hennessy, 2012). This setting is powerful in determining the response from society and some women themselves towards domestic violence.

**Patriarchy and Men’s Sense of Entitlement**

In this study, the women describe their husbands as someone who asserts themselves as “God” or a “pious husband” to reinforce their domination over their wife. Patriarchy and religious beliefs thus provide two justifications for the abuse based on the perpetrators’ assumed position in traditional Malay and Indian culture in Malaysia. These are often used interchangeably: the “pious husband” can become a “God” and vice versa, or he may draw on
other aspects of patriarchy that centralise women as male property. A case in point is the Malay perpetrators using religion as a ploy to dominate their wife on the grounds of ‘solidifying’ the religion. This is related to the discussion in Chapter 5 of eloping for marriage and obedient wife grooming. Religion is utilised as a tool by which to dominate their wife’s identity so that the latter is wholly under their control. The wife is pressured by the notion that it is their fault that the husband becomes abusive. In Islam, the wife needs to obey her husband as long as he is still practising his religion. If the husband is violent, however, the wife does not have to comply with him (Zuhrah, 1950). According to the women in this study, among the excuses used by the perpetrators to ensure their wife’s obedience is their need to make sacrifices for the husband, as well as honouring and obeying his orders. For example, Mariam explains how she was physically assaulted for defying her husband:

Mariam: I told him (the husband) “No wonder you get mad, it’s because you don’t get your fix (marijuana)”, I knew that once he had it he looks fine. But suddenly he struck me, saying... “What did you say? Are you mocking me?”
Lieya: Did it happen in car?
Mariam: Yes, we’re inside the car. He did punch me but the aim was deflected. It’s hard for him because I sat at the left side and he was driving at that time. Later, he halted the car at roadside as he wanted to hit me. I just remained silent. I told him slowly, “I’m sorry, that was wrong of me”. Then he took the water bottle, which was in the car by chance, and spilled the water on me.
Lieya: Was that the first time?
Mariam: Yes, at first I was startled. He then said he would send me to my mother’s home, blaming me for criticising him. It’s like I didn’t respect him, that I defied him and purposely found fault with him.

Mariam added that her husband justified his behaviour by arguing that as a wife she should make sacrifices for him:

Mariam: He (the husband) yelled, “Remember, you’re my wife! How can’t a wife sacrifice for her husband?”
Lieya: What is the purpose of the sacrifice?
Mariam: It’s as if I have to struggle to find money for him to buy drugs (chuckling).
Lieya: That is considered as sacrifice?
Mariam: Yes, I need to help him. Because I didn’t know how to find source of income, he wanted to smack me.
Faizah explained that her husband justified his violence through an expectation of the wife to be ‘obedient’ and not to violate the rules dictated by the ‘nice husband’:

*Faizah*: He used to tell me prior to marriage, “My utmost detestation is someone who doesn’t listen to me”. He said the same thing to his ex-wife. Indeed, he hates it when people don’t listen to him. I was fine with that. Admittedly, I was in fact stubborn. But then even the simplest thing that seems ok could rile him up, it’s as if I go against him.

*Lieya*: Can you give an example?

*Faizah*: It’s hard to say. For instance, we shouldn’t shout at kids in the morning, make no noise, but sometimes as a mum I would nag about something. It’s not that I uttered harsh words, it’s just that my tone was high. But often, he thought that I was mad at kids and chastised them. It was like that. In fact I don’t think it’s wrong, but not for him.

In Faizah’s case, not complying with her husband’s strict rules at home led to domestic violence. The manipulation of religion is also a compelling way in which perpetrators exert and retain control over women like Faizah. This is related to the status of Malay women in Muslim culture and particularly the notion of nusyuz (disobedience) under Sharia law. For example, Faizah is still conflicted by her decision to run away from home as she fears that she has committed the offence of nusyuz:

*Faizah*: Then I ran away for many times.

*Lieya*: To where?

*Faizah*: To somewhere, for a while. Like I ran away for a day, and the next day I returned home. It feels like I was committing nusyuz. Then when I get home, I stayed there for a while.

*Lieya*: When you ran away, where did you stay?

*Faizah*: At that time, the house that belongs to my family is near, so I just went there.

*Lieya*: So your family knew that you ran away from your husband?

*Faizah*: No.

*Lieya*: The house is empty?

*Faizah*: Yes.

*Lieya*: You went there with your kids?

*Faizah*: No. It’s only me, I didn’t bring them along. I was afraid that my husband would accuse me of being nusyuz. He warned me and that’s the reason I came home. Then, you had it again (physical abuse).
She added:

*Up to now, I’m still unsure of what I did (running away from the house), “Am I doing the right thing?” I told the social worker that I’d committed nusyuz (Faizah).*

According to the Islamic law, nusyuz means challenging or disobeying the husband without a valid reason (Mohd Yusoff, 2010). It is a sin and is liable to legal action, often understood by the Malay community as an action that only women can commit. What is often described in marriage with regards to the Sharia law is that the wife must obey the husband. Otherwise, she is often deemed as being nusyuz. Instead, the law related to nusyuz with regards to the husband consists of attributes such as being negligent in providing for his family, being harmful, or abandoning his wife. But these acts are not automatically deemed as nusyuz or wayward. The ambiguity of the use of this term can be immensely misleading and has specific social impacts, as highlighted by Norani et al. (2005, in Joseph, 2014), who argue that the patriarchal conception of woman’s role in Islam leads to disregard for fairness and justice towards women. Hence, nusyuz as a term taken from the Islamic excerpts in Arabic language requires a thorough explanation, in which the explanation can refers to both husband and wife.

For the Malay survivors, the imposition of notion of an ‘obedient’ wife consistently occurs from the early marriage and is used to justify violence and control. The only escape for these women is to seek refuge in the shelter. However, survivors are haunted by the notion that they fail to be an obedient wife, do not work hard enough to be obedient and that the violence they endured is justified as resulting from their fault. This justification for abuse through the notion of women as obedient wives does not only apply to Malay wives. It also happens to survivors in many other countries and is described by Hennessy (2012) as grooming, a process in which women are brainwashed into accepting their role as wife who should obey all forms of rules dictated by the perpetrator.

In the context of Indian culture in Malaysia, this imposition of an ‘obedient wife’ identity can become a form of slavery. Chumy recounted:

*One day my husband told me, "You’re my slave. As long as I’m alive, you must stick with me. Even if I smack you, torture you, I can do what I want. Even if breaking your...*
leg, I can do that. You have to accept that. Whether you like it or not, I don’t care, because you’re my wife. You belong to me. You’re my slave, forever, until your death”. He told me, “Ok, let say one day I’m dead, I’ll come in form of spirit to bring you to death. I responded, “No need, you're dead, just get lost. I don’t want you to mess with me and our children, let me live happily with my kids”. He said, "I can’t let you go. If I die, you must die as well”. That’s what he said. Because he’s so pigheaded, he retorted, “although I’m dead, you can’t marry someone else”. What kind of mentality is that. He reiterated that I belong to him. I must, in whatever thing I do; I should be patient, that’s what he said. It's not fair. He said like I am... errr... a slave, his slave.

The quotation reflects a common tactic among perpetrator in this study of making their wife believe her role in marriage is to be both servile and completely submissive. It is a belief that is both manifested in and supported by the perpetrator’s action in domestic violence. In the context of Indian culture, an “obedient wife” is often interpreted by the perpetrator as a servant, and even a slave. Slavery is not a new term in domestic violence; past studies also use “slavery” as a role definition for survivors, regardless of cultural background. In relation to Hindu culture that perceived Indian men as ‘God’ after marriage, perpetrators justify this by positioning themselves as God and claiming to have similar God-like authority over the life of others. This is supported by a case study conducted by Dasgupta (2007: 60) who recounts a statement from an Indian perpetrator regarding his wife:

“You have to listen to me, I am your God.”

In this case, the perpetrator treated his wife like a servant by limiting food intake, deciding on what she should wear, as well as physically and sexually abusing her on a regular basis (Dasgupta, 2007). Similarly, among the women I worked with, Ashna explained:

*I have no right. I have been a slave to him, in his thrall (Ashna).*

Chumy also recounted the feeling of possession by her husband as a sense of life being granted by and entirely dependent on her husband. This happens without her consent and also creates the possibilities for violence:

*Ok, as a woman, her own life, that she is leading now, belongs to her own husband. In fact, the husband makes the wife as their property. Then the wife becomes the victim.*
She hands her own life to her husband. She is still alive, but her life is in the hands of her husband. So, even when she is crying, only she will experience this, others will not know. Until she left the place... she realised... that in fact she is in control of her life, so she can continue her life (Chumy).

Subordination of women has long existed in the culture of Indian communities as defined by Hindu tradition. Meanwhile, for Malay women, the misapprehension of Islamic concepts such as nusyuz to the male partner has made disclosing violence experiences difficult (Abdul Ghani, 2014).

The Role of Families in Patriarchal Cultures of Possession

The patriarchal notion that a husband possesses his wife is perpetuated by the expectations of other family members and the ways in which the wider family can be complicit in justifying violence closely resembles experience of sihr. Via sihr, the women clarified that domestic violence does not only involve their husband’s wickedness. Sihr is a form of possession that is plotted and assisted by other perpetrators, who are responsible in reinforcing the culture of wife entrapment. Chumy and Rekha gave the example of the wider family’s role in their subordination to their husbands and the violence that resulted:

He (the husband) always listened to his father and sister. Both of them dislike me. They liked to contact my husband. He (father-in-law) called him (the husband), asked my husband to go to his home. My husband went there, my father-in-law complained, “You can’t allow Chumy to dress up, she can’t work, ask her to quit, forbid her from going out, ask her to take care of the kids, anything, they are...” that’s how he made a request. He thought that I couldn’t work myself up. Even if I’m dead, I will remain as his son’s slave (Chumy).

Shalini added that the mother-in-law plays a crucial role in initiating the abuse by ‘worshipping’ her son’s abusive behaviour. In addition, the daughter-in-law is also treated as slave or maid:

Lieya: Do you notice that the abuse is ingrained into your culture? (Shalini abruptly responded before the question finished)
Shalini: Yeah, that’s right. His parents are like that. They argued every day, and the father hit his mother every day. They reviled each other every day. His mum
condemned his dad, and vice versa. The words from his mum are more insulting. When he had other woman he became like this. The first factor is his mum.

Lieya: How about his mum?

Shalini: Normally, if our children are problematic, we’ll teach them to behave.

Lieya: We educate them...

Shalini: Yeah. But she (mother-in-law) is not like that. Even when her son is guilty, she could say “It’s ok, that’s good, you can do it again.” Indeed, he acts like that because of his mum. She won’t say anything that degrades her children. Even when they (her children) are guilty, she still defends them. That’s why she treats her children really well, but the children-in-law are treated like maids. His mum use to hit his brother’s wife.

Lieya: For what?

Shalini: Because she’s just daughter-in-law. That’s how she (mother-in-law) thinks.

The status of the wife comes close to that of a slave. This is compounded by the expectations of the woman’s family, who see her as an absolute property of her husband. As a result, the wife loses contact with her own family and comes under greater control of the husband’s family after marriage. According to Chumy:

_They (my family) assume that upon marriage, their daughters have become someone’s wife. Before marriage, she (the daughter) belongs to herself, but after marriage, they (the family) think that she belongs to her husband; someone who is outside of the family, the daughter becomes other’s property. I can’t touch (have relation) with my own family. She (my mum) thinks that her family only involves her, my dad and their oldest son. Only three of them are the members of the family. So, even if I can go there, talk to her, I can’t stay there for long. But I can live there not up to a month._

Chumy added that, as the husband’s property, the wife needs to tolerate everything, even if it involves violence.

_My parents gave him err (green light)... and they gave me some advice. But mostly, they asked me only one thing, “You need to put up with your husband. Because you have five kids with him. You want them to grow up. So, anything he does, just deal with it”. However, how long can I bear with him, is it until I’m dead?_

_Do you know what my mother says (now), “Even there are good and bad things about him, you don’t need to think too much. Whatever happens, you have to accept him. You must stay with him and the five kids. Whatever happens, even the good or bad, you must endure it. That’s your right, that’s your responsibility as a mum”, that’s what she said._
The notion of the obedient wife has several similarities with slavery. Some Malay women lose their family once they have eloped with their partner. The husband has the absolute right and enslaves the wife because he knows that his wife has broken the relationship with her family. For some Indian women, marriage causes them to be their husband’s absolute property and they even lose their own family. This possession over the wife takes place due to cultural and societal normalisation of abuse.

**The Subjection of Women to Violence**

**Entitled Rape**

Marital rape is a form of abuse that has an impact on women’s sense of identity. It arises from the perpetrator’s sense of entitlement. Even though it is aggressive and frightening, the survivor is confused and thinks that the sexual intercourse needs to be fulfilled due to her duty as a wife. Rape is not necessarily intended to satisfy the perpetrator’s sexual desire, but part of a wider pattern of emotional torment. It is also an extreme form of possession. It is often aimed at causing humiliation (Stark, 2007) and insecurity (Ferguson, 2011), and as a way of exerting power, dominance, and moral violation of the person (Herman, 1997). It can happen when the perpetrator is drunk, without sexual satisfaction or as a prelude to other physical abuses. As the Indian survivors explained:

*Let’s say when he had his booze, he still wanted it. What I mean is, sex. Whatever happens, even when I refused, he insisted. So, as a wife I think that is my responsibility. I've been married, so I must satisfy my husband. My body belongs to him. So for me, as a wife I just followed his lead. But he tried to change once and that time when he didn’t drink, the way he did it was different. In his drunken stupor, he would do it longer, and he wasn’t really in a mood for that. But I couldn’t accept his kind of thinking. Even when I refused to do it, he would force me. He told me in his drunken state, “Whether you like it or not, I don’t care. I want it, so you’ve to deal with it”. If you don’t like it, I don’t care. I still need it. So, at that time he forced me even when I refused. So, I don’t have a choice because in the next room, there were my children. I couldn’t make any noise, otherwise my children could hear. My children were sixteen and fifteen and although they didn’t know what sex is, but they can hear and sense it. So, I didn’t want my children to hear what's going on in our room. I didn’t want them to know, that's all. But while I'm crying, I let out no noise, that's just me. Eventually one day, when he wasn’t drinking, I explained to him. For sex, I do want it, but it's not the real marriage life. In the afterlife, true love is the real*
life. Sex is only a part of it. Not the entirety. When I advised him at that time, he nodded with agreement. However, when he got drunk, he was a different person (Chumy).

The perpetrator views sexual abuse as his right as a husband. Statements reported by the women such as; “whether you like it or not, I don’t care. I want it, so you’ve to deal with it”, “If you don’t like it, I don’t care,” “I still need it” illustrates the sense of entitlement. The abuser’s behaviour is atrocious, disregarding his wife’s feelings and the effect of such behaviour has on her. Shalini and Usha implied that the rape occurred and involved physical harm because the perpetrator intended to instil fear and control over them:

*There was a time when he forced me to have sex but because I refused him so it was kind of bitter. I just put my kids to sleep. In his drunken stupor, he asked for sex. Yeah, and he didn’t try to be romantic, he just ordered me, “Come here!” With this kind of manner (sighing), it’s like he commanded a servant to do chores. He was always like that, heh! “Hurry up, wake up! Do this, do that, like this”. I was steaming with anger. Do you know what did he do after that? He struck me! (Shalini)*

*He is very aggressive during sexual intercourse and I was in pain (Client file, Usha).*

The survivors often find it difficult to equate such attacks with domestic violence. For example, Chumy also said that it is the wife’s responsibility to pleasure her husband. However, other women are clearer about distinguishing loving sex from violence; Shalini, for example, states that she expects romantic foreplay before sexual intercourse. For perpetrators, the satisfaction or romance that might be desired by survivors is irrelevant because to them the sexual attack is intended to conquer and possess their target. This distinction is crucial because the fallacy of love between a husband and wife is often used to distinguish marital sexual violence from rape cases that happen between woman and a stranger.

The sexual abuse is often hidden because it may result in no evidence. Perpetrators feel safe in committing these forms of violence against their wives because they know the latter will not speak out, because of embarrassment or concern for children, as stated by Chumy and others. In contrast, Malay survivors in this research often refused to discuss the sexual abuse they experienced because of cultural taboo. According to Abdul Ghani (2014), the discussion of someone’s sexual life with another person is not allowed from the cultural standpoint and
Belittlement of Women

Most of the women discussed the brutality of belittlement, from which the perpetrator gains satisfaction by persistently targeting his wife, including driving her to self-harm or even encouraging her to commit suicide. Such psychological violence and abuse sometimes does lead to suicide. The attacks deliberately make the women look little or unimportant and she is forced to bear any kind of insult, accusation and humiliation. The pattern of attacks aims to damage the women's own sense of worth (Hennessy, 2012), particularly through insults about their body, including reproductive organs, insults about appearance or facial expression, allegations of sexual misconduct, insults about social class, and anything else that can be manipulated by the perpetrator. Several respondents told harrowing stories of their experience of such abuse:

*Harini:* I was pregnant with my third child at the time. It was during Deepavali and I told him that I wanted to see my mom. He sent me there, then he brought a woman to our house.

*Lieya:* Were you mad at him?

*Harini:* Yes I was. But then he threw all sort of insults. He remarked that my thing (private part) was loose and my body wasn’t attractive anymore. He cannot stand it anymore. He added, “You’re not a respectable woman; when I had you, you’re not a virgin anymore. You’re just a second hand, so I’m looking for a virgin. That’s what he said. For the first time I heard those words, it really broke my heart. All this while, if someone hurts me (physically), I can stand it. But for that kind of derogatory remarks, I couldn’t deal with that. So, my heart shattered into pieces. After that, I couldn’t contain my feeling so I ran away to my mom’s house.

*There was one day when I couldn’t stand it anymore... I myself was flooded with shame. He interrogated me, “Have you had sex with that man? Your friend, the one that I saw at school, who looked like he wanted to kiss you?” I countered, “Never, never, never”, because I never did that. Again and again, he kept asking me the same question, so I had to concede. Then he retorted, “Just admit it, even if it’s true, I’ll still accept you”. I was exhausted with his relentless queries, yet he didn’t trust me. So I just said “Yes”. I thought everything would be ok but it turned out to be worse.*
He hit me with the wooden pole (used to pick rambutan fruits) that he brought home earlier. The scar is still on my thigh and it won’t fade away. Then he said, “Go upstairs. Don’t even try to do absurd things, or run away”. I just followed him, my mind in limbo, thinking of quitting, stop living anymore. In fact, I had that kind of thought to kill myself, because I couldn’t stand this suffering any longer (Fika).

Yes, I was furious. Because he told me “You don’t deserve happiness in this life, you’re just a hooker, bitch” (Fazlin).

When he saw I’m all cheery, he’ll ask, “Why you look so happy? What is going on? Is there anyone (a guy) else? Did you meet anyone? Did you call him?” I can’t be happy. Even if I looked glum, “Look at your face, what do you expect with that kind of face? I didn’t want to see it, get lost, get lost, you better die. Just go to hell, no need to live anymore, yeah, you better die. Please kill yourself, you don’t need to live. You please die. Once you’re dead, I’ll be with my kids, we’re gonna live happily, don’t you know that?” he said. “Let me give you some choices; this fan, you can hang yourself; outside, there’s poison to get rid of dog lice, you can drink that poison; the knife, you can use it to cut your hand, up to you, please kill yourself, don’t live anymore.” That’s what he said (Shalini).

“He said...when I was with him, he couldn’t achieve any success. Huh, how about himself? He had the guts to say that. I’m that despicable?” (Usha).

“...he said that I was a burden in his life, hard to afford.” (Faizah).

These tactics of abuse continuously put pressure on survivors’ psychology and are often far more brutal and destructive to their self-identity than physical abuse (Stark 2007). Because the resulting mental scars are invisible, it can be argued that these tactics remain hidden to outsiders and sometimes go unnoticed or excused away, even by the survivors themselves. Significantly, the Domestic Violence Act 1994 in Malaysia places lesser attention on such psychological injury. Instead, it defines domestic violence only in terms of physical and sexual injury, confinement, or confiscation of valuables (Mohd Yusoff, 2010). Yet, all these different forms of attack and tactics by perpetrators are often carried out simultaneously (Pain, 2015).
Unprovoked and Deliberately Severe Physical Abuse

Physical injury is the benchmark for laws and public understanding on domestic violence. However, public understanding of physical abuse is not exact. For instance, news headlines in Malaysia as shown below give the justification that domestic violence stems from wife provocation:

- *Nagging about financial issues, wife hit with shoes (Kamal, 2016)*
- *Get a thrashing, evicted, divorced: nagging punishment (Ibrahim & Raja Rahim, 2015)*
- *Wife was beaten because she refused to ‘be together’ (Wahid, 2017)*
- *A husband hit his wife, because of not cleaning the chicken well (Mohd Najib, 2017)*

These reports give the impression that the wives influence their husbands’ behaviour through certain actions or words on their part. The idea that women provoked their husband’s violence is explicitly stated; wife hit due to nagging (Kamal, 2016 and Ibrahim & Raja Rahim, 2015), refusing sex (Wahid, 2017), and incompetence with the house chores (Mohd Najib, 2017). This principle sides with perpetrators, as suggested by Jones (2004), Stark (2007) and Pain (2015); the blame is placed on those suffering from it.

