# Intersectional Social Resistance Towards Women in Malaysia
## A Case Study of Social Resistance Against "Dehijabing"

Shiyu Fan[1*]

[1] *Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU)*
*Corresponding author. Email: 18080059@bfsu.edu.cn*

**ABSTRACT**

Dehijabing, which demonstrates women's pursuit of dressing freedom, has been harshly criticized by the public. An objective of this paper is to refute public assertions that religion leads to social resistance and elaborate the real sources of social resistance towards dehijabing. By using theory of intersectionality, the resistance, involving legal ones and individual ones is analysed in a comprehensive perspective. The analysis results show that the religious factor was only an excuse for the dominant social norms. Actually, gender and race are the two main factors that exist in Malaysian society, leading to social resistance against dehijabing. Based on gender rights disparity, the patriarchal society gives males the right to interpret religion and set social norms. While race factors have led to a greater focus on social identity issues at the expense of foundational rights equality issues. These two factors influence each other and intermingle to form a synergy that constrains women's rights and space for development in society. Moreover, apart from dressing freedom, intersectional social factors directly contribute to a solidified view of women that affects their social status. This calls for the Malaysian government and related organizations to address the intersectional social issues and expand the space for women's social development.

*Keywords: Intersectionality, Dehijabing, Malaysia.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

" Dehijabing" refers to the behaviour discarding hijab among Muslim women. However, such personal behaviour has always been toughly condemned by the public in Malaysia. For women who publicly announce dehijabing, they will face not only the incomprehension of friends and families, but also the abuse from the broader real world. Therefore, Malaysian feminists started "Dehijabing Movement" to advocate for women's dressing freedom.

Not only about dehijabing, due to the multiple limitations of women' social rights, there has been persistent movements in defence of equal rights among men and women. Zainah Anwar, the founder and former executive director of Sisters in Islam (SIS) wrote in her book about the unsmooth passage of the equal rights bill in 1984, which faced resistance from certain Muslim male parliamentarians [1]. This shows that resistance towards women's pursuit of equal social rights is evident in Malaysia.

Predominantly, most people believe this social resistance stems from religion, as most proponents of unbalanced social rights often cite religious doctrines as an excuse for their resistance.

However, in Islamic doctrine, particularly in the Quran, does it clearly state that it is a must for Muslim women to wear hijab? Does the resistance faced by feminist movements like "dehijabing" really stem from religious factors? Looking beyond the surface of religion, what is the essence of such resistance? Does the development of gender-based or race-based social norms influence social attitudes towards feminist movement?

Introducing intersectionality, this paper analyses the causes of social resistance to women at the societal level. The constraints against women's rights in Malaysian society are explained by analysing gender and racial factors and the synergy they form. Moreover, in addition to the social resistance against dehijabing, the resistance against women's rights is multifaceted and multi-layered. This paper argues that the social impact

on women caused by intersectional social factors will create barriers to women's development in multiple domains.

## 2. RESISTANCE TOWARDS 'DEHIJABING'

In Malaysia, there has been continuous opposition to "dehijabing". The opponents claim that such behaviour manifests religious infidelity and the invasion of western culture, arguing that women who engage in "dehijabing" behaviour not only disrespect the religious doctrine but also violate long-standing social rules. They also see that behaviour as a reflection of Muslim's diminished reverence for their religion, which has a negative social impact. For one, such behaviour dispiritedly affects younger generation's religious belief. For another, it leads to a lack of social identity for the Muslim community. Widespread opposition to the behaviour of "dehijabing" has created widespread resistance. Based on the difference in the origins of resistance, it will be divided into two main categories, legal resistance and individual resistance.

Legal resistance refers to resistance from government officials and religious institutions. The main reason for the resistance, both institutional and personal, is that the behaviour goes against the religious laws and doctrines. Hence, former hijab-wearers in Malaysia have been facing intense scrutiny for voicing out on their experience of unveiling. For example, the activist, Maryam Lee, who launched her book, Unveiling Choice, was toughly criticized. The book which delineated Maryam's own experiences to remove hijab has led to concern of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs Mujahid Yusof Rawa, who publicly stated that such behaviour has negative social impact. Besides, on the grounds of disobeying religious doctrine, Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) summoned Maryam to co-operate in an investigation. According to Federal Territories mufti Datuk Seri Dr. Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri, "discussing a religious issue without credentials is an offence under the Syariah Criminal Offences". In the given explanation of authority, the investigation does not target on individual Muslim women or their own "dehijabing" behaviour, but on the socially promoting of such behaviour. However, since the scope of "discuss without credentials" is not clearly defined in religious law, the power of religious interpretation is entirely vested in the religious authorities and departmental administrators.

