

# Symbolic Distancing: Indonesian Muslim Youth Engaging With Korean Television Dramas

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## Abstract

This article deals with Indonesian Muslim youth engaging with Korean television dramas. This article employs observation and interview among 43 Indonesian Muslim youth. This study has shown that there is symbolic distancing that happens in Indonesia because of Islamic and Hallyu's interaction and negotiation. Based on symbolic distancing concept, Indonesian Muslim youth engaging with Korean TV dramas involves the localized appropriation. Indonesian young Muslims believe that it is crucial to preserve Islamic values while consuming Korean TV dramas. Images and representations of Korean TV dramas basically do not reduce their Islamic identity. Ultimately, images and representations in Korean television dramas support their Muslim identity. Indonesian Muslim youth who enjoy watching Korean television dramas learn from the scenes depicted. However, these young Muslims also negotiate or even oppose the representations which contradict with their Islamic understandings. These images and representations have been appropriated based on their Islamic values.

Keywords: Muslim Youth, Korean Television Dramas, Symbolic Distancing, Indonesia, Islam

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## Introduction

The dissemination of Korean pop culture around Asian countries and beyond has been called as *Hallyu* or Korean Wave. The term *Hallyu* was coined by Chinese media when the Korean pop culture started to become popular among Asian people (Jang & Paik, 2012). In 1997, the media began to recognize Korean pop culture in China which showed a Korean television drama *What on Earth is Love?* that was broadcasted in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Asian countries (Jung, 2009). Recently, *Hallyu* has become a prevalent discourse as it is widely discussed in scholarly journals, newspapers and magazines (cf. Lee, 2020; Ju, 2020). The emergence of *Hallyu* in Asian countries has been extensively recognized as Asian people increasingly opted for Korean genre movie, music and drama (Sung, 2008). The rise of the *Hallyu* in Indonesian television was catalyzed by Indosiar, a private television company in Jakarta. In 2001, it aired a Korean drama entitled *Endless Love*, every Monday through Thursday (Tambunan, 2015). It attracted so many viewers that, in 2009, Indosiar added another Korean TV drama titled *Boys Before Flowers* (Ayu, 2013). In 2020, the popularity of Korean TV dramas has been continuing since the broadcast of Korean TV drama titled *The World of the Married* (Fitria, 2020). Recently, several Korean TV dramas have been aired on Indonesian TV channels such as TransTV and NetTV. Some of them are *Angel's Last Mission*, *The K2*, and *I Can Hear Your Voice*.

Research on Korean pop culture in East Asian regions is abundant (cf. Chua, 2008; Iwabuchi, 2008; Jiang & Leung, 2012; Kim & Ryoo, 2007; Lee, 2015; Shim, 2008; Sung, 2010; and Yang, 2012). An article written by Eldakhakhny (2017, pp. 33-52) explores the issue of Korean Halal Food. It accounts *Hallyu* as a phenomenon which should accommodate Islamic food on a substantial manner. Metaveenij (2019) uses the notions of modernity and nostalgia to elucidate the global fandom occurrence in Thailand and Myanmar by using two transnational movies as case studies. The above research unfortunately does not include a focus on Indonesian young Muslims' responses to Korean TV dramas. In fact, their Islamic identity enables Indonesian young Muslims to negotiate some representation and images mediated through Korean TV dramas. Furthermore, audience views and responses for consuming Korean media content—including Korean television dramas—are plural. They depend on local and social identities, sense of belonging, and shared histories and experiences (Chua, 2012). In fact, Indonesian Muslim youth do not share the underlying values of East Asian countries such as Taiwan and China (Chua, 2012). Their religious identity is also different. Indonesia is a home for more than two hundred million Muslims.

Based on Indonesian Law Number (No.) 40 of 2009, youths are those aged from 16 to 30 years (Youth Act, 2009). The percentage of youth in Pekanbaru, based on 2014 statistics report, is about 22,3 % of total populations (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Pekanbaru, 2020). Informants are selected based on purposive sampling techniques in which they are selected based on two important characteristics. The first characteristic is they love consuming Korean TV dramas. The second characteristic is they have Islamic identity. Based on these characteristics, there are 43 informants selected. These informants consist of 18 youths aged from 16 to 21, and 25 youths aged 22 to 30 years. Furthermore, 11 informants are males while 32 informants are females. Most informants in this study, then, are predominantly female because those who love consuming Korean TV dramas are mostly female youth (Heryanto, 2015, p. 254). Those Muslim youth are interviewed and observed. Interviews are conducted in the form of focus group discussion and personal interview. The fieldwork is done in four periods. The first is from July 2013 to January 2014. The second period is from June to December 2014. The third period is from March to October 2017. The last period is from April to June 2020.

