

Gema Dari Menara (1968): Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar as Islamic Da'wahism in Bruneian Film

Najib Noorashid, Nur Raihan Mohamad & Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati
Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Abstract

Gema Dari Menara (1968) was intended as a mode of *da'wah* (the propagation of Islamic teachings) in response to the situation faced by the local community in Brunei at that time. Following its status as a medium of disseminating the Islamic values, the film embodies Islamic teachings that guide Bruneian Muslims to fully embrace Islam. This current study aims to unravel the meaning of the Islamic value of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) that is strongly depicted in the film and perceived as the enlightening Islamic value from the film. Therefore, this study examines the extent of the manifestation of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* in the film. It is found that the portrayal of da'wahism using *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* is imbued in education, social interaction, clothing, and one's upbringing which is the most influential factor. By applying the Islamic requisites, the scenario and sentiments in the film also encourage the audience to ponder upon the cause and effect of the characters' actions and deeds.

Introduction

Gema Dari Menara (GDM), or Echoes from the Minaret, was the first Bruneian feature film and it premiered at the New Boon Pang Theatre in Brunei Town (now known as Bandar Seri Begawan) on 23rd October 1968. The film was produced by *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Ugama Brunei* (the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei, now known as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, henceforth MORA) and was filmed in collaboration with *Filem Negara Malaysia* (the National Film Department of Malaysia). GDM was originally shot as a 35mm film with approximately 1 hour 10 minutes of play time. The film was set within the 1960s Bruneian community. The script was written by Awang Haji Abdul Saman bin Kahar in 1967. The cast included many local talents and a few Malaysian actors. In 2018, the film celebrated its 50th anniversary with a commercial rescreening for today's young Bruneians (Fizah, 2018; Saerah, 2018). Screening days and show venues were extended due to high demand as the film was well received by locals (*Media Permata*, 2018).

Using film as a medium for *da'wah* is a common tactic in the Malay world. This is also a rich field of study, as seen in the discussion of Malaysian and Indonesian films as part of Islamic *da'wah* (Rosmawati, 2012), the analysis of *da'wah* messages in Malaysian and Indonesian television programmes (Haidir et al., 2016), and in a number of other studies (Mana Sikana, 2014; Pratiwi, 2017; Rosmawati et al., 2011). The infusion of Islamic elements in Malay creative works is then not surprising due to the symbiotic relationship between Islam and Malay cultures in the Malay World (Mohd. Shuhaimi & Osman, 2012)¹. In comparison to other Malay countries, research on religion in creative production and film making is limited in Brunei.

In Brunei, the edification of Islam is carried out by MORA. Back in the 1960s, *da'wah* included the delivery of religious talks in mosques, prayer halls and at villages, until the Religious Affairs Department (before it was known as MORA today) established a specific

¹ Refer also to Zuliana Masri's *Malayness in Gema Dari Menara (1968)*, also included in this special issue.

Information and *Tabligh* (missionary) Section and initiated the use of mass media for *da'wah* purposes. Since 1985, *Pusat Dakwah Islamiah* (also known as the Islamiah Da'wah Centre), a division under MORA, has been the only institution to carry out Islamic propagation in Brunei (Ministry of Religious Affairs Brunei Darussalam, 2002). It is understood that the edification of Islamic knowledge in Brunei is carried out through education and government efforts (Asiyah, 2014). A recent study by Nur Fadilah (2019) also showed that most Islamic propagation activities in Brunei are centred upon direct approaches from MORA, even though the study later suggested that there are alternatives to attract people to Islam. The study also implied that there is a growing interest in the use of popular culture and creative production as part of Islamic edification among new converts, showing the relevance of mass media in Islamic teachings today.

Besides the formal institutions such as government agencies and education sectors, the Office of the State Mufti and MORA also publish Islamic knowledge through “websites; CDs and DVDs; and radio and television broadcasts” (Prime Minister’s Office Brunei Darussalam, 2014, p. 309). However, these articles do not mention the use of creative productions such as film as a means of *da'wah* in Brunei. GDM plays a significant part in the sociocultural legacy of *da'wah* in Brunei.