Yet, compared with legal ones, individual resistance can be more serious, because it can be found anywhere. Individual resistance is crystallized by real-life bullying and cyber bullying against hijab-removing women.

Typically, real-life bullying occurs in specific places such as homes and schools. For example, in an Instagram post, a father wrote that his daughter had taken off her hijab in front of a man she did not know. That father had hit her because he wanted her to "understand the meaning of a girl's dignity". After claiming that it is his responsibility to protect her, that father chose to abuse and shame his daughter on social media. While this father's actions have since been reported to the police and slammed by the public, the stigma around Malaysian women who choose to remove the hijab remains prominent. In addition to the home, women who do not wear the hijab at school are also suffering from invisible violence. For instance, Dr. Amalina Bakri, a female student who chose not to wear the hijab, was countlessly condemned for removing hijab. In addition, some female students point out that although the school and teachers do not all explicitly say female students must wear hijab, they tend to give unsolicited comments or make fun of some students' choice not to wear jilbab. Thus, the individual resistance towards "dehijabing" is in a way implicit, but constant.

Cyber bullying is also one the of main components of individual resistance. Cyber bullying first targets at female celebrities who publicly announced their hijab removal on social media. Two famous actresses, Emma Maembong and Fathia Latiff, have received heavy criticism online for choosing to take off the hijab. Among the critics, Malay rights group Perkasa's women's wing has expressed concerns, saying that their actions will indirectly promote "dehijabing" and influence Muslim women to copy their actions, especially younger women who may be wavering in their faith. Another example is the twitter posted by the Gerakbudaya (@GerakBudaya) about the launch of Maryam's book, Unveiling Choice. In the comment section, some netizens attacked her personally and wantonly.

Thus, resistance towards "dehijabing" is extensive. In the name of religious teachings and national regulations and laws, government officials and religious institutions resist the behaviour of removing hijab from the legal level. While individual resistance, including real-life bullying and cyber bullying, demonstrated the resistance to dehijabing in a broader range. Both resistances mentioned above intertwine to form a two-dimensional network of resistance that suppresses women's hijab removal.

## 3. RELIGION: SOURCE OF RESISTANCE?

The hijab debate has actually been going on for a few decades already. In general, opponents have condemned "dehijabing" as "against religious doctrines" and "non-compliance with Islam". It follows that religion becomes the most essential cause in forming the two-dimensional resistance network described above. In

practice, however, the wearing of the hijab has not been a long-standing social norm in Malaysia, and there are no legal provisions in Malaysian religious law that compel Muslim women to wear the hijab. In addition, there is a long-standing controversy in the Muslim community over whether wearing hijab is mandatory and whether Islamic doctrines require Muslim women to wear it.

## 3.1. A brief history of hijab-wearing in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the history of hijab-wearing is not that long. Although nowadays it is common to see women with hijabs, 30-40 years ago, wearing hijab was actually bizarre. Until 1970s, it was still very rare to see Malay Muslim girls cover up as they do now.

According to Editorial Adviser of *Sinar Harian*, Datuk Jalil Ali, hijabs were reserved for special occasions at that time, like funerals or formal banquets. Other than that, most Malay women did not wear hijab at all. There were even certain places in those days where women with hijabs were not allowed to enter. For people at that time, hijabs made women look like criminals. Covering up was also viewed as old fashioned and extremist, which not only went against social trend but also was not in line with the lenient religious policy.

From the 1970s onwards, the wearing fashion of Muslims began to shift. One reason was the surge of Islamic movements, especially in universities. Such movements asked Malay community to return to its Islamic identity. For example, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), a non-governmental organization was said to have succeeded in renewing the appreciation of Islamic teachings in the community. Another reason was the return of traditional Islamic politicians. Mashitah Sulaiman noted that the development of Islam in the 1970s was linked to the return of Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamed to mainstream politics in Malaysia. Under his leadership, the Malaysian government supported many policies related to the progress of Islam.

Moreover, Iran Revolution also indirectly contributed to the revival of Islam in Malaysia. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the religious authorities of the new Iran happened to insist that the hair of women was considered part of the aurat, which should be covered. Hence, some Malaysian scholars think that the current hijab practices in Malaysia could have been influenced by the revolution. According to Nur Afifi Mohamed Taib, the lecturer of Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Iran's rise affected the fashion trend to some degree, and wearing hijabs started becoming a must. But only the younger generation that were into religious studies followed this trend at that time. As time went on, and social

perceptions changed, eventually people began to accept hijab and see it as one of the signs of Islamic faith.

