

## YOUTHS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PORTUGUESE IDENTITY IN MELAKA

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### ABSTRACT

*The Portuguese identity plays an important role not only towards the Portuguese community but also to Malaysia. If the Portuguese community does not preserve their identity, they may lose their identity throughout time. It will be a loss for Malaysia as well because Malaysia is regarded as a country uniquely rich with its ethnic diversity. This Portuguese community is the only community in the world where they speak a localized Portuguese language, furthermore, their customs and cultures are influenced by the locals through assimilation. Thus, this paper aimed to examine the roles of language, customs and traditions in the maintenance of cultural identity among the Portuguese community in Melaka, Malaysia based on the Portuguese youths' perspectives. In this article, we analyze the role of the youths in the maintenance of the Portuguese identity - a topic not widely explored. Data were collected from seven (7) open ended interview questions based on Berry's acculturation model (2005). Eight (8) Portuguese youths were interviewed face-to-face in Melaka Portuguese settlement from May to June 2017. The results showed that the respondents emphasized that the maintenance of Portuguese identity should focus on the cultural perspectives such as the Portuguese traditional customs and festival celebration. However, unlike other ethnic groups in Malaysia, the element of language, i.e. Kristang language was deemed as unimportant in the youths' opinion on Portuguese identity.*

**Keywords:** Portuguese, Cultural Identity, Youths, Maintaining Identity, Portuguese Community

### ABSTRAK

*Identiti Portugis memainkan peranan yang penting bukan sahaja kepada komuniti Portugis tetapi juga kepada Malaysia. Jika masyarakat Portugis tidak mengekalkan identiti mereka, mereka mungkin akan kehilangan identiti mereka pada masa yang akan datang. Kehilangan identiti Portugis akan menjadi kerugian yang besar bagi Malaysia kerana Malaysia sering dilihat sebagai negara yang kaya dengan kepelbagaian etniknyanya. Komuniti ini adalah satu-satunya komuniti di seluruh dunia di mana mereka bertutur dalam Bahasa Portugis yang berunsur dengan masyarakat setempat serta adat dan kebudayaan mereka juga dipengaruhi oleh masyarakat setempat. Oleh itu, tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk mengkaji peranan bahasa, adat dan tradisi dalam pengekal identiti budaya di kalangan masyarakat peranan Portugis di Melaka, Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif remaja Portugis. Dalam artikel ini, kami menganalisis peranan remaja dalam pengekal identiti mereka, topik ini masih belum diterokai secara meluas. Data dikumpulkan dari tujuh (7)*

*soalan temu ramah terbuka berdasarkan model acculturation Berry (2005). Dari bulan Mei hingga bulan Jun 2017, seramai lapan (8) remaja Portugis telah ditemu bual di Perkampungan Portugis, Melaka. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa para pemberi maklumat menekankan bahawa pengekalan identiti Portugis harus fokus dari perspektif budaya seperti adat tradisi Portugis dan penyambutan perayaan. Bagaimanapun, tidak seperti kumpulan etnik lain di Malaysia, golongan belia Portugis menganggap unsur Bahasa seperti Bahasa Kristang tidak penting dalam pengekalan identiti Portugis.*

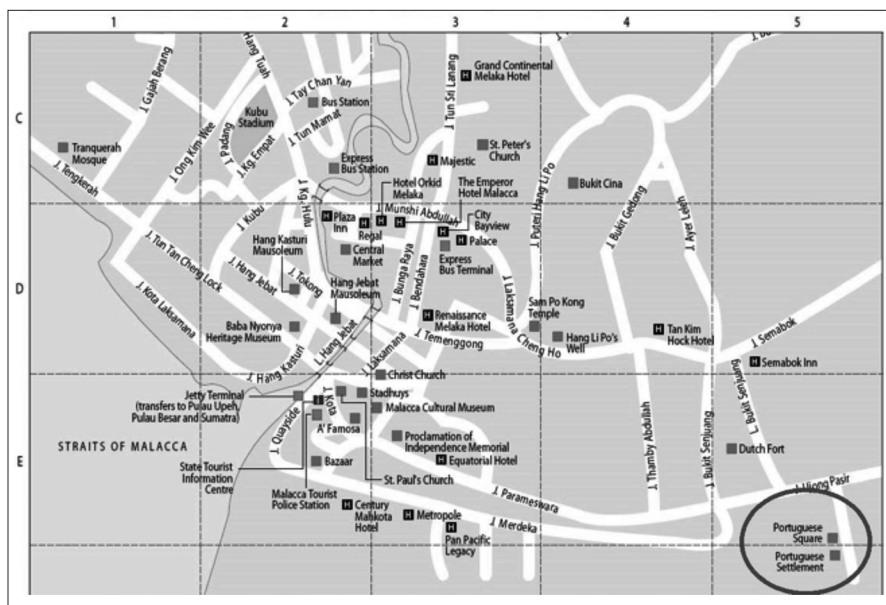
**Kata Kunci:** Portugis; Budaya, Remaja, Pengekalan Identiti, Masyarakat Portugis

## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1400s, Melaka under the Malay Sultanate was already a bustling center of trade with China being the Malay Sultanate earliest trading partner (Wade, 2005). Then in 1509, the first Portuguese sailing ship arrived at the Straits (Ricklefs, 1991). In 1511, Melaka was conquered by the Portuguese until 1641, the reason being of its ideal location, in which the Dutch took over the control of Melaka after a siege (João & Vítor, 2012). The Dutch used Melaka as a mere guard post on the way to a new Malay and Dutch trading centers in Johor and islands of Java. Melaka was under the Dutch control until 1824 where they then ceded Melaka formally to the British in bilateral attempt to consolidate colonial possessions. Melaka was then ruled by the British until Malaya was granted independence in 1957 (National Archives of Malaysia, 2011).

The Portuguese community or also known as the Kristang community in Melaka mostly resides in the Portuguese Settlement in Ujong Pasir, roughly five kilometers from Melaka City, Malaysia as shown in Diagram 1. During the 16th to 17th century, the Portuguese colonial period, mixed marriages between the Portuguese and the locals (Malay, Indian and Chinese) was practiced and this then led to the creation of the Portuguese ethnic group in Malaysia. Gradually, Portuguese families which were scattered throughout Melaka were moved into the settlement, 11 hectares of land which was purchased through the efforts of two (2) Catholic priests, Father Pierre Francois and Father Álvaro Martinho Coroado to create a haven for the Kristang community (Sarkissian, 2005). Founded in 1997, the Malacca Portuguese Eurasian Association reunites the Portuguese descendants by having meetings and organizing many Portuguese related cultural activities (Sarkissian, 2005). The Portuguese community in Melaka is unique in a way that the community has their own distinct language, the Kristang language. The language is a creole from the Portuguese language. The Kristang language is only spoken by the Portuguese in Melaka and no other place in the whole world. In addition to that, in 2007, UNESCO had listed the Portuguese creole to be highly endangered as the language has only approximately 2,150 speakers where only about a third of the speakers are young adults (Bradley, 2007).

**Diagram 1: Map of Portuguese Settlement**



*Source: Malaysia Travel Guide*

In modern day Melaka, according to the Regedor (village headman), Mr Richard, the population of the Portuguese people stands around 1,200 (Richard David Hendricks, personal communication, 14th Jan 2017) and it is merely 0.1% of the population in Melaka which stands at 872,900 (Department of Information, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia, 2015). The existence of the Portuguese identity could become extinct as they are facing various threats such as lack of living space, land reclamation around the Portuguese settlement and also the gradual loss of the Kristang language. The community here stands out because it is the only sanctuary in Malaysia for the Portuguese people where the Portuguese customs and traditions are very much alive and still being practiced by the Portuguese in the settlement.

The identity of the Portuguese people can only be maintained if their culture survives. Culture plays a major role in shaping a person's identity. A person's identity is defined by the culture they grew up in and the culture they practiced. The culture that they practice contributes to how they see themselves and also to the groups which they are identified with. For one to understand his or her own identity, it all develops from birth and then shaped by the values and attitudes prevalent at home and the surrounding community. Including systems of norms, beliefs, world view, social institutions and values, culture is the collective matrix or web of influences that shape the lives of individuals and groups (Corin, 1994).