This paper explores *da'wahism* in GDM through the meaning of the Islamic value of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) in the education system, social interaction, and the characters’ behaviour and clothing found in the film. The meanings are further examined to determine how *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* is manifested in the film to channel the values of Islamic teachings.

Gema Dari Menara as an Islamic Film

The introduction and storyline of GDM clearly depicts that the film is a religious Bruneian Malay film. The opening of the film includes an audio recording of a choir singing in the background which creates a religious setting and encourages Muslims to abide by the teachings of Islam for a better life. Also, Islamic elements can be identified from the film title *Gema Dari Menara* which translates to ‘Echoes from the Minaret’ or ‘Voice from the Minaret’. The title symbolises the calling of Islam through the representation of the call to prayer or *adhan* for Muslims from the minaret of a mosque. The *adhan* from the minaret of the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien mosque is also heard during the opening scene of the film. In addition to the *adhan*, the representation of Islam is further shown through several other symbolic images including the recurring images of mosques, the acts of praying (performing *Salah*) and performing the Hajj, as these are among the five pillars of Islam.

The plot also includes elements of Islamic teaching as seen from the contrasting behaviour of the main characters. The film is essentially a cautionary tale against secularisation in Bruneian society in which the notion of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* is strongly embodied. The plot revolves around a Bruneian Malay family of five, focusing on a family drama between three siblings: Azman, Nordin and Noriah with their parents, Haji Bahar and Che Timah, in supporting roles. GDM focuses on the narrative of Azman, who is a dutiful son and a good Muslim compared to his younger siblings, Nordin and Noriah, who are characterised negatively as transgressing against the Islamic teachings. Throughout the film, Azman is shown to be a devoted Muslim who also embraces modernity. However, his siblings perceive him as old-fashioned and resistant to change. The contrasting practices of Islamic ideology among the siblings creates conflicts between them. In addition, this film addresses social issues such as alcohol consumption, adultery and gambling to raise the issue of secularisation. In brief, the film tells a progressive narrative of the three leading characters which emphasises that every action has repercussions. Thus, all these aspects are employed to

spread Islamic teachings in support of the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei which was in response to the secularism among the local community then (Muhammad Hadi, 2017).

Gema Dari Menara and Education

The meaning of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong is first depicted in the education system upheld by the family of Haji Bakar. How the siblings were raised by different education systems results in the ways they embrace the Islamic teaching. Consequently, the discussion of education system in this section is carried out by comparing how the characters are educated.

GDM narrates the sibling relationship of the three main characters framed as the protagonist (Azman) and antagonists (Nordin and Noriah). These characters model good and bad characters of Brunei Malay and Islamic communities in Brunei and can be further linked by looking into the education background of each sibling. The main character of GDM, Azman, is a Brunei Malay man in his mid-20s to early 30s who works as a teacher at a local college in Bandar Town. Azman is framed as the 'ideal' son as he is respectful, polite, soft-spoken, and he holds onto the ideals of Brunei Malay culture and values. Despite being educated abroad, Azman shows that he has a strong will and faith as the result of Islamic teachings by his parents. This is evident as both parents claim that they have succeeded in inculcating the Malay cultures and Islamic teachings to Azman at the beginning and the end of the film. In this case, Azman also portrays an image acquiring the best of both worlds by receiving education abroad, but still retaining local values – a coveted characteristic of the youth of Brunei even today (Muhammad Hadi, 2019; Noorashid & McLellan, 2021).

