

## **Re-inventing The Self: Constructions Of Identity In Malaysian Blogosphere**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses issues relating to constructions of identity by examining representations of the self through personal ruminations of selected Malaysian bloggers. The blog is a recent product of cyber culture which functions as a medium for the presentation of self; this virtual space offers freedom to the blogger to express issues that reflect his or her concerns. Many bloggers assume online identities to achieve visibility in cyberspace and yet remain invisible. Aspects of identity are traditionally characterized in terms of gender and interpersonal characteristics, which may include self definition or personal traits, roles and relationships, personal values or moral beliefs (Calvert, 2002). However, the emancipation and anonymity of cyberspace offers Malaysian bloggers an opportunity to re-invent themselves. In this culturally diverse and virtual community, these bloggers, not only incarnate themselves through avatars, but they also deconstruct accepted norms of gender and appropriate identities in Malaysian history to create alternative identities of themselves. The dynamic nature and constant re-drawing of rules in cyber culture has sanctioned the blurring of gender lines as well as manipulation of the personal and shared past. By drawing upon Butler's (1990b) concept of gender performativity, I will disclose instances of fluidity of gender among selected young bloggers. The deconstructive nature of New Historicism permits me to illustrate the appropriation of history as the means for a metamorphosis of the self. Thus, identifying ambivalence in the way one perceives oneself and the choices made to present one's self to others, as well as attributing that ambivalence to social factors (such as social attitudes toward questions of gender ambiguity and appropriation of history) may bring to light issues pertaining to identity reconstruction and the implications of such trends on contemporary constructs of the self in Malaysia.

**Key words:** identity; history; appropriation; Malaysian blogosphere; gender performativity

## Introduction

A new medium for the representation of self is the blog; this product of cyber culture gives bloggers freedom to express themselves. Some Malaysian bloggers assume online identities as a way of re-inventing the self; this occurs when they reveal alternative representations to their respective identities. By doing so, they achieve visibility in cyberspace and yet still remain invisible. The use of avatars, deconstruction of accepted norms of gender and appropriation of identities in Malaysian history provide the means for these bloggers to re-present themselves in their blogs. Why do these bloggers feel the need to re-invent themselves? Why do they substitute themselves with an alternative historical persona? Answers to these questions will disclose the ambivalence in the ways these bloggers perceive themselves, and the examination of their choices of self-representation and the issues that are of concern to them will bring to light issues pertaining to identity reconstruction and the implications of such trends on contemporary constructs of the self in Malaysia.

To comprehend the bloggers' choice of re-presenting themselves with a new identity, we have to understand the need for this act. Representation is certainly a fundamental aspect of everyday life. The issue of substitution is pivotal since it is generally understood that representation refers to the process of standing in for someone or something, or rather acting as a substitute for the 'real thing'. It is a complex process as it is cultural and not natural, making it therefore unnecessary or fixed. Many disciplines, including philosophy, linguistics, ethnography and anthropology, examine representation as a way of disclosing the embedded, underlying meanings of texts. Experts also claim the way a person represents his or her personal history or feelings offers insights into the person's psychological well-being, which is basically the way one's brain functions, and how one understands one's self as well as environments. Webb asserts people:

practice representation all the time because we live immersed in representation: it is how we understand our environments and each other. It is also how we both *are*, and how we understand ourselves; representation is implicated in the process of *me* becoming *me*. None of us is like Popeye (I

*yam* what I *yam*); rather, each of us is produced through a complex mix of backgrounds, tastes, concerns, training, tendencies, experiences – all made real to us through the principles and processes of representation that frame and govern our experiences of being in the world. The frames thus generated do not give us a stable or permanent sense of being in the world, but one that is frequently confusing, and always subject to change... (2009:2)

This indicates that what is seen, or presented, is not what it is; it is instead what “social and cultural traditions and their consequences” give to people. Hence, what matters are three central issues: who performs the representation; what the representation means; and what effects the representations have.