Pekanbaru is chosen as the place of conducting fieldwork because it is growing with other outer towns in Indonesia. Researching Indonesia commonly is only focused on certain parts of Indonesia located in Javanese Island. In fact, Pekanbaru, located in Sumatra Island, plays an intermediary role between the cosmopolitan centers and hinterland. It represents provincial towns in Indonesia which seeks to manage tension between the global and the local more smoothly (Hasan, 2011, p. 119-157). In this context, the availability of global cultural products in Pekanbaru intermingles with the strong support of local values coming from Islamic teachings. Pekanbaru as a developing city is entangled with globalization and Islamic values.

In this article, the concept of symbolic distancing proposed by John B. Thompson (1999) is employed to describe the views and responses of Indonesian young Muslims to the representations and images of Korean TV dramas. This concept argues that the globalized symbolic materials, such as Korean TV dramas, involve the localized appropriation. Based on this concept, Indonesian young Muslims take some detachment from the circumstances of everyday lives, symbolically and imaginatively, by acquiring some values represented on Korean TV dramas. However, this concept does not reject the tension caused by the images and messages of cultural products with the values associated with a traditional way of life such as Islam. Based on this concept, this article seeks to know the views

and responses of Indonesian young Muslims on images and representations mediated through Korean TV dramas.

This article then argues that images and messages mediated through Korean TV dramas are negotiated by Muslim youth in Indonesia. They value and, to some extent, contest images and messages represented on Korean television dramas. In this article, there are four parts presented. The first part is information about young Muslims in Pekanbaru. In so doing, it seeks to distinguish them from other Asian consumers of Korean television dramas in places such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. Furthermore, this shows how these young Muslims might differ in certain characteristics from other young Indonesian Muslims in other Indonesian regions. The second part is a description of Korean TV dramas being watched by these young Muslims. It also describes young Muslims' consumption and appropriation of the dramas. It deals with Muslim youth acquiring some positive values from Korean TV dramas. The third part explains about the young Muslims' negotiation on images and representations mediated through Korean TV dramas. Their Islamic identity contributes to this negotiation. Some representations of Korean TV dramas are proximate with Islam but others are not. The last part is the conclusion.

### **A Glimpse of Muslim youth in Pekanbaru**

Indonesia is the largest country in the world having predominantly Muslim population. It should be noted, however, that Muslims in Indonesia are not monolithic. In a region like Javanese Island, some Muslims tend to be accommodative with local cultures (Picard, 2011). However, in Sumatra Island, some Muslims are conservative in observing Islam. Their conservativeness can be seen from local regulations (Peraturan Daerah) which are based on Islamic law like in Aceh and West Sumatra (Salim, 2015). In Pekanbaru, the capital city of Riau, there is basically no local regulation based on Islamic law but Islamic symbols appear in most public spaces. In this town veiled Muslim women can commonly be seen in public places. *Da'wah* (Islamic proselytizing) is conducted in the form of several activities like *wirid* (Islamic study circle), *Forum Remaja Masjid* (Mosque Forum for Youth), and so forth.

Under such public piety, young Muslims interact with foreign cultural products, broadcasted by both domestic and foreign media, more extensively than in older generations. Therefore, Muslim youth in Pekanbaru who enjoy Korean television dramas have general, identifiable characteristics, one of which is their easy access to global cultural products. It is unsurprising that they can consume foreign cultural products both on television and on the internet. In Pekanbaru they can access Korean TV dramas anytime and

anywhere on YouTube and other internet sites through their mobile phones and laptops. Furthermore, these young Muslims struggle to preserve their Islamic values by attending Islamic education in universities and schools (Noer, Tambak & Rahman, 2017). These young people opt to study in cheap state universities and schools rather than private universities and schools, as the tuition fees are lower (Hamidy, 2020). State universities and schools are often subsidized by government and thus many of these students are able to pay the tuition fees (Amin, 2019). However, some still need to work part-time to financially support themselves.