Physical abuse from husbands is usually driven by a thought that the wife deserves to be badly treated. Hennessy (2012) stated that perpetrators’ intention is driven by an evil intention to inflict damage on the women that they perceive as target. In cases where the target of domestic abuse remains resilient, the perpetrator will often seek to exert his possession through physical violence and harm. The abuse of the female victim by the perpetrator continues until the latter is satisfied, without considering the effect of the abuse on those targeted with it. Perpetrators use their mouth, hands, feet, and head as weapons, as well as any objects that come to hand. As the participants recounted:

`Harini: He would think by himself, contemplating all questions, and answered them by himself. Then suddenly, his anger was fully redirected to me. Whenever he could reach an object (weapon), it was used to bash me. At that time I didn’t keep (hide) them away. At home, there are TV, radio, but no desk and chair. I didn’t want him to keep using them, because I was hit with those objects before. If there’s a desk, he`
yanked my hair like this, and thumped my face on the desk. He used to lift a chair and
smacked it to my body. Having used to work in a guard house, he got a bat with him.
Liya: A baton?
Harini: Yeah, that stick. He used an object (for abuse), a machete once. Then he used
another thing, this time a stainless steel bat about this length (around three feet) to
beat me up. There is a huge hammer and there are also other types of weapons like
helmets, anything that you can imagine. There’s one room... if he was in a temper,
even when I didn’t want to infuriate him, he would bash me without even looking. He
just kept hitting me by using any objects, repeatedly, without even thinking.

“Do you only think about your ego? Let me show you my ego!” (the perpetrator
said). But yeah, that night I was gasping for air four times. Four times! Then I got
thirsty and he let me drink, then he ordered me to wash my face. After that, he’ll strike
me again (Faiza).

Whatever he saw, he would use it to whack me. For instance, there was an iron box.
He lifted it and walloped my head with it. Even when I already passed out, he would
beat me until I woke up (Rekha).

He smashed my head against the wall... I was bleeding at that time. Then he slapped
me and the blood was dribbling out of my nose... it (blood) wouldn’t stop. Later I took
a shower... and then I lay down. I could barely recline because my head was badly
hurt. He remarked “Why didn’t you ask for an apology?” It didn’t cross my mind for
me to ask for his forgiveness because I was dealing with pain. He carped at it, and
then he struck me again! (Mariam).

He was mad at me. He beat me up, kept smacking me with his ring and pulled me
again and then he struck here (in the head) with his ring. I was bleeding, And this
happened so many times. He smashed me repeatedly, yet he still wasn’t satisfied. One
time, he brought back a chain gate, to be installed at the gate area, it was thick. He
brought it back just to whip me (Shalini).

Perpetrators are often unmoved by bloodshed, instead they rather seek to inflict physical
torment that involves bloodshed. As Chumy explained:

A belt, he used the belt worn by him. In the belt buckle at one end, there’s a prong
right there. The belt buckle is like a solid rock, so he used that part to whip my head.
There’s one wound after another, and blood was gushing out. So I cried my eyes out.
He just laughed and then he said, “Look, you're bleeding after I hit you, just weep,
then I’ll be happy”. Finally, he said, “Huh, now I’m relieved, I’m satisfied”. He had
to see the blood (Chumy).
The women also said that each episode of torture can happen without the perpetrator feeling they need a valid reason; it can be due to some concocted reason, or because of the pain, struggle and discomfort experienced by perpetrators in wearing down their target. From the survivors’ experience:

Ashna: He (the perpetrator) had toothache, but I was whacked by him.
Liyea: Why?
Ashna: I’m not sure. Whenever he had toothache, he hit me. Then, when his finger got hurt, he hit me. He said, “I felt tension, in pain, what did you do for this? He used to sleep in the bedroom, at that time I was peeling, cutting onions into slices, and then he suddenly came and hit me near the hall. He said, “I can’t stand the smell. Unless when it comes to meal time, I can deal with that.
Liyea: Just because of the smell of onions?
Ashna: Yes, because of that he smacked me to a pulp, and then he locked me in the toilet for 3 hours. Just because of onions, I was tormented. Until now if I want to peel onions I would think how hard he would torture me. In fact, I don’t know what my fault is. It was just him.

He asked her to stand up and held her hands up for hours, and if she put her hands down, he would beat her nonstop. He asked the client to stand in a small area, marked by a cardboard paper and she was instructed to not leave the area. Then he asked her to kneel down and lick his feet. He urinated on his mum’s photo and shoved it into the client’s mouth (Client file, Ashna).

Did I tell you there was one time when we were on a bike, he was mad at me because it’s raining? We went out (for a stroll) with the vehicle so that we can park easier... out of the blue it was raining cats and dogs... so we went home totally drenched. Once we’re at home, he said “This is all because of you!” He had a fit of rage, “I’m completely soaked” ... “Yeah! You’re the one who wanted to go out right?! Look! We’re caught in the rain. For no reason I got drenched! Then I replied, “I’m sorry, I don’t know, I didn’t expect that it’ll rain, I did apologise right? (Mariam).

He was drunk, and for no reason, he came and hit me (Rekha).

These findings are significant because provocation is always used by perpetrators as their excuse to evade legal sanctions. Although physical injury is the benchmark for domestic violence laws in Malaysia, in this way perpetrators can still get away with the crime. According to Mohd Yusoff (2010), if the act of abuse (physical) is caused by sudden loss of temper, this can be a mitigating factor that frees those perpetrators from being charged. For
instance, if it can be argued that the offence is due to provocation by the wife, the perpetrator can be excused for hitting or harming her. However, the findings of this study clearly show that the abuse is rarely a consequence of a sudden loss of temper or a one-off incident, but is understood as a product of a long-term process of possession that shapes the perpetrators’ physical abuse pattern. It is not caused by provocation, but can occur anytime and can be life-threatening for the women. Failure to understand that the perpetrators are acting demonically can excuse and perpetuate the abuse and further compounds the survivors’ extreme experience of domestic violence. In some ways, therefore, viewing the perpetrator and his acts as demonic allows the responsibility to be placed back with violent husbands rather than with their abused wives. It casts light on the appalling and unacceptable violence towards women and resists excusing this by ascribing blame to women.

D. POSSESSION AND TRAUMA

As clarified in the previous sections, the cultures of possession make the perpetrators very powerful in dominating women’s psyche and body. This is because the perpetrators’ actions are supported by their family members and the community may abet in such offences. Over time, the culture of possession put the women in this study in a situation of being possessed on their own. The possessed body is a local cultural expression of and a way of naming abuse and trauma in this context. This chapter now goes on to explore trauma in more depth based on the empirical research. The abused women in this study developed four symptoms of PTSD. These are a sense of identity adjustment, ‘love’ sihr possession, hyperalertness, and flashbacks and re-enactment. These may exist in the same person simultaneously.

Sense of Identity Adjustment

A common feature of possessed bodies is that a person feels and acts like her identity and body are closely controlled and replaced by other spirits (Boddy, 1994). As in Pain’s (1999: 126) account, significant changes and adjustments to an individual’s sense of identity are due to violence, and prolonged captivity (Herman, 1997). The psychological self of possessed bodies, such as the body image, including the values and ideals that give a person their sense of purpose and coherence – has been destroyed and broken down methodically (Herman, 1997:93). This condition occurs when the victims are shrouded with shame, self-
loathing and sense of failure (Herman, 1997) and is articulated by several of the women I spoke with:

*Shalini:* The first time he hit me, I was lost. Then when he kept beating me, I got used to it, then I felt numb (didn’t know what to do), I’d met a dead end. Then I was wondering, is this who I am?

*Lieya:* Psychologically?

*Shalini:* Yeah, it’s a mental torture. I thought to myself, am I really like this?

*Lieya:* What do you mean? What did he say?

*Shalini:* “You’re useless, you not reliable, you only bring me bad luck, all sorts of things”.

Every day he would say “You’re an idiot, you know nothing, you’re a stupid fool”. He always found my faults. I used to work in an office, over there people appreciated me, I had been told “You have an advantage, there are so many things you can do”. But at home, once I got back, he said, “you’re a fool, know nothing, can do nothing, incapable of anything”, that’s what he said. So it had happened for about ten years, I kept hearing the same words over and over again, and I was wondering (thinking), am I incapable of anything? See, I had lost my self-esteem (Chumy).

Even after separation, the women struggle to assume their former identities. Any new identity that they develop after separation may include the memory of being abused (Herman, 1997). Some women are still dealing with the consequences of psychological abuse while gaining protection in the shelter:

*Ashna:* Another thing is, when I lived with my husband I always thought, he likes to make me feel stupid. He said that anything I say isn’t right. It’s only him who is always right. My decision is all wrong, I’m a fool. He always said that I’m useless. So, I thought, maybe I am good-for-nothing.

*Lieya:* Did you have those feelings anymore?

*Ashna:* It really affects me. When I came here (the shelter), I spoke with a social worker, “I was in kind of a blur, confused, err, now I can’t even make a decision, I do feel that I am indeed useless”. I had to face that every day.

*Lieya:* Many times?

*Ashna:* Yes.

The effects on the women can range from them losing their sense of self and feeling like they are a different person to, where the trauma of abuse has been severe, feeling like they are no longer a person. Such responses are common in situations where the traumatic experience is
unbearable, where a woman feels that her body has become an object, or where the abuse has been particularly dehumanising (Herman, 1997).

‘Love’ Sihr Possession: Contradictory Thought and Bonding

Some women explain the effect of domestic violence as akin to becoming the victim of love sihr and rendered incapable of leaving. One respondent, for example, suspected her husband of giving her water enchanted with a spell:

Rekha: They (her own family) asked me to run, because I’m the only daughter. I have three brothers; I’m the only girl, the youngest child. They love me. The asked me to be back many times, I argued with my husband many times, my head was going to explode. My family asked me many times but I won’t budge.
Lieya: Why?
Rekha: (Sighing) it’s seems that I was under his (husband) influence, from the drink that he gave me (sihr).
Lieya: You’re unconscious?
Rekha: Yes. It seems that I’m charmed to stay with him. I kept looking for him. Before he got me, he gave the shaman something; I didn’t know what he did. It’s just that I wanted him. I wanted to sleep with him when it comes to night, like that. If he called me, I just followed him. If I went to pray, I knew he did something to me (sihr), he gave me water. I felt that the God was telling me, “you should return to your parents.” When I slept, every night God appeared in my dream. No one trusted me. She said, “don’t stay with him, he is wicked, go back to your parents”, like that, it happened every day.
Lieya: What did the dream mean?
Rekha: It looked like the dream was from the God, my grandma had died; she came to me, and told me those things. She had passed away, she came in my dream and told me, and “don’t stay with your husband, you better go back to your parents.” I wanted to run away, but it only lasted for two or three days. After that, I would look for him again.
Lieya: But he didn’t come to win you over right?
Rekha: No.
Lieya: You just went back voluntarily?
Rekha: Yes, I went back on my own. He was just him.
Lieya: You had no control at that time?
Rekha: Yes, I couldn’t control myself. I knew he hit me, I knew what he is, sometimes taking a knife, but I couldn’t control myself, I don’t know why.
Rekha internalises her experience of being possessed in two ways, through contradictory thought and through bonding. Contradictory thought is thinking that the abuse was wrong on the one hand, and on the other hand, ignoring her family’s advice to leave the abuser and being unable to translate her will to run away into action. She keeps longing for her husband every day due to his charm. This psychological state is a survival strategy as a way of coping with chronic fear, the lack of availability of help elsewhere in society (Pain, 2014b), and the unfathomable atrocities practiced by her husband. Chronic fear for personal and children’s safety is a strong influence for the tendency toward contradictory thought. Herman (1997) defines the attachment abused women have to their abusive husbands as a symptom of traumatic bonding:

Being isolated, there is no opportunity for prisoner to bond with peers; paired bonding may exist between victim and perpetrator, and this relationship appears like a “basic unit of survival.” This is the traumatic bonding that forms in hostages, who come to view their captors as their saviour and hate their rescuers. Victims tend to cling to the very person who is endangering their life. A similar traumatic bonding may occur between an abused woman and her abuser. The repeated experience of terror and reprieve, especially within the isolated context of love relationship, may result in an intense feeling, as well as worshipful dependence upon all-powerful, Godlike authority. The victim may live in terror of his wrath, but she also views him as the source of strength, guidance, and life itself. The relationship may take an extraordinary form of uniqueness. Some abused women speak of being in an exclusive, almost delusional world, while embracing the grandiose belief system of their partner and voluntarily suppressing their own doubt as a proof of loyalty and submission (Herman, 1997).

The cultural specificity of Malaysia helps to explain how strong the ‘love’ sihr (or traumatic bonding) can be between the women and their perpetrators. Survivors lived in the space of home, reluctant to discuss private matters in public, confused by the perpetrator’s tactics that justified abuse as love, under the cultural and societal pressure for women to be obedient wives, and with a lack of legal protection, which lead to greater isolation. Together with the abuse, this isolation means that traumatic bonding is common among abused women in Malaysia. This prolonged bonding sparks mixed feelings before and after leaving. The survivor feels confused, empty and worthless without her husband’s presence as in Faizah’s case after leaving:
Even though when I was alone here (in the shelter), sometimes I shed my tears because I longed for him (husband). Sometimes I called the police station when he was remanded, asking whether had he had his meal or not. The police officer told me, “don’t worry, we’re here, no need to feel worried, why do you need to pity him (husband)?”, that is what they said (Faizah).

Ashna tells the story of survivors at the shelter, who experienced traumatic bonding. While she herself is ‘recovering’ over time, she was aware from speaking to other women that some survivors return to the abusive relationship, which relates to Matsakis’ (1996) argument that PTSD may increase the risk of repossessing:

Ashna: I used to encounter many women here (shelter), for instance Mona, she coaxed me to make amends with my husband, to give him a chance. But why do I need to do that? They always tried to persuade me to go back. But mostly it’s Mona, she said I should pity my husband, because we had just been married for a year.

Lieya: She knew what happened to you right?
Ashna: Yes, but not in detail. I always see she’s crying, thinking of her husband when she’s here.

Lieya: Did she tell you what made her cry?
Ashna: When we’re eating, she’ll tell me about her husband. Then, whenever she called or had a conversation with him, or when she’s writing a letter to him, she began to whimper. I see, Kak Fika also cries her eyes out often. When she spoke to her husband, she’s crying. Then I will persuade her, because she stays in this room. I said she doesn’t need to cry for him but she said she doesn’t know why she wants to cry whenever she talks to her husband.

Lieya: So, do you think they still love their husbands?
Ashna: But I don’t love my husband anymore because when he hurt me, he was ruthless. No compassion at all. When I told him I was in pain, he still hit me. So why do I need to think of him now?

Lieya: How about when you just came here (at the shelter)?
Ashna: At first when I was here, I did pity him. I told the social worker, I was confused, I felt sorry for his predicament, I was thinking of his future, what would happen to him. Eventually I realised, I’m not going to care for him any longer. I was fed up; he did so many things to me so why do I need to feel sorry for him.

(Mona had returned to her perpetrator when she left the shelter.)

All of those interviewed associated contradictory thinking and ‘love’ bonding with the mental health impacts of abuse such as losing consciousness, confusion, a blurring of events, and
losing control. Experiencing this trance-like state perpetuates abuse by preventing the survivors from taking action, unable to leave the abusive relationship, and returning to their abusive husbands even if they have managed to escape. It therefore allows the abuse to continue beyond spatial entrapment (Pain, 2014b). The experience of being possessed is one way in which they are trying to understand why they felt they should not or cannot escape from their abusive husband. Possession is their way of explaining to themselves and to others why it was so difficult to leave. It is perhaps also a way of dealing with the guilt that survivors feel for having ended up in an abusive relationship once they have been able to leave.

**From Terror and Chronic Fear to Hyperalertness**

Possessed bodies that experience fear in the moment and chronic fear in-between incidents (Pain, 2012) often find that this persists after leaving, a state known as hyperarousal. Fear in the moment is beyond something that survivors could imagine as they never experienced this previously. It emerges from shock, with an ‘out of the blue’ experience that triggers a psychological reaction such as panic (Pain, 2012:10) and anxiety, leading to physical effects such as incontinence:

*Mariam:* He used to threaten me with sickle. It’s just to tease me, not that he planned to use that against me. He knew I was frightened. I was afraid, even though he didn’t dare to use that. It was just to frighten me. I was in a cold sweat.

*Lieya:* How can you describe the feeling?

*Mariam:* I was chilled to the bone.

*Lieya:* Have you even been scared like that before?

*Mariam:* Never. Ever.

Then he raked up the past. Then he dragged me to the middle area, banging me against the floor. I was frightened to death, until I peed myself (Mariam).

Some women experienced fear in the moment as if being haunted by a ghost, in which the perpetrators aim to render the victims powerless and helpless. Even though survivors realise that the demon-like perpetrator can hound them anywhere they go, they still deliberately find a way to save themselves. Some survivors (and the children) describe that they could only escape within a confined space, such as from a room to another room at home:
Chumy: Ok, he did say that he intended to hit me and my kids, so he locked us inside. All the padlocks were fastened. Then he kept all the keys in his pocket. That's how he started. He shut all the lights off in the room, roaring like uhm... a lion, it’s sounded like a ghost. The roaring sound was like this, roarrr (Chumy roared like a lion).

Lieya: Was the sound coming from him?
Chumy: He made it by himself. All the lights were shut off. My son and I screamed in the room. Although it looked fine, we're scared. When we realised he started doing that, we headed to the second room. There are four rooms in that house. We went to the second one, my kid’s room. I was petrified too, so I joined him to be in the room, and locked the door. After that, my husband attempted to break the err...

Lieya: Door?
Chumy: Yeah, the door. The door couldn’t be broken into, so he thumped the windows. Those windows are made of glass. He smashed all the glass windows and when he’d done, he popped his head in and said, “Ok, I'll get this open, then I will bash everyone. You better ask your mother to show up. Otherwise, I'll hit everyone”. So, all of us were horrified.

Lieya: Did you fear your kids being hit by him?
Chumy: Yes.

Between incidents, domestic violence engenders a unique emotional and psychological state over time, referred to as chronic fear (Pain, 2012). Chronic fear prompts the women to be on constant alert towards a potential risk of abuse. They are constantly on guard, only relying on themselves to spot danger (Berman, n.d.), besides retaining their own safety:

Mariam: Whatever I planned, I should let him know. Otherwise, I would feel guilty. He would ask me why I didn’t inform him. That’s why although I did the right thing, he misunderstood. Sometimes, it placed me in a difficult situation. Even when I wanted to go downstairs to cook, I had to think many times. Thinking what would he say to me.

Lieya: So everything you want to do, you need to tell him
Mariam: Yes, I should inform him. “I’m going downstairs, to do this”... Like that. Or... “I’m going to hang clothes outside for a while”. Doing something alone is a big no-no. If I was sitting alone watching TV and staring into space, when he saw that I was distracted, he would say that I’m building castles in the air, thinking something else. Then he would accuse me of daydreaming and other things. He said, “are you fantasising about your other boyfriend, or planning to escape?”

Shalini: If he woke up, I just stared into space... If it seemed that he threw a glance to look for me, I shut my eye quickly and slept fast.

Lieya: Did he use to threaten to kill you?
Shalini: Yes, he did! He wielded a knife here (neck). He used the sharp one, then he said, “did you want this?”, then he took a razor blade, asking me, “I can cut slits along your neck, do you want this?” Then he kept that in his pocket, “beware, I’ll keep this with me, if you do something, watch out.” That’s what he said. I couldn’t close my eyes that night. I kept looking at him. I was sleeping in a room like this. He was asleep on a sofa bed in the TV room I couldn’t blink back my eyes and was awake all night.

Lieya: Were you in the bedroom?
Shalini: Yes, he was in the living room, dozing off after having his fair share of alcohol. I was sleeping in the bedroom with the kids. So, I could see him from the bedroom. Whenever I opened my eyes, I saw him.

Lieya: So, you didn’t sleep all night because you kept seeing him?
Shalini: Yes, I was petrified! He could do something to me anytime. When I woke up, I went to him, to see whether he really asleep, or snoring, and then I would be relieved, especially when he was dead asleep. Otherwise, I would be jumpy for no reason - he could do whatever he wanted anytime. Even when he opened his mouth calling my name, I was in a cold sweat. I didn’t know why he looked for me. When he was angry he would cry out my name, I couldn’t handle his ear-splitting shouts.

Chumy: He could become someone else in a minute.

Lieya: That means when you’re at the house, you had to beware of his movement every second?

Chumy: Whenever he’s at home, I would be wondering what I would face later on. I’m dead, out-and-out. It called to my mind. I knew something would happen but I couldn’t expect what it was. I didn’t know what was the reason, and who would be involved. He did all sorts of things, switching off the lamp, locking the rooms, keeping the keys in his pocket. Even for our phones, he had our contacts, so he called all the numbers. Then he found my phone, and those that belonged to my kids, he switched them off and put them in his pockets. Then he started the abuse. He knew that I couldn’t go out after being hit by him. When he struck me, I could call no one. That’s it. I could only go out with keys or phone.

All the interviewees who were in chronic fear experienced sleep deprivation, depression, and anxiety. Some of them would then develop PTSD symptoms due to hyperarousal caused by being in an abusive relationship, such as getting startled easily, being snappy in their reactions and sleep-deprived (Herman, 1997). Resistance due to hyperarousal can contribute to the next episodes of abuse:

I was stunned when he called me out or held me. “Can you stop being so stuck-up? Why do you flinch when I touch you?” He was shocked at my response that he
became more enraged, so I got abused that night. I accidentally pushed him off. He kept beating me- that was why I got startled when he touched me. I was always cooking in the kitchen, so when he gripped my waist, I was appalled.