Culture is where it makes a person feel most at home, it allows a person to have that sense of belonging. Culture gives identity and meaning to each and every human. It takes many forms, like visual arts, performing arts, crafts, literature and the history of each individual; expressing one's beliefs through language and communication forms; institutions created by humans to express their social and political beliefs; and how well humans able to adapt in the natural environment. The societal glue that holds humans together or tears humans apart is how culture is created. Therefore, if what connects each individual is culture, then the tool that tempers and strengthens this connection will be through community development. For a community to survive and thrive, the community cannot remain static and some degree of change is required and necessary.

This paper aims to examine the roles of language, customs and traditions in the maintenance of cultural identity among the Portuguese community in Melaka, Malaysia. There are few main parts in this paper, firstly, the literature review on relevant studies on cultural identity and identity maintenance; secondly, methodology and theoretical framework used; thirdly, the findings of the study; and lastly a conclusion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section will discuss on the past studies on what defines heritage language and how cultural identity is being perceived. Furthermore, this section will also explain Berry's acculturation model. In addition to that, Tan's (1988) study on the Babas in Melaka will also be discussed as the Babas too are the minority and they share certain similarities with the Portuguese of Melaka. Lastly, the term symbolic interactionism, coined by Herbert Blummer (1969), will be discussed to explain why the youths no longer feel the importance in maintaining their Kristang language.

Not only does culture tell us who we are, but also it tells what is to be done, as Worsley has argued. 'It supplies a project, a design for living,' (Worsley, 1984, p.43). Park (2011), reviewed literatures relating to heritage language and cultural identity maintenance, with a specific focus on North America based on the multicultural and multilingual aspects of these countries. It was reported that majority of Asian immigrant parents encouraged their children to be in schools that use heritage language because they recognize the importance of heritage language education. Three benefits were reported by parents with regards to sending their children to heritage language schools: culture maintenance, language learning and the co-ethnic friendship being established. Except for aboriginal languages, brought to host societies by immigrants, heritage language refers to all languages. The term was originally defined in Canada as "a language other than one of the official languages of Canada that contributes to the linguistic heritage of Canada" (Canadian Legal Information Institute, 1991). This showed that heritage language does play a role in the lives of the Portuguese community because the heritage language aids in the culture maintenance in which the youths are falling behind.

In 2000, Ferdman & Horenczyk, described a way to conceptualize cultural identity as one major component of ethnic identity. Both of them pictured cultural identity as the reflection of culture because cultural identity is constructed by people. Cultural identification's strength was conceptualized and measured in terms of self-perceptions and emotions associated with these individual constructions of group culture. There were three elements in cultural identity. The first element involved aspects of a person's ethnic affiliation, the second element explained on the feelings an individual had about the cultural features ascribed to the group and the third element described the view of an individual of how, where and to what degree the group culture is reflected in the self.

Another study, carried out by Benish-Weisman & Horenczyk in 2010 which proposed an emic conceptualization and measurement of identity and adaptation following immigration in which constructs in terms of the immigrant's own criteria and not according to standardized external parameters were both assessed. The study consisted of 337 immigrants of which 137 were men and 200 women from Ukraine and Russia, who immigrated to Israel between 1990 and 1995. The group characteristics questionnaire with relation to their majority ("Israeli"), minority ("Russian"), and ethnic ("Jewish"), in addition the perceived success questionnaire is completed with all the 337 respondents. The results from this study revealed that higher levels of Israeli identity were exhibited by those who perceived their immigration successful than those who perceived their immigration as unsuccessful. The study also found that those who are unsuccessful were characterized primarily by a marginalization orientation. On the other hand, those who perceived as successful showed primarily an integration orientation followed by one of assimilation. Negative valences of the Jewish identity but also positive valences of the Israeli identity, were related positively to success. Lastly, from the study, it was learned that success in terms of competence is defined very likely by newcomers with high levels of Russian identity, whereas immigrants with high levels of Israeli identity tend to characterize success in terms of belonging.

Based on what Ferdman & Horenczyk (2000) mentioned, despite being 10 years apart, the three aspects in the study by Benish-Weisman & Horenczyk (2010), are still relevant. Both studies were on how cultural identity was being perceived and the key aspects that made cultural identity.