As the eldest among the three siblings, Azman is labelled his father's *tangan kanan* (right hand) to educate his younger siblings in the teachings and morality of a good Muslim. It can be seen that Azman is patient, tolerant and able to conform. In short, Azman is portrayed as an obedient son and a devoted Muslim throughout the film. Azman represents the ideal characteristics of a good Muslim. Meanwhile, Nordin and Noriah play the roles of the middle son and the youngest child respectively. In contrast to their eldest brother, both characters are depicted negatively as they are inclined towards liberalism (adherence towards liberty and freedom in life and choices) and secularism. The two younger siblings serve as contrasting foils to the pious Muslim represented by Azman. Both Nordin and Noriah are young adults who are students, and Noriah eventually drops out of school. Here, the educational background is used to contrast Azman and his younger siblings and GDM attempts to demonstrate the manifestation of a Malay proverb '*yang baik dijadikan teladan, perkara yang buruk dijadikan sempadan*' (emulate the good and avoid the wrongdoings) in which education is portrayed as an influential element to one's character and decision making. As Wee (2021) mentioned, this is also a strategy used in GDM to rationalise the sacredness of Islamic and Malay principles through portraying religious prohibitions².

In addition to institutional education, childhood education from parents is seen as the core of Islamic da'wahism in GDM as the contrast between Azman and his siblings stem from how they were raised in the home. The different nurturing styles mould their characters into becoming different characters with contrasting personalities. GDM dictates that childhood education from parents is a pivotal component of one's character as one becomes an adult. This is showcased in the beginning of the film when Azman and his father, Haji Bahar, assume the lack of inculcating Islamic values during Nordin and Noriah's childhood years has made the younger siblings ignorant of Malay culture and Islamic teachings. This is followed

² Refer to Daniel Wee's *Justifying the Sacred Through the Secular: Evaluating Gema Dari Menara's arguments for religious prohibitions* in this special issue for further justification on how Islamic restrictions are portrayed in GDM as part of Islamic edification.

by the conflicting opinions between the parents as they compare the upbringing of their children:

Haji Bahar: *Dan adakah awak menafikan yang Azman telah berjaya membentuk hidupnya dengan sempurna?*

[And are you denying that Azman has successfully shaped his life?]

Che Timah: *Adakah Abang beranggapan Nordin dan Noriah sudah gagal untuk membentuk hidup mereka?*

[Are you implying that Nordin and Noriah have failed in shaping their lives?]

Haji Bahar: *Dengan tidak syak lagi kita mesti akui hal itu Timah dan perlu kita menyedari kerana selama ini kita telah mengabaikan didikan rohani dan ugama kepada mereka.*

[Absolutely, we ought to admit that, Timah, and be aware about it because all this time we've neglected spiritual and religious guidance for them]

(GDM, 00:15:45-00:16:05)

As mentioned previously, Azman was raised with strict Islamic teachings and values by his parents and this made him more aware of Islamic and Malay-cultured lifestyles, but he was able to adapt to modernity and progression whilst studying abroad. This suggests that Azman's parents had laid a strong foundation of Islamic values in his life that survived his educational background. In contrast, Nordin and Noriah's spiritual and religious education was "neglected" and they followed a more liberal ideology. These differences suggest the significance of parental guidance in defending against inappropriate foreign influences, building one's character while moulding personality, amid efforts to accept and adapt to modern developments of ideology and socialisation.

Another core value related to Islamic teachings on education in GDM is seeking knowledge for one's self-betterment. The film suggests that fundamental knowledge of Islamic teachings and principles must be understood by every Muslim in order to achieve perfection in life, while also embracing these principles as life guidance. Therefore, the essence of Islamic values in the film also invites the audience to continue seeking knowledge for self-improvement.

It is observed that Azman's character is seeking knowledge to better himself as he accepts Islam as his holistic life guide. This is possibly due to the strict teaching of Islamic knowledge by his parents. Nevertheless, Azman's aspiration to understand Islam continued even after his childhood years as he is shown to engage in several Islamic discussions with Hassan, an associate who also shows interest in Islam. While such scenes can be seen several times throughout the film, Azman also visited the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei to study more about Islamic laws (see Figure 1), attending Islamic talks and conventions, and is later seen assisting Hassan in disseminating Islamic posters in support of the national religious department. Through direct and indirect approaches in this creative production, the depiction of Azman as an exemplary character also urges the audience to seek knowledge continuously as encouraged in the following verses from the Al-Qur'an and Hadith:

Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.

(Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Mujadila, 58:11)

Allah makes the way to Jannah easy for him who treads the path
in search of knowledge.

(Hadith narrated by Muslim)

Here, the film promotes religious activities that are in line with its production by the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei. This also suggests that the film has embedded elements of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy or MIB as the national philosophy of Brunei) that highlight the importance of proper Islamic teachings in the everyday life of a Malay³, while abiding to the edification of Islam by the government, even though the MIB philosophy was only articulated officially after Brunei's independence in 1984. Depicting the efforts made by Azman and his undivided support for the religious institution was an implicit encouragement for the audience to seek relevant Islamic knowledge from the most reliable source in the country, as well as being up to date on the development of Islam and the religious institution. In this case, the Religious Affairs Department strategized an understanding that religious knowledge can only come from state-sanctioned authorities and must not be sought elsewhere. This suggests that the Islamic da'wahism in the film adheres to the philosophies of MIB, as well as showing the Religious Affairs Department's aim to utilise this creative production in disseminating knowledge and information about themselves as a religious institution, and setting itself up as a religious authority and source for all religious knowledge.



Figure 1. A scene showing Azman visiting the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei (1:13:17)

In contrast to Azman, Nordin and Noriah are shown to be nonchalant about learning Islam. They are unable to understand the meaning of Islam as explained by Azman and are often sceptical about the relevance of religion (Islam in particular) in the modern world. The two younger siblings refuse to seek advice from Azman due to their contrasting "*nilai tersendiri mengenai pengertian hidup*" [values about the meaning of life], which emphasizes their stubbornness. The contrastive characterisations between Azman and his siblings in their willingness to understand Islam are reflected in their different ideologies. Azman believes that Islam can assist human progression towards the betterment of humankind, but his siblings'

³ For further reading on this, refer to Zuliana Masri's *Malayness in Gema Dari Menara* (1968) included in this special issue.

resistance towards interpreting Islam makes them perceive Azman as old-fashioned and ignorant of modern culture.

Azman also believes that Islam is relevant across the generations and that it can withstand time, culture and practice, so he is able to understand the position of youth and religion while being rooted in the Malay culture. Nordin and Noriah do not share their older brother's sense of adaptability. This is shown by Noriah's decision to drop out of school because she believes that an education will not benefit her. This suggests that a formal education is also one of the channels supporting Islamic edification in the country. Besides their childhood upbringing, GDM also shows that Nordin and Noriah's ignorance of education, including formal Islamic teachings, has caused them to be influenced by secularism, practising a lifestyle without boundaries, rebelling against the Malay culture and societal norms, which ultimately leads to their tragic outcomes. Here, the contrast between the siblings shows the importance of understanding Islamic teaching. The central issue of understanding the relevance of religion has caused the main characters to act differently, framing their characterisations as binary opposites that lead to either good or bad consequences.

However, despite his portrayal as "*anak yang sempurna*" [a perfect child], there are instances where Azman shows himself as someone who is still lacking in Islamic knowledge. This complicates his image as the model child. For example, Azman raises questions about the acceptance of Islam in a time of progress and the prospects and effect of religion on the younger generation. He expresses his uncertainties to Hassan, thus complicating his character's "perfection". Furthermore, there are several scenes where Azman is not able to persuade his siblings to abide by the teachings of Islam, despite repeatedly lecturing them about the Golden Era of Islam and the significance of Islam to the Malay culture and lifestyle. This can be observed in a scene (Figure 2) where Nordin and Noriah challenge Azman to provide them with a simplified answer to "*apakah yang boleh diberikan oleh agama dalam hidup?*" [what can religion provide us in life?], but Azman's responses are still not taken seriously by the siblings. These recurring episodes suggest that Azman's character is not entirely successful in promoting Islamic teachings.