A perception that work in a city pays more than work in a village draws many youth to cities like Pekanbaru (Noveria, 2010). Cities in Indonesia have become the center of development and may enjoy privileges from the government. These privileges are related to the availability of modern infrastructures, which also attract young people to go and experience those places (Surbakti, 2018). The fast growth of modern shopping centers in Pekanbaru is due to the desires of the people in Pekanbaru to consume, and these shopping centers embody that desired consumption (Bokings, 2014). Shopping malls commonly provide many varieties of local and global goods. In these places, there are many shops which sell global cultural products such as foreign movies and television dramas which are not available in traditional markets. In fact, they do not only buy a thing, they also *nampang* or commonly look around wearing a new style. Muslim youth want to be trendy under limited finance. They do not want to be *ndeso*, which mean “not trendy.” Pekanbaru, as other cities in Indonesia, is a comfortable place for Muslim youth to consume cultural products which then support their desire of being active consumers of Korean TV dramas.

## **Consuming and Valuing Korean TV Dramas**

The consumption Korean TV dramas by the youth indicates that they are open to foreign cultural products. The cultural flow from South Korea to Indonesia is a case of the dispersing variety of global media flows (Kim, 2008, p. 3). Before and after the rise of Korean pop culture, like Korean television dramas, they have also been consuming Hollywood films. As a result, the rise of Korean pop culture sits alongside the plenitude of western cultural products available through television, radio, cinema, billboards, online sites, and mobile phones. Transnational media—including Korean television dramas—support young Indonesian Muslims to interact with images and representations of Korean TV dramas which have created a space of appropriation for them. Stories and representations depicted in Korean television dramas facilitate young Muslims in Indonesia to engage in symbolic distancing. Thompson (1999) proposes that individuals distance

themselves from their own life and, at the same time, they gain a critical purchase on official interpretations of social and political reality, both in their own country and elsewhere (p.175).

During the fieldwork one popular Korean TV drama being watched among young Muslims in Pekanbaru was *Boys Before Flowers*. It was broadcasted in 2009, but due to its popularity it was re-broadcasted on Global TV (Indonesian television channel) at the end of August 2017. It was aired from Monday to Friday at 03:30 PM until 05:00 PM. There were two informants being observed, namely Riza and Santi, who routinely watched this drama on television. These young Muslims stay in the rental room called Kos in Pekanbaru together. Both of them are students of Islamic university in Pekanbaru. This Korean TV drama was mostly about a love story between a rich man and an ordinary woman. The love conflict and accommodation of this couple was interesting to watch. However, the social background of a woman which is ordinary in this drama provides insight for these young Muslims that an ordinary person can have a dream to reach his or her love.

They learn about some values in this Korean TV drama such as life struggle presented by an ordinary woman in the drama. Through consuming this drama, Indonesian young Muslims understand that some values represented in Korean television dramas, such as discipline and hard work, play significant roles in achieving future wellbeing. From this Korean television drama they also comprehend that anyone can become a successful person depending on his or her hard work. This encourages Muslim youth to work and study hard as it is portrayed in the television drama. This stimulates them to think critically about their own lives and life condition. Riza stated: "I then realize why many Indonesians are poor. Many of them did not work hard. I see from the drama, Korean people were hard workers. So, they are rich and advanced" (Riza, personal communication, August 24, 2017).

In this modern life, for them, hard work as performed by the woman in the drama is needed. Geum Jan Di, a poor girl, is a student in a famous school named Shin Hwa. In fact, most students in this school come from rich families. She is given a scholarship to study in the school because of her swimming skills (Kim & Jeon, 2017). The life struggle performed by the girl in this drama motivates their audiences including Santi and Riza. These audiences are also experiencing the similar situation in which they have to work to fulfill and support their life while studying in university. This is because their parents cannot fully support their studies financially. While attending university, Santi works in a bakery shop and Riza gives tutorial for some rich students in their homes. Korean TV drama titled *Boys Before Flowers* is valued by these young Muslims since it provides a hard work

spirit to its audiences. They make sense of the Korean TV drama messages and incorporate them into their lives.