The history of hijab-wearing in Malaysia shows that although Malaysia has always been a religious country, the social rule that Muslim women must wear the hijab is not long-standing, and in the early Malaysian Muslim society, wearing hijab was even considered heresy.

## 3.2. Is wearing a hijab mandatory?

Looking back on the history of hijab in Malaysia, it is easy to see that the requirements for wearing hijab have not always been so strict. Although wearing hijab is now very common and has become a normalized social phenomenon, whether to wear hijab or not is still a personal choice.

Malaysian religious laws have not made wearing hijab compulsory. In Malaysia, there is no law at the federal level that requires wearing hijab. Even for Muslim women working in the public sector, there is no federal law forcing them to wear it. The General Orders, Article 6, Dress Etiquette Division, Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 which came into force on 15 December 1993 required modest dress for civil servants but did not mandatorily require hijab for Muslim ones. At the state level, there is also no law that clearly outlines the obligation to wear hijab. Although in some state laws, the term "indecent act" has been codified and legislated into the Administration of the Religion of Islam Enactment in Malaysia, the act of dehijabing is also not explicitly included. Since not wearing hijab is still a personal choice of clothing, both the federal government and local governments respect the rights of individual women.

The religious community in Malaysia has also shown tolerance for the removal of hijab. They believe that removing hijab is a personal choice for women. Neither scholars, nor religious officials took Muslim women without hijab as apostates. In fact, the two major sources in Islam, the Quran and al-Hadeeth (Prophetic traditions), emphasize the respect for women and inclusion of diversity. Another example, Gamal al-Banna, the youngest brother of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood said in the Quran or authentic hadiths women were never told to wear the hijab or cover their hair. He also said some general instructions about clothes and manners were used to imprison women and keep them away from normal social life.

Besides, whether hair is aurat remains controversial. Although the act of wearing hijab has become accepted by the majority of Muslim women today, the controversy still exists in the religious community. In some cases, there are also scholars who say that wearing hijab is not obligatory and women's hair is not a part of aurat. Out of the different approaches to the interpretation of religion, scholars like Khaled Abou El-

Fadl, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Sheikh Mustapha Rashid state that there is no special instruction in the Quran that asks women to cover their hair.

In summary, wearing hijab is neither a religiously mandated requirement nor a long-standing social rule. Prevalent resistance towards dehijabing is not because of religion, but in term of religion instead. Just like Zainah Anwar stated in her book that it is not Islam that oppresses women, but interpretations of the Quran influenced by the cultural practices and values of a patriarchal society.

# 4. INTERSECTIONALITY: ANALYZING RESISTANCE HOLISTICALLY

It is clearly untenable to consider the multi-original resistance to dehijabing purely from a religious perspective. Compared with religious factors, social ones can better explain the presence of resistance. Just as Maryam said in her book, women were in a "jail of society's expectation" [2]. The exterior of such jail appears to be the social norms and women who violate them will face with social prejudice.

From the perspective of psychosocial factors, cognitive differences between intra-group and extra-group cannot be ignored. Under this definition, an intra-group is a social category to which most social individuals belong, while an extra-group is a social group which represents the ideas of social minorities. When people make social value judgments, they tend to give positive evaluations to people or ideas that belong to the same category while negative or even critical ones to people or ideas that belong to the opposite category. Due to the difference of supporters of different groups, social value evaluations are often dominated by the majority group, and intergroup bias arises [3]. Translated into the narrative of the act of hijab removal, a small number of Muslim women in Malaysia are choosing not to wear the hijab, going against social conventions and pushing back against rising conservatism in the Muslim-majority country. The dehijabing belong to the minority group and inevitably face with bias from the majority one.

However, such multi-original resistance cannot be fully explained by psychosocial factors. First, psychosocial factors cannot explain the formation of legal resistance. Second, established social rules and social institutions cannot be ignored when analyzing social resistance, because they are important indicators that lead to intergroup discrimination. Therefore, this essay applies intersectionality theory to analyze the formation of resistance towards dehijabing.

## 4.1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory is an important paradigm of feminist research and a significant method in analysing gender phenomena in society. It emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the formation of social resistance. Analysing it from both macro and micro perspectives, scholars considering both macro systems of resistance such as race and gender, as well as resistance from individual-group system on the micro level. Since the factors related to social resistance do not exist independently, the analysis of social resistance needs to focus on a holistic approach.