Figure 2. A scene in which the siblings debate the relevance of Islam in modernity (00:52:55)

Nevertheless, Azman's imperfections might be formulated to portray the inevitable flaws of human nature, especially when it comes to seeking knowledge and the meaning of life, in order to make Azman more relatable to the audience. In this case, Azman's flaws can be seen as a functional representation of humanity, providing an opportunity for the audience to ponder his characterisation. His flaws are justified as he is portrayed as a continuous seeker

of Islamic knowledge through his work and activities. Thus, Azman's comment that "*setiap orang harus menolong dirinya, keluarga dan masyarakatnya supaya seluruh manusia benar-benar mencapai kesempurnaan hidup yang bernilai*" (GDM, 00:19:47) [everyone should help themselves, their family and the community so that all humans can achieve a worthy, fulfilled life] is a reminder to himself and the audience. Azman's efforts in instilling Islamic values within himself, while encouraging the audience to make an example of his character in seeking knowledge not just for self-betterment, but also for the benefit of family, community and nation raises the possibility that part of being an ideal Muslim is also asking questions for one's betterment.

Gema Dari Menara and Social Interaction

In GDM, Azman only associates with people who share his interests such as Hassan, Samsiah and attendees at religious gatherings. Hassan is a religious officer at the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei, as well as being a peer who provides constant reminders about Islam and its practicalities to Azman. Samsiah is Azman's female companion who later becomes his wife. She encourages his aspirations to seek Islamic knowledge and support the edification of Islam by the religious department. Hassan and Samsiah enhance Azman's characterisation as an ideal man of goodwill in the film. This is shown through recurring scenes in which Azman, Hassan and Samsiah discuss Islamic principles and morality and their relevance in one's life, as they strive to have a better understanding of Islamic teachings.

Indeed, Hassan and Samsiah echo Azman's beliefs about seeking knowledge and the importance of childhood education. According to Hassan, a Muslim in a progressive world should strive for "*kemajuan untuk keharmonian rohani dan jasmani dan bukan hanya kemajuan tiruan sahaja*" (Hassan, GDM, 00:20:15) [the development of physical and spiritual and not just artificial progress], while Samsiah believes that "*keluarga perlu ikut campur dalam mendidik anak-anak dalam soal agama [kerana] tiada bimbingan yang kukuh selain dari agama*" (Samsiah, GDM, 00:35:22) [families also need to intervene in educating their children in matters of religion as there is no guidance stronger than religion].

It is observed that Azman is cautious in selecting his peers as he wants to avoid immorality. In the film, he rejects Zulkifli's invitation to go to a picnic at a beach where men and women socialise without boundaries. Although Azman's reluctant attitude towards random socialisation earns him the reputation of being too conservative amongst his siblings and their peers, the audience is meant to understand that Azman's decision is due to his choice to hold onto Islamic teachings and Malay cultural values.

Nordin and Noriah are portrayed to be more sociable than Azman, and like him, they befriend those who share a similar ideology to their liberal one. Nordin and Noriah's friends are presumably Muslims but are self-proclaimed paradigms of modern youth: versatile and eager to seize opportunities in life. In addition to these liberal friends, the character who has the most influence on Nordin and Noriah's social lifestyles is Zulkifli (Nordin's close friend and Noriah's love interest). Zulkifli expresses the belief that a young person should be able to socialise unreservedly and know how to celebrate the freedoms of life.