Even after they have escaped from their abuser, these symptoms continue and can become aggravated. The triggers may consist of events that are connected to violent perpetrators, for example, the phone ringing, a vehicle starting, and being in places known by perpetrators to perpetuate the fear:

> When Usha opened the shelter’s gate, out of sudden there’s a red car passing by my back. Usha abruptly ran for her life. I asked her why she acted like that. She responded, my husband drives a red car (Diary keeping, Lieya).

> When the phone is ringing, I purposely refuse to answer, my daughter started to get scared you know. “Usha, is it him? Is it him?” She knows. When I kept finding excuses not to answer the call, she understands me. Whose call is that? Is it him? His ex-girlfriend used to call me. Sometimes I acted busy and decline the call. “Is she coming? Usha, who is it? Whose call is that?” She was traumatised that much. I’m scared Lieya (Usha).

> When Usha called me to share something in a room, Shalini and Chumy rushed into the room. They said, “both marketing managers who came just now are Indians, I’m worried that they know my husband.” So they locked themselves up until the marketing managers went back (Diary keeping, Lieya).

> Lieya: So you can also apply assistance from the Society Welfare Department (JKM). Rekha: But I have to go back to my hometown. Lieya: Where are you from? Rekha: Tanjung Mutiara. My husband also lives there, if he sees me, I’m dead.

> That day when I went to other shelter, I just found out. Suddenly I got this feeling, it’s better if I don’t go, because this place is not far away from my mum’s place. So, I don’t proceed (Usha).

Abused women avoid people, places, events, or things that are associated with the traumatic events in their lives. This behaviour looks odd and is often assumed to be a feature of mental illness and possession in certain societies. In Malaysia and other context such as in Tamilnadu (see Clark-Deces, 2008), it is common for multicultural women who exhibit this ‘odd’ behaviour to articulate their abusive relationship as feeling like they are possessed by
their husbands, and they are also being judged by society as being possessed by spirits or demons. The traditional and cultural beliefs of demonic possession still adhere within Malaysian society and even within Sharia courts. As the judges from two Sharia courts in Malaysia corroborate, the practice of *sihr* in marriage does exist and they used to face such claims during trials (Mahyuddin, 2012).

**Flashback and Re-enactment**

A flashback of abuse is a sudden, vivid memory of a traumatic event, accompanied with terror. This ensures past trauma intrudes in survivors’ everyday lives (Matsakis, 1996). Flashbacks tend to occur among people who have endured situations that involve intense chronic moments, or a loss of pervasive security and lack of safety (*ibid.*, 1996). Abused women may replay the scene of traumatic abuse, smell it, and hear its sounds. Some women, for example, Usha, say that their sense of terror is heightened by the flashbacks of stalking and incarceration, with the perpetrators seeming to appear in places such as doors or windows. Usha also conveyed this in her photovoice, in which her images and accompanying descriptions show her feeling of being constantly watched or haunted by her husband:

*I feel my husband’s shadow in places such as in these photographs (Figure 13, 14, and 15). It seems like he is standing there, whispering my name… Usha… Usha… Usha…*
Figure 13: “I Feel My Husband’s Shadow Here” shot by Usha

Figure 14: “I Feel My Husband’s Shadow Here” shot by Usha
Usha added:

> My husband kept intimidating me like that, in the house that I lived in before. This shows the nature of a man who does not trust his own wife and keeps eyeing her from windows and doors. How frightening to live with a husband like him.

Shalini also experienced flashbacks of stalking (see Figure 16):

> I’ll be scared witless when I see open windows. I feel the shadow of my husband, he’s standing, peering at me.
In contrast to Usha and Shalini’s flashbacks of stalking when they look at open windows, Harini comes across traumatic incidents in her confined space (see Figure 10):

My husband locked me in the house. When I see window frills, I’ll think of past violent incidents (Harini).

Trauma is not only relived in dreams, cognition and memory, but also in behaviour. The reflective behaviours of traumatic incidents are called re-enactment (Berman, n.d.). Re-enactment causes survivors to act out of control or have sudden outbursts, as if being possessed by demons. Other people are unable to understand what the survivors experience and relive in looking for security. It occurs by exactly replaying the trauma (Berman, n.d.):

Rekha: When the clock hit twelve, I was petrified. I went to my room, and kept quiet.
Lieya: You mean every day?
Rekha: Yes... I’m scared out of my wits.
Lieya: Did he drink every day at twelve?
Rekha: Yes, at night. Around past twelve... Or one in the morning.
Lieya: That means you’ll stay in your room when it came to twelve?
Rekha: Yes.
Lieya: Locking the door?
Rekha: Yes. Then, he would break into the room. Smashing it. When I see the clock reached twelve...there was a sound, “ting, ting, ting, ting”, I quickly ran into the
house, went into the next room, locked myself up and twenty minutes later, he would show up.

Lieya: So he’ll break into the room?
Rekha: Yes.
Lieya: Are you still living in fear?
Rekha: Yes, I can still sense it (shaking in fear). I can’t let it go, I won’t forget it till my death (sighing).

Re-enactment may lead to further abuse, self-hatred (Van der Kolk, 2015) and self-harm (Calof, 1995). However, many scholars such as Berman (n.d.) interpret re-enactment as an unconscious active attempt of possessed bodies to gain control over painful situation, and eventually settle the trauma. Calof (1995) describes re-enactment as self-harm due to trauma, as a way to ‘tell without saying a word’ the story of abuse. Also, it offers a feeling of control that is not present during the abusive incident (ibid., 1995).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that demonic possession is either a metaphor or for some survivors, a reality for domestic violence that is understood and commonly used by the community, including diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia. The chapter started by outlining the common beliefs in Malaysia pertaining to demons, demonic possession and possessed bodies. This explanation is important to understanding why women from different ethnic groups in Malaysia associate demons with perpetrators and how their experience of domestic violence makes them believe that their body are being possessed by demons.

The perpetrators were represented as demons by three different groups of people. Demonic possession as a metaphor through which the perpetrator’s atrocities are understood is prominent in the accounts of most of the women in this study, who are aware nonetheless that their husbands are responsible for violence. This is based on their conclusion that the only explanation for the abuse is the husband’s viciousness: the husband is the perpetrator who resembles a demon. Nevertheless, another woman who is more inclined to make excuses for her husband’s abuse sees her husband as a victim of demonic possession who behaves as a demon. This is based on symptoms such as the husband seeming not to realise his behaviour is abusive. Perpetrators also claimed that they become demons in the form of dead human spirits as an excuse for their abuse. Possession has particular resonances in the context of
Malaysia in which abusive men can be assumed to be possessed as an excuse for their violence. Likewise, the description that women are possessed by the demonic presence of their husband because patriarchal cultures deem women to be subordinate to men is manifested in a very specific way in relation to religion, culture and societal norms in Malaysia. These explanations therefore differ markedly from those in western theory.

The chapter has revealed cultures around female possession not only involving husbands, but also the families as perpetrators. Here, the cultures of possession describe the systematic male domination and structural procedures designed to possess women. This is very powerful in creating obedient women and can be used to force them to break their own moral principles. Possession of women cultures are widespread cultural belief that provide legitimacy to the perpetrator’s belief that he is permitted to abuse his wife. This chapter has demonstrated on how women become the subject of husbands’ violence through marital rape, belittlement of women and deliberate physical attack arising from the perpetrator’s sense of entitlement to their wife. After these abuses have continued for some time, women also exhibit signs of being possessed. The women use possession as a way to explain the effects of the close control and abuse on their body and mind, which eventually results in a possessed wife. The symptoms of being possessed are very similar to the symptoms of PTSD that have been identified in domestic violence survivors by western psychiatrists and researchers.

PTSD, as the effect of possession cultures and intimate captivity influences the women’s perspective on their husband’s brutality and their response when being possessed by demons. This theory of demonic possession clarifies two main aspects in this study, namely culture and space. Therefore, it is clear that domestic violence experienced by women as a form of demonic possession can be regarded as either a metaphor or, for them, a reality. It helps to explain that the diverse experiences of women across different cultural groups in abusive relationships represent the reality of living with a demon.

The western frameworks for understanding how women experience domestic violence and the trauma associated with it are useful, but also must be much more nuanced to take account of cultural difference. The key aspects of the women’s experiences in terms of a description of the violent husband as a demon, their behaviour as demonic and the PTSD as being
possessed all differ from what is suggested in western theory. In the context where conversation around patriarchy and gender-based violence are scarce, the operation of this metaphor needs to be much more widely discussed, both by individual victims, and by wider society, if we are to create better public understanding of violence against women. This is supported by the next chapter in which a woman's understanding of domestic violence as demonic possession also determines the way they seek help. To state this in different way, demonic possession also determines the action taken by them, either in leaving the abusive relationship or deciding not to do so.
RESISTANCE, HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR, AND ‘RECOVERY’ FROM VIOLENT POSSESSION

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has revealed the distinct way of understanding domestic violence in Malaysia that is quite different from western understandings. I go on in this chapter to discuss the actions taken by the abused women when the violence took place and became worse that manifested in very specific ways in the context of Malaysia. The women’s efforts during the episodes of violence involve resistance and assistance-seeking behaviour. After they managed to seek protection at the NGO-run shelter, they talked about their recovery from violent possession. This chapter argues that resistance, help-seeking behaviour, and recovery are the phases that empower the abused woman in becoming survivors, in ways that are highly informed by their religion and culture.

Section A of this chapter elucidates the strategies that women employ to resist and endure abuse in intimate captivity where there appears little or no opportunity to escape. Among the initiatives taken by them is adopting religious practices, hiding in any small space in the home, and fantasizing that they can fight the perpetrator. It also explores how, for some women, the abuse becomes so unbearable that their only way of escape appears to be opting for death in a way that is linked to their faith either by suicide or giving in to the abuse, which they believe could lead to death.

This chapter further describes the women’s efforts to seek help in section B. Help-seeking behaviour refers to the efforts of getting help from other parties such as a shaman or psychiatrists to ‘get rid of’ the perpetrator’s abusive nature. In addition, the women also seek help from the police, hospitals and NGOs to free themselves from perpetrators. This is done by them once they feel capable of contact those parties, either in captivity or after escaping.

‘Recovery’ from violent possession is another significant phase that will be explained in section C. The women’s psychological state gets better in terms of consciousness, self-
esteem, and confidence, while they are in the shelter, often only temporarily. This does not mean that the abused women fully ‘recover’ from trauma or possession, because they still experience some of the PTSD symptoms during the recovery period, as described in Chapter 7. The recovery process also depends on the women’s ability to rebuild themselves once they leave the shelter and become survivors, as perceived by the community in the context of this study. In general, this chapter reiterates that the actions of resistance, help-seeking behaviour and recovery process for the women in this study are closely related to religion and culture. Religion and culture inform the ways in which women seek help, resist their abuser and recover. These are matters that must inform not only effective and appropriate refuges, but also the long-term structures to help them recover.

A. RESISTING VIOLENT POSSESSION

Religious Women and Resistance

Most of the participants claim that they are religious, either Muslim, Hindu or Christian (refer to Table 4.1). However, the complex relationship between faith and resistance in domestic abuse is connected to the way survivors and the local community view religion as a source of empowerment. The research findings show that most participants adopted religious practice to resist violent possession:

Mariam: The night that he was gonna hit me, it was during the Isha prayer. I recited zikr longer (to avoid being beaten). Then he said, ‘Hah you’re no longer praying! Why do you need to show off, don’t pray if you want to show off. For what? I just told myself, ‘I need to show that I’m praying, because I’m looking for His (Allah) help’.

Lieya: What kind of help are you looking for?

Mariam: I was asking God to show me the way to get out of this.

‘Do you think I’m scared, do you think I won’t hit you when you’re holding the Quran?’ he (husband) said. Then I put the Quran down. I’m worried he would be more furious (Mariam).

These actions of praying and holding the Quran when the perpetrator started being violent are forms of resistance that aim to show the perpetrator that she is being protected by the greatest power, which is God. In fact, Muslim survivors in Malaysia understand that if their husbands
are religious, they are usually afraid to commit a crime because they realise they will be punished by God for doing something bad. However, this study shows that all the perpetrators who are deemed to be ‘religious’ by survivors have no such feelings and do not think that being cruel to women is an offence.

In Malaysia and in other context too such as in Tamil Nadu (see Clark-Deces, 2008), survivors’ faith may also empower them to escape from the perpetrator and to seek refuge and safety to begin a new life free of violence. This starts with the courage to ‘open your mouth’ about domestic violence, and to ask for help. As shown in the case of Mariam:

Mariam: My husband was not at home. I prayed for a while and then went down. It seems that God had given me the strength, to lay it bare (domestic violence) to my mum-in-law. At first, I wanted to borrow money from her, but somehow God had shown me the way for me to unburden myself to her, because I couldn’t bear it any longer. Before I performed my prayer, I asked God (prayer), like, “please show me the right way to get out of this, the best way to go, make my life easier - make it easier for me to let it out. I realise, sometimes for those things (violence), it’s hard for me to say about it, it stuck there.

Lieya: Why, is it because of fear?

Mariam: Hmm ... one of the reasons, I’m scared. Yeah... that’s it.

Many Malay participants get help from in-laws, driven by their understanding that religion does not condone cruelty and we have to accept qada and qadar\(^\text{13}\), as God’s provision:

My mum-in-law said, Islam is beautiful, so if her son is placed in the prison, then the God’s decision is the best, indeed. “It’s ok let it be, on this Friday morning, if it is his fate, just let it be”, because we wish (pray) the best for him. We are not doing something bad, we want him to be a nice person. Maybe once he’s been there (prison), he’ll be better (Faizah).

Even after leaving, this evoked the motivation to continue with their daily lives through a spiritual connection with God. As Abdul Ghani (2014) found in her study, Muslim survivors in Malaysia perceive their experiences of violence as motivation to surrender themselves to God, seek spiritual assistance and find inner peace, as in Mariam and Faizah’s case:

\(^{13}\) Fate and destiny (Arabic words).
Lieya: Maybe the intervention can help you.
Mariam: As is doing it earlier?
Lieya: Yes, if you do it earlier.
Mariam: Not really.
Lieya: It didn’t cross your mind?
Mariam: Because, I feel that this may a test from Allah. Allah really wants to test us.
So, I just resigned to my fate. I don’t regret it a second.

Faizah represented herself as a green rose that associated with her faith\(^\text{14}\) during a group activity of “I am a rose” (see Figure 17):

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure17.png}
\caption{Green is peace. A piece of Islamic mind. I want to spare more love to Allah instead of loving another man! When we love Allah, we’ll have a better future ahead (Faizah)}
\end{figure}

\(^\text{14}\) In Islam, the colour green is associated with sacredness.
This is also true for Harini’s case as a non-Muslim woman:

*When I had to go through this, I didn’t seek help from my mum, instead, I seek solace from God. I remembered that I worship its feet (God), asking him to help me. That’s how I did it. I told Gold, “don’t leave me in this situation. Bring me closer to you. I need to be close with you, I need to love you, I need you by my side, I just think like that. That’s how God let me into this place (shelter).*

Hence, in most cases, the painful event does not shake survivors’ belief in God, as they still hold onto their beliefs strongly. Herman (1997) calls survivors “extraordinary people with strong belief” who can endure the trauma of imprisonment and survive with their faith intact or strengthened.

However, there are other religious women who never find the spiritual or practical support that would enable them to leave the fear or the reality of violence behind (Nason-Clark, 1997). Being totally helpless and powerless to challenge the abuse often causes survivors to question the tenets of faith (Herman, 1997). For example, one Indian survivor experienced frustration when it seemed that God did not answer her prayers:

*Shalini: I don’t pray anymore. I’d stopped. When I came here (to seek refuge), I totally stop praying. I feel that my heart is not there, I have no intention to pray.  
Lieya: Do you feel sad or lose your confidence?  
Shalini: Yeah....That is...Even God exists, I feel there’s no meaning to me. Because of that, I don’t pray. I remembered, when I was at home, I prayed a lot when I stayed at his (husband) home, devoting myself to worship God in many ways, including using a specific cloth in my prayer. At last, I’m here, still not happy.*

All participants resisted and coped with domestic violence by means of religion. Only some women lost faith in their religion because of “being forsaken by God” while experiencing domestic violence.

**Restricted Initiative and Planning**

Abused women manage to exert power, even in extreme situations (Hammer, 2002). As Herman (1997) described, the reversible process between submission and active resistance depends on the degree of psychological degradation. Abused women’s agency arises from some sense of bodily control, which is constrained and dictated by perpetrator. Abused
women who retain sense of agency and are ‘not entirely broken’ (Herman, 1997) are still active, therefore. They plan their own strategies to deal with atrocities. They do not give up active engagement in the space they live in (Herman, 1997). On the contrary, they often carry out small daily tasks with extraordinary ingenuity and determination, in order to survive. However, their initiative is increasingly restricted. As time goes on, women can no longer ‘think’ about escaping from intimate captivity, but they focus on how to stay alive, or face captivity in a more bearable way. The survivors describe this narrowing of their initiative in many ways. Some women find spaces of temporary escape within the house. For example, Ashna hid in the toilet after being abused:

Ashna: At one time he slept in the bedroom, I was peeling, cutting onions into slices, and out of the blue he came and smacked me against the hall. When he suddenly appeared I just looked at him. But he came and hit me. He said, “I can’t stand the smell. Unless when it’s the meal time, then I can deal with that.
Lieuya: Just because of the onion smell?
Ashna: Yes, because of that he smacked me to a pulp, and then he locked me in the toilet for 3 hours. Just because of onions, I got tortured. Until now if I want to peel onions I would think how hard he would beat me. In fact, I don’t know what my fault is. It was just him.
Lieuya: So when he unlocked the doors did he win you over?
Ashna: No. He beat me again. Feeling resentful, he had no idea of why he couldn’t control himself. He locked me for three hours, but in the middle he came and struck me, then he locked the doors again and went somewhere else. He did it over and over as he please.
Lieuya: Then what did you do in the toilet?
Ashna: I felt at ease.
Lieuya: It’s sort of like an escape.
Ashna: When we’re fighting, my husband sometimes asked, “do you want to sleep in the room, or you want me to lock you in the toilet?”, I told him that I would stay in the toilet rather than dealing with him. Get lost then! He showed me the door. I don’t mind (bold enough) to sit in the toilet, because I would be hit if I stayed in the room. So it’s better to be in the toilet.
Lieuya: What did you feel when you’re there?
Ashna: It was calm.
Lieuya: Because he’s not there?
Ashna: Yes.
Lieuya: It seems like there’s other dimension in the house?
Ashna: Yes, if I heard his footsteps I knew I would get his blows, “I’m going to dead”. And many things would happen.

Meanwhile, others focus on activities, like Harini, who explains that she took up henna painting when her husband locked her in:

Lieya: You did henna if you couldn’t go out (locked inside)?
Harini: At first, it was not so nice (henna), eventually it turned out to be ok.
Lieya: So were you alone?
Harini: Yes. Because he didn’t let me go out. So, I just stayed in the room, almost similar to this one (referring to the living room space in the shelter). I couldn’t turn on TV or anything. He said, he’s the one who’s working so he had to pay for it, not my dad. He asked whether my dad going to pay for that.
Lieya: Then, nothing you could use?
Harini: Yes, I couldn’t turn on anything (fan, TV, lamp).
Lieya: But it was hot right?
Harini: I felt bored (she’s unperturbed if it’s hot but it was boring for her).

Fantasies of fighting back also helped them to endure their incarceration:

When I was watching TV, I saw an interesting drama. In the fighting scene (in the TV show), I saw myself as the leading actor. He was the opponent. When he (the antagonist) attacked me (the protagonist), I stunted his blows (self-defence) (Harini).

Simple survival or resistance techniques as described above may not offer a positive outcome to the survivors (Pain, 2012). Hence, they find complex ways to challenge abuse, reduce fear, and improve their sense of safety. Agency and victimisation thus go hand in hand.

Suicide: “This is the only way that I can get away from him”

Abused women are not passive in confronting violence, although self-harm is perceived as a passive response. Many scholars point out that self-harm, in most cases, is not carried out with intent to end life (Deiter and Pearlman 1998; Feldman 1988; Osuch et al. 1999; Stengel, 1970). However, some victims feel that suicide is the only way out; they are entrapped in a prison, with a sense of being possessed, unable to flee and enduring abuse that gets more severe, beyond what they can handle. As argued by Stark (2007) and Flitcraft (1995), it is the sense of entrapment for such women that may lead to them committing suicide: the feeling of being trapped and caged by perpetrators’ tactics of possession (Humphrey and Thiara, 2003).
These research findings support Herman’s (1997) argument in regard to suicidality: frequent suicidal fantasies and occasional attempts are in line with the will to survive (Herman, 1997). Fika describes her suicidal thoughts as one way to save herself, when she was under the perpetrator’s control:

_Fika: He (perpetrator) ordered, “you prepare the little bro (to school) then come downstairs, don’t do anything sneaky... Or plan to run”. So I just said yes. In fact, in my head, I don’t want that kind of life any more, I don’t want to be alive. I did think that I want to commit suicide. I couldn’t stand it any longer. If I planned to run during weekdays, he was there watching me. But if I waited until night I would think, “oh Allah, I’ll be dead” (sighing)._  
_Lieya: What happened at night, did he hit you again?_  
_Mariam: It became worse; she’s scared if he hit her again._  
_Fika: Yeah. Yeah... At one time when he hit me many days, I ran away for a week. It was two in the morning, that was when I reached here (Peninsular Malaysia)._

Occasional suicide attempts may also be a strategy to survive:

_Client is extremely afraid of her husband. She is terrified of her life. Client has attempted suicide twice before due to the abuse. In Sept 2014, she took 30 paracetamol tablets. She fainted and gained consciousness afterwards. In other incident on March 2014, she gulped detergent. Her husband forced her to vomit. She didn’t go to the hospital in both incidents (client file, Ashna)._  

_Usha: I was mentally stressed. Then when I was with him, he already held a knife, to scratch my face. My daughter was screaming when he took the knife. I just went upstairs. I was crying, I must cross the path to get out. I only had this one way. Even if I seek others’ help, they don’t dare to help me, I was the victim. This is the only way that I can get away from him. Before I swallowed (overdose) the pills, I prayed to God. This is the only opportunity for me to get out from this life, with you (God). I can only escape from this one life. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die, please help me. However, last time (last suicide attempt) I told my daughter, let’s swallow (overdose) these pills, we would be gone._  
_Lieya: What do you mean?_  
_Usha: I wanted to bring my daughter to commit suicide. But luckily I didn’t give her the pills. I realise I didn’t want to die. I wanted to escape._  
_Usha: Then I went to the next house, telling my neighbours, “anything happens to me, please don’t let my daughter be with him (husband). Please pass her to my family._  
_Lieya: What did you do?_  
_Usha: Swallowing the pills, overdose._
Lieya: Did you really want to kill yourself?
Usha: Yeah, I took overdose pills, but I had showered. Everyone had showered, we made ourselves clean. Even my daughter.

