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Gema Dari Menara

Director: Mohasbi Ahmad

Production Company: Department of Religious Affairs [MORA]

Main Cast: Pg Haji Abbas bin Pg Haji Besar [Brunei]

Aishah Mohd Noor [Brunei]

Harun Md. Dom [Malaysia]

Jamaliah Abu [Malaysia]

Release Date: 1968

Film Title: Gema Dari Menara [Echoes from the Minaret]

Genre: Family Drama/Religious

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[c/o: Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports]

English Subtitle: National Gallery Singapore

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Editorial

***Gema Dari Menara* (1968), Brunei's first feature film**

Kathrina Mohd Daud
Universiti Brunei Darussalam

The film was a revelation to me because I was not aware of any visual record of such a culture in pre-independence Brunei. Until I saw the film, my impressions of Bruneian culture came mostly from hearsay and oral history [...] to put it bluntly, Gema Dari Menara is not a very good film at all, but is nonetheless a time capsule of Brunei's lost pop history.

Gema Dari Menara/Echoes from the Minaret: A Conversation with Mervin Espina about the Lost Cinema of Brunei (Espina, 2013: 70)

Gema Dari Menara (Echoes from the Minaret), Brunei's first feature film, was originally screened on 23 October 1968 at the New Boon Pang Theatre to popular reception. In 2014, it was re-screened at a lecture theatre in The Core, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), through the efforts and cooperation of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UBD and FITREE (*Persatuan Filem dan Teater Evolusi*/Film and Theatre Evolution Association). According to Dato Paduka Haji Mahmud bin Haji Bakyr, a former Director at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (National Language and Literature Bureau), this 2014 screening sparked a new nostalgia for the 1968 film (2018:5). This culminated in a reunion between the film's cast and crew in August 2018, followed by a celebration of the film's 50th anniversary on 23 October 2018. This celebration was a collaborative effort between the Malay Language and Linguistics and Malay Literature programmes at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences UBD, FITREE and the cast of *Gema Dari Menara*, and supported by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam.

Commissioned by the then Religious Affairs Department (now the Ministry of Religious Affairs or MORA) as a means of *da'wah* (religious propagation), and with a script written by Dato Paduka Ustaz Awang Haji Abdul Saman bin Kahar, *Gema Dari Menara* was produced in cooperation with Filem Negara Malaysia in 1968 and featured Bruneian and Malaysian actors in the title roles. It would be 45 years before another Bruneian feature film would be produced and screened¹ (Regalblue Productions' *Ada Apa Dengan Rina* in 2013), although some telefilms (films produced for television) were made in the interim period² after the establishment of Radio

¹ In this, the development of the film industry ran parallel with that of the literary arts. The first Bruneian novel, *Mahkota Berdarah* by Yura Halim, was penned in 1951 and followed by the 1952 *Tunangan Pemimpin Bangsa*. This was followed 9 years later by Mohd Salleh Abd. Latif's *Garis Cerah Ufuk Senja* in 1968, followed by another 12-year silence until the same author's *Gegaran Semusim* in 1980.

² In an exploratory study of Bruneian film development, Izni Azrein notes that 7 films were made between 1952-1972. Of these 7 films, 6 were documentaries covering cultural, religious and national themes and events such as

Televisyen Brunei in 1975. From 2013-2020, an additional 14 Bruneian films have been made (Liu, 2021: 218), with 4 of these having been screened internationally³.

According to Espina, newspaper reports show that the initial premiere of *Gema Dari Menara* in 1968 was sold out, and that subsequent screenings in 1968 and 1969 were well-attended (2013: 66-67). Chin and Liu (2018) note that the 50th anniversary screenings of the film in 2018 were also sold out “through pre-purchased tickets without any promotion effort” (48). At least part of the pleasure and interest in the film both in 1968 and during the screenings in 2014 and 2018 came from the recognition of family and friends (Espina, 2013: 67), especially as several of the actors were at the time or have since become “respected, high ranking officials” (2013:68) and otherwise well-known members of the community⁴.

The film itself is a didactic family drama that has the agenda of addressing the social ills of the day, and in so doing, documents the social milieu of a nation newly grappling with a clash of social values amongst its youth between religion and modernization (Haji Mahmud, 2018: 6). This “clash of social values” is manifested through the three children of Haji Bahar (played by Abu Bakar bin Ahmad) and Che Timah (played by Pengiran Umi binti Pengiran Idrus). Azman (played by Pengiran Haji Abbas bin Pengiran Haji Besar), the dutiful, religious son, represents a way to reconcile modernization with Islamic values and norms; his siblings, Noriah and Nordin (played by Jamaliah Abu and Harun Md Dom respectively), represent the evils of embracing “modern elements” unreservedly. In classic didactic fashion, Noriah and Nordin’s transgressive behaviour, which includes the religiously prohibited practices of drinking, gambling, excessive partying and pre-marital sex, leads to punishment and exile, after which they repent and are accepted back into the family fold.

Despite its status as Brunei’s first feature film, and the generally warm reception of audiences, it can be said that the general public was mostly unaware of *Gema Dari Menara* until its’ rescreening in 2014 and the subsequent efforts by FITREE and the Malay studies programme at UBD to raise its profile. The scriptwriter, Haji Abdul Saman noted in 2018 that the overall reception to the film has been lukewarm – neither critically reviled nor lauded (4). This general indifference to the film has until recently been reflected in academic fields. Perhaps the most well-known and accessible scholarship specifically of *Gema Dari Menara* to date comes from Mervin Espina’s conversation with Ben Slater in a 2013 issue of the Singaporean *Cinematheque Quarterly*, which has been referenced numerous times both in this introduction and in the essays in this special issue. In the interview, which comprises an introductory history to Bruneian cinema in general and to *Gema Dari Menara* in particular, Espina notes that the film “has very little private and public documentation” (2013: 72) and that it was the photocopy of a chapter on Bruneian cinema in *The*

the coronation of Paduka Seri Begawan, and a visit from the Queen of England. *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was the only non-documentary film made during this period.

³ While these feature films have been limited in their box office success both domestically and internationally (Liu, 2021: 219), observers and scholars of the Bruneian film industry, including Espina (2013), Izni Azrein (2020) and Liu (2021), have noted the role of digital technologies in Bruneian filmmaking, citing a robust online culture on YouTube and other platforms where short films, music videos, documentaries, comedy skits and other media are circulated and shared.

⁴ In a conversation with Harlif Hj Mohamad and Nurain Abdullah in 2018, they anecdotally noted that one of the most popularly recognized individuals during screenings was Pengiran Umi binti Pengiran Idrus, who was a school principal, and played the mother Che Timah, in the film.

Films of ASEAN (2000), produced by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, that initially sparked his own interest in this mostly forgotten film. At the end of the conversation, Espina mentions the recent (2013) release of a comedy, *Ada Apa Dengan Rina* as the first Bruneian feature film in a while (74).

