ISLAM AS A WAY OF LIFE: THE REPRESENTATION OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS IN NON-ISLAMIC FILM

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ABSTRACT

Islam provides specific guidelines for all people to follow in their daily lives as Islam guides in several aspects such as social, economics, politics, moral and spiritual. By saying that, it shows that Islam caters for all the fields of human existence. A study on the representation of Islam in the media is not new. Many remember that it starts with the historic event of September 11, 2001 in which Islam has been represented as negative in the eyes of others. Apart from that, Islam images have been represented through drama, films, newspapers and other media channels in which have also contributed to the new image of Islam and Muslims. Interestingly, this study would like to draw special attention on how far non-Islamic film applied/portrayed Islamic teachings in the film. Therefore, a film Bisik Pada Langit (BPL) has been used as a sample for this study. The storyline of BPL will be analysed through quantitative content analysis method. The frequency of representation of Islamic teachings will be examined through quantitative content analysis. The results showed that, the representation of Islamic teachings in BPL, has been explained through the depiction of performing prayers, reading Quran, covering aurah and kindness towards parents. Through this discovery, it proved that non-Islamic film has played a role as a medium to enlighten Islamic images and teachings for the benefit of the society. Most importantly, the correlation between non-Islamic film with Islamic teachings has been proven through BPL.

Keywords: *Non-Islamic film, Islamic teachings, Islamic values, media representation, media and dakwah*

INTRODUCTION

Religious films produced by Western touched a lot on Christianity, spirit, soul, morality, angel and demon (Lindvall 2004; Nayar 2010; Santana and Erickson 2008; Kozlovic 2005; Okuyade 2011). The influence of the existence of these Christian philosophical scholars in the West somehow affects the community. For example the film *The Passion of Christ* (2004) talks about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ reached the

box-office collection and received tremendous response from the audience. Besides Hollywood, the world of Islamic cinema is nearer to the religious film especially in looking at the religion and spiritual elements through the films.

For an example, Rosmawati (2012) stated that films from Indonesia and Iran dominated the rises of Islamic films. Films like *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (2008), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (2010) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1&2* (2009), managed to pull the attention of audiences who thirst for Da'wah movies like the aforementioned movies. In addition, religiousscholars like Habiburrahman el Shirazy contributed to the production of religious films that are more honest and sincere. The rises of these films, which are based on Islam are positive and have gained interest among the Muslim audience. Javed (2010) added the rise of the masterpiece from Majid Majidi, a prominent director from Iran who spread its wings to produce films that contain strong spiritual and religious elements like Children of Heaven (1998), The Color of Paradise (2000) and The Song of Sparrows (2008) add color to the Islamic film industry. Iran films are the example of how films are produced through the development of spiritual and religious concept which is translated through a film (Javed, 2010). The films produced in Iran and Indonesia has created a phenomenon and has placed Islam at a noble position globally.

Rosmawati (2012) discussed on the statistic of film produced in Malaysia from 2005 until 2010. She stated that FINAS produced only a few films that had Islamic elements. According to the statistic from FINAS (2005-2010), from 140 Malay films produced, none of the films had elements of religion as the main content of those films. Therefore, the statistics showed that many of the filmmakers prefer to produce films that have conflicts with cultural value and religion. For examples, *Anak Halal* (Legal Child), *Bohsia...Jangan Pilih Jalan Hitam* (Bad Girl...Don't Choose Bad Direction), *V3...Samseng Jalanan* (V3...Streer Gangster).

In this case, Rosmawati (2012) in her article claimed that Malaysia did produce films that have Islamic elements even though it never received high attention from the audiences and did not make it into the popular list of films. Sincethe spreading of da'wah is very important and Malaysia has less produced on films that have Islamic elements, this article looks into the Islamic elements that emerged in non-Islamic films produced in Malaysia.To elucidate this concept further, Malaysian film entitled *Bisik Pada Langit* was purposely selected. BPL has been taken as an example to see the role of Malaysian film industry in delivering Islamic messages to the society and plays a role to spread da'wah. Even though the film merely portrays the common life

of the society, but this study intends to see the Islamic values that emerge through the societal values, which had been portrayed in the film.