As described by Usha, her suicide attempt is ‘a cry for help’ (Stengel, 1970) and a signal of her wish to seek solace from God. She self-harmed her body, because it was the only way to escape her perpetrator’s control and her fear, without losing her will to live. This is her attempt to ‘save herself’ (and her daughter). According to Stengel (1970), this is about survival and contact – its significance lies in the message of the act that is intended to be conveyed (Dunleavy, 1992). Some scholars describe this as self-harm instead of a suicide attempt. The underlying intention of the behaviour differentiates suicide and self-harm, in which people who attempt suicide want to kill themselves, while those who self-harm do not (McCallister, 2003). However, in Usha’s case, she had a complex intention to survive, but physically and mentally she was prepared for death. In this context, self-harm and suicide attempt are used interchangeably.

The wish and attempt to commit suicide in extreme distress marks resistance and pride (Timerman, 2002). The decision to attempt suicide preserves or restores a sense of power and control for the abused women (Herman, 1997):

Usha: When he hit me, I would be ok if he asks for apology. Like saying “don’t take this seriously” ... I would feel relieved. I am human. But he never said sorry. The first time I overdosed (suicide attempt), that was the first time he asks for apology. Then whenever we fought with each other, I reclined, he was scared if I took anything (for suicide), so he came and asked for forgiveness. That was three months after the suicide attempt. Then he just ignored me. Even if I die.

However, over time, suicidality may lose its function to serve as an adaptive purpose. This is when the survivor directs her rage and hatred against herself, according to Herman (1997). Nevertheless, women in this study did not show any evidence of passivity in their decision to commit suicide during imprisonment.

‘Surrender’ as Martyr

Although abused women are often not passive (Pain, 2012), anyone can be ‘broken’ when the traumatic experience becomes more severe; losing the will to live represents the final stage of
the breaking process or being entirely broken. Timerman (2002) describes this as adopting an attitude of absolute passivity. At this stage, women do not steer clear of abuse anymore. They succumb to their fate, as if they can go out of incarceration through death. A few cases illustrate this condition:

**Faizah:** During that time (before coming to the shelter), I didn’t want to do this (leaving), but my mum-in-law asked me to do so.

**Lieya:** How she can know?

**Faizah:** My second child told her. It happened on Monday night, just because of simple things. For me it’s just due to petty issues but he was exaggerating. When we’re out (of the house), he began to shout endlessly, and I did expect I would be beaten. And I just let it happen. I braced myself. At that time, even if the outcome is death, I just resigned to my fate.

**Lieya:** You could think about death?

**Faizah:** Yes, it’s always in my mind. If I’m going to die, I don’t mind. That’s what I told myself. Hmmm (breathing out), I couldn’t handle that anymore. I never retaliate. Just he did what he wanted to.

**Lieya:** So you just give in?

**Faizah:** I backed down. I could just say allahuakhbar, allahuakhbar. That’s what I could do. Then he shouted, “why you need to say Allah?” That’s what he said. The he continued, “what can Allah do? You just think about your ego right? Let me show you my ego”. That night, I was gasping for breath four times. In-between the four times, when I felt thirsty, he let me drink, and asked me to wash my face. Then he continued his abuse.

She added:

I can say that I forced myself to lodge a report. That’s also because my mum insisted me to do so, otherwise, I won’t make a report. I feel that if that is my fate, I could just accept it. I don’t mind if I have to live my life like that until I’m old. I don’t care about my life any more. But they (in-laws’ family) asked how long I could lead such kind of life, or did I want to wait until death (Faizah).

For Usha, death is an exit that can put an end to fear and abuse:

**We are just human; we can’t keep living our life in fear. Death is definite. I became bolder for the sake of my daughter. She was scared. She kept saying that she couldn’t sleep, always in shock, “mum, I’m scared” (sobbing). Then I shut off the lights. I told her, “don’t go out. This is our fate to live like this. Even if we die, we’ll deal with it, what can we do, this is our fate. I used to tell her (her daughter), “your dad tortured**
me a lot... Let’s die together.” One day, when I went to work, my daughter told my mum, “Usha and I are better off dead”. On that day she said, “Come Usha, let’s us die together”.

However, when the survivors said, “I become bolder” and “Allahuakhbar” (God is the greatest), emphasising their faith; both phrases symbolise martyrdom, which is anticipated death that will be dealt with courage after fighting their best to defend their rights. There is a belief in many cultures that anyone who fights to defend their property, soul, family, religion, and dies in the fight will die as martyr. It is a symbol of submission to God in their fight, after various efforts have reached stalemate. Hence, martyrdom does not fully support the notion of being entirely broken, living dead or absolute passivity, because survivors are still ‘active’ although they surrender themselves or become victims.

B. HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

Shaman and Psychiatrist: Lifting “the Demon” in the Husband

As prisoner to their respective husbands, the first step often taken by abused women is by fixing the husband themselves. As Chapter 7 explained, quite often demonic possession was used as an excuse for the husband’s cruelty. This form of men’s violence against women is not always considered a problem because it is within an intimate relationship, rather than perpetrated by a stranger. Besides, this is associated with the belief that the demon in the husband’s body can be removed, which can lead to a strong rescue fantasy for their partner. As a wife, they see that their husband is a victim of sihr, which could have been sent by family members, friends or anyone in society. Hence, if the victim finds the help needed by her husband, everything will be alright and he will stop being abusive.

Such response from the women is common in the context where the institution of witchcraft is very strong and people of all classes and from different ethnic groups turn to traditional healer. Based on the existing literature reviews on Black couples and violence in the Carribean, Brice-Baker (1994:35) argues:

*It would not be unheard of for spiritual possession to be used as an explanation for a man’s abusive behaviour. A natural outgrowth of that belief could prompt a woman to*
turn to a traditional practitioner to lift the evil spirit from the husband...with the belief that the “evil” in her husband can be lifted.

Similarly, in Malaysia traditional healing is generally regarded as a reliable method, and people of all classes and ethnic groups meet shamans for help. Some women who were interviewed turned to the shamans to lift the demon out of her husband:

Rekha: Yes. I brought him to the worshipping area, the people there said, “You've been affected by the spell casted by a shaman”.
Lieya: Sihr?
Rekha: Yes.
Lieya: So if he's not affected by sihr, did he look ok?
Rekha: Yes. He is nice. He went out for work, gave me money and asked me to eat.
Lieya: But if you asked him to get a medication, was he ok with that?
Rekha: He was ok with that.
Lieya: Did he realise that he has a problem?
Rekha: Yes, he knew that. But he couldn't control it.

For some women, the demon inside the perpetrators’ body is associated with mental illness, so that they have to undergo exorcism or psychotherapy. However, seeking treatment from a shaman is an easier option as compared to a psychiatrist, as there is a social stigma concerning mental illness and a belief that only people with mental illness will consult a psychiatrist. The perpetrators’ refusal to cooperate causes the abused women to be held responsible for their husbands’ abusive behaviour. Therefore, the woman has to be the one to seek help for him:

Shalini: Did you know he has a problem? He actually had internal issues. I think there’s something inside his body, or maybe because of his mental issue, like other people said about him, there’s a monster (interpreted as demon) in him, but I’m not so sure. Because in a day, his sperm was ejaculated for five to ten times without forethought. It seemed that there’s an entity unites with his soul in his body, which could be that someone sent him sihr. He felt something like that. Suddenly, he felt that something was leaking out, yet there’s nothing came out from his body. I don’t know, maybe it was his body, I’m not sure, he indeed has internal or external complication. We had seen the doctor, a shaman, we tried many things to cure him. We had done so much, yet up to now, it couldn’t be fixed. So when he was possessed, he couldn’t control himself, so he turned violent and said I did something to him (sihr), sometimes he accused me of seeing a shaman to do something bad to him, that’s why he became
like that. Sometimes he said, “Owh you’re thinking of another man, staying with him, that’s why I become like this”. And many sorts of things, I couldn’t understand his thinking.

Lieya: So, he put all the blame to you?
Shalini: Yes. Everything is my fault. I used to ask him to consult a doctor, but he refused. He said, “Do you think I had lost my mind? Why do I need to see a psychiatrist? Because I know you’re the one with problems”.

Lieya: You wanted to help him.
Shalini: Yes, I told him, “There’s an issue with your mind, even your body, so you have to be prepared mentally. Once your mind is ok, you can take medication, then your body will be fine”. Both of us realised that, yet he couldn’t accept the fact.

Lieya: Did his family know about his problem?
Shalini: Yes, they know about it, yet he couldn’t admit to his problem. He couldn’t swallow the fact. That’s his only problem.

As Pain also found in her collaboration with Scottish Women’s Aid (2012), some of the women of my study are also expected to use their emotional skills to counsel the perpetrators, manage them, and put an end to the abuse. For example:

Chumy: Most of the time my parents would tell me the same thing, “You should put up with your husband, because you have five kids with him. You wanted to raise them. Whatever he did, just swallow it”. But as a woman, how long can I endure this? Is it until I lost my life? I bear with him, gave him advice, sent him to counselling, someone was giving him hints, yet he didn’t listen. He remained unchanged.

Lieya: So, you brought him for counselling? Did he attend the session?
Chumy: The counselling was conducted by my friend. My friends just offered him suggestions. So, he just nodded, like he agreed with the ideas. The he retorted, “Owh, do you think I can follow whatever she said? I have my own thinking, I just do as my heart pleases. I didn’t want to listen to others, I don’t”. Even when someone spoke nicely to us, somehow we tend to listen, but not him. He said he has his own way, so I need to follow his suit. He didn’t give others a hoot. That’s what he told me.

Chumy and Mariam gave an example of their efforts to fix their respective perpetrators’ behaviour, which must be done strategically to avoid their wrath:

Chumy: Can we find out if we have mental problem? Because do you know what I told my husband? One day he told me that he loved me, any issues between us are because of me, because I was always mad at him. That’s why he become like that.

Mariam: What? Just because you’re mad at him?
Chumy: Yes, he said I kept nagging non-stop. So I just admitted my mistake. So I asked him, to see a doctor with me, to check our condition. To find out who is the one with a mental problem.
Mariam: How did you bring out the topic?
Chumy: I said, sometimes he let out his anger too. Both of us did. Maybe either one of us is afflicted with mental problem. If I just asked him to check his mental state, he won’t listen to me.
Mariam: So you just admitted that you may go mental (crazy) to play it safe? Yeah, I did the same, by treading it nicely. I didn’t want to point the blame to him. I agree with you.
Leyla: So, you guys have the same experience?
Mariam: Yeah, that’s right.
Chumy: Yup. I told him, “If you really want to stay with us as a family, and you really love me, both of us need to check ourselves. Maybe you have a problem, or maybe it’s me. Both of us go for a check. If one of us has an issue, that we realise for the whole mishap, we can then file for a divorce. If both of us have no issue, we can stay together”. That’s what I said. “Won’t you feel ashamed to see the doctor? (the husband)”, I responded, “For what reason? Maybe you’re ok, but I’m not. It can be the other way around. So, we must check before we live together again”. It has been seventeen years that we lead our life like this. It’ll remain the same, even for the next fifteen years.
Mariam: But he didn’t change right?
Chumy: At first, he was ok with that. Then something struck his mind, he then said, “It’s ok, I don’t want to embarrass you and myself”. Why do we need to be embarrassed? There’s nothing to be ashamed of.

Such response is common among abused women that they tend to take responsibility for counselling, managing, and trying to fix the perpetrators due to gendered social relations as in Pain’s (2014b) account. This socially-assigned responsibility is referred to as ‘doing gender’ (Cavanagh, 2003) or ‘emotional housework’ (Pain, 2014b). This implies agency which requires an ability to resist in some way (Cavanagh, 2003). As illustrated above, Chumy’s effort to ask the perpetrator to have a mental check-up is actually for the purpose of seeking a divorce because she believes he has the problem.

The effort to ‘lift the demon’ has been shown in this study to be a prolonged process, full of strategizing and accompanied by resistance. Abused women are very aware of their perpetrators’ abusive behavioural patterns - they know the signs in detail, the times and places where violence might take place throughout the intimate captivity. They hope that
their husbands might change, once they (the women) discover an efficient treatment. It is crucial that abused women, others involved, and wider society realise that this ‘demon’ in the abusive partner cannot be lifted by a shaman or a doctor. Even ordinary concepts of psychopathology are stretched in the effort to define or comprehend the perpetrator (Herman, 1988). He is contemptuous of those who seek to understand him, and he does not volunteer to be studied, or check himself. Since he believes that nothing is wrong with him, he does not seek help unless he gets into trouble with the law (Herman, 1992). Some interviewees talk about their long-term efforts to lift the demon out of their husbands:

For 17 years, I could do nothing. That’s why I think I couldn’t help him (perpetrator) any longer. He couldn’t be nice (Chumy).

In short, it’s like a rusty metal [simile for the perpetrator]. I washed it for a bit, yet it turned out to be worse (Shalini).

This awareness does not necessarily stop them from making an effort to remove the demon. Rather, the struggle to change the violent husband became a second priority, the first one being to survive. However, when the women are subjected to extreme abuse, they often totally ‘gave up’, which is common for abused women in other context too (see Cavanagh, 2003).

Seeking Help from the Police

The Police are a formal institution which serves to facilitate and become an agent through which abused women may save themselves. According to a Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) report (2015), 68 out of 110 abused women in Malaysia (62%) sought help from the police before approaching the government or NGO services. Such women lodge police reports explaining that the violence had accelerated and that they desperately wanted to escape from intimate captivity, and realising that the process of ‘lifting the demons’ was largely unsuccessful and really hard. For some women, the act of lodging a police report is still part of their efforts to fix their husband:

I could bring myself to make the police report after twenty years. Maybe he can change or be intimidated or slow down. We just wait and see (Usha).
If he didn’t get caught by the police, his condition (cruelty) will not cease. It would aggravate. Although he was imprisoned, he must behave once he is there. It’s unlikely for him to commit something bad any longer. I don’t say that he will be nice, but at least he is safe from being involved from the offences. So he won’t be exposed to all those things (drugs) any longer (Mariam).

However, some women couldn’t lodge a report because they were severely entrapped, some had contacted the police and filed a report many times but received a poor response, and some refused to make a report because they had lost their faith in the police. Mariam is the abused women who was severely entrapped and forbidden from going to work, had no access to communication devices and lost all of her social connections. Meanwhile, her husband was at home watching her movements all the time. Therefore, Mariam was desperate to ask for help from others to bring her case to the police.

Police assistance is often the only way out for survivors, especially for Indian women. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the only police sanction that is effective is to put a stop to God-like perpetrators’ abusive acts. In this study, God is the perpetrators’ assumed position in traditional Indian culture in Malaysia - according to the Indian women, their husbands assert themselves as “God” to reinforce their domination over their wife as a slavery. Therefore, making complaints and contacting the police repeatedly is a sign of the difficulty of escape. Sometimes, the police do not treat domestic violence as a serious issue and side with the perpetrators in assuming the issue is a private family matter:

*The Inspector Officer (IO) tried to make me reconcile with my husband and when I went there with a social worker, my husband was outside the police station, waiting for me after being contacted by the IO to show up. The social worker and I tried to find another exit secretly. The IO told me, “This NGO (WAO) will never help you, it’s better for you to just reconcile with your husband”. My husband was in the army, so some police officers asks me to show compassion for my husband. If I took an action against him, how could he work? In fact, he couldn’t take care of his wife, how in the world can he serve the country? (Ashna).*

*Actually, I’d made police reports for twenty times. I think for 19 times I told the police that he hit me when he was drunk. Once I told that he acted violently because of booze, he was released straightaway. No action was taken against him. So, on the 20th time I filed a report against him, I didn’t tell the police (that her husband was*
drunk). I said I purposely went there to make the report. Then he was caught when I said like that (Chumy).

Usha: I called an inspector, saying that my husband was causing a fuss. I was unsure whether he wanted to kill or stab his own friend for intervening with our issue. I couldn’t get a hold of the inspector; it was the fasting month at that time. The Muslims were breaking fast. He didn’t respond. I made a call, texted him some messages, yet there was no response. Then, my younger brother, a cadet police gave me the contact number of the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) in the police station over there. He was an Indian. I contacted the ASP. I told him what happened, that I tried to call the inspector who was in charge of my case, yet I couldn’t reach him. I asked him what should I do to resolve my issue. Do I need to go to the police station? I did ask him nicely. It was clear that I never asked him to take over my case. I told him my problem, that my husband still create havoc, but he’s still breaks free. This Indian man (the ASP), who was just like me (same race as Usha), he asked me, "how do you get my number?" I passed the phone to my brother, and my brother told him my story. Then the ASP responded, “Hello, this is your family problem”. I said, “Yes, I know this is my family’s problem, I already made few police reports, yet the police still never arrest him... Now, I do what I can, more than I could handle. I made few reports already. Until now, my husband is still doing havoc. I cannot think through, what is the best solution?”. He retorted, “Ok, now I’m busy, call me later (sighing)”. He is an ASP, same race with me, but that was how he talked to me.

Such misguided interventions cause abused women to lose confidence in the police and stop seeking help, which makes them face the risk of even worse abuse:

Chumy: The next day (after abuse), I went to work, I saw a doctor after that. My head was swollen, I had to take medication because its hurt. When I met the doctor, he asked me why my head was bleeding, I told him my story. He advised me to lodge a report, he said, “It’s better for you to lodge a report now, otherwise you would be dead”. He asked me to take an action.
Lieya: So did you make a police report?
Chumy: No. I knew that if I file a report, the sergeant would call my husband, then I would have to deal with him again.
Lieya: Did the sergeant call your husband?
Chumy: Many times. I made a report many times, the sergeant called my husband twice, asking him to meet at the district headquarter (IPD) in Kapar. When I made the report, I told the sergeant that I’m scared to live with my husband because he beat me until blood gushing out. So, whatever happened to me and my kids, it’s because of him. I made that statement. So, the sergeant took an action by asking my husband to
meet him at IPD Kapar. He told my husband, “I don’t want your family to be in ruin. Ok, I gave you (Chumy and her husband) five minutes to discuss”. Because I’m the one who made the report, the sergeant said, “You must withdraw the report, then I’ll release your husband. Otherwise, I have to arrest him now”. At that time, my husband was begging to my feet.

On the other hand, intervention by other people, who challenge the perpetrators’ abusive behaviour, sometimes only serves to put the women or other parties involved in danger. Faizah for instance, had to lie when the police came to her house to intervene:

Faizah: There was a time when we were at each other’s throats (arguing) at my mum’s place. The houses in that area in close proximity to each other. Suddenly the police came. Someone who live opposite the house (neighbour) called for the police. Lieya: What did you do when the police come?
Faizah: I still remember, he smacked my face, that my eyes were stark red. Not as red as the one that I have now. Then, the blood trickled down. Our kids were small at that time. The police asked what had happened, then I told the police, “There’s nothing sir. We’re ok”. That’s what I could do.

Ashna gave an example of poor police intervention that put her neighbours in danger:

The police made a call at her husband workplace, “Hello, this call is made regarding someone who was abused by her husband, her name is Ashna, do you have any info about this?” Her husband’s colleague received the call and revealed the info to her husband. Then her husband interrogated her. Ashna denied that she made any report, then her husband blamed, scolded and blindly making a wild guess to the neighbours (Diary keeping, Lieya).

Similar to Rekha, she said the interference from her neighbours was the cause of discord in her family. These mixed experiences of seeking help from the police affect the rate of domestic violence, as most cases are left unreported. Meanwhile, inefficient intervention results in the case of repeated reports or underreported abuse by survivors. The police who treat domestic violence crime lightly and consider it a private family matter are effectively siding with perpetrators, putting the survivors in danger. As stated by Tucker (2012), abused women in Malaysia cannot rely on the police due to the perception that the police force is not willing to help, and this tend to dampen the efforts of domestic violence victims in seeking help. This situation is worsened because domestic violence statistics, especially from police departments, become the benchmark by which the gravity of domestic violence in Malaysia
is judged. If the statistics decline in a particular year, cases of domestic violence are assumed to dwindle as well.