Unbeknownst to Espina, Harlif Hj Mohamad and Nurain Abdullah of Regalblue Productions, the production company responsible for *Ada Apa Dengan Rina*, were also at the same time looking more seriously into *Gema Dari Menara*. Harlif had previously heard about the film during his time as a cameraman at Radio Televisyen Brunei, but had mostly forgotten about it until he, with Nurain, began talking to numerous industry veterans on the processes involved in bringing *Ada Apa Dengan Rina* to local cinemas in 2012-2013. During these conversations, *Gema Dari Menara* was mentioned repeatedly, but there was always some confusion about its status and existence, including whether it had previously been banned from being aired on TV. It was these conversations, as well as doing the press circuit for *Ada Apa Dengan Rina*, which Harlif and Nurain suspected was erroneously being called Brunei's first feature film, which motivated them to find out more about *Gema Dari Menara*. In November 2013, *Ada Apa Dengan Rina* was invited to a film festival in Mindanao, and it was there that Harlif and Nurain met Espina. One thing led to another, and in 2014 it became FITREE's goal, headed by Harlif as President, to clear the confusion surrounding *Gema Dari Menara*, and return it to the screen and to the annals of Brunei's film history. On 19 October 2014, after communications with the Ministry of Home Affairs, the then chairman of RTB, and reaching out through their networks to anyone who might have been involved with the film in 1968, *Gema Dari Menara* was successfully screened at The Core, UBD.

Since then, there has been renewed interest in the film amongst the general public and scholars. Espina (2013), Harlif and Nurain (2018, personal communications) and Liu (2021) refer to the film as a "time capsule" of Bruneian culture and pop history, and indeed the film provides a rare and therefore revelatory glimpse at the sights and sounds of 1960s Brunei, from dress to language to ideology, and including the on-screen shots of the then-prevalent, religiously prohibited practices of cock-fighting, alcohol consumption and gambling, amongst others. Apart from the social aspect, the physical landscape also offers a valuable cinematic perspective of iconic landmarks and spaces such as the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin mosque, Kampung Ayer, the capital city, oil fields, highways and what Chin and Liu (2018) call the "traditional kampong landscape" (40). The significance of this film is manifold – it is an important piece of cultural history, and offers many insights into a pre-independence period during which a visible and widespread negotiation between the changes wrought by technology and globalization and a desire to propagate cultural and religious values is ongoing.

This special issue, which brings together the first collection of critical essays on *Gema Dari Menara*, amply demonstrates the significance of this film for any scholars of Bruneian history, culture, media and identity. The essays in this collection range from discussions of national identity construction and popular culture, to a comparative study of language use via signs in the film to the present-day, to an evaluation of the construction of religious prohibitions, and the use of modern technologies in the film, amongst others. While this collection in no way constitutes comprehensive scholarship of the film, it is hoped that it opens up conversations for further study and research on a film whose significance continues to be relevant today.

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Particular appreciation and acknowledgement must go out also to Regalblue Production, who provided the scholars in this issue with access to a digital screener of the film with English subtitles for research purposes. Recognition must go to Harlif Hj Mohamad and Nurain Abdullah of Regalblue Productions, who through their work with FITREE and with Mervin Espina have been instrumental in bringing *Gema Dari Menara* to Bruneian audiences in the 21st century. I am grateful for their generosity with their time and conversation when this special issue was still being conceptualized and since.

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Justifying the Sacred through the Secular: Evaluating *Gema Dari Menara*'s Arguments for Religious Prohibitions

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze and evaluate the arguments provided in *Gema Dari Menara* that aim to justify Islamic prohibitions. The first part of this paper will attempt to indicate that the arguments concerning Islam's prohibition of certain activities are surprisingly secular in their justification, in the sense that their reasoning rests on mundane empirical considerations rather than lofty theological exhortations. For instance, pre-marital sex must be prohibited because it would "ruin one's personality and community", Bruneians should not gamble because people who do so "forget their own responsibilities", and alcohol should not be consumed because it can "ruin a sound mind and one's personality". These justifications do not appeal to the divine but instead refer to phenomena that can be observed, measured, and quantified. The second part of this paper will consider the implications of trying to justify absolute religious prohibitions through secular considerations. It will be argued that in doing so the film opens itself to empirical queries that must be addressed for the film to have its desired effect. This paper ultimately draws attention to some of the challenges facing religious apologetics as the social sciences gain prominence.

Introduction

The primary intention behind *Gema Dari Menara* is made clear at the beginning of the film. As the then Head of the Department of Religious Affairs, P. M. Yusuf states, the film:

is part of the government's efforts through the Department of Religious Affairs to give awareness for the Muslim community in Brunei particularly on the importance of holding on to the teaching of Allah in our daily lives.

This point is reiterated by another official at the start of the movie:

Thus, the film *Gema Dari Menara* was produced solely as a measure to explain to the Muslim community about the benefits and functions for those who adhere to the religion and the losses as well as danger to those who ignore the teachings of Allah SWT. Through this film, it is our intention to call all Muslims to uphold and practice the teachings of religion.

In pursuit of this goal, the film attempts to convince Muslims to remain steadfast in the Islamic faith not just through the cautionary tales of Nordin and Noriah, but also through addressing concerns and queries about Islam. Such topics include the rationale for Islam forbidding certain activities, the compatibility of Islamic beliefs with Westernized ways of life, whether Islam is outdated, and how religion can be beneficial to societal harmony.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the film's attempts to justify Islam's prohibition of gambling, consumption of alcohol, and *zinā*. The plan of this paper is as follows. First, I shall present the relevant parts of the film that supply justifications for Islam's prohibitions. Next, I shall provide a breakdown of these arguments and point out how its premises are secular and empirical in nature. In the following two sections I shall evaluate the film's premises and show how they are

made precarious precisely because they are secular and empirical. In the final section I shall consider two potential objections and give my replies to them.

I wish to clarify at the start that this paper is not meant as an attack on Islam's restrictions or on the desire to supply religious guidance through the medium of film. Rather, this paper should be construed as an attempt to show how arguments for religious claims might intersect with secular reasoning and the challenges this entails so that future collaborations between religious scholars and filmmakers are better equipped to reach inquisitive minds.

The purpose of Islam's restrictions

A recurring theme throughout *Gema Dari Menara* concerns the perception that Islam's prohibitions are unnecessary hindrances. For example, Azman laments that "there are still many people who see religion as an obstacle in their lives. They say Islam has too many restrictions" and that "some people are mad when they get punished for doing things that are forbidden by Islam". Similarly, Hassan worries "that confusion over the purposes of religion may lead to disregard of God's orders and restrictions."

In response to this worry, the film's protagonists point out that Islam's restrictions are for humanity's benefit. For instance, when Nordin confronts Azman by asking "Tell me, what can religion give us in life?" Azman responds that

It is Islam that maintains spiritual and physical human perfection. Do you think that the order and prohibition of Islam is devoid of any good purpose? And Islam forbids us to do evil things for our own good. This is where you are wrong, Nordin. You see the orders and restrictions as obstacles in life.

Along the same lines, Hassan states that "The command and prohibition of Islam is to preserve the perfection of human beings as whole. This should really be understood by everyone" and "religion is intended to safeguard the well-being of fellow human beings."

Given that the film intends its viewers to perceive Islam's prohibitions as beneficial to the well-being humanity, it would be helpful to specify exactly what are these benefits. The film does this by addressing three prohibitions: gambling, consumption of alcohol, and *zinā* (*zinā* refers to sexual intercourse committed by a man and a woman who are not married to each other and as such includes both adultery and fornication).

The film's explanations for Islam's prohibition of gambling and alcohol are supplied during site visits organized by the Department of Religious Affairs. In these scenes, a speaker addresses a crowd and explains why these prohibitions must be upheld. Regarding gambling, the speaker informs us that:

Gambling can ruin one's character. People are willing to commit robberies to get money for gambling bets. Gambling often brings poverty and misfortune. Gambling also makes people forget their duty to themselves. Gambling even makes people forget their responsibility to God who created them. A peaceful and happy life always turns into frustration, suffering, and chaos. To avoid these dangers, Islam forbids gambling.