While others scholars claim there are things beyond representation, Prendergast (2000: 1) maintains “everything is representable”. He argues it is not that representation as such is impossible, but rather it fails in its task. He offers two definitions; the first “is the sense of represent as re-present, to make present again, in two interrelated ways, spatial and temporal” (ibid, 4). This is representation as *Darstellung*, which is the German word referring to the notion of making or *rendering* presence. The second is the sense of “*delegating* presence, or *Vetretung*: the substitution of something for something or someone else” (ibid, 4). This complex nature of the concept is addressed by Jacques Derrida:

If the noun ‘representation’, the adjectives ‘representing,’ ‘representable,’ ‘representative,’ the verbs ‘represent’ or ‘represent oneself’ are not only grammatical modulations of a single and identical meaning, if kernels of different meaning are present, at work in or produced by these grammatical modes of the idiom, then the lexicologist, the semanticist, indeed the philosopher who would try to classify different varieties of ‘representation’ or of ‘representing’...is going to have a rough time of it (1982: 299).

This paper draws upon Prendergast’s (ibid) second definition to attempt an examination of the self representations of two Malaysian bloggers and to discuss issues relating to their reconstructions of

identity through avatars and personal ruminations. The bloggers are Raden Galoh and Hikayat Mamak Bendahara. It is clear here that these are bloggers who take on the names of Malaysian historical characters, having appropriated the identities of Raden Galoh Chendera Kirana and Mamak Bendahara Sri Maharaja Tun Mutahir – all well-known characters in our history text books. There are many others who do the same, for instance Teja (Tun Teja Ratna Benggala), Jebat Must Die (Hang Jebat) and Sultanmuzaffar (Sultan Muzaffar Shah), but they will not be analysed in this paper. Traditionally, aspects of identity are characterized in terms of gender and interpersonal characteristics, which may include self definition or personal traits, roles and relationships, personal values or moral beliefs (Calvert, 2002). However, the emancipation and anonymity of cyberspace offer Malaysian bloggers an opportunity to re-invent themselves. In the case of the two bloggers, they have chosen to look back into their pasts and appropriate identities to re-construct their identities in their blogs.

### **Gender Performativity and Appropriation of History in Malaysian Blogosphere**

The most popular way of re-inventing the self is through the use of avatars. In the culturally diverse and virtual community, a blogger may incarnate himself or herself through an avatar, an ‘alter ego’ or a representation to re-present his or her blog identity. The avatar is an embodiment of the self, a new personification of what is a familiar idea. It represents the blogger’s persona and his/her actions, beliefs and interests. Bloggers may also deconstruct accepted norms of gender. By drawing upon Butler’s (1990b) concept of gender performativity, I will disclose instances of fluidity of gender among the selected Malaysian bloggers as gender is performative. She questions the belief that certain gendered behaviors are natural, illustrating the ways that one’s learned performance of gendered behavior (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. It is the very act of performing gender that constitutes who we are.

Another way of constructing alternative identities is when bloggers appropriate identities in Malaysian history to represent themselves.

This choice of self-representation is 're-visioning' in nature, as these bloggers claim old identities to re-create new ones from a contemporary perspective. Alicia Ostriker (1983) views 'revisionist mythmaking' as an "employment of a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture ... and the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends ... but ultimately making cultural change possible." As re-visioning is central to New Historicism, the deconstructive nature of the theory sanctions an appropriation of the past to suit the intention of the person doing the re-visioning. This theory permits me to illustrate the appropriation of history by these bloggers as the means for a metamorphosis of the self.