**Seeking Help from the Medical Profession**

Domestic violence is a prolonged and repeated cycle. The physical consequences of the abuse are often worse when they coincide with menstruation, pregnancy, confinement after childbirth and diseases such as breast cancer. The women interviewed reported the physical effects they experienced, including suffering from miscarriage, head injury, bloodshot and swollen eyes, broken bone/ribs, broken nose and teeth, broken leg, bruises, cuts and backache, and urinary incontinence. The majority of women in the study did not get proper treatment at the hospital when they were injured, because of being isolated by the perpetrators. For instance, in the case of Shuba:

*Shuba:* It was hard when I can’t lift heavy things using my hands. It was because of the incident few years back.

*Lieya:* Your hand was broken?

*Shuba:* Yes. When he whacked me, the bones slipped out. I was under anaesthetic, to reposition the joint back into the correct position. I was unconscious because of the effect of anaesthetic. Even this one is dislocated. For three months, I didn’t go to the hospital for follow-up. In fact, I removed the arm cast by myself at home. He’s the one who took it away. He forbade me from going to hospital. Often, after he did that (a series of beating), he held me back from going to hospital. Even when my leg was broken, I didn’t go to hospital, I only stayed at home. At home, I used only medicated oil to massage the swelling. It took me four months (to recover). It just happened eight days after I gave birth to my child (her child is now one year).

*Lieya:* How did you take care of all the children?

*Shuba:* I had to. I went around with a limp, doing all the chores and cooking for them.

Even if they have the chance to seek treatment, some women lie about the reason for the injury to the doctor. They may believe that their husband is innocent, as a result of the psychological effects of intimate captivity (refer to Chapter 7, as quoted by Rekha). For other women such as Shalini, the chance to seek medical treatment lead her to return to suffer more abuse from the perpetrator:

*Lieya:* Did you request him to send you to clinic?
Shalini: No. Do you know what he did? Let’s say he gave his blow on one day, the next day he bought me a meal, send me to clinic, and then got drunk, when he was agitated, he said, “See, I bought you a meal, for what? It’s useless! Wasting my money for nothing. All the expenses of going to clinic, buying you food. I spent fifty, do you know what can I do with that? Such a waste”. So, I was turned off to consume the medication. I didn’t ask him to bring me to clinic anymore.

Doctors usually intervene by convincing the survivors to take action by making a police report. However, this does not work for the women who have given up on the police. Among all the women, only Mariam managed to benefit from measures taken by the hospital, when she ran away for good.

Mariam: I rushed myself to lodge a police report. The police asked me to go to the hospital for check-up, if there are injuries, they can be detected via x-ray. Then I told the police that I didn’t want to get back with my husband, I was scared shitless to return to him, I didn’t know how can I go back, not to my parents’ home as they’ll be startled, since there were bruises all over my body. They would be worried. As it was already Friday, I was asked to stay in the hospital on Saturday and Sunday. This place (the shelter) is only open on weekdays. Then, they would refer me to the Welfare Department.

Lieya: So were you warded at that time?

Mariam: Yes, I stayed in the ward. But I was still terrified. The hospital staffs reassured me, “It’s ok, we’ll place you in a secluded area”. They are understanding. Because I looked so terrible, one of them said, “How can it become like this (the injury)?” Then I told her the whole true story. The doctor said, “It’s better for you to stay with the kids, your husband in fact has nothing (income) right? So no need for you to be with him. Your kids need you”. That’s what he said, the doctor is an Indian, he’s still young.

According to Mohd Hashim and Endut (2009), in Malaysia, only the survivors who suffer from severe physical injuries that require immediate medical attention come to seek treatment in hospital. They suggest it is possible that there are more abused women with non-physical or mild injuries out there that don’t get proper treatment or keep the incidents secret. In addition, there is a low prevalence of pregnant women coming to hospital for medical treatment due to domestic violence (Jahanfar et al., 2007). According to my research findings, most abused women do not view medical institutions as independent agencies that can intervene and offer a way out of intimate captivity. Hospitals are seen as institutions that provide medical treatment only to abused women who are still physically able to go to the
hospital. They either go there while keeping the perpetrators’ actions private or go there without the knowledge of the perpetrators. For women who do not seek treatment, it is not because their injury is not ‘severe’, as stated by Mohd Hashim and Endut (2009), but in fact because their condition is too critical, they are powerless, and caged by the control of perpetrators. This is also experienced by women who are pregnant, in confinement, and suffering from other diseases such as cancer. Nevertheless, an effective intervention like the one experienced by Mariam provides a temporary protection before her case can be referred to NGO, thus helping women to get out of intimate captivity.

**Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) Shelter**

Perpetrators’ intimate knowledge about survivors allows them to easily put the women back into prison after escaping. Effective physical liberation for abused women only happens when they can escape to a secret place unknown to the perpetrators. This is based on the experience of those who had tried to escape several times from intimate captivity to the homes of their family and friends. Perpetrators found where they were, causing the women to return to captivity repeatedly.

Refuges are secret places under the control of NGOs that fulfil the criterion of effective physical liberation for survivors in this study. The shelters provide a place to stay, counselling, legal protection, justice, and post-shelter support. Information about NGOs is usually shared by a family member, family-in-law, friends, mass media such as radio, co-workers, or hospitals. The journey to escape intimate captivity comes about through detailed planning by survivors over a long period of time. They often only leave once there has been life-threatening incidents, and due to urging by their family members, particularly when the abused women are in chronically traumatic situations. Before fleeing, some women have made preparations like saving some money and keeping their bags and personal documents in a secret place. They wait for the right time to take action. However, the distance between home and these shelters as well as geographical location results in different experiences for every woman. In the case of Fika, geographical isolation and her home location in East Malaysia led to an escape experience (as discussed in Chapter 6) that was filled with strategies to avoid being detected by the perpetrator:
Fika: He was so furious, thus he turned up the radio so loud. He slept like a log. I told myself, if I’m awake at wee hours, I’ll run off. Otherwise, I won’t. Then I was awake at 1 in the night. I made a run for it at two. I took my identity card, clothes, because I’m still in my pyjama, and a pair of pants. I hurled my bag out the windows, then I bolted down the stairs. He (the husband) was sleeping next to me at that time. But then, I made my move slowly. The radio was roaring, so he didn’t realise what I did. I wore my scarf, then I rushed out via the stairs at the back. Then I hurriedly went to the back of my neighbour’s house. It was not dawn yet. So there were not many people passing by. I did stop the cars that carry goods and few buses. After several days, I think it was within two days, that I eventually reached Kota Kundasang (KK).

Lieya: You’re there in two days? It was far.

Fika: When I was out of the house I stopped a bus. The one that was available only stopped far from my house, it stopped by some transits, and I went to several places. Then I told the driver, please stop here, thank you. That’s how I asked him to stop. I didn’t recognise the place, but I just looked into the place.

Mariam: Then you took the other buses?
Fika: Yes, but it’s not a direct bus. That’s why it took me several days to reach Kota Kundasang town.

Mariam: Then, where did you sleep?
Fika: In empty abandoned houses by the roadside.

Lieya: Won’t you feel afraid to sleep in the abandoned houses?
Fika: I don’t know, not really.

Lieya: It was a daring escape.

Fika: Yes, I couldn’t stay there with him any longer. I couldn’t, because my husband has many friends. He knows many people. Once I’m in KK, I took a flight to KLIA (Kuala Lumpur International Airport).

Lieya: Did you have any money at that time?
Fika: Yes. I saved some. I felt the need to save money because I was beaten many times, so I managed to prepare the emergency fund.

Mariam: So the money was from him? He gave you the money?
Fika: Yes. It was the balance from household expenses, so I save them for the emergency fund.

Mariam: Same goes to me, but sometimes my husband took it back.

Fika: Yes, I kept the money but he still took some of it.

Mariam: That means both of us took the money little by little. Bit by bit.

Fika: Yes, I did save some.

In Harini’s case, she had devised a strategy to run away a few months prior to the escape. This long period was used to devise her plan carefully, due to failed previous attempts.
During this period, she worked and raised money to buy a motorcycle and saved some for travelling costs. By using the motorcycle, it took her five hours to reach the shelter from her home in the northern Peninsular Malaysia. All possessions including documents and clothing were hidden in her workplace, so the perpetrator wouldn’t notice her plan. Harini also looked for a babysitter who could protect her four children. The journey fleeing to the shelter was revealed through photovoice (see Figure 18):

*This is how I fled from my house. I had to cover my face so that other people won’t recognise me. A woman that fled from the house, bringing her stuffs. She has to cover her face and disguise herself by wearing like a man so that the others won’t notice her. The women who experience domestic violence has to make a breakout to save themselves.*

Likewise, Ashna who lived in an army camp also devised a long-term plan to escape. However, she only used her motorbike half way, then continued the journey to a shelter using public transport. This is a strategy to prevent the perpetrator from tracking her. Shalini, who lives in an urban area within the same state as the shelter, had also prepared herself before leaving the abusive house:
Shalini: Before I came here, I called a social worker, she told me, you can stay here, so you need to prepare your stuffs in one bag, with your kids’ birth cert, IC, and their health record (with vaccination history). So from the information, I got prepared. I put my stuffs in the bag and kept it hidden.

Lieya: So didn’t he realise about the bag? Where did you hide it?

Shalini: We keep our clothes in the wardrobe right? But we rarely see the space at the back of the clothes. I put the bag there, with some of his clothes and other important things.

Lieya: But he didn’t realise your plan to come here?

Shalini: No. When I wanted to come here, I already called the taxi.

Lieya: So he was out for work?

Shalini: Yes, he’s working. I already called the taxi. He worked in his own office, which is close to our house. It was less than five minutes driving. It was really near. So I called the taxi, the driver is an Indian, I told him, “Once you’re here, please stop by the next house, not in front of my house”. That’s what I said. Then once the taxi was there, it stopped in front of the house adjacent to my house, then I called him, “Ok, wait for a while, I’m coming now”. I looked around, then when I brought my bag out, I saw my husband. He was home, after fetching my son from the school.

Lieya: So he’s the one who pick your kid from kindergarten every day?

Shalini: No, he never did that before this, I was so shocked, “Why he’s at home at that time? Did my plan was discovered?” Luckily, he went out after he brought back our son home. Once he was out, I hurriedly open the gate, put my kids in the taxi, took my bag and closed the gate. I did everything as fast as lightning, all in five minutes.

Lieya: How terrifying is that. Did you wear other clothes at that time?

Shalini: Yeah it was so nerve-racking. I wore clothes like this (attire worn at home) because I’m worried the others would notice. My house is located in this row and the house in the opposite row is where his brother lived. If his brother passed by my house I’m really dead. I was so jumpy throughout the journey.

As well as this intensive planning, some women received immediate protection after life-threatening violence by the perpetrator against them or their children. One woman was forced by her family-in-law to seek protection in the shelter (Faizah’s case, recounted in Chapter 7). Other strategies used by the women in this study to get out of intimate captivity and seek protection in the shelter include –travelling unidentified by perpetrators, abandoning vehicles that might be recognised by perpetrators and use public transportation; using ordinary clothes worn at home to avoid being suspected by perpetrators, or disguising themselves in men’s clothes. Often their careful planning allowed them only a short period of five to ten minutes in which to flee. These strategies do not always work, and are very risky for the women. The
process of seeking protection in the shelter is easier via police intervention, as it removes the perpetrators from the house or arresting them, rather than women having to carry out these elaborate escape plans.

C. MURAL ART PROJECT

Intervention from WAO is the most effective so far, by providing temporary shelter and keeping the survivors under the radar, unable to be traced by perpetrators. Through the findings obtained by utilizing the PAR method, I produced a mural to inform the public about WAO’s help and support and the reality of domestic violence. It was created by a Malay artist Ahmad Hizmy who worked with me to create the mural which displayed in a public site in Selangor, Malaysia. Permission is fundamental to mural projects, as using a surface or wall must be granted by the property owner. The local authority of Shah Alam City Council was involved in approving this project. Additionally, the paints that were used for this project were fully sponsored by Nippon Paint Sdn.Bhd.

The location of the mural is at PKNS Apartment, Section 7, Shah Alam, Selangor, which is opposite the laundry store and near the government and private sectors’ offices and a multipurpose hall (see Figure 19). The selection of this place is to break with the practice of concentrating domestic violence campaigns in middle class areas, such as in Malaysia's leading shopping malls.
I also incorporated a strapline, to drive public to take action. It contains powerful messages that fit the Malaysian context, in Malay (as proposed by the multicultural participants). The message emphasises that love is not a prison, domestic violence is in fact a crime and WAO hotline number is displayed (see Figure 20).

“Love is not a prison”

“Domestic violence is a crime. Take immediate action. Call the WAO hotline for help and support”
The mural in Figure 21 illustrates the pain and suffering on the face of the woman, the expression of being abused while she covers the bruises, scratches and cuts with her hands; because survivors do not want to be noticed. Abused women find it very difficult to get out of the dangerous space that entrap them. Many women do manage to escape from the violent space after several attempts, sometimes with the help of public intervention. But others remain incarcerated in abusive relationships for a long time. In some cases, the women die in this ‘invisible prison’ designed by abusers. The abused woman’s life is compared to that of a wilting rose bud that is tightly bound. Their hope is like a dove flying out of the red cage and seeking freedom. Yet the external future is uncertain for them, and the rays of hope seem at the same time to be full of terror.

Besides this mural, I also launched a Facebook page of Cinta Bukan Penjara (Love is Not a Prison) for the purpose of getting response from the public. However, it takes a timeless effort to promote this campaign, especially through my own funding and commitment as well as cooperation with the Women’s Aid Organization. What is most important is that the mural
is expected to serve its function, indirectly, since 2016. Research methods such as focus groups may be feasible in the future to determine the impact of this mural on the public.

D. RECOVERY FROM VIOLENT POSSESSION IN THE SHELTER

Temporary Recovery

Women in this study explained that the recovery process can occur when the control of the perpetrator in their body and their environment is lessened. This may only be a temporary process, prior and during the three months protection they receive at the shelter. Most interviewees experience a sense of empowerment, alongside traumatic symptoms (as discussed in Chapter 7). They talked about regaining consciousness, self-esteem, confidence, their own right to a safe life, and a sense of the restoration of control (Herman, 1992). For example, Rekha describes as ‘exorcism’ the process of dispossessing the demonic hold that violent men have over women, which allowed her to leave the abusive relationship. Although Rekha is not a Muslim, she holds the local community’s belief that water taken from a mosque may have a healing effect, and believes it was effective in her case:

Rekha: After I drank the holy water before coming to this place, I felt better now as I regain my consciousness. It was like that.
Lieya: Is it like medicated water?
Rekha: Yes. The one from the mosque.
Lieya: At mosque?
Rekha: Yeah, at a mosque in Teluk Mutiara. It’s made by the Malays, they gave me the water, I drank it until the last drop. Now I’m ok.

For other women, the process of getting back self-confidence is with the help of counselling:

In this place (shelter), there’s counselling service, so I get my confidence a bit. My kids are here with me, they’re happy too. In the morning, there’s tuition session, they can play in the late afternoon. My case was just managed recently, I couldn’t stay long in this shelter, there are other victims coming in. I was requested to find a new house with other survivors (Fika).

Chumy also talks about her own and other women’s self-confidence in an activity named “I am a rose”:
Now, I am more confident. I must respect myself and others. In time, I started to appreciate myself. A woman needs to believe in herself and follow her heart when making decisions. A woman can reach her goal to become successful. Women can do, women can do.

Ashna told the social worker that this recovery process is ‘to get herself back’:

*Client believes that she has the right to be free of violence. She felt that she has lost herself because of the violence and now trying to get herself back and recover (client file, Ashna).*

‘Herself’ for Ashna means self-esteem. As she describes below, this was partly regained for her by helping other survivors in the shelter:

*Ashna: In this shelter, I always test myself. Sometimes I share my ideas with others, so some of them said my ideas are ok and would follow it. “So now I realise, my thinking is right after I recovered. So, I don’t feel useless. I feel ok. I realise that what he did is all wrong. When I think about this, I really hate him. He made me feel as if I have nothing (loss of self-esteem). Within two months I stay here, I recovered to the original version of me.*

*Lieya: So, you realise that on your own?*  
*Ashna: Yes, from my own thinking.  
Lieya: Do you receive help from friends?*  
*Ashna: The first time I came here, I listened stories from others; Their experience, what did they do. At that time, I haven’t yet recovered. So, I kept thinking by myself, then I began to get to know the others. Sometimes when they have problem, I give them some ideas to settle it. They follow my instruction and somehow, it’s working. So, they thanked me. Saying that my ideas are good, that they’re happy to get what they want. And I feel happy too. Like we can contribute something (getting back self-confidence).  
Lieya: Then you realise from that?  
*Ashna: Yeah and I tell myself, Ok, we’re not useless, we do have something. Now that we have support groups, they somehow assigned me as their leader. Anything that happened, they’ll look for me. Then I wonder, since when I become their leader? Then I feel like I do have something within me (chuckling). I do get what I wish for. Maybe once I’m out, I want to test myself again.*

Chumy said that she was able to regain a sense of her rights in life after ‘freeing’ herself from her husband's control:
Here (in refuge), I have no money, no home, nothing, but I’m happy. That’s what I want. Because this is my own life. Before this, I gave my life to him, but it was futile. I cried every day. But now, I have my own capacity, my own strengths. Why do I need to give myself to others? Let me move on by myself. Is this the right choice? That’s what I’m hoping for. Then I told myself, I don’t want to put my hope on to others. Even for my husband, his life and mine are different. Even though we are spouse. His aim and direction are different from mine (Chumy).

The recovery process relies on the individual experience of each abused women, which is contextual in line with local culture and beliefs. The interviews show that recovery from trauma or possession occurs through exorcism, psychotherapy such as counselling, and self-recovery as in Ashna’s case. Psychotherapy is an approach that uses western diagnostic criteria in treating trauma victims, using the technique of counselling. On the other hand, exorcism is often perceived by western scholars to be associated with violent and uncivilised rituals. In referring to exorcism as a traumatic treatment to erase traumatic memories or even alter their content, Herman (1992) views exorcism as an implicit fantasy for traumatised people in seeking treatment. She further explains:

*It is understandable for both patient and therapist to wish for a magic transformation, a purging of the evil of the trauma. Psychotherapy, however, does not get rid of the trauma. The goal of recounting the traumatic story is integration, not exorcism. In the process of reconstruction, the traumatic story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in restorative power of truth telling.*

Exorcism is not a violent practice but is similar to psychotherapy in that it helps women to integrate their experience. Often, exorcism is conducted by practising local religious rituals frequently such as drinking, taking a bath, and washing the face by using holy water. This is in contrast to western writing about exorcism, where it is poorly understood as in Davey’s (2014) idea of it (discussed in Chapter 6), in which ritual exorcism involves violence against possessed bodies. Instead, exorcism is related to tenets and beliefs that bring about a placebo effect for possessed bodies when the patients believe and have confidence in it; in this sense it has similarities with psychotherapy. Women’s accounts of treatment in this study suggest that both techniques of exorcism and psychotherapy are recognised and integrated by the subject.
According to Brice-Baker (1994), before offering solutions to domestic violence survivors, it is helpful to know individual preferences and who they would rather turn to for help. In Malaysia, traditional healers are more popular as sources for help to cure ‘possession’, and this is the case regardless of ethnicity or social class. One of the reasons that exorcism is more often considered than psychotherapy is because of the social stigma associated with the latter. Those who are inflicted by demons gain more sympathy from society, as compared with those who are seen to have mental health problems and in need of a psychotherapist. Hence, it is important that therapists pay attention to the way in which women wish to use these different sources of help for trauma relief. Malaysia, like other countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, is medically pluralistic and patients and their families are free to find a diagnosis and therapy that suits.

As Marshall and Sousa (2014) argue, trauma is not a politically neutral and “value-free” category. Survivors must be the author and arbiter for their own recovery (Herman, 1992). We must therefore attempt to learn from survivors, who understand, more profoundly than any investigator, the effects of captivity (Herman, 1992). Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure (Herman, 1992). As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of the abused women in this study recount traumatic symptoms through the cultural explanation of possessed bodies. Demonic possession is a ‘convenient’ and comprehensive term for multicultural societies to understand chronic trauma, and also offers knowledge regarding healing, which can thus help rather than hinder health providers.

**The Conditions of Rebuilding**

The recovery process is not a linear path that reaches an end (Tamas, 2011). The survivors stated that they recover temporarily in the shelter, but the violence is ongoing because the sense of perpetrator is often still physically and psychologically present. When the women are in the shelter, therefore perpetrators may continue to dominate them via trauma (as in Chapter 7); but they may also call and send messages, come to the family’s home, go to the kids’ school, and some even come to the shelter after they find out the location (sometimes with assistance from the perpetrators family members who disguise themselves as abused women). Some women also have to face abusive traits in their children, who imitate the violence they have witnessed.
Interviewees talked about the conditions they desire as survivors, which Pain (2014b) calls rebuilding. Most of them agree that survivors can obtain a safe life when perpetrators are imprisoned, dead, or sent to a rehabilitation centre (due to other criminal cases):

The client reiterated her fear of her husband. Client believed that the only way for her to be safe is her husband to be in jail. If he is not imprison, she felt very unsafe. The client worried if her husband would harm her children after he is released, similar to the experience she had last time (by intentionally getting into a car accident involving her kids). When she was asked for how long she wants her husband to be in jail, she said for ten years, 20 years, the more the better. Client also said that she wants her husband to be dead, so she can be free from him forever. Client has been informed that her husband is currently in a lock-up in Sabah. Client felt safer because of that. However, she wishes that he would be in the lock-up for a longer period of time, at least until her children grow up. Client wanted her husband to be sent to the drug rehabilitation centre. She asked how this can be done. Client is very anxious if her husband went out from jail and afraid that he would look for her and hurt her again (client file, Fika).