The relationship between Nordin, Noriah and Zulkifli further establishes their characterisations and attitudes as the antagonists. Their liberal attitudes and ignorance towards Islam lead them to alcohol consumption, gambling, breaches of trust and pre-marital sex, all of which are prohibited in Islam. These transgressions ultimately lead to their demise as Nordin is permanently injured due to a car accident caused by drunk driving after a night of gambling, while Noriah and Zulkifli are caught in the act of pre-marital fornication by religious officers and face imprisonment. Nordin and Noriah's fates clearly show the punishment for those who transgress against Islamic values as well as how Brunei legislates

through Islamic law. In this case, the essence of “*Nahi Mungkar*” (forbidding wrong) is clearly shown through the narrative of Nordin being involved in the accident and Noriah getting caught by officers, which is a way to caution the audience to avoid all that is prohibited in Islam.

In another scene, Nordin and Noriah flaunt their wealth in the film to keep their companions close, which suggests that their friends are more concerned with material possessions than spiritual or cultural values.

A number of scenes in GDM strongly suggest that religious guidance in one’s upbringing can affect how a person socialises, and how without proper guidance, can lead someone to fall into the trap of worldly pleasures and entertainment. Throughout the film, Noriah and Nordin socialise freely and without restraint, including during parties which feature music, alcohol and dancing. Ultimately Nordin and Noriah blame their mother for all their wrongdoings, and Che Timah finally admits her failure to nurture her children which caused them to distance themselves from Islam (Figure 3). This is further confirmed by the Islamic lecture entitled “*Pendidikan Islam Kepada Anak-Anak*” [Islamic Teachings To Children] shown in the film (GDM, 00:41:37) which is shown juxtaposed with Islamic sermons and school teachings on the same theme and issue, and discussed by Azman throughout the film.



Figure 3. Che Timah realises her failure to nurture Nordin and Noriah (GDM, 00:46:03)

The extent of peer influence is evident in the film’s denouement, when Nordin turns on Zulkifli. The scene suggests his recognition that the wrong friends may be the cause of one’s misfortunes (see Figure 4).

“Jangan kau halang aku Noriah, kerana dialah [menunding kepada Zulkifli] kau dipenjara dan kerana dialah aku jadi begini dan kerana dialah keluarga nama kita tercemar.”

[Don’t you try to stop me, Noriah, because of him [pointing to Zulkifli] you were sent to jail and because of him I ended up like this, and because of him, our family’s reputation is ruined]

(Nordin, GDM, 1:11:45)



Figure 4. Nordin blames Zulkifli for influencing them.

The choice of comrades also shapes each character's ideologies and actions, with specific consequences. Indeed, the effect of social interaction is the source of an interesting argument in GDM. For instance, Azman, Hassan and Samsiah's Islamic advocacy does not seem to appeal to transgressive characters like Nordin and Noriah. This is demonstrated in a scene where Nordin disturbs Azman and Hassan's discussion about the relevance of Islam in humanity by playing loud music, which causes Hassan to leave the space immediately. This scene shows Nordin's refusal to welcome a guest like Hassan due to their different ideologies. This rejection offers a perspective on how social interaction must offer a more appealing edification of Islamic knowledge to society, than the one-way lecture applied by Azman. The possibility of change, however, is embodied in the minor character of Samsiah, who is introduced as part of Nordin, Noriah and Zulkifli's social circle, but ends up socializing with Azman and Hassan as the story progresses. At the close of the film, Samsiah is married to Azman, thus manifesting the importance of choosing good friends.

Gema Dari Menara and Clothing

A vivid visualisation of embracing the Malay culture is shown in the contrasting attire between Azman and his siblings. During a confrontation between the siblings, Azman wears a *Cara Melayu* (a modest, traditional Brunei Malay clothing for males) while Nordin and Noriah wear a Western style suit and dress respectively (Figure 5). These clothes symbolize the difference between the siblings' relationship with Western culture.



Figure 5. Azman confronting his two siblings at Nordin's birthday gathering (00:30:31)

During the confrontation, Azman's presence at the Western-inspired birthday party signals his willingness to adapt to change even though he is a man of faith, while Nordin and Noriah respond by rejecting of the possible coexistence of religion and progression. Azman exhorts his siblings to consider that a celebratory event such as a birthday gathering can be adapted to Islamic culture and style, modelling this adaptation through his and his partner Samsiah's traditional attire.