On the consumption of alcohol, the speaker tells us that:

Alcohol can ruin a sound mind. And it can ruin sanity. Alcohol also ruins one's character. Alcohol can make people forget about the responsibilities towards God. When one has forgotten grace and blessing of God and lost his sanity, he has lost his dignity as a human being and all kinds of bad things can happen. So, to avoid these dangers, Islam has forbidden alcohol.

The film's rationale for the prohibition of pre-marital sex is provided in a scene taking place in court where Noriah and Zulkifli are being sentenced for the crime of *zinā* (it is implied that they have engaged in fornication). As the judge explains,

Zinā is very much condemned in Islam because such acts are not beneficial and can even ruin one's character and community. Therefore, people who are here today are required to distance yourselves from any act that is prohibited by Allah's law.

Analyzing the three arguments

For the sake of clarity, we can set out the three arguments provided by the film as to why gambling, alcohol, and *zinā* should be prohibited.

The argument for prohibition of gambling goes as follows:

- (G1) Gambling can ruin one's character.
- (G2) Gambling often brings poverty and misfortune.
- (G3) Gambling causes people to forget their duties to themselves.
- (G4) Gambling causes people to forget their duties to God.
- (G5) Gambling always turns a peaceful and happy life into frustration, suffering, and chaos.
- (G6) Therefore, gambling should be prohibited.

The argument for prohibition of alcohol consumption goes as follows:

- (A1) Alcohol can ruin a sound mind and sanity.
- (A2) Alcohol can ruin one's character.
- (A3) Alcohol causes people to forget their responsibilities towards God.
- (A4) Therefore, consumption of alcohol should be prohibited.

The argument for prohibition of *zinā* goes as follows:

- (D1) *Zinā* can ruin one's character.
- (D2) *Zinā* can ruin one's community.
- (D3) *Zinā* is not beneficial.
- (D4) Therefore, *zinā* should be prohibited.

There are two things worth noting about these three arguments. First, that each of these three arguments are attempts to justify the prohibition of an activity that is otherwise legal and regulated by law in many other countries. The second thing to notice is that most of the premises (with the exception of G4 and A3) are secular, in the sense that their truth is verifiable by secular reasoning rather than by appealing to faith or theology.

To help explain this distinction between secular and theological premises, consider G4 and A3, which together claim that gambling and alcohol causes people to forget their duties or responsibilities towards God. These are theological premises, since to verify the truth of these claims requires answering the question ‘What are our responsibilities towards God?’ Additionally, to assess whether these premises justify the conclusion that certain activities should be prohibited requires answering questions such as ‘What are the ramifications of our relationship with God if we neglect our responsibilities to Him?’ These questions pertain to the nature of God, what He requires from us, our relationship with Him, and what He has revealed to us through divine revelation. In short, they pertain to theology.

Having made this distinction between theological and secular premises, we can see that the remaining premises do not require theological understanding to verify their truth or to assess how well they support their conclusions. To see how these other premises are secular, consider a premise that all three arguments share, namely the premise that these activities can ruin a person’s character (G1, A2, D1). While gambling, alcohol consumption, and extra-marital sex can be identified and quantified, is character something identifiable through secular means?

Character and virtue

Let us start with some background. The notion that we have a duty to cultivate positive character traits has a rich history. It can be traced back to ancient Greeks thinkers such as Plato who called upon humans to seek wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice, to Hinduism’s advocacy of nonviolence, truth, purity, and self-control, and to Confucius who encouraged people to adopt courtesy, generosity, honesty, persistence, and kindness (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, p. 147). These laudable character traits can be called virtues, and a virtue can be defined in general as

a disposition to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing.

Moreover, virtuous activity involves choosing virtue for itself and in light of some justifiable life plan. (Yearley, 1990, p. 13)

The fact that diverse ancient world cultures have been able to identify and prescribe traits of good character already suggests that the ability to recognize and classify virtues is not exclusive to any particular culture or faith. This ability has been further honed in modern times, where in the effort to conduct empirical research on strengths of character, psychologists have identified the following core set of virtues that are acknowledged as important across all human societies (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005):

- wisdom and knowledge—cognitive strengths entailing the acquisition and use of knowledge
- courage—emotional strengths involving the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
- humanity—interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others

- justice—civic strengths underlying healthy community life
- temperance—strengths protecting against excess
- transcendence—strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

Having identified this core set of virtues, these researchers embarked on measuring character strengths corresponding to these virtues:

To date, we have devised and evaluated (a) focus groups to flesh out the everyday meanings of character strengths among different groups; (b) self-report questionnaires suitable for adults and young people; (c) structured interviews to identify what we call signature strengths; (d) informant reports of how target individuals rise to the occasion (or not) with appropriate strengths of character (e.g., hope when encountering setbacks); (e) a content analysis procedure for assessing character strengths from unstructured descriptions of self and others; (f) strategies for scoring positive traits from archived material like obituaries; and (g) case studies of nominated paragons of specific strengths. (Peterson & Park, 2012, p. 7)

Furthermore, these different methods of measurement show promising reliability and validity:

We have successfully established the internal consistency of our questionnaire measures and their test—retest stability over several months. We have investigated their validity with the known-groups procedure and more generally by mapping out their correlates. (Peterson & Park, 2012, p. 7)

The purpose of this account has been to convince the reader that good character can be identified and measured without recourse to theology. In other words, whether and to what extent someone possesses the virtues of, e.g., humanity or temperance can be determined without answering questions involving the nature of humanity's relationship with the divine or what God has decreed through revelation. This is of course not to claim that theology has nothing to say about virtue, nor that religiosity has nothing to do with being virtuous. After all, these researchers acknowledge that the core virtue of transcendence includes religiousness which they characterize as having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life (Peterson & Park, 2012, p. 6). Does this imply that theology is necessary to make sense of the virtue of transcendence? Not quite, for there is an appreciable difference between the psychologist's questionnaire that asks, 'Do you think God has a plan for you?' and the endeavor to answer the question 'What is God's plan for you?' The former is an attempt to find out what people think through secular and empiricalⁱ methods while the latter is a theological and philosophical query. To be clear, the claim here is merely that good character can be identified and quantified without resorting to theology.

The upshot of showing that good character can be measured without theology is as follows. *Gema Dari Menara* has claimed that there is a causal connection between two kinds of observable and quantifiable phenomena: gambling, extra-marital sex, and alcohol consumption on the one

hand, and the decline of virtues on the other. As a result, the film opens itself to the following secular and empirical query:

- (Q1) Does the film provide any evidential support for believing that there is a causal connection or at least a correlation between gambling, extra-marital sex, and alcohol consumption on the one hand, and the decline of virtues on the other?

Unfortunately, beyond what can be gleaned from the vignettes accompanying the site visit scenes, the film is reticent in addressing this question. Therefore, it seems we must conclude that premises G1, A2, and D1 are insufficiently justified by the film.

Communal well-being

Let us now move on to examine the remaining set of premises:

- (A1) Alcohol can ruin a sound mind and sanity.
- (G2) Gambling often brings poverty and misfortune.
- (G3) Gambling causes people to forget their duties to themselves
- (G5) Gambling always turns a peaceful and happy life into frustration, suffering, and chaos.
- (D1) *Zinā* can ruin one's community

Taken together, these five premises propose that performing certain actions forbidden by Islam will produce deleterious effects on the well-being and development of a community. This causal relationship is further emphasized in a scene where a speaker encourages her audience to raise children who will adhere to religious guidance, for the sake of avoiding the destruction of society:

Parents need to provide religious education to their children. This is because the causes of all the adverse events among our society are due to most of our society members being unable to provide religious guidance during their childhood. Parents should be aware that without holding onto religious guidance, one can be easily influenced by bad elements and will forge to do things that are condemned by God and will destroy society.