In this life until death, I don’t want to look at him. If he passes away, I will just admit the fact, that’s all (no sadness) (Chumy).

In addition, some believed that they will be free from being a target of abuse if the husband is married or has another woman as his partner:

My mum-in-law told my husband, “don’t worry, its ok, just divorce your wife. I will find another woman to marry you”. That’s what his mum said. I retorted, “It’s good if he gets married to another woman. Because he won’t bother me anymore. So I’ll be happy if he’s married” (Shalini).

I think yeah, I do love him. I really love him. That’s why now I realise, I couldn’t change others’ attitude. I couldn’t change my husband. I told myself, “It’s ok if you have no feelings for me, my family and my kids. Its ok if you like other woman. You can marry her. You’ll be happy in the new life. Its ok, you can pick another woman, get the kids with you, so when you’re be happy in the new life, I’m happy too. Its ok, as long as you’re happy with the new life, it’s enough, even if I lose my husband. In this shelter, I’m single, but I’m happy. Even if I have a penny or not, that is another story. Inside my heart, I’m happy. Even if I die tomorrow, I’ll be happy. Because this life is mine. I lead my life as I please. In my own way. I don’t want to burden anyone”. He can shut his mouth, marry other woman, have kids and live happily, then that’s enough.
Lieya: When did you speak with him?
Chumy: I didn’t say this to him. I just spoke to myself.
Mariam: So you didn’t tell him?
Chumy: No. If I said those things to him, he would react. He won’t be mad, but he’ll act nonsense. Like there’s an energy (evilness). So, I spoke to him myself, “Don’t disturb me. Just go and live your own life. You can get married for the second time or keep a mistress”.

In contrast, if the perpetrators are still free, there are steps the women need to take to avoid continuation of the coercive control. One of these is to break off the relationship with the perpetrator:

In my opinion, there is another way. I can’t say anything to my husband too, you know why, because we can realise that we don’t want to proceed any longer. Even he’s my husband, I already know about him, his manner. He can listen to nothing with whatever I say. So, it’s better for me to shut my mouth. What I mean is, I don’t want to deal with him anymore, even via hand phone, call or face to face, it’s not working. Because there is only one option. Because throughout my life with him, he as a husband owned me. But when he did like that, I couldn’t live any longer (Chumy).

He said, “Please come home. If you don’t want to be with me, it’s ok, as long as I can see the kids”. I don’t want him for good, because he had caused my son to be in an accident. I’m worried if he would do it again. I refused, then I stop using the sim card. I still don’t use it until now, so I don’t know what happened (Fika).

Some women keep their identity a secret, so they cannot be tracked by the perpetrator or his family:

I don’t want my husband’s family to find me if I use my real name. That’s why I don’t put my picture (in Facebook). To make it easier, I write things in my phone, using Evernote app, it can be our diary. I used the diary (Shalini).

Meanwhile, for women who have family support, staying in a secret location is still preferred. This is to ensure that she cannot be tracked by the perpetrator, because of the risk being killed:

But now my family already knows (that she is currently at the shelter). My dad texted me, he said I should stay here (at the shelter) for the time being. So, he’ll look for a place that my husband can’t find me. But I don’t know where. Because I don’t know
what my job will be. My mum-in-law also said, don’t look behind any longer. It’s possible that he bears a grudge against you, that he’ll kill you (Faizah).

Many of the women interviewed refuse or are cautious about seeking formal assistance, because of the possibility of being tracked or having to face their perpetrators:

But like what I said, I can apply for a divorce. But when we apply the divorce through government institution, we need to attend counselling sessions three times. The one organized under the welfare department, we apply our divorce to the lawyer, they’ll conduct counselling for three times. Both husband and wife need to attend the counselling. I don’t want to meet him any longer. I don’t want to go to counselling or anything with him any more (Shalini).

One day I went to the sharia court in KL with a social worker, the officer asked me, “Where do you stay?”, I said I live in KL. The officer responded, “Ok then you should apply for divorce at a place near your area”. Then I think what should I do when I want to seek divorce later on. If I do it in KL, my husband will surely come and find me. What if he has a spite against me. I asked the social worker, “Should I settle fasakh process at that time or can I do it later?” Then she said I could do it later. I can find a job first. I can’t leave it hanging for too long (Fika).

Freedom from being in fear or controlled by perpetrators is important to survive, and allows reconnection with family, friends and the outside world, so that the woman no longer lives in isolation and has financial security. As Fika mentioned to the social worker:

For the life without fear, she described three scenarios - she can go back to their family and live happily; she can have a house and a car; she can be free to have friends and go to places she wants to (client file, Fika).

In this way, abused women are able to gain a sense of empowerment:

Shalini wants to prove to her husband and her family members that she can be independent. Her husband often told her that she can’t be independent. She wants to

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15 A woman married in accordance with Islamic Law shall be entitled to obtain an order for the dissolution of marriage or fasakh on any one or more conditions that the husband treats her with cruelty such as habitually assaults her or makes her life miserable by cruelty of conduct; disposes of her property or prevents her from exercising her legal rights over it; or obstructs her in the observance of her religious obligations or practice (Islamic Family Law, 1984).
prove to the world that she can take care of her children. She wants to work hard so she’ll not be looked down by other people (client file, Shalini).

The majority of other interviewees also gave their opinion about ‘regaining the world they have lost’ and want to achieve better economic, career and education positions. They want to prove their success by living independently from their perpetrator, in-laws, and their own family who looked down on them when they were in the abusive relationship. According to Rekha, this is a stage she had to go through for her to move on, as depicted in her photovoice (see Figure 22) as a multi-layered tree, which represents an increasingly advanced life. For her, it is important to upgrade herself, and to protect her son, particularly by providing him with a good education:

_In the future, I want to rise for higher position like this tree (Figure 22). Going up layer by layer. Yeah, I should make progress little by little. To protect my son. To give him good education, to raise him up, so I need to move forward. Then, I can push on for my son._
Additionally, the women also believe that children’s education is able to reverse or rotate the impact of the violent environment that the perpetrators exposed them to when they were together. As stated by Chumy and Shalini:

*I think now I want to focus on two important things. I want to provide safety for my children. Second, their education. Because only through education, they can change their lifestyle. That’s the right thing (Chumy).*

*The most important is education for the kids, I don’t want them to be like their father. I only think about one thing. I want to be a nice person, then I want my children to be the same. If I come across my husband again in a few years, I want my kids to be in a good condition. After two months in the previous leaving attempt, I went to see my kids (at family in law’s house), their behaviour became worse. Because my husband’s family is like that. I don’t want it to happen. I’m not sure if he comes and see me or the kids later in a couple of years, I want him to take his breath away. Oh are they my kids? Wow!” (Shalini)*
Besides children’s education, social awareness of domestic violence is also important. Some women expressed their desire to be an activist to educate the community and empower other women through their experience:

*Chumy:* I don’t really mind if I get money or not. But I just want to share my experience.
*Mariam:* I can share out these strong feelings.
*Chumy:* Maybe some people will listen once I share my story. If they can’t understand, it’s ok. Because, if others can gain awareness from my experience, they may be able to change their behaviour or lifestyle.
*Mariam:* Even we can’t give money (to the abused women), we can also help from that aspect.
*Chumy:* If I know someone outside who’s suffering the same fate, this is the chance for me (to be an activist). Deep inside me, I used to tell my mum when I was 17, by the age of forty, I want to live independently, I want to do social work. I want to be a social worker when I reach forty. By then, my kids have grown up, they have their own life. There’re smart enough, so I don’t need to be worried about them. Then I can go out to give back to the community. I want to help them in any way I can.
*Mariam:* By being a volunteer?
*Chumy:* Yes.
*Mariam:* I wish the same thing.
*Chumy:* Yeah, that’s why. God already knows, I don’t need to torture myself, I don’t need to wait until forty, I felt the call when I’m thirty (which is now).
*Liaya:* So this experience does give me wisdom.
*Chumy:* So this is the advantage. I do like it (being an activist).
*Mariam:* That means God helps you.

To sum up, these conditions are in line with Herman’s (1992) suggestion of three stages of recovery, namely regaining safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. These recovery stages are a convenient device, and are not to be taken literally (Herman, 1992). For the women in this study, safety is when their perpetrators leave them for good (psychologically and physically). Moreover, safety also involves several conditions that will prevent ongoing violence such as financial security through a decent job, a good education for children to transform the family lifestyle and educating the community as well as empowering other women by sharing their experience. Reconnection with ordinary life is when survivors are no longer living in isolation and can socialise with family, friends and the outside world like normal people. Finally, the remembrance and mourning stage is as
described in Chapter 7, when the narrative of trauma becomes more ‘real’ after the
counselling period at the shelter is almost over.

**The Reality of Being a Survivor**

In Malaysia, resettlement services for domestic violence cases are not yet established, and so
temporary shelters are the only efficient short-term intervention for abused women. After
three months of protection at the shelter ends, women are advised to live independently.
Because other formal interventions are less effective, the majority of women face difficulties
living independently and freeing themselves from violence. This is due to issues such as
having no financial support, no safe shelter, and no reliable childcare.

In general, women who have children with their perpetrator find it hard to live independently
without family assistance. For instance, in Shalini’s case, it is difficult to secure a safe place
for her and her children, because her family sides with her husband:

*My husband called my dad, saying that he wants to take the kids. My brother told my
dad, “Shalini has nothing (money), how can she take care the 3 kids? Her husband is
well off, so he can look after the kids”. I don’t mind if my husband is nice, love his
children and can provide good education. Now I’m afraid to go back to Besut because
my brother has sided with my husband. He’ll surely bring my husband to see me and
carry off my kids. My husband will leak about the place in Besut (before this, Shalini
told the researcher that Besut is her aunt’s home and her husband don’t know about
the place). If possible, I want to find a place to put my children while I’m out looking
for a job.*

However much the women wish to be free of their husbands, the reality of their economic
situation and the need to both work and find care for their children, means that they often
have to reengage with their husbands. Shalini’s case provides an example:

*Shalini: I can go to my parents’ house, but if my husband knows the kids are there,
he’ll come and make a fuss.*

*Lieya: Does he insist to take the kids?*

*Shalini: Yeah. I want to go to the police station to lodge a cover report. I want to say
that I want to send my kids to live with my husband; he has to bear the kids. I want to
make the cover report, then I’ll send the kids.*

*Lieya: But are they safe with your husband? Did he used to lay a hand on them?*
Shalini: Never. He just hit me, how drunken he can be, he never hit the kids. I’ll go there and see how it goes.
(Harini said something to Shalini in Tamil).
Lieya: Then do your parents know that you want to send them to your husband?
Shalini: They are the ones who called me and asked me to send them there.
Lieya: To your husband?
Shalini: Yeah, both of them called me, asked me to send my kids to live there for a while.
Lieya: They don’t want to take care of your kids?
Shalini: They want their grandkids, but they’re terrified of my husband. He can go there and create a ruckus. Because before this, he visited my parents’ house, brought knife and machete. In the future, I’ll look after them. It’s just temporary, not permanent.
Lieya: Do you know how long they’ll stay there?
Shalini: Until I get my own job, and a steady position (economically) for myself and once I’m stable. If I bring them to live with me now, I can’t take care of them.
Lieya: So you really want to send them to live with your husband? Is this your final decision?
Shalini: I really don’t want to do that. But the current situation doesn’t allow me to do so. I can do nothing. Even for me, if I have a job, I can look after them. But I have nothing, zero, no money, nothing, in this shelter its ok because I get food, but what happens once I’m out of here? It is hard right? Its ok if I bear the hardship alone, but I don’t want to drag them with me. So for this baby its ok, I can bring the baby with me (the baby is five months old). One social worker used to ask me, “Is it possible to send my kids to any centre, like child centre”. I said, “It’s just the same if I send them to either live in the centre or with my husband. It’s better for them to go with their dad, at least they get love from him”. Its better like that. Their dad has arranged everything for the kids, even the schools that they’ll go to. It’s just that they’ll go there and live as usual.

The same as the case for Chumy, who had to return to her family who were in contact with the perpetrator. Her family’s insistence is because they did not take the domestic violence seriously, leaving her with no choice:

Lieya: Will you go back to your mum’s house?
Chumy: Yeah, but my husband knows where the place is. I feel unsafe to go back there. That’s why I’ll go home with my Chinese friend and my boss; they are the ones who sent me here. Once I return home, they know they can’t help me any longer. If the social worker let me send my two daughters to the childcare centre, I don’t need to be worried about them. I’m concerned about their safety (risk of sexual assault by
the perpetrator). Even in other shelters, I can’t send them there. So I can’t force them. My mum said, I need to be responsible, not him, so it’s better for me to go there (her mum’s house), and take care my children. Now, my son is there, that’s why my mum keeps calling me. Let’s say if I send them to hostel, all five of them in that place, then I don’t need to feel worried. I can rent any place nearby the hostel and I can go to work. So I don’t need to travel back and forth to my mum’s house, so I don’t need to be bothered about my kids because all of them are safe and they can finish their study. I can go to visit them once a week. As long as they are protected, I’ll feel secured. That is my concern, now my mum has said that she can’t look after them. That’s why she kept calling me every day.

Pressure from the family puts women at risk once they are out of the shelter, not only because of being tracked by the perpetrators, but because it can reduce the possibility of getting help from others such as colleagues and employers who had been trying to save them before. Women’s action in returning to the high-risk situation causes the community to judge them as being passive and ineffective in decision-making. Chumy visualises this complexity like a forest through her photovoice (Figure 23):

Now I’m confused of what should I do for my future. The decision that I make will determine whether my life will turn bright or ugly. After this, I need to decide by following my own gut.

Figure 23: “My Confusion and Uncertain Future” shot by Chumy
Usha faces similar dilemmas. Her violent husband had kept her daughter with him, so that Usha would return to live with him. She was unable to take action because of the complexity of her case, which involved her conversion to Islam prior to her marriage, her child’s status as adopted, and high legal costs. However, the difficulty is also experienced by other women who are able to secure a ‘safe’ physical residence or those without a child with their perpetrator. They also find it challenging to free themselves from violence, partly due to trauma and fear, and partly because the perpetrators are still free and try to track them, or perhaps only having received short sentences of only a few months in jail after being found guilty.

Evidence from my research suggests that survivors coming out of the shelter very often return to their perpetrators, live in their family’s house known to the perpetrators, have to hand over the children to their perpetrators because they are unable to take care of the kids on their own, or have to be separated from their children because they lose child custody or children are simply taken by perpetrators. Others live alone in trauma and fear after leaving the shelter. A situation that provides the conditions of stable recovery (as described earlier in this Chapter) is very hard to obtain. Herman (1992) suggests that the task of establishing a safe environment cannot be done by one person, instead, it requires societal support.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has revealed how cultural specificity matters in explaining the difficulties that abused women in Malaysia have when trying to resist, seeking help and ‘recovering’ from violence. This chapter has illustrated that the ways in which the women escape from domestic violence is understood and experienced in Malaysia differ from western understandings in many ways. Religion plays an important role for the women in resisting violence. The belief that God exists and can help the women to find a way out of domestic violence enables them to endure intimate captivity. Even if the women decide to commit suicide or get to the point where they give up fighting abuse that threatens their life, this can also be viewed as resistance, as both decisions are the last resort to be out of the abusive relationship, by surrendering to God through death. No one put their life in their perpetrators’ hands.
Likewise, the way the women seek help has specific cultural explanations, influenced by their understanding of the specific reasons why their husband is abusive; this is somewhat different from the western culture. In western countries, perpetrators are often assumed to have mental health problems, for example diagnosed with psychopathy or narcissism by psychologists. However, this assumption tends to lead to formal interventions that favour the perpetrators (via rehabilitation programmes) and the blame is shifted to the survivors. In reality, perpetrators are cunning in evading punishment, either from the perspective of law or society. Hennessy (2012) argues that, it is better for the community to acknowledge that a perpetrator is just a normal person who is evil, so that intervention can be done effectively. According to Hennessy (2012), counsellors who are dealing with perpetrators should be better trained to be aware of perpetrators’ sneaky tactics.

In the context of this study, the difference in the cultural argument - whether the perpetrators are possessed by demons or whether they themselves are the demons (metaphorically) influences survivors’ decisions in seeking help. The majority of women in this study who use the demon (and mental illness) as the metaphor for perpetrators’ viciousness are those who are aware of the perpetrators’ tactics, and often, they tried to find a way to leave intimate captivity for good. The purpose of them looking for a shaman (and psychiatrist) is to find out why their husband becomes violent, because they want to find grounds for divorce. On the other hand, there are women who blame demonic possession as the cause of their husband being violent, and for them the decision to leave the abusive relationship is not on their own will, but often it is due to family intervention. It is hard to get the perpetrators to cooperate to seek help from shamans and physicians to deal with the perpetrators’ ‘issues’. Thus, there is no evidence that the perpetrators are ‘possessed’ (or have mental illness). When the violence gets worse, survivors realise that the only hope for them to save themselves from intimate captivity via police intervention is misguided and does not make the situation any better. This causes most of the survivors to lose their confidence to the police. Some women manage to escape, but the process is traumatic and exhausting. The shelter as the refuge space is indeed important to help them to escape and temporarily ‘recover’ from trauma, besides learning the way to rebuild their life and face the reality of being a survivor in Malaysia.
However, the information on WAO is hard to obtain because their most of the campaigns are held in middle class areas among the English-speaking community. The information regarding domestic violence is also influenced by the western-centric feminist perspective in Malaysia. Often, the participants who manage to secure protection in the shelter get assistance from the people who care about them. To break the tradition of having such campaigns, and to take into account WAO’s effectiveness in intervention, this study has come up with public art that utilises the data from the participatory method. The public wall art thus gives a stronger message to empower women, raise awareness, and enhance knowledge because it is based on their real-life experiences of domestic violence. The public wall art helps to convey the message 24 hours a day to the public who pass by the mural, which is situated in a residential area with occupants from different economic status and ethnicity.

Nevertheless, shelter protection is only a temporary solution. The women’s economic status, especially those with children to support, makes it difficult for them to be completely free of their abusive husband and find a solution that is long-term. Still, the participants in this study who leave the shelter are at risk of being abused or killed by perpetrators due to the weakness of the legal system in dealing with domestic violence perpetrators. Although some participants are physically capable of fleeing from the perpetrator, the abuse is still ongoing in the form of trauma. In Malaysia, there is no treatment method that is informed by abused women’s experiences. Instead, the therapeutic method is based on western psychology. Meanwhile, the women in this study have explained the need for methods that take into account cultural and religious aspects to treat violent possession (trauma), such as exorcism.

The study findings provide different perspectives, especially for Malaysians who often regard abused women as passive and stubborn for hesitating to take action even after being abused, and view them as clueless about finding a way out of the abuse. In fact, the abused women are the ones who really know their perpetrators and they are very aware of the risks of any action that they take to escape from domestic violence. They are totally traumatised and helpless in intimate captivity, besides the fact that it is hard to seek assistance. The chapter highlights that the abused women are active in resisting violence, using various strategies which are rooted in their belief system and condition in intimate captivity. They have agency.
to resist the perpetrators and should not simply be deemed as victims. Understandings of how women resist, seek help and ‘recover’ from domestic violence needs to reflect on cultural difference so that intervention can be done more effectively, especially in efforts to free the survivors from violence for good. The findings should be noted by western scholars who assume that they are the role models in determining any form of intervention in domestic violence cases, especially the way to deal with trauma among non-western women.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the research findings and their implications for this study. The findings capture the experiences of survivors of domestic violence and the ways in which the women of this study understand and contest established narratives on domestic violence. It examines the importance of participatory methods and the benefit of mural art to convey a sense of practising space in the everyday lives of women in abusive relationships and after separation, and also explores the value of making abused women’s experiences public. This is valuable in opening up dialogue about often unheard and unspoken stories of domestic violence across different cultures in the context of Malaysia.

This thesis has offered grounded insights from traumatic accounts of women who have managed to find temporary escape from violence. Examining the nature and understandings of trauma is, therefore, at the root of the aims of this thesis. As outlined in the introductory chapter, this project set out to highlight the need to understand the spatially and culturally specific experience of domestic violence from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. This research project aimed to explore the following questions; what bearing does trauma have on abusive relationships, as defined by women survivors in Malaysia? How far do these meanings, and associated experiences of domestic violence, differ for women from different ethnic groups and across rural and urban settings? What are the related experiences and differences in help-seeking behaviour and expectations of informal and formal intervention in domestic violence? Informed by postcolonial theory, the findings provide a culturally-sensitive understanding of domestic violence. They also point towards the need for culturally-sensitive forms of help and support to deal with underreported cases and to avoid misguided interventions that might be inappropriate in responding to specific circumstances. In what follows, I summarize the major findings of the study with particular focus on how they fill a gap in the literature about domestic violence, which tends to be dominated by western accounts. Before the concluding remarks, this chapter provides recommendations for
improving the conditions of abused women in Malaysia, specifically, and more broadly in diverse cultural contexts.

**KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Spatial and Social Vulnerability**

Marriage is an important process across ethnic groups in establishing family institutions in Malaysia. It has strong cultural and religious elements, which are associated with receiving the blessings of and prayers from parents. The findings show that marriage without seeking family approval through eloping, arranged marriage and marriage via deception often lead to women being more vulnerable to domestic violence. Social and spatial processes that create the conditions for domestic violence also emerge from these kinds of marriage.