Noriah and Samsiah's clothing also offers a commentary on Islamic modesty. Noriah's revealing attire is a hallmark of her transgressive ways, and her repentance is signalled through her donning the *baju kurung* and a headscarf after she has been punished (Figure 6). Conversely, Samsiah begins the film in a blouse and trousers as she socialises with Nordin and Noriah, and wears a *baju kurung* after she embraces Islamic thoughts and teachings.



Figure 6. Noriah is seen wearing *baju kurung* towards the end of the film

A number of scenes in GDM use the characters' clothing styles to exemplify the contrast between good and bad behaviour, modelling the essence of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar*. For instance, other characters – men and women – who attend Islamic seminars, classes and sermons in the film are seen wearing *cara Melayu* or *baju kurung*, portraying an idealised image of goodness to the audience (See Figure 7).



Figure 7. Men and women attending Islamic sermons and gatherings

This is in contrast to the characters who portray transgressive behaviours and lifestyles (drinking alcohol, drunk driving or committing adultery), who wear more revealing and Western-inspired clothing. This can be seen during the picnic at the beach (GDM, 00:17:35) and at Nordin's birthday gathering (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Nordin's friends wearing Western-inspired clothing at his birthday

More modest, culturally traditional clothing is thus a characteristic of “good” Muslim Malay characters, while more revealing and westernised clothing are characteristics of transgressive characters. This conflation of Westernisation with transgressiveness may be attributed to the common belief in the 1960s that Western thoughts and influences, known as the ‘yellow culture’, had a detrimental effect on the lifestyle of Malays and Muslims (Muhammad Hadi, 2017).

‘Amar Ma’ruf Nahi Mungkar’ in *Gema Dari Menara*

In the film, every wrongdoing committed by Nordin and Noriah is paid for accordingly in this life. As discussed, all the transgressions and sins shown in the film are prohibited in Islam. Nordin and Noriah's actions stemmed from their misunderstanding and ignorance about Islam, which is put forward as the best life guidance in GDM. Thus, the interpretation of worldly punishment is in accordance with the notion of retribution for the ignorant in Islam. However, there is an interesting turn to both Nordin and Noriah's characters towards the end of the film when both of them are seen to repent and return to Islam. This is shown through a symbolic interpretation of regret when Nordin hears an Al-Quran recital from the minaret of the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, and Noriah confesses her wrongdoings to her parents. Both characters seek forgiveness from their parents and Azman and are perceived to learn from their mistakes. The repentance allows GDM to offer a space for atonement and peace for wrongdoers, even as the core message invites righteousness and encourages viewers to avoid sin altogether.

These messages are derived from the Islamic requisite of ‘*Amar Ma’ruf Nahi Mungkar*’ as drawn from the following verse in the Al-Qur’an:

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.

(Al-Qur'an, Surah Ali 'Imran, 3:110)

This Quranic verse highlights the importance of having strong faith and belief in Allah SWT and Islamic teachings and encourages all human beings to both perform and invite others to good deeds (the principle of *Amar Ma'ruf* (enjoin good deeds)), while abstaining and preventing other people from bad deeds (the principle of *Nahi Mungkar* (committing bad deeds)) (Rehman & Askari, 2010). This principle encapsulates religious deeds within a vertical relation with God and social deeds through horizontal relations with human beings, in an attempt to live a prosperous life on earth and to receive final rewards in the afterlife (Hendy, 2017; Rahardjo, 2002). This sentiment, is traced throughout the contrasting narratives of the main characters in GDM, insinuating that this Islamic principle may be the central guideline for the production in formulating these characters and the plots.