Since the 1970s, the importance of heritage language maintenance has been advocated by Cummins. The threshold hypothesis was proposed by Cummins (1976) to account for the relationship between cognitive development and bilingualism. Two levels in the threshold hypothesis, the lower threshold and the higher threshold were then later proposed by Cummins (1979). In order to avoid negative cognitive effects, the lower threshold level of language competence in both languages should be attained. Additionally, regardless of the language of testing, they will have positive cognitive effects when bilinguals reach the higher threshold.

Furthermore, Cummins claimed that the degree to which students have competence in their heritage language at the time when they were introduced to intensive second language learning rests on students' level of second language competence.

Berry (2001) stated that acculturation is "a process that entails contact between two cultural groups, which results in numerous cultural changes in both parties". Thus, the individual's perspective and dominant group's perspective from the host country are both perspectives on how the different acculturation attitudes are described by Berry. Two different dimensions, namely "acculturation attitudes" (Berry 2001:618). In which, first, to what degree of the cultural values the people want to maintain ("cultural maintenance"), and second, to what degree do the people want to be in touch with members of a different cultural group ("intercultural contact")

Berry (2001) stated that acculturation is a process. On the other hand, O'Leary (2001) sees acculturation as an outcome. In accordance with Berry, the importance to see acculturation as a process rather than as a permanent outcome was highlighted by other researchers (e.g. McGuire and McDermott 1988; Ward, 2008). From their point of view, an individual's feelings of belongingness or not and the degree of integration to the host society varies from time to time and the individual's actual situation had to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the outcomes for acculturation should always be perceived as temporary (McGuire and McDermott, 1988).

In Malaysian's minority studies context, a study based on the Baba of Melaka, Malaysia was done by Tan (1988) to examine the nature and dynamics of cultural change, and in particular the relationship between cultural changes. The Baba form a minority within the Chinese group, which after the Malay ethnic group is the second largest ethnic group followed by the Indians in Malaysia. The term 'Peranakan Chinese', refers to the Baba, Malay-speaking Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia. These Baba use Malay language as their mother tongue and adopted other features of Malay culture, such as Malay style of cooking, women dressing in kebaya and sarong by Baba women and so on.

Despite being perceived by the Malaysian Chinese to be more Malay-like, the Baba's system of thought had hardly integrated any Malay cultural principle. Thus, Tan objected statements such as the 'assimilation' or 'resignification' of the Baba by the Malays. Instead of looking at its internal dynamics, external manifestation of Baba culture was considered when these terms were used to describe them. Back then, through marriage to Nyonya (Baba ladies), the Chinese immigrants were incorporated into the Baba society, it is more the other way round. Among the factors are the 'pure' Chinese dominates the Chinese society in Malaysia as of this time and the Chinese culture and identity are defined by the 'pure' Chinese which then cause the Baba model to be despised. Another factor is that the Baba

living away from the Baba social environment and their Baba identity is lost in the process. The term 'resignification' does not match what the Baba had undergone as they have always been Chinese. Although with the adoption of certain Malay cultural features, the Baba's symbolic order remained Chinese. Besides, the Baba practiced Chinese folk-religion. Rather being a syncretic religious system, it is a polytheistic one, with a hierarchy of spirits, deities and ancestors. Between the Malays and the Baba, Tan stated that an important ethnic boundary marker is religion. This is because the Malays are Muslims but the Babas are not, the Malays do not consume pork but the Babas do. This portrays the Portuguese identity where certain Malay cultural features are adopted, the Portuguese symbolic order remained Portuguese, for example, the Portuguese remained Catholics as it symbolize their identity (Tan, 1988).

The term, symbolic interactionism, coined by Herbert Blummer (1969), put forward that interaction among a person to another by re-defining or interpreting each other's responses instead of merely reacting to them. In other words, every behavior and action of a person was based on the meanings that they attach to their situations. The symbolic interactionism perspective explored how meanings were attached and created by people during the course of social interactions, how the self was constructed and eventually in the presence of others how a person defined his own situation. Therefore, one of the main idea of symbolic interactionism is that the reason people behave and act the way they do is due to how they define the situations and not how the situations depicts them and controls their actions and behaviours. This can be observed in the Portuguese youths as they no longer feel the need and urge to learn the Kristang language as it holds no significant value nor meaning to them.