To be sure, the five premises above relate to the well-being and development of a community. For instance, poverty and misfortune are negative indicators of standards of living, while neglect of duties is a manifestation of hindered human development, and frustration, suffering, and chaos are signs of poor life satisfaction. Additionally, the ruining of sound minds and sanity negatively affect all the indicators just listed. Standards of living, human development, and life satisfaction are all indicators of well-being and human development. So now we ought to ask, are there metrics for a community's well-being and development that can help us assess these five premises?

The answer is yes, and a prime example of measuring well-being is provided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which examines eleven dimensions of life such as income and wealth, health status, education and skills, subjective well-

being, social connections, and work-life balance (OECD, 2017). So, given that well-being is quantifiable in principle, the following secular and empirical questions present themselves:

- (Q2) Does the film provide any evidential support for believing that there is a causal connection or at least a correlation between the legalization of gambling, alcohol consumption, and extra-marital sex in a society with that society having poor well-being?
- (Q3) Do Muslim societies have higher well-being than non-Muslim societies?

The answer to question 2 is unfortunately, no. Similar to its previous claims on the ruining of character, the film chooses not to provide any statistics or case studies to help convince its viewers that there is a correlation between allowing these activities to take place and the degradation of societal well-being. Consequently, it seems we must conclude that premises A1, G2, G3, G5 and D1 are also insufficiently justified by the film.

Question 3 is especially pertinent given the film's insistence that society will crumble if it allows the activities forbidden by God. Taking the film at its word, we would therefore expect countries—especially ones with non-religious majorities—that legalize alcohol, gambling, and adultery to have the least amount of well-being. Conversely, we should also expect Muslim countries to be at the top of the rankings.

To enable ease of comparison, we can turn to the Human Development Index (HDI) created by the United Nations Development Programme. The HDI is intended to measure three key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living ("Human Development Index," n.d.). Notably, these three dimensions overlap with some of the indicators of well-being in the OECD index, and thus the HDI can be considered as a proxy for measuring a nation's well-beingⁱⁱ or at least its level of human development. Another reason for using HDI over the OECD index is that the HDI ranks 189 countries including Brunei, but the OECD only measures 41 countries and does not include Brunei. Finally, given the large number of indicators used in the OECD index, a definitive ranking of countries is especially difficult due to the number of different possible sets of weighted indicators (Lorenz, Brauer, & Lorenz, 2017).

In the latest HDI rankings at the time of writing ("2018 Statistical Update," 2018), the top ten countries in order are Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Ireland, Germany, Iceland, Hong Kong, Sweden, Singapore and the Netherlands. To help us determine how religious their populations are, we can turn to a survey by WIN/ Gallup International that explored the religious beliefs of over 66 000 people in 68 countries across the world. Among the questions asked by the survey was whether an individual would say that they are a) a religious person, b) not a religious person, c) a convinced atheist, or d) do not know/ no response. Here are the breakdowns of responses for these countries except for three that did not participate, namely Switzerland, Singapore, and the Netherlands (*Religion prevails in the world*, 2017, pp. 7–8):

Country	A religious person	Not a religious person	A convinced atheist	Do not know / no response
Norway	30%	50%	12%	8%
Australia	31%	50%	13%	7%
Ireland	40%	47%	9%	4%
Germany	34%	46%	14%	6%
Iceland	46%	32%	17%	5%
Hong Kong	33%	33%	30%	3%
Sweden	22%	55%	18%	5%

As seen from this table, in all seven countries the number of people who identified as religious were less than the number of people who identified as the opposite (i.e., either as non-religious or as convinced atheists). Moreover, all the countries in the top ten of the HDI rankings have legalized gambling and alcohol (subject to regulations and age limits), and do not criminalize adultery (although it may still be a legal ground for divorce).

What about Islamic countries and their HDI rankings? While attempting to identify a country as Islamic may not be straightforward, we can use membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as a guide. The highest ranking OIC country on the HDI index is the United Arab Emirates at number 34, followed by Qatar at number 37, and then Brunei at number 39ⁱⁱⁱ.

The takeaway from this comparison is as follows. Contrary to the film's insistence that societal well-being and development is intimately linked with following the dictates of Islam, the data indicates that there is no such correlation. Instead, we find that the countries with the highest amounts of human development have populations that are mostly non-religious and institute laws that do not conform to Islamic prohibitions. To put things another way, it appears that a religious majority is neither necessary for well-being and human development (due to the countries with the highest HDIs being mostly non-religious), nor is it sufficient (due to the fact that six of the ten countries with the lowest HDIs are members of the OIC, i.e., Niger, Chad, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mozambique). To be clear, none of this implies that high well-being correlates with irreligious populations. Rather, the point here is merely that there is no clear correlation between well-being and religiosity as the film tries to claim.

Replies to potential objections

Let us now look at two potential objections to the analyses provided so far. To start, one might say that the evaluation of some of the premises have been unfair due to interpreting them as making general claims when they are in fact meant to be specific. For instance, perhaps

(A1) Alcohol can ruin a sound mind and sanity

is not intended to be understood as implying that

- (A1[^]) If we were to compare two similar groups of people, where the only major difference is that in one group alcohol is prohibited and that in the other it is allowed, we would find that after some time the group where alcohol is allowed will have more cases of mental illness than the group where it is prohibited.

Rather, the suggestion here is that we should interpret (A1) as:

- (A1*) There has been at least one specific case where someone has developed a mental illness due in part to the consumption of alcohol

Obviously, (A1*) is easier to support compared to (A1[^]). Whereas (A1[^]) requires case studies or statistics, (A1*) can just rely on common knowledge.

So does interpreting (A1) as (A1*) help strengthen the argument for banning the consumption of alcohol? To see why it does not, consider the following analogous argument:

- (C1) There has been at least one specific case where someone's life has ended due in part to the use of a car.
- (C2) Therefore, the use of cars should be prohibited.

Most people would find this argument highly dubious for obvious reasons. Firstly, there needs to be an explanation for why one individual's death or ruin due to an activity justifies a ban on the activity for the rest of society. Secondly, the argument neglects to consider regulation of the activity as an alternative to prohibition to lessen its dangers. Thirdly, there needs to be a consideration of the advantages of permitting the activity and a justification for why the disadvantages of the activity outweigh them. Thus, unless these concerns are addressed, it seems that interpreting the premises of the arguments given by the film as specific rather than general does not necessarily put them in a better position to withstand criticism.

The second potential objection to this paper is that while it has focused on secular measures of well-being and human development such as the HDI, perhaps Islamic countries should instead prioritize indexes that take into account their non-secular developmental goals and well-being.

To be sure, indexes such as an Islamic Human Development Index (I-HDI) have been proposed (Anto, 2013). One of the unique features of the I-HDI is that it possesses a 'Faith-Index', which takes into account data such as daily mosque visitors per 1000 Muslim population, fasting per 1000 Muslim population, the ratio of actual *zakah* to expected *zakah*, and the percentage of the Muslim population who have performed the Hajj pilgrimage.

Does the proposal to use the I-HDI instead of the HDI help the film's arguments? The first thing to note is that one of the key performance indicators of Brunei's latest National Development Plan, *Wawasan 2035*, is to be among the top ten nations in the world as measured by the HDI ("FAQ National Development Plan," n.d.). Of course, this does not imply that a Muslim country cannot seek to achieve a high rank on both the HDI and I-HDI. However, one concern that might be raised is that while the HDI and I-HDI share some indexes, some indexes are unique to the I-HDI. As a result, in a situation where decisions on allocating resources need to be made, one index may need to be prioritized at the expense of the other.