Using this principle as a lens to understand the film, we can see that GDM's portrayal of education, social interaction and clothing invites the audience to learn Islam and to replicate the characteristics and lifestyle of an ideal Muslim through the exposition of the human paradigm. This is highlighted through the depiction of Azman as the ideal but still learning role model who practices *Amar Ma'ruf*, while depicting Nordin and Noriah's storylines as cautionary tales that represent the notion of *Nahi Mungkar*. GDM not only puts forward the Islamic principle as a pillar of religious edification through intrinsic elements in the film, but also through the production's aspiration in delivering morality messages to the audience. In this sense, GDM indeed follows the pursuit of an 'Islamic film' which refers to a work of art that carries the messages of belief, conviction and submission to Islamic teachings and values in an attempt to disseminate the principles of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* (Naim, 2010). As GDM was produced and funded by the Religious Affairs Department of Brunei, the film also focuses on the Islamic morality prescribed for Bruneian society in the 1960's.

The thematic analysis through the cause-and-effect principles of characterisations in GDM in the present study also shows that the edification of religious knowledge in the film may have been targeted exclusively at a Muslim audience. Several aspects in the film may not be easily interpreted by non-Muslims or a non-Malay audience. For instance, the idea of reaping the rewards in the afterlife over the present life is not foregrounded or explained in the film. Although this paper earlier claimed that GDM encourages replication of an ideal Muslim through the characterisation of Azman, one might think that Azman's benevolence throughout the film is rather futile as all of his compassion, charity and self-betterment are rewarded only moderately, as he is shown to live a similar life in the beginning of the film and towards the end. GDM's moderate treatment of Azman may be perceived by Muslim viewers to be sufficient. This is because Azman's unwavering belief in the Islamic principle of reward in the afterlife, enables his patience in this life. This is observed from his refusal to engage in worldly pleasures and entertainment opposed to Islamic teachings and values, highlighting the notion that he understands Islam is a religion that will reward every human's good deed and will punish every sin committed, while signifying life as a 'temporary assignment'. Additionally, although Azman is mistreated by both parents due to defamation by his siblings, he still forgives his parents and takes them in when they are in despair, as part of his responsibilities as a dutiful son. This suggests that Azman seeks his reward not on earth, but in the hereafter.

By analysing religious teachings through the lens of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar* to comprehend the distribution of rewards and punishment in GDM, it can be seen that the moral teaching here is to urge the audience to avoid wrongdoings in accordance with Islamic teachings to avoid negative repercussions in life. Meanwhile, the moderation of earthly rewards, exemplified by Azman's fate can be understood only by rationalising it with the knowledge that in Islam the ultimate reward is in the afterlife.

GDM thus functions as a reminder about Islamic teachings and their relevance to Muslims and the Malays in Brunei, through its didacticism of the Islamic requisites of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong. This helps us to understand Mana Sikana's (2014) claim that Malayness and Islamic values go hand in hand, and so the creative works in the Malay World should also be understood from Islamic perspectives. The attempts to contextualise and imbed Islamic religious elements in Brunei Malay society shown in the film, represent the acknowledgement of MIB principles in the nation, supported by government agencies including MORA. This can be understood as a way for the religious institution to communicate the religious essence of Islam and their own agentic role in the Sultanate, to Bruneians in general.

Conclusion

The Islamic da'wahism infused in the narrative of the main characters strongly adhere to the Islamic requisite of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar*, particularly in the aspects of childhood upbringing, education, social interaction and clothing. While the symbiotic representation of Malayness and Islam is prominent in the characters, it is also found that GDM as a *da'wah* film exclusively targets Muslims with prior knowledge of Islam.

Whilst GDM can be enjoyed as a form of entertainment, it can also be valued for its cultural purpose, particularly in comparison to contemporary creative productions which seek to portray religious belief and national aspiration in Brunei.

This study offers possibilities for future researchers to investigate the effectiveness of GDM as a religious teaching material for the current and next generation of Bruneians which can be accomplished using an audience reception approach. The use of GDM can also be compared with more contemporary methods of *da'wah* in the Sultanate and offers a rich site for historical and sociological study of religious education, the role of national agencies and institutions, and the creative industries in Brunei Darussalam.

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