Overall, it can be said that very few studies were found on the Portuguese of Melaka that explore which elements of culture have the strongest positive effects, and what can be done to improve the maintenance of the Portuguese identity. Besides, the study carried out by Benish-Weisman & Horenczyk in 2010 might not be applicable as it was carried out in a different context in which immigrants were used. Furthermore Tan's (1988) study on the Baba and Nyonya will not be able to be fully reflected on the Portuguese as the Baba adopted features of the Malay cultures and did not intermarried with the Malays. But the Portuguese did intermarry with the Malays.

## **METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopted a qualitative approach using Berry's acculturation model (2005), to examine the roles of language, customs and traditions in the maintenance of cultural identity among the Portuguese community in Melaka, Malaysia. The data were collected by interviews. The open-ended interview technique was chosen. An interview guide comprising seven primary questions that could be altered and developed on the interview situation was designed. McNamara (1999), the interview



guide approach is a perfect interview protocol assuring that similar information are acquired from each informant; an equivalence can thus be established among the data collected.

In qualitative studies, to obtain a sample size which is accurate, there is no specific set of criteria to be followed as meaningful information generated by respondents are more important and eliciting a researcher's observational and analytical skills rather than determining the sample size (Patton, 2002). The research will be deemed appropriate as long as it is able to answer the research questions (Sandelowski, 1995). The study involved a total of eight interviewees aged 21 to 24 years old. The selection was made by using the critical case sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique that is particularly useful in exploratory qualitative research. Critical case sampling is used in this study as it permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases because if it's true of this one case, it is likely to be true of all other cases (Patton, 1990).

The study was conducted in the Portuguese settlement of Melaka, Malaysia. The interview questions used in this study was developed based on the literature review to achieve the research objectives. The interview questions were designed to determine the roles of customs and traditions and language in maintaining the Portuguese identity. The interview consists of seven questions. The interview questions will relate to how the Portuguese identity is maintained through customs and traditions and language. The interviews on the eight respondents took 50 days starting from 6th May 2017 until 24th June 2017 to be completed. 50 days were required to complete eight interviews because most of the interviewees were only available either on long holidays or during weekends thus prolonging the duration of the completion of the interviewing process. Pseudonym will be used to ensure the identity of the interviewees stay confidential.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of The Respondent**

No.	Pseudo Name	Current Occupation	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Preferred Language
1	LS	Student	21	Male	Single	English
2	TJ	Portuguese Dancer	18	Female	Single	English
3	MT	IT Assistant Manager	24	Male	Married	English
4	LD	Economic Affairs Officer	24	Female	Single	English
5	SMA	Student	20	Male	Single	English
6	JMDC	Unemployed	24	Male	Single	English
7	PA	Housewife	23	Female	Married	English
8	AEJ	Student	22	Male	Single	English

*Source: Fieldwork 2017*



Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the respondents. For all eight (8) respondents, English language seemed to be the preferred language. The gender skewed towards the male gender with five (5) males and three (3) females.

**Diagram 2: Four Acculturation Strategies Based Upon Two Issues**

<u>Strategies of Ethnocultural Groups</u>				
(+) Issue 1	+	(+) Issue 2	=	Integration
(+) Issue 1	+	(-) Issue 2	=	Separation
(-) Issue 1	+	(+) Issue 2	=	Assimilation
(-) Issue 1	+	(-) Issue 2	=	Marginalization

<u>Strategies of Larger Society</u>				
(+) Issue 1	+	(+) Issue 2	=	Multiculturalism
(+) Issue 1	+	(-) Issue 2	=	Segregation
(-) Issue 1	+	(+) Issue 2	=	Melting Pot
(-) Issue 1	+	(-) Issue 2	=	Exclusion

Issue 1: Maintenance of Heritage culture and identity

Issue 2: Relationships sought among groups

*Source: Modified from Berry (2005)*

The acculturation strategies as shown in Diagram 2 explains about four acculturation strategies based upon two issues, in ethnocultural groups and the large society (Berry, 2005). The top figure showed the four possible acculturation strategies for individuals or groups when joining an environment with a foreign host culture. The resulting strategy could be 'integration', 'assimilation', 'separation' or 'marginalization' depending on their acculturation attitude from the perspective of non-dominant groups, when a person no longer wishes to maintain his or her cultural identity and seeks daily interaction with other cultures, then this is defined as the assimilation strategy. In this situation, the individual preferred to shed his heritage culture and absorbed into the society that is dominant. Contrary to that, if a person places a value on holding on to his original or heritage culture, and at the same time avoiding interaction with those from other cultures, then the separation alternative is defined. In this phase, the person turns his back on involvement with others from a different culture, and turn inward towards his own heritage culture.