Michel Foucault's (1972) ideas on 'power' and 'discourse' are fundamental to the way New Historicists view narratives. As social language that is created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, discourse expresses a particular way of understanding human experience and draws attention to the role of language as a vehicle of ideology. There is then a dynamic, unstable interplay among discourses in which overlap and competition with one another takes place. These exchanges of power are always negotiated in any number of ways at any given point in time. New Historicists also believe objectivity is affected by views of what is right or wrong, and important or unimportant which influence the ways in which historians interpret events; this means a person's 'selfhood' is shaped by as well as shapes the culture into which he/she is born into. Hence, the relationship between individual identity and society is mutually constitutive (they create each other) and is dynamically unstable. By deconstructing narratives, one can reveal hidden sub-texts, the explicit or implicit agenda in the discourse. Thus, deconstructing the bloggers' choices of self-identity and the issues that are of concern to them will reveal the reasons why they re-invent themselves in their blogs.

It is essential to appreciate the constructed identities of the two Malaysian bloggers when we understand that processes of representation do not merely make connections, relationships and identities visible. The reality is these processes *make* those connections, relationships and identities. Webb (2009:10) argues representation "is not just about substitution and reiteration, but is about *constitution*: it constitutes – makes real – both the world and our ways of being in the world and in

communities. The media of representation contributes to the ambiguity of what constitutes a self, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Webb discusses this phenomenon:

The digital environment has enabled new modes of existence and identity, new ways of representing oneself and being represented. Facebook, ‘a social utility that connects you with the people around you’ (splash page, <http://www.facebook.com>); MySpace, ‘a space for friends’ (splash page, <http://www.myspace.com>); Second Life, a 3D online world imagined and created by its residents’ (splash page, <http://secondlife.com/>): these sites and others like them allow individuals to represent, indeed construct, their identity in purely digital form, and enable the existence of ‘people’ who are in fact only pixels and data sets, born of the imagination of their creators and the software programs used to produce them (61).

Thus, regardless of whether they are digital or material, Webb goes on to suggest “human subjects *become* within, and inhabit, a world that is simultaneously real and representational” as the actuality of the digital world means that “people can do anything at all, they tend to do in their avatar form pretty much what they do in the ‘real world’ - they have jobs, they buy commodities, they flirt and date” (64). Boss (2007) claims what occurs in virtual form is in fact what fits the social context and representational frameworks that the individuals understand and, more importantly, within which they understand themselves.

Many bloggers use blogs as a means of articulating their personal expressions, and many people who follow a blog on a regular basis can begin to feel as if they know the person behind the blog. The reality is that we may not know the blogger personally. It is the blogger’s distinct voice that is carried through in every blog post. This is what invokes “the feeling of accessibility and familiarity” that the readers have with the blogger (Risdahl 2006: 83). The blog persona is a conscious construction of the blogger. It can be done openly, whereby the identity is not hidden; the blogger takes on a different character in his or her virtual space. Alternatively, the blogger could assume a persona or character without having to reveal his or her identity.

## **Raden Galoh**

One blogger who chooses to re-invent her ‘self’ while simultaneously revealing her real life identity in her blog is Dalilah Tamrin. She chooses to appropriate a historical character, Raden Galoh, as her new constructed persona in her blog, Onebreastbouncing (<http://onebreastbouncing.blogspot.com/>):

ONEBREASTBOUNCING  
WITH ONLY ONE BREAST LEFT, I TOLD MYSELF  
TO BOUNCE AND LIVE STRONG. HENCE, THE  
BLOG NAME. NOW, WITH MANY CANCERS IN  
MY BODY, I STILL SEEK THE MERCY AND LOVE  
FROM GOD TO BOUNCE AND LIVE STRONG,  
INSYA’ALLAH!

## **RADEN GALOH**



“Breast Cancer Metastasis is a Test of My Faith, Love and Resilience”

## **DALILAH TAMRIN**



## **RADEN GALOH**

**BANTING, SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA**

A Breast Cancer Metastasis Survivor, still fighting the battle...