The stories on Korean television dramas that seem to be most loved by young Indonesian Muslims are those depicting family struggles. Eli (personal communication, May 4, 2017) shared that she is interested in consuming Korean TV dramas because Korean TV dramas depict people who work hard to achieve their goals. Hard work is a value that is suitable with Islam. Muslim youth understand that hard work is necessary to achieve their ideal character of being a successful person. They identify that the spirit of struggle represented on Korean TV dramas motivates them to have this spirit. Some of them learn from Korean TV dramas in which their characters promote the term “fighting” frequently. This term usually refers to the situation when one character in a Korean TV drama wants to rouse their spirit to achieve their desire and dream. When these young Muslims need much effort to finish some assignments given by their teachers or lecturers they do not want to give up. Some of them update their Facebook status with the word “fighting” to show their spirit of struggle.

Another Korean TV drama which is popular in Indonesia is *The World of the Married*. During the field work done in 2020 it was broadcasted on an Indonesian television channel, TransTV. Starting from 18 May 2020, it was screened at 08:15 PM. This drama is mainly about the complicated relationship of a married couple, Lee Tae-oh and Lee Joon-young (Park & Mo, 2020). Lee Joon-young, a successful doctor, was betrayed by her husband. This drama invited the curiosity and anger of audiences toward the husband. Learning from the drama, audiences understand that marriage is not always fun. They will be selective when choosing their partners. For Anita, Lee Tae-oh was not an ideal husband though he was handsome. Anita said: “I hate Lee Tae-oh because he abandoned his wife. In fact, his wife was beautiful, rich and successful...I will be more careful in future. I will be selective. I will not marry the man like him though he was handsome” (Anita, personal communication, May 24, 2020).

From the drama, audiences also acquire a conception about the condition of marriage which is not always happy and comfortable. Mirna (personal communication, May 29, 2020) for instance said that the story depicted improves her understanding about the world of marriage in South Korea. Furthermore, she claimed that a wife in Korea as depicted in Korean TV dramas is more independent than a wife in Indonesia. She said: “This drama was valuable. I can understand the complicated world of marriage. There is not always happiness in it...I also understand that in Korea a wife is very independent. It is different from Indonesia, I think” (Mirna, personal communication, May 29, 2020).

Muslim young people's interaction with Korean TV dramas is also stimulated by modern items represented in Korean television dramas such as mobile phones and cars. Modern cities depicted in Korean television dramas also inspire them. Muslim youth also notice the many modern images such as modern houses and clean environments portrayed in most Korean television dramas. Fitri (personal communication, March 18, 2017), for example, commented:

I hope that sometimes Indonesia could be like that. I see that through watching Korean television dramas the environment in Korea is clean, no rubbish. Their houses are modern. The roads are good and there is no rubbish in the street. I think Indonesia should look at Korea in order to be modern in future.

For Indonesian Muslim youth, Korean television dramas have provided interesting images—embodied in details such as film locations and fashion styles—and have provoked an interest in visiting South Korea to see non-fictionalized Korean people, locations, and culture for themselves. The many elements of Korean culture that are not suited to Indonesian culture do not deter young Indonesian Muslims from enjoying Korean television dramas. This supports the open attitude of young Muslims toward universal values from different cultures and traditions (Aljunied, 2018). By consuming multiple cultural products from different countries these young Muslims are respecting and interacting with the universal values represented. The emergence of Korean television dramas has intensified this (Chan & Wang, 2011, p. 299). Interestingly, Dina (personal communication, March 26, 2017) does not like watching Indonesian television dramas because she feels that those shows do not portray *Gaul* (i.e., a new Indonesian term meaning 'trendy' in the form of modern fashion and hair styles).

A Muslim youth, Nadia, for instance, adores the setting and images she sees on such dramas, and this inspires her to find out whether it is real. She said:

I really want to visit South Korea to see the real condition of this country. I want to see about modernity there in real situations. I imagine that when I graduate and then I am able to get job, I could visit there. I will earn much money to go there. I admire the stylish ways of Korean people. Even the female people who are thirty years old as depicted on Korean television dramas are still stylish like those who are twenty years old. I also admire the modern and stylish rooms

owned by Korean people. (Nadia, personal communication, March 22, 2017)

Another young Muslim, Fitri (personal communication, April 4, 2017), also commented on the contrast she sees between her living arrangements and those portrayed on Korean television:

I admire the architecture of houses in South Korea depicted on Korean dramas. It is unique because it unifies traditional and modern values. It is impossible to arrange my room to match those on Korean television dramas. This is because my 'Kos' room does not support this. Every room consists of two persons or more so that I cannot freely arrange the room as I want.