Eloping in this context refers to unregistered marriage that does not conform to Islamic marriage procedures for Muslim couples or the civil procedures for non-Muslims. Eloping often occurs not only due to the wife’s family’s disapproval, but that of the family-in-law. In this study, Muslim couples eloped to Thailand, so their marriage is not registered in Malaysia. Women, in particular are rendered vulnerable by this form of marriage. The wife cannot make a legal claim because the court has to determine the marriage status before resolving any claims. Moreover, the wife is susceptible to high risk consequences because eloping does not require HIV testing unlike other forms of marriage in Malaysia. For non-Muslims, eloping happens when women run away from their families and live with their spouses as cohabitants. Such relationships do not have any rights under family law and are not covered by the Domestic Violence Act 1994 because Malaysia does not recognise extra-marital relationship or cohabitation. Eloping thus puts women in a vulnerable position due to the lack of protection under Malaysian Law.

Marrying without family approval further threatens the women because their families tend to isolate them. Meanwhile, the women feel guilty and thus also withdraw from normal family relationships. For survivors, eloping often leads to losing their own family and ensuring the husband feels that he is the sole owner of the wife. It is viewed by the women as a reason why their husbands come to be more possessive. Some survivors become more vulnerable where the family-in-laws are abusive and do not accept her presence in the house.
Meanwhile, their own families cannot intervene when the violence takes place. Moreover, eloping also causes the survivors to lose rights to their family’s house. The abused women usually have to stay longer in an abusive relationship because there is no place for them to escape to, especially if they have no means for accessing information regarding shelters. In fact, the research has shown that eloping becomes an excuse for the husbands to manipulate the women into being ‘obedient’ wives. In relation to this, some women who eloped in this study become a target of deception for the purpose of economic exploitation. The abusers married the women solely because of inheritance money, knowing their wives would receive their mother's inheritance money as the only daughters in the family. Deception also occurs in arranged marriages. Survivors in this study define this as a marriage that is intentionally arranged by in-laws in a short time, with the intention of concealing the husband’s cruelty. Therefore, the abused women cannot choose their own spouse and have to bear with the abusive husband.

Finally, in extreme cases, women are deceived into fake marriages for the purposes of exploitation. These types of ‘marriage’ put the women at risk of sexual exploitation and extreme forms of abuse by the perpetrators. In this study, women whose religion differs from that of the perpetrators often become victims of fraud and are compelled to convert. This is a trap for creating a totally submissive target of abuse and sexual exploitation, and also renders the women more vulnerable due to the lack of awareness of rights and laws in the abusers’ religion. The women find themselves in a situation where the options become very limited and there is no other real alternative than to agree to the marriage. The marriage process and the way marriage is perceived by wider society also makes women vulnerable because their relationship with their husband after marriage is private, making it harder for the women to get help. Marriages based on eloping, arrangement and deception enable perpetrators to dominate women, without the possibility of intervention by family members or for protection under the law.

**Intimate Captivity: Spatial Experience of Abused Women**

In the context of Malaysia, existing understandings of how domestic violence is spatially experienced by diverse women can be seen as western-centric, as they only relate to the physical sense of home as private sphere. Meanwhile, the subject of space in domestic
violence and the experiences of women across diverse cultures has been absent both in research and debates. This research has revealed that the spaces of violence are not only restricted to ‘private’ space as observed and perceived by most western geographers and that very often women experience domestic violence as intimate captivity.

The spaces in which intimate captivity occurs covers the spaces external to the home (rural or urban locations, the extension of the private sphere into public spaces), spaces within the home and the spaces of women’s psyche and their body. Many abused women in Malaysia and other context are entrapped in complex, but very common, relationships of intimate captivity, but it takes different forms according to the background of the individuals involved, where they live, the circumstances of their marriage, cultural and religious expectations and so on. The study found that the perpetrators’ culture and religion determine how far the public/private binary works in intimate captivity. Indian husbands often assert themselves like ‘Gods’ to reinforce their domination over their wives as defined by Hindu tradition. Their God-like power over their wives extends from the immediacy of their bodies into both private and public spaces and may persist because of an unwillingness by people in the wider community to intervene. Abuse in public space is in part a manifestation of this power and the extension of the private realm into these spaces, in which women are humiliated into compliance and submission. This happens through various kinds of abuse, including both psychological and verbal abuse, which is often followed by physical abuse. Intimate family matters are used as an excuse for abuse. This extension of the imaginary ‘private’ space into the realm of the public is so powerful that it restricts intervention to prevent the abuse by members of the community. It is often the case that the abuse in public spaces only stops with intervention by the police.

The findings from this study demonstrate that domestic violence is spatialised in different ways in Malay culture. Abusive Malay partners often assert themselves as a ‘pious’ husband to reinforce their control over their wives, who are compelled to be obedient. The spatial area of captivity by pious husbands extends from their wives’ bodies into private space as defined by Islamic tradition. Islamic notions of public and private space are predominantly contextual (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001), determined by the physical dimension of space, which includes a wider context involving participants, activities and territorial behaviour. In Islam,
privacy is related to the need that individuals or groups have for safety and it requires that one should ask for permission before entering other people’s private spaces. Therefore, pious husbands emphasise ‘privacy’ in establishing intimate captivity. The consequences of this are that most of the abuse takes place in a room, often sound proofed, in which there is no witness or, in a few cases, only the children and other family members to what happens. In this way, the perpetrators do not feel ashamed of themselves, are able to maintain their image as pious husbands in the community, enjoy impunity in the ‘safe space’ of a Muslim home, and avoid social sanction. This study has also argued that perpetrators may draw on other aspects of patriarchal culture that permit the abuse of women or social norms that allow them to exert control.

This research therefore contributes to the growing body of work in geography that examines domestic violence against women in ‘private’ spaces, most of which has been based in studies of western contexts. This research corroborates Meth’s (2003) argument that not all domestic violence is experienced in private spaces in the physical sense. In this context, ‘private’ space is experienced and spatialised through cultural and religious specificities. The boundaries of ‘private’ spaces’ differ across culture and religion and have both physical and psychological dimensions. The home as a space of abuse is walled by visible and invisible barriers that make it difficult for abused women to escape. In such circumstances, they also find it hard to get any source of intervention as the perpetrator has usually severed the relationship between the women and their families and the wider community, geographically and socially. This becomes more serious with the use of psychological force, such as love and fear, which causes survivors to be bound to the perpetrators, thus making them submissive and unable to escape, often for many years (in this study, the longest period that a woman was trapped in an abusive relationship is 20 years).

Furthermore, the geographical and social marginalisation of women creates invisible barriers that create the conditions for intimate captivity. These barriers are influenced by perpetrators’ class and job. Survivors who marry military officers and live in a military camp are locked away at home, are unable to seek help because the husband is usually well-regarded within the small camp community and are unable to escape without being observed because the camp entrances are staffed by security guards. Similarly, women can become trapped in rural
areas, as shown by the case of the drug dealer who lived in a rural palm estate. Here, the perpetrator’s network comprised of drug addicts, drug dealers and police who favoured him, causing the survivor to be trapped at home. In addition, the spatiality of rural house also works to trap survivors. The houses are designed as two-level village tall houses in which the perpetrator is able to confine his wife to a specific floor, which make it more difficult for women in such situations to escape domestic violence. In addition, the houses are usually quite far away from the neighbouring houses, surrounded by forests and rivers that exacerbate distance and with limited access to public transportation services.

In contrast, women from urban areas have a different experiences of geographical and social isolation. The perpetrators often relocate to distant locations to further isolate their wives from their family, friends, and co-workers, especially after any shows of resistance, such as attempts to seek help or leave. Some women were forced to travel back and forth between two houses located in different states, which also creates dislocation and isolation. This often happened because both houses were close in distance with neighbours and other potential help providers, so the abuser minimised the risk of his wife seeking help or leaving by constantly uprooting her. Moreover, these houses were often designed in such a way that made it easier for women to escape or were located close to public transportation. Geographical relocation also occurs quite often in cases where the husband is a drug addict or criminal, who use mobility to cover their activity as well as to isolate the women socially. Most participants in this study described multiple experiences of being held in captivity including being prevented by the perpetrator from contacting family, going out, improving their appearance, and having freedom of movement.

The findings also demonstrate how abused women are rendered captive by psychological barriers of love and fear. As in other studies, these forces are not easily broken because they are ‘developed and refined’ (Hennessy, 2012) by perpetrators who constantly gather intimate information about their wives, which enhances their skills to form and reform the violence against them. Expressions of love and sympathy are often used when the captors see the possibility of prisoners of resisting, escaping, or attempting to seek help, and especially after they try to leave for good. As observed by Walker (1980), the reconciliation phase is a crucial step in breaking down the psychological resistance among abused women. The woman is
often coerced to return by apologies, promises to change, expressions of love, as well as appeals to compassion and loyalty (Herman, 1997). These tactics work effectively in preventing the abused women from leaving. However, the perpetrators often find it difficult to maintain these tactics because the expression of love is not genuine. They are subsequently more likely to incite fear for the same purpose. The women in this research all left their relationship because the experience and fear of abuse eventually became unbearable. Nevertheless, even if they have managed to leave they often go back to their perpetrators because the violence and fear does not end, there is little to protect them in terms of safe spaces and legislation, and the violence escalates after an attempt to leave (Pain, 2012). The women face different kind of threats, such as murder, kidnapping, property damage, threats to their children, family members, or anyone who is providing them with support. As in other contexts, the evidence from the previous cases in the refuge suggests that if the survivors stick with the decision to leave the relationship, in extreme cases the intimidation turns to attempted and actual murder of the women and sometimes their children and other family members.

Other visible barriers create the conditions for intimate captivity, such as homes that are always locked or designed in such a way that that the women feel like they are under constant surveillance. The psychological trauma that this generates is described powerfully by the survivors through photovoice (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). These visible barriers also depend on the perpetrators’ identity, most obviously social class. For instance, one middle-class perpetrator who had previously been in prison changed the home design to emulate a real jail by building high wall to avoid being seen from the outsiders, securely fastening the exits with locks, and equipping the house with CCTV to monitor his wife 24 hours a day so that she could not escape. The physical and psychological abuse that survivors in such situations endure thus resembles punishment in real prisons. Where a perpetrator is unemployed or does not have his own home, the survivors often find themselves living with in-law family members who often get involved in the marriage. In these circumstances, the perpetrators exercise control in different ways, rarely leaving the house, always following and watching their wives and ensuring they account for every single activity done at home, or even attempting to control her thoughts. Intimate captivity remains hidden, appears normal and precludes outside interference. Therefore, abused women in these situations often find it
impossible to ask for help and they are often blamed by the community when they attempt to flee from the intimate captivity. These accounts of intimate captivity in Malaysia fulfil the research aims by adding important new insights into the nature and spatial experiences of domestic violence among women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and offer more nuanced understandings to what have tended to be western-centric feminist spatial accounts.

**Demonic Possession: A Perpetrator-Centred Domestic Violence Narrative**

Western ideas about gender oppression and patriarchy are not necessarily understood by people in other countries. Each society has different ways of absorbing or making sense of their world. This study focuses specifically on Malay and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia that adds more fine-grained, culturally-sensitive accounts to the data on domestic violence. Current research on ethnicity can be problematic when diverse ethnic groups are often collapsed in a single category such as ‘women’, ‘Southeast Asian women’ or ‘Asian women’, which precludes meaningful generalizations. The research findings suggest that some of the unexamined, western-centric, universalist assumptions about the nature of violence against women are not always accurate or applicable in the context of Malaysia. For example, Dobash and Dobash (1992) claim that only poor and uneducated men abuse their wives and alcohol causes violence. In the context of Malaysia, perpetrators are from various classes and educational backgrounds. Meanwhile, alcohol is not necessarily a cause for violence because empirical data has shown that perpetrators often do not drink, yet violence continues to occur.

The use of the discourse of demonic possession is a common way in which the women in this study understood and experienced domestic violence. This belief in demonic possession is widespread in Malaysia and serves as a convenient story for making sense of and explaining the abuse. The framing of demonic possession focuses on the husband’s atrocities, with perpetrators described by survivors as demonic or possessed by demons. In a different sense, the women themselves become possessed by the demonic husband and this is enabled by the cultural context and patriarchy. Perpetrators use cultural norms and expectations concerning the husband’s role as a God-like man and pious companion as justification for possessing and abusing women without being held accountable by anyone in any way.
Even after the participants in this study have left the abusive relationship, they often feel like they continue to be possessed or stalked by perpetrators. Such experience is likened by women from different cultural backgrounds to being possessed by a demon. Western discourse recognizes the experience of being possessed as a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and PTSD is also a recognized condition in Malaysia (see Phillips et al., 2006 and Che Din et al., 2010). However, there are still many Malaysians who understand the symptoms of PTSD as demonic possession. In fact, those who have experienced PTSD symptoms will usually see a shaman before getting treatment from psychotherapist, as discussed by the participants in Chapter 8. This indicates that, without negating scientific understandings and methods of treatment, the therapy and understanding required of those experiencing psychological problems in relation to domestic violence needs to be culturally sensitive. Therefore, demonic possession as a domestic violence framework includes the understanding of how the perpetrators are viewed by the women, the psychological effect of the fear and violence on women from different cultural backgrounds, and the way they are being treated.

**Resisting and Escaping Domestic Violence**

Understanding the ways in which women escape from domestic violence in Malaysia may differ from western understandings in many ways. The western secular development of “awareness” that suggested that religion was one of the major impediments to the revitalisation of women’s rights in society does not necessarily apply in this context. A majority of the survivors showed resistance through religious practice. Some women, however, lost their faith because they felt totally helpless and that their prayers and cries for help went unheeded. They often found complex ways in challenging abuse, reducing fear, and improving their safety. Some women find spaces of temporary escape within the house such as creating fantasies of fighting back against their perpetrator to help them endure incarceration. Very often, however, women are reduced to focusing only on how to stay alive, or how to face captivity in a more bearable way. Even in a severely helpless and powerless situation, the women could still resist the violence.

Nevertheless, when the abuse gets so severe beyond that which can handle, along with a sense of being possessed and unable to flee, suicide becomes the only way out for some
women. Western research suggest that the suicide attempts are often ‘a cry for help’ (Stengel, 1970) by the women and an attempt to ‘save themselves’ from their perpetrator’s control and fear, rather than an actual losing of the will to live. Even when the women have lost the will to live and become fatalistic about the possibilities of their husband killing them, the Muslim survivors who have experienced this state explain that they consider this a form of martyrdom. Islam does not permit suicide, so this is a way for the women to excuse their suicidal thoughts. For Indian women, suicide is a signal of her wish to seek solace from God. One woman self-harmed her body, because it was the only way to escape her perpetrator’s control and her fear, as an attempt to ‘save herself’ (and her daughter). Therefore, despite these being the most extreme and desperate forms of agency, abused women are not in absolute passivity as the victims of abuse.

The evidence from this study recommends that, in the absence of legal protections, the role of families is critical in providing some protection for women in abusive relations irrespective of cultural, ethnic and religious differences. A common feature of almost all of the women participants is that they have encountered isolation from their own families. This is brought about after marriage by eloping, not having their family’s blessing, being required to live with in-laws, or being constantly uprooted by their husbands. For Indian women, the nature of marriage itself renders her as the husband’s property. Most families do not help abused women when it comes to domestic violence. This means most women are dependent on formal intervention, such as the police, hospitals, and shelters. However, these sources of support are difficult to access and even when they are accessed they are often ineffective. Some of the women recounted inefficient intervention from the police, which put them in even greater danger. Consequently, domestic violence remains significantly underreported both by the survivors and across Malaysia more widely. Meanwhile, hospitals are seen as institutions that provide medical treatment to the abused women who are still physically able to go to the hospital. Most women do not view medical institutions as an independent agency that can intervene and help them escape their intimate captivity. This study suggests that only dedicated services, such the refuges, provide effective support to enable women to escape and survive violent relationships.
The refuge is a secret place under the control of NGOs that provides a temporary place to stay, counselling, and legal protection. Women in this study explained that the trauma recovery process can only be temporary because of the time-limited (three months) protection they receive at the shelter. Most interviewees talked about regaining consciousness, self-esteem, confidence, their own right to a safe life, and a sense of the restoration of control while at the refuge. The recovery process relies on the individual experience of each abused women, which is contextual in line with local culture and beliefs. The interviews show that recovery from trauma or possession occurs through exorcism, psychotherapy such as counselling, and self-recovery. Psychotherapy is an approach that uses western diagnostic criteria in treating trauma victims, using the technique of counselling. On the other hand, exorcism is often perceived by western scholars to be associated with violent and uncivilised rituals.

In this context, exorcism is not a violent practice but is similar to psychotherapy in that it helps women to integrate and cope with their experience. Often, exorcism is conducted by practising local religious rituals frequently such as drinking, taking a bath in and washing the face with holy water. This is in contrast to western writing about exorcism, where it is poorly understood as a ritual involving violence against possessed bodies. Instead, exorcism is related to tenets and beliefs that bring about a placebo effect for possessed bodies when the patients believe and have confidence in it; in this sense it has similarities with psychotherapy. Women’s accounts of treatment in this study suggest that both techniques of exorcism and psychotherapy are recognised and integrated by the subject. This finding is important in suggesting that to address post-trauma issues in Malaysia requires going beyond western models. From the previous studies such as Phillips et al. (2006) and Che Din et al. (2010), the help provider organisations in Malaysia, particularly the therapeutic services, generally do not consider the cultural background of their clients. This is due to western models of trauma relief that disregard the specific cultural and political nature of violence and the cultures of possession as justified by the perpetrators (as discussed in Chapter 7).

Furthermore, after three months of protection at the shelter ends, women are advised to live independently. Because other formal interventions are less effective, the majority of women subsequently face difficulties in living independently and freeing themselves from violence.
This is due to having no financial backup, no access to safe shelter, and no reliable childcare. In addition, resettlement services in domestic violence cases are not yet established. Evidence from my research suggests that survivors who have left the shelter are very often vulnerable in multiple ways: they often return to their perpetrators; others have no option but to return to their family’s house, which is known by the perpetrators; they are forced to hand over the children to their perpetrators because economic insecurity means they do not have the capability to take care of them on their own; they become separated from their children because they lose custody or the children are taken by the perpetrators. According to the women I spoke to who have previously had to leave shelters, many who manage to escape violent husbands still live alone in trauma and fear after leaving the shelter.

This research also confirms that domestic violence data are inadequate because women under-report incidences (UNICEF Innocent Research Centre 2000). As discussed in Chapter 8, the mixed experiences of seeking help from the police affect the rate of domestic violence reporting. The police too often treat domestic violence crime lightly and consider it a private family matter, which means they are effectively siding with perpetrators; this tends to dissuade domestic violence survivors from seeking help. Therefore, the domestic violence statistics, especially from police departments are not an accurate representation of the reality of the Malaysian women’s experience in domestic violence.

**Common Aspects of Domestic Violence Across Cultural Differences**

From the major findings of the study above, there are some aspects of women’s experiences of domestic violence might be thought of as commonplace across cultural differences. All women who experience violence appear to be vulnerable in some way; as Chapter 6 argues, the survivors in Malaysia have usually married their abusive husbands either due to poor decisions or under the influence of their family. However, this does not mean that a wise decision in choosing a husband can guarantee that any women could escape the risk of domestic violence. This is because it is hard to discern the characteristics of a perpetrator (as discussed in Chapter 6 and 7). Domestic violence research more widely suggests that there is no specific or obvious indicator to show that a man has the potential to become a perpetrator. Evidence from this research has shown that the perpetrators are pleasant and reasonable in
the beginning of the relationship with survivors. Perpetrators are often not obviously deviant or disturbed (Herman, 1992).

This study demonstrates that many of the tactics employed by perpetrators are similar to those found in other contexts, and as Chapters 5, 6 and 7 demonstrate, there is much in western theory that helps in understanding the nature of domestic violence. The common tactics among perpetrators appear to be: deliberately targeting the wife as a long-term partner, setting up the abusive relationship, ‘obedient wife’ grooming (as described in Chapter 5) and exerting different forms of violence such as psychological, physical and sexual violence, confinement, or confiscation of valuables, which are often carried out simultaneously (discussed in Chapter 6 and 7). These are common tactics among perpetrators for ensuing wives become both servile and completely submissive. In this context and other contexts, the expectation that women should remain faithful to the domestic sphere and obedient to male authority is widespread (Bennett and Mandersons, 2003). These tactics create the conditions of intimate captivity that is such a strong feature of women’s experiences in this study.

The nature of intimate captivity in this research (Chapters 5 and 6) shares similarities with that revealed in studies based in other contexts. Captivity in domestic violence is basically a space that is beyond the limits of visible space of home. Stark (2007) refers to this particular space as a cage, a site that is made up of bars that imprison (either physically or psychologically) women who are subjected to abuse, such that the woman’s house itself or even the neighbourhood in general can be spatialised in such a way as to render women vulnerable and unable to seek help (Root, 1996).

The women’s responses to violence also correspond to those outlined in previous studies by scholars such as Pain (2014b) and Cavanagh (2003). The common responses among abused women are taking responsibility for counselling, managing, and trying to fix the perpetrators. This socially-assigned responsibility is referred to as ‘doing gender’ (Cavanagh, 2003) or ‘emotional housework’ (Pain, 2014b). If women fail to rectify the issues in their marriage, they are the ones who are blamed by their family and society.