Both identities, the real and the re-invented one, identify themselves as a “breast cancer metastasis survivor, still fighting the battle...” which is “a test of ... faith, love and resilience”. A dynamic

social phenomenon of the Internet and the Web is the “formation of communities of like-minded people who find one another online and communicate on a regular basis, most often about a specific topic” (Ris Dahl 2006: 5). Raden Galoh’s topic of concern is breast cancer, most importantly, surviving it and continuing life with it. She has even provided her mobile number for her readers and any interested parties to contact her, thus also confirming her existence in present-day society. Her personal ruminations reveal her feelings throughout the continuous daily routine of her “trials”.

Raden Galoh speaks from her heart; her narratives are very personal and intense. In her latest entry (Thursday, April 30, 2009), she confesses her on-going daily struggle:

***Shreechhhh! (The sound of my life’s break)***



I went back early because I noted that my body is telling me that it can’t cope with the going-back-late work pattern. In fact my work life has been like that for the past few weeks. I told MH, the rest at night is not fulfilling with the hot flushes and the tired body. If I leave my office after Maghrib, I will reach home by 10pm. When I’m tired, I can’t combat the negative voice in me. Reading the Qur’an has been an easy source of calmness for me...Reading it injects many negative ions that recharge the positive ions in the body. I need to do it more often now. I need my energy back.

Thus I know, something is definitely not right with my life. I feel lethargic. I feel fatigue, even when I get up. I feel I need a vacation! I keep on imagining that I am at a place that is full of negative ions... A waterfall, a cool place, a beach.... Arrghhh.... Why think of those places when I can get it by



reading the Qur'an? ...I need to find the red lights in my life.

I try putting up a happy face but the eyes droop with tiredness. The head is always hot and the feeling is down sloping. So I will tell my boss that I will not stay back late. I just can't. I need my time for solidarity.

[\(http://onebreastbouncing.blogspot.com/\)](http://onebreastbouncing.blogspot.com/)

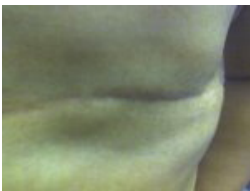
Raden Galoh's reconstructed blog identity is based upon a character named in *Sejarah Melayu* (1998), the princess of Majapahit, Raden Galoh Chendera Kirana, the wife of Sultan Mansor Shah. This marriage was set to seal the union between two rivaling empires in the Malay Archipelago in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Melaka and Majapahit. *Sejarah Melayu* mentions "Raden Kelang, son of Sultan Mansor Shah by Raden Galoh Chendera Kirana, daughter of the Emperor of Majapahit..." (cited in Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1992: 92). Like many other female characters in *Sejarah Melayu*, references to Raden Galoh Chendera Kirana are merely made in connection to her relationship with the men surrounding her: she is, firstly, the daughter of the ruler of Majapahit, and secondly, the intended bride for a rival of her father. She was made a pawn in the political game that men played to assert power. In the text, her voice remains unheard, so her sentiments regarding the marriage that could have been imposed upon her remain undisclosed. Though her role is pivotal in the said alliance, her significance has been marginalized as she exists in a world where narratives favor masculinity. She had to leave her home to face the uncertainty of marriage to a man who was the enemy of her father and her people. However, the modern-day Raden Galoh, the blogger, has the agency to voice out and share her emotions with her readers. This act confirms Tannen's (1992), (cited in Ruzy Suliza and Imran Ho-Abdullah, 2009) claims that women's interaction maintains understanding through the "trouble talks" when women share their problems with other women, who in return show their sympathy and concern. These "trouble talks" are used to confirm their feelings and to create sense of community" (Tannen 1992: 59).

It is interesting to examine Raden Galoh's re-invention of her gendered identity. Webb (2009) maintains our identities are produced as effects of culture and, centrally, of representation. Representations

tell us what we know as gender; this knowledge not only informs but it also frames. Butler (1990a) claims we know whether we are male or female not because of our body, its shape and parts, but because we perform our gender, the way we perform other aspects of our identity. Like rehearsing a play, Butler asserts reiterating gender makes it second nature, makes it “come naturally”, makes it a convincing part of the story of “me” and how I represent myself to myself and others (1990a: 140). She questions the idea that a person IS male or female, masculine or feminine; she wants to show that gender is not just a social construct, but rather a kind of performance, a show we put on, a set of signs we wear, as costume or disguise – hence as far from essence as can be.