The above statements indicate that representations of Korean television dramas have become a resource among young Muslims in Indonesia to compare their life conditions with those on Korean TV dramas. By comparing their own condition, they consider South Korea as an ideal country. However, this should not contradict with Islam. For them, Islam has been used as the basis of negotiating images and representations on Korean television dramas.

### **Negotiating Images and Representations**

The concept of symbolic distancing does not necessarily emphasize that audiences or consumers are immune to any media influence (Thompson, 1999, p.177). This notion fundamentally rejects that audiences have directly received the messages sent by the media. This is because audiences can take up the meanings from the symbolic text sent by media based on their everyday relationship. John Fiske (2005) argues that meaning sent by cultural products have been negotiated by audiences. Images and representations of Korean TV dramas are “transformed in the process of appropriation as individuals adapt them to the practical contexts of everyday life” (Thompson, 1999, p. 174).

Mala (personal communication, May 27, 2020) believes it is crucial to preserve Islamic values while consuming Korean TV dramas, and thus believe that her hard work should include reference to God. That is, *Usaha* or *Ikhtiar* (hard work) will not be effective if there is no *do'a* or prayer. Euis (personal communication, June 20, 2020) also believes that her success in this world is closely related to God's decision or *Takdir*. This has led to an understanding that Islamic spirituality must be practiced to realize her imagined future and identity. It is unsurprising that some youth

from many villages have migrated to Pekanbaru. For example, Hamdah (personal communication, April 28, 2017) who loves consuming Korean TV dramas came to Pekanbaru to earn money and experience modern life. He graduated from Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren) in his village. In Pekanbaru, while working hard to earn money, he actively participates in Islamic study circles and performs daily prayers. Indeed, Islam in Pekanbaru has been alluded to in the popular proverb: “*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah,*” which means “custom is based on Islamic tradition, and Islamic tradition is based on the *Qur’an*” (Salim, 2015, p. 47). Therefore, these Muslim youth can study Islamic values from several sources like Islamic universities and *Madrasah* (Islamic schools); Islamic values are also taught by their parents.

Islam and Confucianism differ in various traditions and beliefs, but also share similar values. Confucian values, which are commonly represented in Korean television dramas, tend to deliver the similar values which are called “Islamic,” though there are some representations which contradict with their Islamic understandings. It is important to note that the popularity of Korean television dramas is basically also bolstered by their “foreignness” representations of values. Scenes that portray foreign values to Indonesian audiences are readily available. An example of this is the Korean television drama entitled *Full House*. In this Korean television drama, an unmarried male and an unmarried female live in the same house (Kim & Pyo, 2017). This is forbidden according to Islam, as they are not *muhrim* (i.e. opposite sexes who cannot be married such as a brother and sister). Indonesian Muslim young people are nonetheless drawn to this story in *Full House*. Chua Beng Huat (2012) says that, in fact, “audiences are aware that the drama is foreign and that this sense of difference is actually integral to the viewing pleasure” (p. 340). As a result, there is a negotiation done by young Muslims toward foreign values presented.

Some scenes depicted on Korean television dramas may provide Islamic values although they are foreign for Muslim youth. For example, the way in which young Koreans show respect for their elders, as represented on Korean television dramas, is foreign for young Indonesian Muslims. However, they rationalize that these foreign traits are compatible with Islam because they are essentially about respecting older people.

My participants were able to distinguish some elements on Korean television dramas that were foreign but are still accepted by Muslim audiences. Nadia (personal communication, May 15, 2017) stated that even though the fashions of Korean actors do not reflect Islamic values, their attitudes do not entirely contradict Muslim culture.

During the focus group discussion, it was apparent that my informants believed that the values represented in Korean dramas are Islamic. Bunga (personal communication, May 17, 2017) said: “I found that Korean culture as reflected in the Korean television dramas is Islamic. I saw in Korean television dramas that younger people respected older people. They bow toward older people.”