However, in year 2013, a film thathadan Islamic background entitled *Ustaz Mu Tunggu Aku Datang* has been produced. Ustaz Azhar Idrus (UAI) who is popular among the young Muslim community made a special appearance in the movie and itwas able to receive attention from the young people with RM 1.4 millions of profit. This film is one of the initiatives to have Islamic-oriented stories and background through wearing scarf, appropriate dressing, covering the aurah, the use of Quran in the script and the use of background of holy places such as mosques.

Other than that, the initiation to conduct this study is to highlight that Malay films do not necessarily display heavy features, simply highlighting simple teachings and Islamic way of life accompanied by interesting techniques that can attract audiences to the theater. This has been agreed by Tan Sri Dr. Rais Yatim, Government Advisory in Social Affairs and Culture who said in his speech that *The Journey*, a local Cantonese film had successfully collected RM17 million by bringing the theme of culture and religion was acceptable and received impressive response in the way it was produced (Utusan Malaysia, April 25, 2014). Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the factors of physical appearance, character and dialogue used which contribute to the portrayal of Islamic elements in film.

DAKWAH AND THE REPRESENTATION OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS IN FILM

The purpose of Da'wah is to give people a better life now and later (life after) as well as achieving God's pleasure and practice it in our daily lifestyle, individually and as a family or even social community (Zaydan 1976; Ab. Aziz 1997; Sohirin 2008). In the effort to vary the medium of Da'wah, the film is seen as a new and influential way that can be explored (Rosmawati, 2012). According to Haidir Fitra Siagian, Mustari and Fauziah (2016), Da'wah means a 'call' or 'invitation' or to convey good messages about Islam. Apart from that, da'wah is normally done through verbal preaching, visuals, one's practices and actions and through emulations and role models. Many of direct da'wah calls aired on television are verbal preaching through talk shows. The main reason is to educate the people about good deeds and good morals. They continued saying that dakwah messages can be disseminated through television program channels to promote religious knowledge and to reach out to the mass population, to share knowledge, to educate and to inform.

However, in modern days, the media plays an important role in teaching the viewers, regardless of their age, through the actor's behavior. Watching Islamic-based films containing Islamic message is seen as contributing to positive actions and behaviors as been discussed by Rosmawati, Md. Salleh, Mohd. Nizam, & Muhammad Sham Shahkat Ali (2012). They found a positive relationship between viewing Islamic based films and the development of pro-social personality.

In discussing the portrayal of Islam in films, Suria Hani, Mazni, Mohd Faizal and Noor Adzrah (2010) has long discussed it. According to their study, Malay films directly or indirectly serve as religious purpose as they claimed that film is a powerful tool in learning process (p.189). They contended that promoting inter-religious film is good for the sake of unity in Malaysia where inter-cultures and inter-religions meet. In addition, Javed (2010) defined Islamic film as "film that conforms to Islamic laws, customs and values" while "Muslim film is a film movement by or about Muslims".

On another note, Naim (2011) added and proposed that Islamic films must be based on Islamic foundation, Islamic model and Islamic culture. All of them must be based on the Al-Qur'an and Al-hadith as source of inspiration. The films must not deviate from the basic source of information; failing to do that is subjected to the Code of Conduct under the Code of Law. He further identified three main objectives of Islamic films which are to inculcate ethical values; to encourage good deeds (amar maaruf) and to forbid bad deeds (nahi mungkar), and; to propagate and disseminate Islamic information (spread da'wah).

However, Mohd Helmi Yusoh and Jamaluddin Aziz (2017) argued the definition of Islamic film made by Naim (2011) need to be improved. They questioned on what are the aspects of the film need to be prioritized in support of Islamic values? Or is it enough to put the name of Allah S.W.T at every start of a movie? Such questions require a detailed analysis to ensure that no abuse and distortion of ideas occur among the community, especially the scholars.

Malaysia is at number six of top Muslim countries by films released in 2008, trailing behind Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan. Based on the statistic provided, it showed that Malaysia actively produced films and since Malaysia is an Islamic country, the producing of films with Islamic elements should be emphasized and highlighted (Javed, 2010). This has been followed by the argument made by Rosmawati (2012) who stated that Malaysia is still not making Islam as the main genre in producing film. Nevertheless Islam has encouraged us to deliver good values

through everything that we do in order to spread good impression about Islam either it is directly or indirectly. Referring to the context of Islamic film, it is undoubtedly one of the best medium to spread da'wah to audiences.