Another general concern with prioritizing a religion-focused index is that it is tension with some claims from the film. During one of the site visit scenes, a speaker tells her audience that "I believe that the Muslim community could also be developed on par with other communities when

the Muslim community follows the teachings of God.” Taking this claim at face value, it implies that the film is confident that a Muslim community can achieve similar if not better levels of development than non-Muslim communities. But of course, in order prove this claim it must be the case that Muslim and non-Muslim communities are evaluated by an index that measures shared developmental goals, rather than by a religious index that measures goals not present in non-Muslim communities. Thus, the proposal to prioritize a religious index over a secular one faces considerable difficulties.

Summary and conclusion

One of the primary aims of *Gema Dari Menara* is to convince its viewers that Islamic restrictions are beneficial. To this end, the film deploys three arguments concerning alcohol consumption, gambling, and *zinā*. This paper has analyzed these three arguments and found that their secular premises fall into two general categories. The first is that if these activities are allowed, then peoples’ characters will be ruined, and the second is that if these activities are permitted, then societal well-being and development will be severely compromised.

However, this paper has also shown that these premises are secular and empirical, and as a result the film opens itself to queries that need to be answered in the positive for the sake of its arguments. These queries were:

- (Q1) Does the film provide any evidential support for believing that there is a causal connection or at least a correlation between gambling, extra-marital sex, and alcohol consumption on the one hand, and the decline of virtues on the other?
- (Q2) Does the film provide any evidential support for believing that there is a causal connection or at least a correlation between the legalization of gambling, alcohol consumption, and extra-marital sex in a society with that society having poor well-being?
- (Q3) Do Muslim societies have higher well-being than non-Muslim societies?

This paper has indicated that the answers to these three questions are negative. Consequently, it becomes difficult to assert that the film provides a strong case for believing that Islamic restrictions are beneficial.

However, it should be reiterated that this paper has only focused on the secular premises of the film’s arguments and does not address its theological premises G4 and A3. It is therefore entirely possible that the religious prohibitions advocated by the film be justified on theological grounds instead. That being said, I do not wish to claim that arguments pertaining to religion should avoid using secular or empirical premises and solely rely on theological justifications. In fact, quite the opposite—I encourage religious thinkers to support their arguments with such premises so that non-religious persons and those ‘on the fence’ about religion can find such arguments persuasive as well. The purpose of this paper is merely to constructively indicate that such attempts ought to be done with requisite care and attentiveness.

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ⁱ To be clear, I am not proposing that ‘secular’ and ‘empirical’ are co-extensive with each other. For instance, it might be granted that there can be statements that are empirically testable and yet make use of non-secular concepts, e.g., ‘I saw an angel in my living room.’

ⁱⁱ The proposal to use HDI as a measure of well-being has its detractors and supporters. For further discussion, see (Yang, 2018) and (Gallardo, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ What might be interesting to note is that while the U.A.E., Qatar, and Brunei share encompassing bans on gambling and *zinā*, the policies of the U.A.E. and Qatar on alcohol consumption are relatively more relaxed. In comparison with Brunei, where the sale of alcohol is prohibited, the U.A.E. and Qatar allow alcohol to be sold in licensed hotel restaurants and bars to non-Muslims (“Drinking alcohol in UAE: 7 things you must know to avoid jail,” 2018; “Living in Doha Qatar,” n.d.). This combined with the fact that the U.A.E. and Qatar have higher HDIs than Brunei raises further questions regarding the film’s insistence that human development is intimately linked with following the dictates of Islam.

The Negotiation between the Predominated Sacredness and Secular Popular Culture in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

In retrospectives on Brunei's first feature film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), commentators have tended to focus on either its historical representation of Brunei's booming post-curfew years in the late 1960s as 'a time capsule of Brunei's lost pop history', or the film's propagandistic nature for *Da'wah* (religious propagation). In this paper, however, I will concentrate my observations on the aesthetic values of the film itself, including the narrative structure, plot design, camerawork, characterisation and character relationships, as well as the resulting artistic effects manifested by these production elements as a whole.

Putting all the propagandistic elements aside, I would like to argue that *Gema Dari Menara*, as a family melodrama, is carefully constructed and propelled by the above-mentioned filmmaking techniques. The drama not only tells the story of an intense familial conflict revolving around the theme of faith rooted in the Bruneian tradition, it also implies the necessity of an internal negotiation between the predominant Islamic ideology and the increasingly secularised Bruneian civil society at the time. While the implied negotiation may have been unintended or subconscious in the original making of the film, it is well-balanced and reflective of the political and social reality of Brunei as a British Protectorate in the late 1960s, foreshadowing the current coexistent status quo of the dominance and sacredness of MIB and the secular popular culture in Brunei.

Introduction

In a retrospective on Brunei's first feature film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), media artist Mervin Espina, a Filipino who grew up in Brunei, commented: 'To put it bluntly, *Gema Dari Menara* is not a very good film at all, but is nonetheless a time capsule of Brunei's lost pop history' (2013, p. 70). Based on his personal interviews of the local audiences who were eyewitnesses of the film's screenings in 1968 and 1969, Espina (2013) claimed that the screenings of the film 'were well-attended. All were excited to see their relatives and friends — and friends of friends — in the film, and Brunei's first attempt at feature film production' (p. 67). Fifty years later, during the film's golden jubilee celebration, the weeklong re-screenings of the newly digitized *Gema Dari Menara*'s at White Screen Cinema were unsurprisingly sold out via 'pre-purchased tickets without any promotion[al] effort' (Chin & Liu, 2018, p. 47-48) (See Figure 1). Hence, there must be some timeless values concealed apart from the draw of *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) being Brunei's feature film debut. As a matter of fact, besides the historical values that Espina pointed out, if we closely scrutinise the film's aesthetic construction e.g. narrative structure, plot design, character design and character relationship, as well as camerawork, we may argue that *Gema Dari Menara* is quite an intense and intriguing family melodrama.



Figure 1. Re-screening poster of Brunei's first feature film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) for its golden jubilee celebration in 2018. Image courtesy of White Screen Cinema

In this paper, therefore, I simply argue that the narrative of *Gema Dari Menara*, as a family melodrama, is carefully constructed and straightforwardly propelled by the aforementioned melodramatic production elements. As a melodramatic fiction, it not only tells a story about an intense familial conflict revolving the theme of faith belief/faith loss which has been long rooted in the Bruneian cultural and historical tradition, it also implies the necessity of the negotiation between the dominant Islamic ideology and the increasingly secularised Bruneian civil society at the time. Such implied negotiation may be unintended or subconscious from the original purpose of making the film, but it is well-balanced and thus reflective of the historical and political reality of Brunei as a British Protectorate in the late 1960s. Moreover, I argue that the implied negotiation is, in a figurative way, also manifested through the struggling sibling relationship between the faithful older brother Azman and his antagonistic younger brother Nordin and little sister Noriah, in comparison to the historically and politically complicated relationship between the three then-British Borneo territories, namely Brunei, Sarawak, and Sabah (Northern Borneo). Finally, I argue that the above two aspects of the implied negotiation in *Gema Dari Menara* foreshadow the status quo of both the coexistence of the sacred Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) national ideology and secular pop culture in Brunei, and the fraternal, in/interdependent relationship between Brunei and her two neighbouring Malaysian states – Sarawak and Sabah – today.