Originating from the feminist movement of black women in the United States, feminists put forward that homogenized social categories can be an unnatural phenomenon, and each individual need to be studied in different analytical levels at which social divisions need to be studied, especially their ontological base and their relations to each other [4]. In the Combahee River Collective Statement, feminists were actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as their particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression were interlocking [5]. In the 1990s, Collins further conceptualized "intersectionality" by suggesting that "other powers such as race, class, and gender interact to form social institutions that in turn construct the groups defined by these characteristics" [6]. Later, in the book Black Feminist Thought, Collins proposed "matrix of domination" to describe the interlock effect between structural factors and individual power, which lead to social resistance [7].

In the theoretical framework of intersectionality, scholars mostly use the systematic model, which put more importance on the system where social resistance comes into being [8]. By analysing how the system of inequality affects the formation of social resistance, it is possible to bring different social categories into one framework of analysis. These scholars who are interested in the complex system sometimes tacitly define it as a political-economic system constructed by gender, race, and class relations [8]. The systematic model of intersectionality breaks down the dichotomy of structure and individuals by making connections between intertwined systems of inequality and the multiple identities of individuals [9].

In Malaysia, gender factors and ethnic factors intersect and create social resistance to dehijabing women. On the gender level, the undertones of a patriarchal society persist and the gender inequality directly contributes to society's resistance towards hijab-removing women. While on the ethnic level, social identity and racial identity restrictions indirectly influence the social resistance towards hijab-removing

women. These two factors interact with each other and eventually lead to the prejudice in Malay society against the act of hijab removal.

## *4.2. Gender factor*

Feminists often believe that the root cause of gender bias is the female gender-construction. This construction is an externally driven social arrangement. Through this arrangement, society transforms gender in the biological sense into a product of human activity. The female gender-construction originates from patriarchal society. Kate Millett, who first introduced the concept of patriarchal society into feminist theory, points out that patriarchal society embodies the unequal domination of men over women, and that this domination evolves from the family sphere alone to the subordination of women in all spheres of social life, forming ideology of male domination over women [10].

Malaysia is a patriarchal society and increasingly influenced by the unequal gender norms of Brahminism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism [11]. The influence of unequal gender norms has been evidenced by the prevalence of gender concepts and norms such as male superiority, male dominance, female subordination, male strength, and female weakness, and polygamy. On the system level, the most obvious feature of patriarchy is that male leaders hold the power of interpretating religious teaching, which constantly influence the formation of social customs. On the social level, male-gaze is hard to avoid, which in turn creates resistance towards women [11].

In terms of the right of religious interpretation, whether the hair belongs to the aurat is the most important factor in defining the act of removing hijab. Although there are differing views among Muslim scholars, male leaders' interpretation is decisive. It is men who have interpreted the Qur'an and the traditions for us. Women's voices, women's experience, and women's realities had been largely silent and silenced in the reading and interpretation of the text [12]. For example, the era of Tun Dr. Mahathir as Prime Minister in the 1980s saw extensive media campaigns that highlighted Malaysia as a developing Islamic country.

In order to strengthen the influence of Islam within Malaysia, the leaders of this period embraced the idea of Arabization [13]. An example is wearing hijab, which most affects Muslim women. Draped in dark veils and robes, women are the most potent symbols of Islamic revivalism. The veil which was a cultural expression in Arab has been interpreted as religiously authentic, a must for all Muslim women. Also, according to Malaysian rights group Sisters in Islam (SIS), the interpretation of the aurat in Malaysia has become increasingly influenced by Arab culture since the 1980s [14]. Because of the government's political need to

accelerate Islamization, the leaders have adopted an Arabized approach to religious interpretation. And when non-Arab Muslims take wearing Arab clothes like hijab under the guise of "Islamic authenticity", the idea that "we're not really Muslims unless we have some link to Arab culture" has been reinforced and further exacerbates society's sense of rejection of those who do not adhere to the teachings of Arabized Islam [15].

The resistance towards "dehijabing" caused by "male gaze" is also evident. "Male gaze" is a method of viewing which invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggests a sexualized way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women. It is a yardstick that can't be avoided in patriarchal society, since women live under the male gaze all the time [16].

The influence of male gaze is particularly evident on the female dress code. Under the influence of male gaze, there is a reinforced connection between women's clothing and women's reputations, since the clothes women wear send messages to the outer world. And affected by the male gaze, there remains a toxic gender culture at play where women's clothing choices are being policed largely by men.