Meanwhile, integration is the option an individual seeks when the individual is in interest with the maintenance of both his heritage culture and the cultures of others. In this situation, the cultural integrity is maintained at some degree and at the same time pursuing, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to engage as an integral part of the larger social network.

Lastly, marginalization is defined when there is hardly any possibility or interest in heritage cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and not keen to have any relations with others (generally for reasons of exclusion or discrimination). Involving different attitudes and behaviors, it is crucial to understand that both assimilation and integration are distinct concepts.

The formulation mentioned above is from the perspective of non-dominant group of people and it is based on the belief that these group of people have the freedom to choose on how they will like to acculturate. Nevertheless, in reality, this is not always the case as when a dominant group imposes certain forms of acculturation, then different terms need to be used. Specifically, non-dominant groups can “freely” and successfully pursue integration only when the dominant group is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity. Hence to attain integration, a mutual accommodation is required, where it involves the acceptance by both the non-dominant and dominant groups of the right to live as culturally different groups. In order for this strategy to work, basic values of the larger society have to be adopted by the non-dominant groups and at the same time, now that all groups are living together in the plural society, the dominant group has to adapt national institutions such as education, labour and health so that the needs of all groups are met.

Till date, only from the view of non-dominant ethnocultural groups have these two basic issues been approached. Nevertheless, engaging in the process mutual acculturation by both groups in contact is inevitable as this was clearly established in the original anthropological definition. Thus, the addition of a dimension (Berry, 1980), as seen on the right side of Diagram 2: the powerful role held by the dominant group in influencing how acculturation takes place. Berry shows the expectation of the dominant group for foreigners to acculturate. As the same acculturation attitudes are followed, these strategies are related to the individual ones. They are called ‘multiculturalism’, ‘melting pot’, ‘segregation’ and ‘exclusion’. Firstly, multiculturalism is defined when integration of all the various ethno-cultural groups feature cultural diversity in a society. Secondly, melting pot is termed when non-dominant acculturating group seeks assimilation. Thirdly, segregation is defined when a dominant group is forced with separation. Lastly, exclusion is termed when marginalization is being imposed by the dominant group.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The data collected during the interview process showed that the youths do take importance of the customs and traditions in maintaining their Portuguese identity. The youths that were interviewed stated that they were brought up with the customs and traditions, thus the customs and traditions have been long bonded with them. This is evident that they chose not to shed their culture and embrace their own thus pointing towards integration (Berry, 2005). As interviewee LD said,

*"I think making a point to actually celebrate the festivals that are held in the settlement is important because these were started by our forefathers and also some of these festivals are to remember our saints. By doing so, it actually reminds us of our roots and origin. These festivals keep me in touch of my own culture. (LD, personal communication, 7th May 2017)"*

Besides the customs and traditions that are carried out in the settlement not only brings their people closer but it also brings the customs and traditions back to live. As explained by interviewee MT,

*"But when it comes to the preparation of the festivals or celebration, they tend to forget about all the conflicts they have and they stand together, unite to get things done so that the festivals or celebration will be able to go on smoothly. Portuguese people of all walks of life will come together to make sure that each festivals or celebration that is being held in the settlement will be a success. (MT, personal communication, 19th May 2017)"*

Not only that, they are proud of their customs and culture because of its uniqueness. They hope the people from different races and religions share and understand their culture. An indication that despite being the minority, they are not forced into assimilation nor separation as there is no restriction imposed on them to practice their culture and they try to reach out to those from a different culture to make them experience their very own culture (Berry, 2005). As mentioned by interviewee SMA,

*"I do invite my friends from different races and religions to come join and experience the uniqueness of my culture as we are the only ones left in Malaysia that celebrate the various Portuguese festival in this scale. (SMA, personal communication, 27th May 2017)"*

As for the aspect of language, they do not see much importance in actually acquiring it or at least being able to speak a few words. The youths that were interviewed see their language, Kristang as something additional, it is as if someone were to learn English, Mandarin or other languages. As said by interviewee LS,