***Gema Dari Menara*: A Bruneian Rite of Passage**

The storyline of *Gema Dari Menara* is very simple and straightforward and depicts a specific time when Brunei was going through a rite of passage. In the late 1960s, a middle-class family is living in an urban apartment in Brunei Town – the then-capital city of Brunei. The older

brother Azman (Pengiran Abbas P.H. Besar) is an upright and devout Muslim, while his younger brother Nordin (Harun Md. Dom) and little sister Noriah (Jamaliah Abu) are obsessed with the Western lifestyle, emblemized by picnicking with friends on the beach, birthday partying with live pop music and consuming alcohol, etc. The narrative is balanced on this tension, which is sometimes a caricatured contradiction between the 'Islamic lifestyle' depicted by Azman and the 'Western lifestyle' lived by Nordin and Noriah.

Nordin and Noriah think Azman is obsolete and has no place in this modern world while the dutiful Azman cannot get along with them. Their mother, Timah (Pengiran Umi BT. PG. Idrus) spoils the two younger siblings and blames Azman when conflicts arise between him and Nordin and Noriah. Before their father Bahar (Abu Bakar Ahmad) goes to Mecca for the obligatory Haj Pilgrimage, he acquiesces to his wife's decision to leave all the family money to Nordin, instead of Azman, to manage the family's daily expenses. But Nordin uses up all the money quickly: gambling over and losing dearly in cockfights and buying two luxury cars, one for himself, one for Noriah. The ensuing nightmare unfolds gradually: the family has to sell their house and move into a smaller house in order to make ends meet; Noriah and her lover Zul (Abd. Kadir Cheku) are caught post-fornication in a hotel room by the Shariah police, and then Noriah is imprisoned for three months. A drunk Nordin seriously injures himself by driving his fancy car into a tree. When Bahar returns from Mecca, he decides to stay in the small kampong house. The lamed Nordin and released Noriah both feel remorseful after reuniting with their family, and Azman receives them with compassion and forgiveness: 'let's forget the past.' The film ends on a hilarious but sour family unification – while Nordin chides Zul in rage for ruining his family's reputation and then pushes him into a water pond, punching him repeatedly, Noriah kneels down in front of Azman, wailing in repentance.

The Historical and Socio-political Context

Before I unfold my discussion about the film, a note on Brunei's historical and socio-political transformation since the early 20th century to the late 1960s, when *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was produced and first released, is a necessity. This is because I argue that the negotiation between sacred Islamic doctrine and the secular pop culture depicted in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) is derived from, and also the result of, the tug-of-war between the Brunei Sultans and the British colonial officials in Brunei – first the Residents, then the High Commissioners – in terms of governmental, ideological and cultural differences. After the Supplementary Agreement of 1905-06 was signed to confirm Brunei under British protection, in most of the first half of the 20th century, Brown (1970) observed, '[t]he authority and power of the Resident – from the viewpoint of Brunei – was decidedly greater than the formerly possessed by the Sultans' (p. 120). Such a power imbalance, as a result, 'brought deliberating political and social consequences to the Sultanate which were difficult to rectify later even after the Bruneians themselves began to command their own destiny. In spite of the great wealth and prosperity the Sultanate was behind in social-economic progress compared to its progressive neighbours' (Hussainmiya, 2011, p. 18).

Only after Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III ascended to the throne in 1950, did the power game between the Brunei Government and Great Britain tilt in Brunei's favour. As the first Brunei Sultan who had received the British education in the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar, Malaya, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III attempted to use his background to develop sufficient power in order to resist the British decision to combine the three former Brunei territories i.e. Brunei, Sarawak, and Sabah (Northern Borneo) to establish a united Malay commonwealth. He 'was determined to advance his country socially, politically and economically. In measured steps, he began to assert his independence and challenge the decision-making capability of the

British officers' (Hussainmiya, 2011, p. 23)¹. Ultimately, he managed to succeed in keeping Brunei under concrete British protection while keeping a fraternal relationship with Sarawak and Sabah, who both decided to join Malaysia in 1963 (Brown, 1970, p. 123-124).

Because religious affairs were the only domain still in the hands of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III during his early reign, in 1955, a Religious Council was established and it was stipulated that all the members of the Council had to be Malay and appointed by the Sultan himself. Since then religious affairs and the organizations which govern them have steadily grown in importance in Brunei. The centralized religious bureaucracy – the Religious Affairs Department – has expanded very considerably' (Brown, 1970, p.124-125). After the Bruneian Constitution was promulgated in 1959, the position of the Resident was replaced by a High Commissioner. 'Most of the powers formerly exercised by the Resident were divided among the Sultan and his newly established ministers' (Brown, 1970, p. 126), while the main function of the High Commissioner was reduced to the 'means of communication' between the Brunei government and the British Colonial Office in Malaya.

Under the newly promulgated Constitution, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III gathered the powers around him by establishing the most important Council of Ministers. Among the six *ex-officio* members of the Council appointed by the Sultan, the Attorney General and State Financial Officer, nevertheless, were joint appointees of the Sultan and Great Britain, as these two positions represented British interests (Brown, 1970, p. 128). Therefore, although the overall scales of power had swung towards the side of the Sultan in the 1960s, the judicial and financial powers, which should be the most crucial two powers in any modern governance systems, had been still substantially controlled, at least equally shared, by the High Commissioner and the Sultan.

Such a power structure means that if the Brunei's Religious Affairs Department wanted to make a film for *Da'wah* (religious propaganda) purposes, it must have received financial approval from the State Financial Officer, who, as Brown pointed out, represented British interests. According to Espina (2013)², it was indeed the Religious Affairs Department that initiated the idea of making a feature film:

One of the chief proponents of this project was the principal of the department, Pengiran Anak Kemaluddin. I was told that he, along with other Brunei civil servants at that time, had been to Kuala Lumpur to attend Filem Negara Malaysia courses on photography and filmmaking. They wanted to create a film for *Da'wah* (religious propagation), perhaps to address the growing secularisation and Westernisation among the Bruneian populace. They saw film as a potent medium to convey their concerns. (Espina, p. 65-66)

On 1 August 1968, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah ascended to the throne as the 29th Sultan of Brunei. Nearly three months later, Brunei's first feature film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was released to the public in a commercial cinema – Boon Pang Baharu located in Brunei Town on

¹ To know more about the 28th Brunei Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III, read B. A. Hussainmiya. (March 21, 1996, 1st Edition). *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III and Britain: The Making of Brunei Darussalam*. Oxford University Press.

² Espina did not elaborate on who told him the story about the making of *Gema Dari Menara*, neither did he mention whether the person who told him the story was an authentic source or not. However, at beginning of the film, we do see that Pengiran Anak Kemaluddin, who dresses in a Western style suit with a tie and a black songkok, gives a speech, stating the intention of making this film is 'to call all Muslims to uphold and practice the teachings of religion.' In the same speech sequence, we also see a congratulatory remark in Malay from the then-British High Commissioner Arthur Adair. I doubt that if the film had not been a 'measured' way to convey the religious messages, the High Commissioner would have been willing to show his endorsement for the film.

23 October 1968 (See Figure 2). If the ascension to the throne of His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah was an epoch-making event, the production and release of Brunei's first feature film was an important historical emblem following his ascension. It cannot be judged if the two events taking place in the same year was just a coincidence or directly relevant to each other, due to a lack of conclusive literature either way.



Figure 2. The premiere advertisement of *Gema Dari Menara* printed in the *Borneo Bulletin* (19 October 1968).