Wearing hijab is a notable example. Among the criticisms directed at Maryam, many pointed out that the practice of discarding hijab was an insult to Islam and disrespectful to the requirements of society. As stated above, because male leaders hold the power of religious interpretation and social norm-setting, by nature women's refusal to wear hijab violates male-dominated social norms [17]. In the frame of male gaze, men pay attention to what women wear and develop a taste for a certain style and dress sense. Stereotyped opinions are formed about a woman's personality and character and conclusions are made from the way she dresses without getting to know her. This is also the fundamental reason why people will engage in cyber bullying against women who claim discarding hijab.

In recent years, there have been many other examples of restrictions on women's right of dressing freedom in Malaysia. For example, a member of Parliament suggested changing the work attire of Malaysia Airlines flight attendants. He believes that the working clothes of flight attendants are not in line with Shariah law, which will affect the image of Malaysia as an Islamic country. Another example is about Malaysian gymnast Farah Ann. After winning a total of six medals at East Asian Games 2015, a lot of media posted her photos which aroused public suspicion. Some people strongly criticized her sexy outfit, pointing out that the outfit was seriously against the teachings of Islam. Besides, the head of the National Muslim Youth Association of Malaysia also believed that Farah's dress code was not appropriate. These two examples reflect the problems encountered by professional women in the male gaze perspective. Although Malay society has

repeatedly emphasized the importance of the female population and demanded that women should not be excluded from the labour market, the social norms that constrain women in a patriarchal society have led to many limitations in society and in the workplace [18].

However patriarchal society is not the single cause of resistance to women's freedom of choice. By nature, patriarchal society is not a natural phenomenon. The difference in the physical structure of men and women leads to a different social division of labour between men and women. Within the constraints of the established social division of labour, the greater economic benefits generated by men dictate that men have more social discourse. But as society has evolved and the established social division of labour has become obsolete, women have entered the labour market to create economic benefits, and some men are returning to their families to take on domestic responsibilities. In this case, the reason why traits of patriarchal society still remain is that apart from the gender factor, race factor also plays an important role.

### 4.3. Race factor

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country in Southeast Asia of approximately 32.7 million people, mainly including Malays, Chinese and Indians. To accurately delineate the ethnic identity of people, Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia defines a Malay as someone born to a Malaysian citizen who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, adheres to Malay customs and is domiciled in Malaysia, Singapore or Brunei. This shows that for Malays, conversion to Islam is an important condition of social identity. According to the most recent census in 2010, 61.3% of the population practices Islam.

As a religious nation, Malaysia is politically and socially conservative and hijab can be seen as a symbol of Muslim women. 77% of the population view religion as "very important", and the particular brand of Islam has been described as, inter alia, supremacist and puritanical. According to the results of a social survey in Malaysia held by World Values Wave, 950 out of 1314 respondents indicated that religion is very important in their social lives. Besides, according to an SIS survey of female Muslims, 90% felt that wearing a hijab is mandatory for Muslim women. It is thus clear that for Muslim women, Muslim identity is an integral part of their race identity, and the hijab is an important symbol to show the Muslim identity.

In Malaysia, hijab is not only a reflection of social identity, but also a social requirement. As for the most basic commonalities, all Malays order various aspects of their social relation in accordance with a body of cultural codes glossed *adat*, a concept which encompasses "tradition", "custom" and "customary

law" [19]. The transformation trajectory of the concept adat reveals that it was essentially a common social practice of the Malay nation, which gradually transformed into a social norm of the Malay nation. Hence, since hijab is a strongly marked symbol of basic similarities among all Malaysian Muslim women, it can be seen as a mandatory social requirement. The act removing hijab, on the other hand, goes against established Malay social rules and creates a strong sense of social disapproval while blurring Muslim women's social identity.

The enforced dichotomization between Muslims and non-Muslims also leads to further constraints on Muslim women. As a result of the "divide and rule" policy under British colonial rule, the various ethnic groups in Malaysia were clearly divided by geographical and occupational levels. This led to significant differences in the degree of economic development of various ethnic groups. Since independence, Malaysia has become increasingly racial-polarized. On the one hand, the non-Malays were suppressed in terms of their civic and political power status. On the other hand, due to the difference in economic development between Malays and non-Malays, the Malays attributed their racial backwardness to the policy. Thus, the dominant policy was more favourable to Malay group. The "Malay Supremacy" during Mahathir's administration was a product to protect Malay group's own interests. In order to better safeguard the interests of Malays, the criterion of distinguishing between Malays and non-Malays has been further emphasized. More political energies were expended to fortify the Syariah laws, while cultural attention was targeted to ensure a distinct dress code for Muslims, particularly women. Dehijabing has been socialized as a result of the degradation of Muslimization development in Malaysia. This is the reason why a modestly dressed but unveiled Malay woman would attract much criticism.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the race factor does not exist independently either. The formation of many social norms still depends on the prerequisite of a patriarchal society. On this basis, the intersection of racial and gender factors creates social resistance towards "dehijabing" women.