By claiming the identity of a cancer survivor, Raden Galoh shares her experiences battling breast cancer with her readers. Her campaign includes publication of a book, *Kanser Payu Daraku* (2009; My Breast Cancer). In one entry, she confesses “I want people to understand ‘We can have cancer but cancer can’t have us’” (Monday, April 13, 2009). She uses her body to promote her agenda. Webb believes that “the body is not just a feeling organism; it is a cultural performer” (2009: 80). The body’s performances always fall short of the ideal since those ideals are not ‘real’; they are the “products of ideology, of discourses about what is appropriate to as a human being, and of representations of those discourses and ideologies”(ibid, 80). As Raden Galoh, she unveils a part of her body to her readers, thus defying conventions when she uploads an image of her bare chest, post mastectomy:

### MY BARE CHEST



#### The Aftermath of Mastectomy

This image of the missing breast certainly evokes powerful emotions; it presents itself as an avatar of Raden Galoh. It reflects the two sides to Raden Galoh: one part woman with

a breast; the other, like a man, flat-chested, but not quite, as this part is also devoid of a breast. Thus, in a way, she is both female and male. Butler (1990a) has called for a new way of looking at sex and gender. As opposed to the fixed masculine/feminine gender binary, Butler argues that gender should be seen as fluid, variable; the way we behave at different times and in different situations rather than who we are. She suggests that by ‘deconstructing’ the way we think about gender we might move towards a new equality where people are not restricted by masculine or feminine gender roles. Thus, the missing breast speaks of courage, of a woman who has lost part of a feature that many in society view as what a woman is or, rather, what she should have. By baring her chest – minus the breast – Raden Galoh may have had the nerve to reveal her loss to the world, but that act has actually secured in her a stronger sense of identity. She wants to be known, with or without breasts, as a woman with a cause. She does not need both breasts to speak out on issues vital to women. By hiding one, and exposing the absent other, Raden Galoh’s performance of being a woman is not merely restored but, more importantly, intensified. Thus, the historical Raden Galoh Chandra Kirana’s voice may have been buried in *Sejarah Melayu*, but a new agency is restored through the bold act of her re-invented self. While many women display their breasts to the world to assert femininity, Raden Galoh exhibits her loss to defy social and traditional norms and expectations.

### **Hikayat Mamak Bendahara**

An alternative way of re-inventing the self is by creating a blog persona to conceal the blogger’s identity; readers merely know the blogger as the persona revealed in the blog. The other Malaysian blogger does this whilst appropriating a character in history to represent his self: Hikayat Mamak Bendahara. Hikayat Mamak Bendahara’s blog is called Dato’ Bendahara Speakz (<http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>). His blog identity is an appropriation of the character of Bendahara Sri

Maharaja Tun Mutahir, a Tamil-Malay descent who went on to become the most renowned person second only to the Sultan in Melaka; he was also one of the richest men in Melaka then. Muhammad Yusoff Hashim (1992:214) reveals that due to “circumstances and prevailing uncertainty surrounding the system of succession, the Bendahara frequently played a part in the choice of the heir to the throne”. He has been instrumental in many decisions made in court and many accounts in Sejarah Melayu depict the Bendahara as one who is a staunch supporter of the sovereignty of the Sultan; in fact, wives of the Sultan have traditionally been daughters of the Bendahara. Needless to say, this reason could also contribute to the loyalty. The Bendahara is definitely a powerful character during the days of the Melaka Sultanate; his voice is heard by both royalty and commoner.