Image courtesy of Mervin Espina

However, there is a correlation between the two events. To a certain extent, the implied negotiation of sacred Islamic predomination and secular popular culture that I argue is present in *Gema Dari Menara* was both a symbolic reflection and a consequence of the power gaming and balancing between the 28th Sultan of Brunei and the British High Commissioner in the late 1960s. After ascension to the throne, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah succeeded in continuing his father's political and socio-cultural policies and strategies, and leading Brunei to finally gain its full independence from Great Britain in 1984. It is my argument that to this day, the long coexistent status quo of the sacred MIB predomination and secular popular culture harmonising in Bruneian society was foreshadowed and connoted in *Gema Dari Menara*, which I will analyse in the following sections.

The Melodramatic Representation of Implicated Negotiation

Melodrama as a form of dramatic work has been long rooted in Western literary and dramatic traditions, especially popular in 19th century operettas, novels, theatre, and salon entertainment in Europe. The application of 'melodramatic effect' and a range of variations to film production and later, televised drama series are all indebted to the German Expressionist filmmakers of the 1920s. Many of these filmmakers immigrated to America from Germany during the 1930s Nazi regime and brought their Expressionist cinematographic and melodramatic techniques to Hollywood. The combination of visual and dramaturgical devices was used in diverse genres of Hollywood productions, enabling family melodrama, comedy, and musical films to thrive

during the Golden Age of Classic Hollywood, later manifesting in Film Noir, domestic melodrama, and more mixed genres in the post-World War II 1950s and 1960s. The melodramatic technique since has not only been a strong and consistent component in filmmaking styles and waves around the world e.g. New German Cinema (early 1960s to early 1980s), but has also been carried through the decades to incarnate some of the popular contemporary Hollywood movies. The media theorist Thomas Elsaesser (2014) articulates this as ‘melodrama trauma mind-games’.

Elsaesser (1991) previously defined the term ‘melodrama’ in accordance with his observations on a range of the American family melodrama films –

In its dictionary sense, melodrama is a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects. This is still perhaps the most useful definition, because it allows melodramatic elements to be seen as constituents of a system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the storyline, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue. The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation’ (Elsaesser, p. 74).

Except for the opening speech sequence, the propagandistic montage of Islamic teaching in the middle, and the ending music for credits, the main core of the story in *Gema Dari Menara* is a family melodrama full of abrupt ups-and-downs, joy and tears. The limited music/song numbers mark the different tonalities and moods of the evolutionary sequences following the narrative fluctuation like a roller coaster. The folksong style overture sung by a teenage boy dressed in a traditional Malay costume and accompanied by a chorus of girls in traditional dresses, following the opening speech sequence, not only sets up an upbeat tone from the beginning, but also foreshadows the happy ending of the entire story. Moreover, the lyrics of the song draw out the thematic emphasis of the film – religious messages conveyed by a family story. Then the song smoothly converts into softer music with a similar melody produced by a wooden flute, accompanied by a series of tracking shots of Kampong Ayer (the Water Village), introducing the story background (See Figure 3). The ensuing call to prayer soon takes over, in concert with a few more shots of Kampong Ayer with the golden mosque and nearby residential apartments in the background. The sequence ends with a panorama shot panning from Kampong Ayer to the mosque in the foreground, then cutting to the appearance of big brother Azman walking out of his school and driving home as the beginning of the storyline.



Figure 3. Kampong Ayer as the story background. Image courtesy of Mervin Espina

This emotionally plain beginning starts to build up the tension between Azman and his two younger siblings, Nordin and Noriah, while the upbeat and joyful atmosphere accelerates to reach the climax of the opening sequence – Nordin's birthday party scene. This celebratory scene is mainly composed of two Western style pop songs performed by two famous Malaysian pop singers (See Figures 4 & 5), while the imagery shows guests at the party dancing and drinking alcohol during the performance. The delightful celebration, however, comes to an abrupt stop with Azman's quiet arrival at the party, fully dressed in his traditional Malay clothes. Furthermore, the emotional graph drops quickly after the siblings' mother Timah shouts at Azman and drives him out of the home after he is accused of unspecified immoral behaviour. Emotional music accompanies Azman leaving the house.



Figure 4. Malaysian singer Abdullah Chik performing in Nordin's birthday party scene.
Image courtesy of Mervin Espina



Figure 5. Malaysian singer Kamariah Noor performing in Nordin's birthday party scene. Image courtesy of Mervin Espina

Such 'emotional effects' which are signaled by accompanying music sequences 'orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue' (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 74) continue functioning as 'a system of punctuation' in the rest acts of the film. The two emotional ups are an unsurprising variation on the upbeat opening melody of the religious leitmotif, accompanying two sequences of tracking shots captured from Azman's driving car. The first emotional up is when he drives with his friends on the way to visit Mr. Hassan in the Department of Religious Affairs (See Figure 6); the second is when he drives Mr. Hassan to a mosque to

deliver a religious dossier, after which Azman drives to the airport to pick up his father Hj Bahar who is returning from a pilgrimage to Makkah. In between the upbeat sequences, there is a very brief down turn when Noriah is sentenced to jail by the Shariah court due to her adultery with Zul. Another down turn comes later following a very dramatic, high-pitched music sequence that shows Nordin driving under the influence of alcohol and crashing his car into a tree – he ends up in the hospital. Towards the end, the heavenly, virtuous prayer calls emanate from the mosque when the limping Nordin passes it after being discharged from the hospital, and then emotionally strong music accompanies his reunion with his parents and Azman at a new home: both scenes indicate Nordin's repentance for his past. These two scenes, along with musical/vocal marks, also pair with an abrupt, up-and-down, emotional contrast for Nordin as an antagonistic character.



Figure 6. Azman (Pengiran Abbas P.H. Besar) drives with his friends to the Department of Religious Affairs.
Image courtesy of Mervin Espina

Although the scene of Noriah's reunion with her family is one of the most comedic in the film – Nordin first pushes Zul into a pond and then shoves Noriah to the ground before Azman and Timah come to stop him – there is nonetheless no music accompaniment at all, merely Noriah's repentant wailing for forgiveness from Azman. However, earlier when Zul comes to jail to pick up Noriah and promises to marry her, the upbeat religious leitmotif hovers in the background over the entire scene, as it does during her return to home scene later, emphasising her remorseful sincerity.

The family, including Azman generously accept both Noriah's and Nordin's appeals for forgiveness. As Azman says to Nordin: 'Let's forget the past, Nordin. Take it as a lesson for you.' As a matter of fact, before Nordin arrives home from the hospital, a scene, which is set in a smaller house, shows Azman, his wife and his parents living harmoniously, accompanied by the upbeat religious leitmotif until the now physically disabled Nordin shows up. This musical accompaniment has already foreshadowed that, as Espina observed, 'the story concludes on a happy note' (2013, p. 69). From my point of view, it is not Nordin and Noriah's repentant return that is meaningful, but Azman and their parents' forgiveness of them, that confirm Malay traditional family values, including religious leniency, and the profound negotiation between the predominated Islamic doctrine and a Westernised lifestyle. It is in this sense that the musical accompaniment in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) as a mark of 'emotional effects' in 'a system of punctuation', not only melodramatically accentuates the contrasting moods, but also narratively articulates the emotional ups-and-downs, stylistically underlining profound thematic implications.