## 5. STATUS QUO: NOT ONLY ABOUT 'DEHIJABING'

The resistance against hijab-removing women is only a microcosm of the resistance to women in Malaysia. The Malaysian feminist movement has been active since Malaysia gains independence.

Take Sisters in Islam (SIS), an active Islamic feminist organization in Malaysia as an example. The organization seeks to reinterpret the Quran and Islamic teachings to change the situation where men hold the

power of religious interpretation. In this case, the organization pursues gender equality and social justice under Islamic framework. In response to intersectional social resistance, the organization proposes to raise public awareness and policy reform while changing the patriarchal perception of women's inferiority and eliminating discrimination against women.

However, due to inherent social resistance against women that cannot be ignored, feminist organizations have led women's movements with limited success. Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and Tan Beng Hui state that 'Women did gain substantiality from the strength of a women's movement for gender equality, but these benefits have remained tenuous [20]. They were easily exploited by the state and other institutional forces to further objectives that were even inimical to women's interests.

In general, social resistance against women is not only restricted in terms of women's freedom of dress but also in the political and family spheres.

The lack of female leaders in the political sphere and the low level of female political participation are persistent problems. In the political sphere, men have long been the dominant players and women's political participation has been slow to develop. As an example, according to a survey conducted in 1959, the percentage of female members in the Malaysian lower house was 2.9%. Until 1986, the percentage of female MPs was only 3.9%. Since the 21st century, the proportion of female MPs has gradually increased to about 10%. According to the 2018 statistics, Malaysia's female MPs accounted for 11.9% of the total number of MPs [21]. The effects of low female political participation are widespread. If there is a lack of space and participation for women in the political sphere, it is even more so in other spheres. If women are unable to gain a foothold in politics, it is easier to ignore or exacerbate the repression and discrimination against women in other areas.

In the domestic sphere, the resistance against women stems mainly from the solidified family division of labor and the solidified perception of women's character. The female personality has long been defined as submissive and gentle. According to the social division of labor, women are mainly responsible for the internal affairs of the family, including taking care of children, organizing household chores. One of the most notable examples is a bulletin issued by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) during COVID-19. The bulletin asked women to maintain a submissive posture by communicating with their husbands in a tone similar to that of Doraemon. In addition, the bulletin asked women to dress formally and wear makeup when quarantined at home. Generally speaking, it is shaping the stereotyped vision of women through requirements about dressing

appropriately and keeping house, or asking women to be gentle in order to avoid arguments between couples, hoping that women will be always submissive.

Both of these problems are due to the social resistance caused by the intersection of gender and race factors as mentioned above. Influenced by the gender factor, religious interpreters identify the teachings of Allah and the Prophet from the Quran that men are superior to women, women are to be subservient to men, women are not suitable for politics, etc. From a racial perspective, social norms emphasize racial values first and foremost. It is therefore inevitable that some government departments are out of touch with real social issues and govern society with anachronistic ideas. Even the KPWKM, which is supposed to be the most gender-sensitive, has been influenced by racial politics to the detriment of the importance of guaranteeing equal rights.

Under the influence of intersectional social factors, the persistent gender issues in Malaysian society will always be just an elephant in the room, huge but unseen and nobody is willing to address the existed problems. Social resistance against women also cannot be fundamentally eliminated. The measures and policies adopted by feminist organization will also be in vain because the government have not given enough attention.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In general, social resistance against women is a common phenomenon in Malaysian society. In addition to freedom of dress, social resistance places constraints on women in terms of politics, female identity, and the division of labour within the family. Although most people put pressure on women on the basis of religious teachings, Islam actually promotes equality between men and women and gives women the same social status as men. The source of social resistance is not religion, but the intersectional social factors that result from the intersection of gender and race factors. In the frame of intersectional social factors, gender and race factors do not exist independently, but interact and interdepend on each other to form a synergy. Influenced by the synergy, a general social resistance against women is born.

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