Nadia (personal communication, May 17, 2017) added:

From the television dramas, I see that Korean people are disciplined. They are really hard workers. This is relevant to Islam. I also enjoy the scenes in the Korean television dramas when a husband loves his family. It provides some understanding to me that I also should have a man like that in the future.

Bunga (personal communication, May 17, 2017) argued:

I think there are some values represented in Korean television dramas which are similar to our Islamic values. In Korean television dramas, younger people are expected to speak politely to the older ones. This kind of tradition is similar to our tradition. Furthermore, it was not polite in Korean television dramas for younger people to talk harshly.

However, participants also pointed out disagreements with Islamic values. Bunga (personal communication, June 6, 2017), for example, stated that there are differences with respect to drinking alcohol—Korean television dramas portray it as common, while Islam forbids alcohol consumption. Rini, (personal communication, May 25, 2020) while watching a Korean TV drama titled *The World of the Married*, said:

I disagree with some representations on this drama. One of them is drinking alcohol. It is forbidden in Islam. If one has personal problems, he or she should not try to escape them by drinking alcohol. In Islam, we are taught to read Qur’an to make our heart peaceful.

Other female participants spoke particularly about the actors they see in Korean dramas. These young Muslim women want to have a boyfriend who is similar to the actors, or experience a “sweet” love story as depicted in the television dramas. It is interesting to note, however, that although they love Korean actors, some participants are also critical of them. This conflict is represented by Selly and Ditya (personal communications, June 8, 2017), who do not want to have a Korean partner in the future but rather want

to have an Indonesian man—specifically one with Korean tastes. In other words, a boyfriend who is handsome like the actors they idolize but one who is Indonesian, not Korean. I suggest that this preference is based on their understanding of the differences in religion between Koreans and Muslim Indonesians. This is closely related to the current trend of Islamization in Indonesia in which Islamic identity is crucial to uphold. Martin van Bruinessen (2013) mentions this is as conservative turn in Indonesian Islam. This term reflects the rising and growing Islamic appearance and symbol as well as identity in the public spaces. This constructs the perceived meanings of these young Muslims toward scenes or representations of Korean television dramas in which, according to Thompson (1999), cultural products disseminated by media are able to transfer images and messages which may clash with traditional ways of life like Islamic values.

Indonesian Muslim youth have an innate cultural identity as well as conscious knowledge, which they have gained from their learning environment (e.g. education) and culture. Paul Willis (1998, p. 550) states, for example, that consumerism is regarded as an active process. Consumers or audiences actively interpret the polysemic (Barker, 2000) texts circulated by media producers, and interpret their own meanings. Popular culture such as music, films, and television may be produced by capitalist corporations, but meanings are always contested (Barker, 2000) by the consumers or audiences; audiences can selectively receive and interpret the messages. This is developed in reaction to the view that watching television programs is taken to be a passive activity. In this sense, audiences will accept the “cultural texts” transmitted via television programs without question. However, such perception is not accurate instead audiences are active creators of meaning in relation to television programs. They negotiate and do not simply accept the meanings sent by cultural texts (Barker, 2000).

Importantly, some participants reported that after watching Korean television dramas they rarely engage in the physical activities presented in them. Zul (personal communication, June 17, 2017), for instance, said:

I, myself, feel that after watching Korean television dramas, I am not so interested in collecting posters, eating Korean food, or learning Korean language. For me, Korean television dramas touch my heart. If you ask me about the impact of Korean television dramas, I say the impact is not physical, but abstract. Korean television dramas teach me about good character and attitude, that's it.

Korean TV dramas, as other television programs, have some representations that are designed in such a way as to incite their viewers'

desires to be consumerist people in the capitalist world. To be consumerists, actors or actresses of Korean TV dramas have become the best symbols on how to be trendy and fashionable. They invite those who consume Korean TV dramas to buy and wear the fashions and products screened on Korean TV dramas. However, audiences negotiate these representations. Buying the fashions and products screened on Korean TV dramas is not cheap. Furthermore, in Islam, these fashions and products are not encouraged to be purchased. Thus, Zul (personal communication, June 17, 2017) acknowledges that after consuming Korean television dramas he just takes away the positive values that he can follow, most of which are non-physical in nature. By focusing on the abstract rather than the physical it will be less obvious to other people that he admires Koreans.