> Say, *"Obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away - then upon him is only that [duty] with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be [rightly] guided. And there is not upon the Messenger except the [responsibility for] clear notification."* (Quran 24:54)

The concept of film with Islamic background need to be explored and receive serious attention especially to give the solution of definition Islamic film. This is in line with Kozlovic (2007) who said that Islamic films can be defined as film which has portrayed Islamic elements in any part of the film. Therefore, the idea to study the representation of Islamic elements in non-Islamic film is relevant and has the potential to be developed based on the uniformity of scholarly views on this issue.

A SYNOPSIS OF BISIK PADA LANGIT

Bisik Pada Langit (produced in 2017)is literally not a form of Islamic genre as itjust portrays a normal storyline of a societyand about family and love based on Islam that we probably have never thought of. *Bisik Pada Langit* was directed by Kabir Bhatia and focused on the family story as the main plot and is also flanked with the integrity of a written friendship, love and provision of destiny. At the same time, he also emphasized the sacrifice of Wak Rosli (Jalil Hamid) as a father who seems to love his daughter and was willing to fulfill all the wishes of her heart to ensure her happiness at all times. Siti Hajar (Ummi Nazeera) is the only daughter of three siblings. Just like his father, his brother, Zaidi (Beto Kusyairi) and Ikram (Naim Daniel) also need to sacrifice solely to ensure Siti Hajar's dreams to pursue studies in Perth, Australia can be realized. This film successfully had 3.5 million viewers.

As mentioned earlier, this study is an attempt to discover the determinant factors of Islamic values in Malaysian film industries found in *Bisik Pada Langit*. The main concern is to examine the plot, characters and the script of the film to determine what are the determinant factors of Islamic values emerged in *Bisik Pada Langit*. In the context of this study, the researchers will determine the factors that govern the concept of Islamic values in film based on past studies and past literatures. The determinant factors later can be used askey indicators of which Islamic values that has been portrayed BPL. The analysis of this study was made by referring to the

definition of Islamic films by Hajar Opir, Mohammed Yusof, Luqman Abdullah, Norrodzoh Binti Hj Siren, Yusmini Md Yusoff and Wan Yusnee Abdullah (2017). Through their article entitled A Development of Syariah Film Criteria in Malaysia, they have listed definition of Islamic films based on several perspectives such as Akidah, Akhlak, character, attire, music, image and materials used. For an example, the resemblance of women wearing hijab; a family praying together;a child learning to read Quran, there are no touching scenes between men and women such as clapping or hand touching on limbs of women or men who are not mahram except the ones allowed (rukhsah) by religion, does not play a character that resembles a gender other than man or woman, no scenes or symbols can be interpreted something negative to the law and religious values.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, quantitative content analysis has been employed. According to Neuman (2014) using content analysis can help the researchers to analyze words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any messages that can be communicated. Therefore, this study is conducted by choosing the Malay film entitled *Bisik Pada Langit* with regards to analyze the portrayal of Islamic elements in that film. A set of coding sheet was created to record the video content. Before the coding sheet was constructed, a fair and few amount of watching, listening and notes on the film involved was made to help define the researchers to categorize all the Islamic elements found. The researchers coded the Islamic elements portrayed through the narrative and characters in these films.To determine the character, dialogue and physical appearance in BPL which contributed to Islamic elements, BPLwas watched repeatedly. The researcher reviews the films and coding the Islamic elements and derives the plot structure by using the coding sheet.

FINDINGS

The findings showed that BPL portrayed Islamic elements through the characters that contributed to Islamic elements. There are four categories that have been found in this film which are; Reading Quran, Kindness towards Parents, Covering Aurah and Performing Prayers.

Reading Quran

To begin with, there are many verses in Quran that underscore the majesty of Allah’s verses and the Quran itself. See the following:

> *Say: 'If the mankind and the jinn were together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another'* (Quran 17:88)

Allah says in another verse:

> *Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rending asunder by the fear of Allah. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect.* (Quran 59:21)

And thus in the film of *Bisik Pada Langit,* Siti Hajar learnt to read the Quran since she was a child. Her father, Wak Rosli taught Siti Hajar the Quran as it is part of Islamic teachings. Irwan, who is Siti Hajar's friend,was also seen to read the surah Yasin while Siti Hajar was in a coma.

Figure 2 showsWak Rosli teaching his children reading the Quran.

Figure 3 shows Irwan reading the surah Yasin when Siti Hajar was in a coma.