Alternatively, the modern-day Hikayat Mamak Bendahara, the blogger, who also refers to himself as Dato’ Bendahara, too exerts his power of speech, only this time through his blog. Central to his concern is the people’s right to speak freely. He claims to sincerely believe “freedom of speech is a right that should be taken for granted. No one should stay silent, or forced to do so due to intimidation” (<http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>). Hikayat Mamak Bendahara draws upon his voice and agency to speak out on issues he deems important, while staunch in his mission to remain anonymous:

### About Me



Hikayat Mamak Bendahara

The author is a not so conventional Malaysian; he wishes, desires and loves to remain anonymous in the blogging world. The blog reflects the author’s view of the Malaysian political and social scene; he claims no responsibility on the repercussions or influence his writings may have to the world at large. (<http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>)

His claim to be unconventional is certainly clear, having ‘confessed’ to interests as a “cigar smoker, coke addict and the occasional marijuana...” (<http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>).

Another unmistakable feature of Hikayat Mamak Bendahara’s re-invention of self is his choice of avatar. While his name is reflective of a historical character, his avatar represents a character from a comic-book series written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, *V for Vendetta* that was then turned into a movie of the same name. (<http://www.enjolrasworld.com/Annotations/Alan%20Moore/V%20for%20Vendetta/V%20for%20Vendetta%20Revised%20-%20Complete.html>).

The enigmatic protagonist, V, is an anarchist resisting a totalitarian state under the guise of Guy Fawkes. Does Dato’ Bendahara, the blogger, too see himself as V, an anti-hero, the voice and champion of the masses? The Guy Fawkes mask certainly grants him invisibility, while his blog-voice visibility. So why does a ‘secondary school teacher’ living in ‘Shah Alam, Selangor’ – as claimed by the blogger in his profile – choose the Guy Fawkes mask as his avatar? Hikayat Mamak Bendahara’s historical namesake belongs to the aristocracy and would have made decisions unpopular to the common people; the blogger, on the other hand, writes as a social critique in his blog. In one entry (Thursday, 4 December 2008), he writes of “floating, managed float, market prices, DAP, socialism and capitalism” (<http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>) in which he criticizes both the government, i.e. Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s Prime Ministerial performance, and the opposition, i.e. DAP, through dry wit and sarcasm:

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has created a multitude of records since he assumed the Prime Ministerial post. Malaysians had never seen Malaysia on an auto pilot mode, and the government being led by technocrats who are detached from the mainstream society...

For the Abdullah’s administration, its capitalism on the way down and socialism on the way up. When the fuel price was skyrocketing, the public was served with a record-

breaking 20% fuel hike followed by an unimaginable 40% torpedo. The economically sound price for commodities is the market price; subsidies are catalysts for wastages and inefficiencies...

On the other end of the spectrum, DAP's Lim Guan Eng suggested for a RM 6000 petro-bonus for families earning below RM 6000. His expansionary budget was presented to impress the less-educated public and was more of a publicity stunt. If Lim Guan Eng sincerely wanted to implement this proposal, Dato' Bendahara advises him to resign and run for office in a banana republic...

The avatar selected may reveal the blogger's attitude and perception towards the issues he/she writes about (Ruzy Suliza Hashim et. al, 2009). Speaking from behind a Guy Fawkes mask, Dato' Bendahara has taken it upon himself to be the people's dissenting voice, and based on the number of hits his blog has received - 27,047 visitors since November 7, 2008 – his fiery voice has certainly been heard.