Abstract, as stated by Zul (personal communication, June 17, 2017) above when referring to the ability of Muslim youths to identify Islamic values, means things that are not visible. Concrete activities, by contrast, include socially visible activities like collecting posters and joining fan clubs. Clearly, such concrete activities require money. Furthermore, even though these concrete activities are *mubah* (permitted) in Islam, they are not *sunnah* (encouraged). Indonesian Muslim youth negotiate the values that are, according to them, not Islamic. For example, they do not eat Korean food, as it is not *halal* (permitted). Nor do they buy posters of Korean actors and actresses, as they are *mubadzir*, or not advantageous for them. Indonesian Muslim youth prefer to spend money on things they deem more important, such as their university and school studies. This indicates that some young Muslims in Indonesia celebrate their consumerism in a strict way due to financial and Islamic issues. Douglas J. Goodman and Mirelle Cohen (2004) propose that consumption should be assumed as a process of negotiation and contestation (pp. 2-3). This means that the emerging popularity of Korean pop culture is a terrain of struggle and negotiation between the audience and producers. John Storey (2003) also argues that consumption is not a passive practice. It involves the active complexity, and situated agency (p. 132).

Getting pleasure which is influenced by the media, for instance, can be different from one audience to another since they have different social and cultural backgrounds. Indonesian young Muslims in this study propose that they are looking for pleasure which does not contradict with their Islamic identity. In fact, consuming pleasure through watching Korean TV dramas is not prohibited in Islam. According to them, the dramas do not portray free sex, orgy and other representations prohibited by Islam. Furthermore, they confidently believe that they are able to filter out the “bad” values like kissing the opposite sex and only take in the ‘good’ values from Korean

TV dramas that complement their Islamic values and norms. Besides pleasure, idols are crucial for the popularity of Korean television dramas among Indonesian youth. Timothy Gitzen (2013) acknowledges that such images and types of idols are extremely important in attracting fans: there is something for everyone. Therefore, an actor in a fictional television drama program is central. It is commercially developed in order to keep the audiences engaged and anticipate the television dramas in order to support the prolongation of the character and stories connected with that certain character (Schiappa, Allen & Gregg, 2007, p. 303).

Yet idols must be circulated in a very particular way to attract fans. Significantly, however, for Muslim youth, their desire to be trendy (e.g. looking cute like the idols on television dramas) must align with Islamic norms. Madan (personal communication, July 4, 2017) explained: "I want to get a Korean girl to be my partner but she must be a Muslim.". Ulfa (personal communication, July 4, 2017) stated:

I do love the Korean actor named Kim Bum. He is handsome and cute. Although my parents are pious Muslims, they do not forbid me from consuming Korean TV dramas. They of course encourage me to always wear hijab. I have worn it ever since I was in Islamic Junior high school.

For these young Muslims, Korean actors who are not Muslim are simply idols, not potential marriage partners; Islam contributes to this perception. Being Muslim is more important than having a cute face. For a pious Muslim, marriage is a sacred event, and is based on Islamic values. Islam dictates that a Muslim man should marry a Muslim woman. Thus, having a wife or husband whose features resemble those of Korean actors becomes the fantasy of many young Muslim women. Korean actors are modern: they wear modern fashions and they are not *ndeso* (not trendy). Ultimately, however, this imagination is blended with the part of their Islamic identity that wants a Muslim wife or partner.

It is also common for young Muslim viewers of Korean TV dramas to reflect from the characters in Korean TV dramas as a reference for being cute. For them, being cute is not forbidden in Islam since being cute is closely related to being clean and neat; which means that being cute is even meritorious in Islam. This is because in Islam, Muslims are strongly encouraged to be clean and neat. Even before performing the daily prayers, Muslims are obliged to be free from *hadast* and *najis*. The former refers to the obligation of Muslims to be free from abstract dirt such as fart, by performing *wudhu'* (ablution) while the latter refers to the obligation of Muslims to clean their body from any dirt such as faeces.