Kindness towards Parents

The second Islamic value that was portrayed in *Bisik Pada Langit* is kindness to parents. This value is clearly stated in the Quran:

> *"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour."* (Quran 17:23)

Islam is a religion that stresses the qualities of mercy, tolerance and respect. Allah has decreed the good treatment of parents and warned us against treating them with disrespect. No word of disrespect should be uttered toward a parent, nor even a look of resentment or contempt. Honoring parents can be considered a form of worship if the intention is to please Allah the Almighty by respecting His commands.

Allah continues this verse by reminding us that parents are deserving of kindness because they raised their children with gentleness and often made great sacrifices for their wellbeing.

> *"And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small."* (Quran 17:24)

The love and mercy that flows from Allah the Most Merciful is showed in the kind treatment existing between parents and their children. Allah clearly prohibits the bad treatment of parents, and in another verse of the Quran He enjoins on us the need to show gratitude to Him, our Creator, as well as our parents. Again, Allah clearly links the rights owed to Him to the rights owed to parents.

Figure 4 shows a scene where Zaidi kisses his father's hand after the prayer. This is one of the kindnesses that a child needs to practice towards the parents.

A hadith about the obligation to do kind towards parents is also being portrayed in this film. A hadith narrated by Abu Daud and Baihaqi R.A stated that *"Go back to both, then make them laugh as you have made them cry"*. This Islamic element is as showed in figure 5.

Figure 5

Covering Aurah

The Quran tells us that the best garment is righteousness. This is in conjunction to the value of covering aurah that has been portrayed in the film of *Bisik Pada Langit*. Allah said in the Quran:

> *O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of God's signs, that they may take heed.* (Quran 7:26)

These verses make it clear that the intention is for Muslims of both genders to be modest in their dress and behavior. This stresses on dressing modestly rather than in any specific "Muslim uniform" and is repeated in the following verse:

> *"O prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the believers that they shall lengthen their garments. Thus, they will be recognized (as righteous women) and avoid being insulted. God is Forgiver, Most Merciful."*(Quran 33:59)

Figure 6 shows that Siti Hajar wears the hijab and dress accordingly to Islam teachings.

Performing Prayers

Shalat is the obligatory Muslim prayers, performed five times each day by Muslims. It is the second Pillar of Islam. Allah has ordered Muslims to pray at five set times of a day.

> *"And establish prayer and give zakah and bow with those who bow [in worship and obedience]".* (Quran 2:43)

Based on the verse above, it is clearly stated that it is an obligation for Muslims to perform prayers. In the film of *Bisik Pada langit*, this is clearly portrayed and thus indirectly showed that *Bisik Pada langit* contains Islamic values. Another verse that we can refer to about prayer is from Surah Al Ankabut verse 45 :

> *"Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do"*(Quran 29:45)

Figure 7 shows scene Wak Rosli and his family performing prayer together.

Elements/ Time (min)	1st 10	2nd 10	3rd 10	4th 10	5th 10	6th 10	7th 10	8th 10
Performing Prayer		/	/					
Reading Quran	/		/					
Covering Aurah	/	/	/	/	/		/	/
Kindness Towards Parents	/			/				

Table 1: Summary of the Islamic elements that appeared in BPL

Based on the observation, the researcher found that the most determinant factors of Islamic values in the film of *Bisik Pada Langit* is the element of wearing hijab as it is the most frequent element showed in the film. By the result shown, it is essential to propose that filmmakers need to consider Islamic elements to act as an indicator in implementing the Islamic values in a film. In addition, a filmmaker can also add more complex determinant factors of Islamic values in a film for example an element of performing "solat jenazah". This is to increase the level of determinant factors of Islamic values emerged in a certain film.

CONCLUSION

The simple analysis made through this film showed that non-Islamic films produced in Malaysia also have Islamic elements. This has proven that non-Islamic film (in this study BPL) has Islamic elements such as covering aurah, kindness towards parents, performing prayers and reading the Quran. These four elements showed that BPL has positive messages to the audiences even though this film is about family, love and sacrifice. This is in line with Allah SWT's command in Surah Al- Imran: 110:

> *"You are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient".*

Therefore, in order to disseminate Islamic messages/teachings to Muslims, films can be a platform to disseminate those messages through visuals. The non-Islamic filmsnow can be understood as films which contain Islamic elements in any characters and physical appearance emerged in that.

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