The resultant trauma experienced by abused women is often similar irrespective of ethnicity, religion and so forth. Survivors in Malaysia experience several symptoms of PTSD that are
similar to abused women from different context such as the sense of identity loss or adjustment, ‘love’ sihr possession (similar to trauma bonding in western accounts), hyperalertness, and flashbacks and re-enactment. Therefore, it is clear that the effects of perpetrators’ cruelty have many similarities for women worldwide. This evidence corroborates the research findings by Phillips et al. (2006) that assess post-trauma morbidity on Malaysian abused women in comparison with a sample of US women who also reported partner violence. In their account, psychological problems that women face after partner abuse may be similar in many respects despite political, geographical or cultural differences. Despite this, through a specific focus on diverse Malaysian women, the research has also highlighted some significant differences in understandings and experiences of domestic violence, which also point to the significance of postcolonial feminist perspectives in domestic violence research.

The Importance of Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives on Trauma

Despite the commonalities addressed above, not all explanation of domestic violence can be universalised. Previous scholarly works have demonstrated the complexity of domestic violence for non-western women shaped by their culture, ethnicity and religious ideology. Therefore, it is important to deal with the ways in which domestic violence is influenced by the complex interweavings of gender and ethnicity, rather than continuing to concentrate on a privileged epistemological standpoint in western theory.

While intimate captivity is a common experience for abused women anywhere in the world, understandings of intimate captivity need to move away from distinctions between public and private space that are assumed to be universal. What is considered ‘private’ or ‘public’ differs across cultures and social situations. As discussed earlier, this study found that the perpetrators’ culture and religion determine how the public/private binary works in intimate captivity. This study demonstrates the difference ways in which Indian and Malay husbands are able to reinforce their domination over their wives according to their traditions. In Hindu tradition, the husband is perceived as ‘God’ whom a virtuous wife must always worship irrespective of his unruly behaviour (as discussed in Chapter 3). A wife cannot reject a husband for his infidelity. In relation to this belief, Indian abusers impose captivity that extends from the immediacy of wives’ bodies into both private and public spaces as part of a
manifestation of his God-like power. Islam is used as a tool by Malay abusers to maintain their power over women. As a Muslim, the wife is responsible for taking care of the husband and being obedient to the husband in marriage. The Malay abusers often assert themselves as ‘pious’ husbands to reinforce their control over their wives, who are expected to be obedient. The spatial area of captivity by pious husbands extends from their wives’ bodies into private space as defined by Islamic tradition. Clearly, the notions of public and private space in intimate captivity are manifested in very specific ways in relation to culture, religion and societal norms.

The perpetrators manipulate religious teachings, and the community have faith in them, which renders the women helpless and they feel compelled to submit to their husbands, which is also an expression of obedience to God. This complex interweavings of gender and religion in domestic violence can be seen through the politics of demonic possession recounted by the abused women in Chapter 7 and 8. As described in Chapter 7, the abused women use the idea of the demon as a metaphor to justify their husband’s cruelty. The women also believe that they were possessed by a demon in order to make sense of the chronic trauma. Demonic possession as a motif that embodies the entire domestic violence experience is also a convenient basis through which the local community can explain the husbands’ actions and a widespread perception across different ethnicities.

Islam is discussed by the women in the context of wives’ status and ability to empower women for an end to violence against women. Islamic law totally prohibits the husband from abusing his wife, but many Muslim survivors are not clear about this because they are groomed to be the ‘obedient wife’. Most of the Muslim women in this study tried to get help from their in-laws on the grounds that they have a religious duty to uphold justice. Indian women in traditional, patriarchal Hindu marriages feel more threatened because the spousal abuse extends to the in-laws. Most of the Indian women experience gender-based violence upon marriage because they have few rights as a wife.

This study has attempted to gives voice to non-western women in gender-based violence discourse through the adoption of a postcolonial feminist approach. This approach acknowledges women’s belief in demonic possession as a framework through which to
elucidate the complexity of factors contributing to trauma. Trauma arises from an intimate captivity and cultures of possession from which escape from an abuser who may appear normal is difficult. Approaching domestic violence in this way avoids reductionist approaches to cultural difference and also gives attention to the factors underpinning domestic violence and the experiences of women that are shared across cultures within a specific national context. Demonic possession provides a meaningful generalisation for domestic violence that does not only link two ethnic groups in Malaysia, but also extends to other ethnicities that hold similar values in different contexts. The framing of domestic violence using demonic possession fills a gap in previous studies which have tended to reduce the significance of cultural practices in domestic violence to specific ethnicities or religions, such as dowry death in Hinduism (Shamim, 1992) and polygamy and genital mutilation in Islam.

Culture is an entrance through which to understand trauma voiced in accounts of domestic violence. Through the cultural explanation of demonic possession, this research is able to understand the complex causes of trauma through the concepts of intimate captivity, cultures of possession and the demonic behaviour of perpetrators. In a context where the literatures on domestic violence are relatively limited, this research plays a vital role in explaining how a postcolonial feminist perspective is important to fully understand the dimensions and manifestations of domestic violence in non-western contexts. A postcolonial framing that takes account of cultural difference may also have positive impacts in encouraging greater cross-cultural understanding and feminist solidarity in struggles to end domestic violence at different scales.

The relationship between trauma and possession is important especially in response to the recovery processes from trauma and extreme stress, which can sometimes be provided by shamans (Chapter 7), traditional healers, religious-specific rituals and community-based practices that offer forms of emotional support for the person suffering the trauma. Both Malay and Indian women in this study use traditional healing, which is generally believed to be a reliable method, and people of all classes and ethnic groups consult with shamans for help (Chapter 8). Some women turned to the shamans with the belief that this could remove the demon out from her husband. Some women associate violence with demonic possession
as a way of explaining their husband’s behaviour akin to mental illness, which requires exorcism as an alternative to psychotherapy. Seeking treatment from a shaman is an easier option than psychotherapy for all women in this study because of the social stigma concerning mental illness.

This research has examined the concept of trauma, which does not receive adequate examination in discussions about domestic violence particularly by geographers in multicultural contexts such as Malaysia. Most of the research on trauma has been focused on western-centric accounts. Cultural explanations for trauma such as demonic possession are often viewed as ‘anachronistic’ and ‘only used by unsophisticated people to make sense of their worlds’ (Keller, 2002:3). This fails to recognise the diverse ways in which women in non-western contexts make sense of and survive domestic violence. Western models of trauma obstruct entry to meanings that underlie indigenous rituals and cultural practices that may be attributed to the fact that present theorization in literary studies is characterized by a neglect of religion and spirituality (Andermahr, 2015). This research thus contributes to feminist studies in Malaysia that have too often assumed that western models of trauma can be exported and applied to non-western cultures.

A culturally-sensitive understanding of domestic violence as trauma also points to the need for cultural knowledge and sensitivity when it comes to mental health treatment in non-western cultures. A postcolonial feminist approach is therefore important to explore how domestic violence discourse promotes and justifies real interventions with real consequences.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Cross-cultural Education on Women’s Rights

The results of this study indicate that legal factors and cultural norms are influential in domestic abuse, because they only protect those who are married in accordance with established procedures. Hence, it is important to have cross-cultural education of women about their rights and their risks under different forms of marriage; moreover, enhanced legal protection irrespective of religion or culture is essential in Malaysia. This would stop women being trapped in marriages because they do not understand cultural expectations, what constitutes a legal marriage, or their rights as women. Cross-cultural education needs to be implemented in high school by targeting all students. This is to ensure that no individual is left behind from realising their rights as a woman in Malaysia. If cross-cultural education could be implemented like the marriage course for Muslim couples, this would raise awareness of the fact that couples who cohabit get married abroad are not protected under Malaysian legislation and thus could be susceptible to domestic violence. Marriage preparation courses thus need to be extended beyond only those couples who are marrying according to legal procedures.

Improvement to the Marriage Course for Muslims

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Muslim couples are required by the Islamic Religious Department to attend a marriage course and take an HIV test before legal marriage in Malaysia. One of the modules covered in the course is problem management in the family, which includes stress management, conflict management, counselling services in the Islamic Religious Department, as well as talaq/fasakh management and procedures in dissolution of marriage. There is no topic that touches on domestic violence in the module.

This study shows that, although Muslim women in the study have attended the marriage course, they often do not know their rights when it comes to domestic violence. In other words, the marriage course for Muslim couples do not make women well-informed about certain aspects, such as what constitutes a legal marriage, or their right as a woman. Therefore, this study suggests that the modules in the marriage course should be improved by incorporating information on the culture of possession, intimate captivity, rights and justice
for Muslim women in domestic violence, rights under the DVA Act 1994, and intervention methods.

**Creation of a Culture-Specific Marriage Course for Non-Muslims**

Throughout this study, there is no marriage preparation course or any programme that allows Indian women and other non-Muslim women in Malaysia to understand their rights as a woman in marriage or cohabitation when domestic violence takes place. Based on the findings in Chapter 5, some of the Indian women who are not clear about marriage procedures had become victims of fraud in marriage (for example, the perpetrator just made up a fake wedding ceremony), while the others do not realise the risk of arranged marriage. This study suggests that marriage preparation courses could be useful for non-Muslim couples.

**Grounded Social Awareness Campaign**

From the study findings, intimate captivity makes it difficult for many abused women to get information on agencies that can offer assistance in a productive way. As discussed in Chapter 8, many women manage to seek protection in the shelter when their friends or family who have access to the NGO step in and intervene. For instance, the information regarding WAO can only be obtained via the website, social media, radio and public campaigns, most of which are in English and disseminated by Malaysian feminists in predominantly middle-class residential areas. Therefore, the efforts to raise public awareness about domestic violence should be intensified by highlighting information from the survivors. This should be long-term, accessible to all groups in terms of locality and language (that are easy to understand) and should not put the abused women at risk.

**Training for the Agencies that are Dealing with Domestic Violence**

The study concurs with WAO’s statement that the efficiency of law relies on the enforcement agencies, particularly the Royal Malaysia Police, public hospitals, the Welfare Department, the Attorney General’s Chambers, and the court system. Therefore, every professional involved must receive proper training to implement the law. The study’s findings suggest that effective training could enable legal professionals to better understand the reality of the
spatial and cultural experiences of domestic violence, and have greater empathy, act in a non-ethnocentrist way, and place justice above all else, ahead of ethnicity, culture and religion.

**Interventions**

This research was conducted with women who have managed to find temporary escape from violence. It is difficult to reach the women who are still living in violent relationships and are unable to escape due to the nature of intimate captivity. Based on the findings in Chapter 7, some participants explained how only police sanction can halt the perpetrators’ abusive behaviour. Therefore, the police as a law enforcement agency should understand the reality of domestic violence and develop the expertise to address and take action in this matter.

By understanding the realities of domestic violence, and how women experience trauma, legal action should prioritise providing protection for all women, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or marital status, and punishment of the offenders to serve as a deterrent. This study proposes the amendment of DVA so that women in cohabitation can be protected. This is also proposed by WAO, alongside other suggestions for amending the DVA such as extending the maximum duration of protection order (POs) to protect survivors once the court proceedings are over and enabling survivors to apply for long-term protection without needing to press criminal charges against the perpetrator.

Despite this, some survivors have lost confidence in many forms of protection from legal agencies. This is because the law stipulated by the DVA still enables perpetrators to have freedom and there are no sanctions against persistent stalking of survivors. Survivors thus feel that they and their children are doomed to constantly having to run away and live in fear. The perpetrators who are convicted under DVA are sentenced to short-term imprisonment of less than a year. In the meantime, survivors have limited sanctuary in the shelter and find it difficult to relocate to a safe place to live when they are required to leave after a short period of time. Hence, there are many aspects of the DVA that need to be reviewed, especially in terms of the arrest and punishment of perpetrators. They are not only harmful to domestic abuse survivors, but also to their families, children, and other women who become targets of the same men.
Moreover, resettlement services for survivors of domestic violence are necessary in Malaysia. These services provide a safe house under police supervision, with welfare benefits, health, and legal support, particularly for those who have no shelter, those with small children, and those who cannot afford childcare. This service helps women to carry on rebuilding their life and indirectly helps them to recover from trauma. The Malaysian case has confirmed that the support and treatment is required to be culturally sensitive to take account of how women themselves understand and deal with the trauma of domestic violence. Thus, while western scientific and psychological approaches are valuable, they do not take account of cultural norms and spiritual and religious beliefs that are significant in the daily realities of women living with violence.

In addition, many women in this study engage with exorcism practiced by shamans as trauma treatment. Therefore, individuals who offer such services should be regulated by the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Unit under the Ministry of Health. This is to prevent the widespread fraud cases involving shamans who allegedly offer exorcism services, as described in Chapter 7.

Any kinds of intervention which are deemed unfeasible in domestic violence cases need to be revised. For instance, religious and welfare departments (as mentioned by the survivors in Chapter 8) make it compulsory for Muslim couples who plan to divorce to undergo several counselling sessions in advance. In this case, counsellors provide face-to-face counselling to both husband and wife in a room. If they are unable to find a solution, then the couple is allowed to proceed with the dissolution of the marriage. This kind of intervention will only favour the perpetrators, who are often cunning and continue to use psychological force tactics to maintain control through love or fear (as discussed in Chapter 6). When the women are terrified of being threatened by the perpetrators while undergoing counselling, their abilities to obtain divorce are often stymied.

**More Sensitive Research Methodologies**

The findings from this study show that a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach is crucial to get the root of domestic violence across cultures. In Malaysia, understanding is usually obtained via quantitative data, this is done by focusing on the frequency of physical,
psychological or financial abuse of women. This fails to shed light on the reality and everyday experience of survivors in domestic violence. The PAR methods used in this study helped women to express their feelings freely, without any barriers to telling their stories via photovoice and verbally through fragmented storytelling. Photovoice and verbal methods enable survivors of abuse to articulate the spatial and cultural characteristics of domestic violence. As long as ethical considerations are taken into account, such as the need to protect women’s identity and the sensitivities involved in revealing painful and traumatic experiences, the accounts of violence that are captured in the materials generated through PAR also enable the realities of abuse to be made known to the public. This can both raise public awareness and, for the women, represents another form of resistance to the perpetrators’ domination. Meanwhile, photographs give voice to many unspeakable and traumatic experiences of abused women. They capture the survivors’ visceral experiences of fear of shadows, hearing voices, and being haunted by the perpetrators’ in spaces of the home that have been used to confine them and their children, often for decades.

FUTURE RESEARCH: SUGGESTION AND TOPICS

This study has emphasised the ways in which space and culture influence experiences and understandings of domestic violence, and it opens up new avenues of enquiry for utilising PAR approaches in studies of domestic violence.

Chinese patriarchy and domestic violence

As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the limitations of this study is the inability to access Chinese respondents, who constitute the third prominent ethnic group in Malaysia. The Chinese represent a large proportion of the Malaysian population, yet little is known about their experiences of domestic violence, how this relates to culture, and thus what effective intervention measures are needed for Chinese Malaysian women living in violent relationships. Based on my fieldwork experience, the abused women from this ethnic group rarely seek protection in the shelter and this is thus an obvious gap requiring further research.
Economic conditions, slavery, and patriarchal aspects of domestic violence

This study highlights the relationship between domestic violence and the perpetrators’ acts that effectively enslave their wives by producing forms of intimate captivity. However, more research could be done to examine the economic aspects of women’s lives that exacerbate their vulnerability and dependency on violent men. Most of the survivors explained that they were not allowed to work, or if they were allowed to work, the perpetrators took their income. Furthermore, there were perpetrators who married the women for the purpose of prostitution and sexual exploitation. This makes it harder for the women to escape from the abusive relationship. If they manage to flee, they still have to deal with extreme financial difficulties because, for example, they were forced to abandon their assets and residences. The economic circumstances of women's lives, especially if they have children to support, makes it difficult for them to find long-term solutions and to be completely free of their abusive partners. Therefore, an understanding of the interconnection between women’s economic positioning domestic violence is also crucial for improving support that will both enable them to leave violent relationships and to subsist independently thereafter.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This study has scrutinised the experiences of diverse women of domestic violence in Malaysia. Their experiences are discussed in-depth, from their first encounter with the perpetrators until they get protection at the shelter, emphasising the spatial and cultural aspects of violence and its effects. This study has succeeded in fulfilling its aim of examining the spatial aspects of the women’s domestic violence experience in detail via the findings relating to intimate captivity. Intimate captivity is associated with social and spatial processes by which they are rendered vulnerable to violence. Even though the issue of intimate captivity has been discussed in various fields before, there are some aspects that are specific to cultures and religions in Malaysia. This therefore contributes to the field of geography. Furthermore, the spatial aspects of domestic violence in Malaysia have never been focused on by researchers before.

The originality of this study lies in its aim to provide a cultural explanation of women’s domestic violence experiences, which in turn produced the novel framing through demonic
possession. Demonic possession concentrates on women’s clarification of three things that popular discourse struggles to understand. First, demonic possession puts the emphasis on the perpetrator as the initiator of domestic violence crime, who needs to be punished accordingly under legal jurisdiction and held to account by society. Second, women also recount their own experiences as demonic possession by violent men. These framings need to be better understood, both in academic circles and by the wider public, as an expression of psychological injury or chronic trauma, which are also major reasons that make it hard for the women to leave the abusive relationship. Lastly, the abused women state that it is hard for the public to understand the cultures of possession in Malaysia because they are hidden under religious teachings. Hence, women themselves are often confused and are susceptible to becoming trapped in intimate captivity.

These three aspects are important for a wider, more culturally-sensitive understanding of domestic violence experiences in Malaysia for the purpose of effective intervention. The thesis has revealed the diverse spatial and cultural domestic violence experiences of women from different ethnic groups and cultures in Malaysia and the ways in which these cause trauma. Through using a postcolonial feminist approach, the effort has been to understand the issue of trauma in this study in a fair and ethical manner, without dismissing women’s voices, indeed placing them as the centre of attention in this study. The thesis suggests that interventions in domestic violence needs to be sensitive to the different spatial and cultural manifestations and experiences of diverse women, who also need greater support in being able to speak out about, escape from and survive domestic violence in the long-term.
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Appendix 1

10 June 2015

Dear Zuhairunfardah Sahdan,

Re: Acceptance of internship application with Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

I am writing to inform you that you have been accepted for an internship with Women's Aid Organisation (WAO). We hereby accept your request for an internship period from 1st July 2015 – 31st August 2015.

I note that you will be interning with the Advocacy Team.

Interns contribute significantly to our work. At the same time, we aim to provide interns with the skills and knowledge, which will be beneficial in future endeavours.

We look forward to working with you to advance our efforts providing shelter, social work and counselling services for domestic violence survivors, and advocating for women's human rights.

Congratulations and thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Sunita Vasantha
Executive Director
Women's Aid Organisation

Tax exemption No: 487313 / Sept/ 84 Dihulasan HQ 162/2717
Information Sheet

Introduction

This is the participatory action research (PAR) project carried out by a postgraduate student of Geography Department, Durham University, UK. Before you can participate, please read this document in order to understand the nature of this project, and the risks you may encounter.

Purpose:

This research aim is to understand the nature and experience of domestic violence in everyday life for women survivors from multiracial societies in Malaysia. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are representing one of the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia who has experienced domestic abuse.

Study Procedures:

This research project will not involve full PAR, but will use participatory methods to help explore the issues. PAR requires the participants to participate together in all or any aspect of the research you choose. If you are agree to participate in this research project, and depending on your level of involvement, you will be asked to participate in all or any of the following: designing research tools and activities such as participatory diagramming, photovoice, discussion groups, one-on-one interviews and focus group.
Potential Risks:

It is important to note that this research is regarding on your experience, thoughts, opinions and views on abusive relationships that can be sensitive and you may feel a little anxious or sad when recalling your experiences.

Voluntary, Confidential and Right to Withdrawal:

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing. It is also confidential, which means at no point during this process will you be asked to reveal your identity. The visual data will be kept as research finding. The audiotape data will be kept for secondary analysis but will be destroyed following such analysis. The finding of my project will be anonymous so that the identity of all participants will not be recognisable.

How to Consent to Participate:

Before agreeing to take part, your rights will be explained and you will be asked to sign a consent form. This asks your permission to record the interview and include the information you give in a report and other publications.

Please contact Zuriatunfadzliah Sahdan with any questions through email zuriatunfadzliah.sahdan@durham.ac.uk
Appendix 3

Consent Form

Please tick the boxes you agree with below:

I have read and understood the information to participate for this study

I have been brief about this study

I know that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving reason and without suffering any negative consequences

I agree to allow the interview being recorded

I agree that an anonymous record of my interview be securely kept for future reference

I agree to participate in this study under conditions set out on the Information Sheet, of which I have a copy

Would you like to take part? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Signed__________________________________________

Name __________________________________________

Date __________________________________________
Appendix 4

Photovoice Project: Photography Release Form

I grant to the domestic violence photovoice research project being carried out by Zuriatunfadzliah Sahdan and Women's Aid Organization the right to use the photographs of me in connection with the research as long as no one can identify me by name or other background information. I authorise Zuriatunfadzliah Sahdan to use and publish the same in print and/or electronically.

Participant’s name:________________________________________________
Signature:________________________________________________________
Date:____________________________________________________________
## Appendix 5

### Photo Reflection Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant code number:</th>
<th>Photo no.:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site location:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brief description of photo:**

**Why do you want to share this photo?**

**What's the 'real story' this photo tells?**

**How does this relate to your life, the lives of people in your community, or both?**