*"I think the Kristang or some would say Portuguese language, is just like one knowing how to speak another tongue. I do not see it as something like you do not know Kristang, you are no fit to be called as a Portuguese. (LS, personal communication, 17th June 2017)"*

In other words, to them language does not reflect one's race nor ethnicity. Furthermore, no formal class or lesson is being held for the Kristang language. As interviewee AEJ said,

*“It is very hard to keep it up with our Kristang language because as you know, we do not get any sort of formal education to actually teach our younger generation the language (AEJ, personal communication, 2nd June 2017)”*

Besides, the youths that were interviewed find no importance of learning nor acquiring the language as the language is rarely used and has no usage the moment they leave the Portuguese settlement as people around them do not speak or know the language. They maintain what they feel is important as a Portuguese and they learn/maintain the culture of others (Bahasa Malaysia and English) as it is a necessity to live in Malaysia thus the integration acculturation was chosen (Berry, 2005). As interviewee TJ explained,

*“The only thing that I am certain is that Kristang is hardly used these days. Usually only the older generation will speak Kristang among themselves. We the younger generation speak English among ourselves. (TJ, personal communication, 24th June 2017)”*

Additionally, they do not agree that if a descendent of the Portuguese of Melaka does not know Kristang, he or she is no longer a Portuguese. As mentioned by interviewee JMDC,

*“To prove myself or to show my Portuguese identity, I will need to know Kristang then that just does not make sense as I believe there are many other traits to show that one is a Portuguese. (JMDC, personal communication, 11th June 2017)”*

Furthermore, it has not crossed the minds of some to teach their children the language although many of the older generation and family members emphasized that the language is vital for the survival of the Portuguese identity. As explained by interviewee PA,

*“In future, I do not think I will be making or teaching my children to speak Kristang because it is practically useless outside the settlement, why will I want to burden my children learning something that is dying and after-all most of the younger generations do not speak Kristang even in the settlement. (PA, personal communication, 28th May 2017)”*

In addition to both aspects, during the whole interviewing process, the researcher did notice that most houses have been renovated to accommodate growing family members due to lack of living space thus losing the actual house structure and design when the Portuguese first moved in the settlement. There are also hardly any cultural elements with the exception of Portuguese cuisines that could be seen or heard in the Portuguese square where most tourists flock to enjoy the Portuguese

cuisines. The Kristang language is also barely heard being used among the youths despite being in the heart of the Portuguese settlement, the only place throughout Malaysia where the Portuguese identity can be experienced by people from different races and religions.

The youths see the customs and tradition as something they were brought up with. The customs and traditions have been infused into their lives since young. To them, they are born Portuguese and that made them Portuguese whether they like it or not.

The language aspect plays a very minute role in the lives of the youths that were interviewed. They see the language as something irrelevant to the period of time they are in. To them the language plays no role nor does it portrays anything Portuguese.

They have very little interest in learning the language.

Based on the four acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005), the youths are on the integration strategy as it is clear that they still maintain the parts of culture which they deemed important to them. Parts of the heritage culture which was taught to them from young was not shed in exchange for a foreign culture. Ultimately, they chose to stand by their own for who they are and not being absorbed into the culture of others.

## **CONCLUSION**

Customs, traditions and language play a very important role in the maintenance of an ethnic's identity. Due to factors like lack of living space and job opportunities, the younger generations will tend to sway away from their own people's customs and traditions and language as they do not have the same group of people nor the opportunity to practice it. They will then see it as something naturally to just abandon their own customs and traditions and language to embrace the cultural aspects that are practice by the norms of the society that they are in. It is in the younger generation's hands to decide whether these aspects should be maintained or not for one to call themselves as a descendant of the Portuguese of Melaka.

The symbolic interactionism among the youths are clearly noticeable. To begin with, the youths no longer see any importance to learn the Kristang language as they feel it is out of context, as the language is hardly used and understood by not just non-Portuguese people but also Portuguese people of Melaka as well. Although most youths have left the settlement, a totally different environment where hardly anyone practices the same culture as them for either to further their studies or to seek job opportunities, the youths still viewed that the Portuguese culture do play an important role in defining themselves as Portuguese.

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