In fact, their desire to be cute is related to attract their opposite sex. This is because they may have an attraction with someone in their schools or universities. However, love depicted on Korean TV dramas is somewhat different from what they understand. For them, love is perceived as something “pure” and should not be corrupted by sexual desires. They distinguish between love and *nafsu* (lust), of which the latter is closely related to the desire to have sex with their partners. After watching the scenes on a Korean TV drama titled *The World of the Married*, Anita (personal communication, May 19, 2020) stated: “Why Tae-oh betrays his wife...because he follows his lust. In fact, it is forbidden in Islam. If he has pure love to his wife, he will not betray her.”

In this case, Indonesian Muslim youth who enjoy watching Korean television dramas learn from the scenes depicted. However, these lessons cannot be separated from their Islamic identity. These young Muslims negotiate or even oppose the representations which contradict with their Islamic understandings. These images and representations have been appropriated based on their Islamic values. Ultimately, images and representations in Korean television dramas support their Muslim identity. Korean television dramas, then, shape the desire of Muslim youth who want to be Islamic or religious. According to them, their images and representations basically do not reduce their Islamic identity.

## Conclusion

The recent trend of consumption practices among Indonesian Muslim youth indicates two important things. First, although cultural and geographical proximity contributes to the success of Korean television dramas in Indonesia, it should be carefully considered that albeit there are some similarities in culture between the East Asian producers and Indonesian audiences, the differences are also apparent. Basically, the main point is not on “cultural proximity” or similarity in culture, but the freshness and attractiveness of the narratives and characters in the dramas are a vital component. This is because the familiarity of culture contained within the cultural product is not an adequate guarantee to be well received by the audience or consumers. One can see for instance, that some local dramas in Indonesia fail to massively capture the attention of Indonesian audiences, though they shared identical cultural values.

Secondly, these young people are now very actively engaging with different cultures coming from global states. This basically confirms the concept of symbolic distancing proposed by Thompson (1999). Although there is a growing Islamization through several forms of *da'wah* (Islamic proselytizing) in political and economic landscapes of Indonesia, these

young Muslims are able to value some representations on Korean TV dramas. This has supported moderate Muslims who are open to different cultures and traditions coming from South Korea. These moderate Muslims do not regard the non-Islam symbol of cultural representations, but they see the essence of Islam which can be found in any different culture and tradition.

These young Muslims negotiate images and messages represented in Korean television dramas. The spread of values promoted by electronic media like Korean television dramas has inspired ordinary people to have such values. The images screened on them also invite young Muslim consumers to imagine having modern living conditions and sensibilities. Fashionable dresses worn by famous Korean actors or actresses attract young Muslims in Indonesia. They imagine wearing those very fashions. However, they believe that dresses should be worn based on Islamic teachings. In Islam, *aurat* (certain parts of body like chest) should be covered with clothes. Even, female Muslims should cover their hair wearing a veil because their hair is regarded as *aurat* in Islam. Importantly, they recognize that even Korean actors in Korean television dramas, while modern, still practice traditional values.

This study has shown that there is symbolic distancing that happens in Indonesia because of Islamic and Hallyu's interaction and negotiation. Based on symbolic distancing concept, Indonesian Muslim youth engaging with Korean TV dramas involves localized appropriation. It facilitates these young Muslims to take some values which are applicable with their Islamic values. Images and representations of Korean TV dramas basically do not reduce their Islamic identity. Ultimately, images and representations in Korean television dramas support their Muslim identity. Therefore, this study has shown how Korean television dramas help to shape the desire of contemporary Muslim youth in Indonesia to be Islamic. Indonesian young Muslims believe that it is crucial to preserve Islamic values while consuming Korean TV dramas. Indonesian Muslim youth who enjoy watching Korean television dramas learn from the scenes depicted. They make sense of the Korean TV drama messages and incorporate them into their lives. However, these young Muslims also negotiate or even oppose the representations which contradict with their Islamic understandings. These images and representations have been appropriated based on their Islamic values. This of course contradicts with *Ustaz* (a Muslim cleric symbol) Abdul Shomad's (famous Muslim preacher in Indonesia) propagation of forbidding Muslim youth consuming Korean television dramas (Astuti, 2019). Therefore, this study suggests further research focusing on Indonesian Muslim preachers' interpretations to the representations of Korean TV dramas.

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