The issue of identity construction is central to Hikayat Mamak Bendahara; the 'Mamak' in his blog identity reflects a concern he highlights in one of his entries, Malaysia's Obama: Khairy Jamaluddin or Mukhriz Mahathir (Monday, 14 November 2008):

The result of the US Presidential Election has clearly shown Americans has begun to look at each other beyond race or religion... Globalization has rendered us, Malaysians, unable to discard this fact as fantasy... Barrack Hussein Obama... promises change, and he is black. Mukhriz Mahathir promises change (Berani Berubah), but how is Khairy Jamaluddin black? Mr Jamaluddin is currently the UMNO Youth Deputy Chief... in UMNO, how can he be black? It is UMNO - United Malays national Organisation, a one race party, the heaven of right wing Malay politics. Yet, I still call Khairy Jamaluddin black! Mr. Jamaluddin's father is a Malay Muslim from Rembau, Negeri Sembilan. Not Black. Malays from Rembau are of Minangkabau, West Sumatera descent... Why are we still on the assumption that Khairy Jamaluddin is black... So, he's mom is an Indian Muslim, or

mamak as we prefer to call it. Mamaks tend to fake their ancestry and pretend to be Malays in Malaysia to gain special privileges, benefits and even political posts... The “one drop rule” says that one is black even though one has only a drop of Negro blood in his/her veins... Applying this rule to Mamaks, Khairy Jamaluddin is a Mamak... Critics would now start to question the ancestry of Mukhriz Mahathir... a lot of talk among Malaysians regarding the father of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad...

This question of whether one is a Mamak is not really the issue to be focused in this paper. It is rather the concern of who we think we are. In multi-cultural Malaysia, concerns of who we are as Malays, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan-Dusun, Baba-Nyonya or Mamak are still matters of concern to many people. Humans are said to be ‘decentred subjects’; this is because we lack a centre – in other words, we have no fixed sense or locus of self. Butler (199a: 43) claims due to the lack, representation then moves in to stabilize our identity by putting itself in the place of the absent ‘reality’ making it seem “really there”, thus providing us with a sense of presence and hence security. The concept of One Malaysia, as proposed by Dato’ Seri Najib Tun Razak, the current Prime Minister of Malaysia has yet to take root. Hence, by virtue of his re-constructed blog identity, could one then assume that Dato’ Bendahara/Hikayat Mamak Bendahara is Mamak too? The answer is more complex than a yes or no. His blog identity performs a role as that of a Mamak. But identity itself, as Butler (1990a) has claimed, is an illusion retroactively created by our performances. Dato’ Bendahara may or may not even be a Mamak. This blogger has instead chosen to empower his social criticisms by choosing to sit on the foundation of history by claiming an aristocratic and authoritative identity to lash out at what he perceives as wrong. However, one cannot help but notice the incongruity of this blogger mocking other Mamaks for being elected as leaders by the Malays; his purported claim to be one may have given him the legitimacy and authority to speak out on the issue. In addition, his hybrid creation of Guy Fawkes-V-Mamak Bendahara Seri Maharaja Tun Mutahir-Hikayat Mamak Bendahara reveals the fragmented nature of his own identity.

## Conclusion

The reconstruction of self by two Malaysian bloggers, Raden Galoh and Hikayat Mamak Bendahara, reveals that the dynamic nature and constant re-drawing of rules in cyber culture not only sanctions the blurring of gender lines but also the manipulation of the personal and shared past. The blog becomes a hybridized space where the past and the present, even the east and the west, converge to stage contestations. Therefore, by identifying the ambivalence in the ways these bloggers perceive themselves and the choices made to re-invent themselves as well as attributing that ambivalence to social factors (such as social attitudes towards questions of gender ambiguity and appropriation of history), I have brought to light issues pertaining to their identity reconstruction. Bloggers who appropriate historical identities as their preferred personas enjoy certain liberties. The implications of such trends on contemporary constructs of the self are prevalent in Malaysian blogosphere where gender and history are manipulated; old norms are rejected and new alternatives are preferred. However, there is a paradox at play between the ancient identities assumed and the attitudes towards the contemporary issues and concerns discussed in the blogs. Indeed, the appropriation of historical identities as a means to re-invent the self reveals the bloggers' motivations to stand on the foundations of history, for it legitimizes their voices and gives them the invincibility to articulate issues that would not be discussed in mainstream media.

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