In his study of 1950s American melodramas directed by Douglas Sirk e.g. *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Imitation of Life* (1959), Murvey (1989) stated: 'Melodrama can be seen as having an ideological *function* in working certain contradictions through to the surface and representing them in an aesthetic form...Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind tell a story of contradiction, not of reconciliation' (p. 43). Although *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) is about reconciliation through the represented and concentrated ideological contradiction between the members of a Bruneian middle-class family; obviously, its targeted audience is not only female, but also male. The contradictions between the family members are multifold, but they are concentrated on the different attitudes towards the relationship between sacred Islamic tradition and the secular Westernised lifestyle. In this respect, there is some thematic similarity in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) which is comparable to the Japanese melodrama films made in the 1950-60s, especially Yasujiro Ozu's late films such as *Tokyo Story* (1953), and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962), in which the theme of dismantlement and Westernisation of Japanese traditional families after World War II is manifested.

The contradiction between Islamic tradition and a Westernised lifestyle is mainly represented by the stiff and delicate sibling relationship between Azman, Nordin and Noriah, which is described throughout the story as if the entire film is just about a superficial, ideological *function* of judging a dichotomy of faith belief and faith loss. However, as I argued earlier, the implicated ideological emphases of the film are profoundly elicited from the comedic closure, whereby the consistent conflict between Azman and Nordin/Norah is displaced by Nordin's resentment towards his 'old buddy' Zul while Noriah is kneeling and wailing for forgiveness from Azman, instead of blaming Zul. One of the reasons that Nordin hits Zul is because Nordin blames Zul for ruining his family's reputation; from the previous scene, however, we know that Zul has already promised that he will marry Noriah. Therefore, the remaining contradiction in the ending scene has already been transformed from the concentrated, primary contradiction between Azman and Nordin/Norah to the mitigated one between the 'old buddies' Nordin and Zul. Moreover, since Azman has already forgiven Nordin, we know he will do the same for Noriah, although it is not articulated explicitly in the ending scene. 'A happy note', as Espina (2013, p. 69) observed, over the ending credits, confirms the future, off-screen reconciliation between the three siblings. It is precisely this hilarious, open ending that implies that a sort of open-minded negotiation must be made in terms of the relationship between the Islamic tradition that Azman holds dear and the secular lifestyle that Nordin and Noriah have lived in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968). The Islamic leniency incarnated by Azman and his willingness to negotiate with other cultures to coexist and continue harmoniously emphasised in such an open-ended closure is the much more profound and powerful ideological *function* aestheticised by a melodramatic family tale than in an ending of a one-sided winner.

Although in melodrama, plot and character relations are always prioritised over the portrayal of characters i.e. characterisation, the latter is still an important, supplementary technique, alongside the former two ones, to drive the storytelling forward. The lack of clear winner in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) is derived from the stereotypical characterisation formula rooted in the melodramatic tradition. As Elsaesser (1991) pointed out: 'One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present *all* the characters convincingly as victims' (p. 86). Here, Elsaesser is analysing American melodramas. However in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), the family members as a whole reflect the sentiments of Elsaesser's address. None of the main characters in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) is a typical winner – they are all victims, albeit for different reasons. For example, Nordin ends up with a limp due to this drunk driving; Noriah goes to prison for three months as a result of her fornication with Zul; both their parents and Azman are indirect victims of Nordin and Noriah's

unlawful deeds — they have ruined their family's reputation. Meanwhile, the parents and Azman are also direct victims of their own actions: the father Hj Bahar loses all his savings because he is persuaded by Timah to leave all the family money in Nordin's instead of Azman's care. As a result, they have to move out of their family home into a smaller residence. Considering that this downfall happens during the specific sacred timing of Bahar's pilgrimage to Mecca, the laws of melodrama dictate that the entangled process of victimisation in the narrative itself, must hold somebody accountable for blame or punishment. The psychological demand for scapegoats leads to the comedic ending – Noriah and Zul become the 'sinful pair' to blame and punish (although they have decided to marry each other), because their fornication has stained the family reputation.

Because of Azman's insistence on his religious belief and cultural traditions, he is first distanced from his two siblings, then driven out of home by his mother, and mistrusted by his father, resulting in his personal discomfort with his family and consequently he is helpless to stop Nordin from squandering all the family money. At the end of the film, Azman possesses his own but much smaller house and takes care of his parents, cementing his role as the most righteous but also the most victimized of characters. In fact, the story mainly unfolds through Azman's point of view, showing him attending a series of Islamic teaching activities at the same time that he witnesses the downfall of his family. This situating of Azman as victim underscores his sublime leniency when he forgives his repentant younger brother and sister, reconciling with them for a co-existent future.

Therefore, the main storyline revolving the ill-fated Bruneian middle-class family in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) qualifies as the typical 'something melodramatic' in visual presentations delineated by Elsaesser as following:

...when in ordinary language we call something melodramatic, what we often mean is an exaggerated rise-and-fall pattern in human actions and emotional responses, a from-the-sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement, a foreshortening of lived time in favour of intensity – all of which produces a graph of much greater fluctuation, a quicker swing from one extreme to the other than is considered natural, realistic or in conformity with literary standards of verisimilitude: in the novel we like to sip our pleasures, rather than gulp them. (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 76)

'An exaggerated rise-and-fall pattern' constitutes nearly all the key plot points that underpin the narrative structure of *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), propelling the story to move forward melodramatically with intensity and ups-and-downs of both character actions and emotional fluctuations. For example, in Nordin's birthday party scene, when Azman arrives to celebrate Nordin's birthday by dressing up in traditional Malay garb, he is immediately greeted by Nordin calling him 'sarcastic'; later Azman is driven out of home by his mother Timah. On the other hand, Nordin and Noriah, including their parents, have a differing pattern of 'exaggerated rise-and-fall' emotional experiences in this scene. Before Azman arrives, Nordin and Noriah, alongside other invited guests, have been all immersed in dancing, singing and drinking alcohol and 'having a good time'; after Azman arrives, all the guests quieten down and leave the party one by one, causing Nordin and Noriah to fall 'down' instantly from their emotional 'high'. Moreover, Azman's unwillingness to join the party and accompaniment by a woman and a little girl dissatisfy his parents, and result in his expulsion from the home. This all-out, 'rise-and-fall' scene involving all the family members literally foreshadows a mid-point scene, in which Timah persuades Bahar to leave all the family savings to Nordin, instead of Azman, before Bahar sets out for Mecca. This crucial decision made by Timah, acquiesced to by Bahar, quickly leads to two 'rise-and-fall' sequences related to both of them. Firstly, Timah soon realises

Nordin has squandered all the family savings and their house has to be sold to make ends meet. She begs Azman to stop Nordin from selling their house, but Azman can do nothing since Nordin is now in charge of the family assets. Secondly, after Hj Bahar excitedly returns to Brunei from Mecca, his joy soon turns into distress after the discovery of all the calamities that have befallen his family because of his acquiescence to Timah's bad idea. These two 'rise-and-fall' sequences exaggeratedly swing the lives of the parent couple 'from one extreme to the other' in a much condensed, shortened period of time, in order to increase the dramatic intensity and the characters' emotional fluctuations. Here, the realistic portrayal of the two characters, and the revelation of their deep psychological motives, are not that important, but the need to accelerate the narrative pace and intensify the emotive ups-and-downs to define 'something melodramatic' have been prioritised.

The above scene with Hj Bahar is also justified as 'a from-the-sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement' elaborated by Elsaesser (1991, p. 76). As a proud, devout Muslim who has just returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca, Hj Bahar enthusiastically reunites with his wife Timah and his oldest son Azman at the airport; in the next scene, he has to accept the disastrous reality of his family, partially because of his previous irresponsible decision. However, in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), no scene is more like a 'from-the-sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement' than what happens to Noriah and Zul, the 'dissolute couple', in the hilarious, open-ended finale. As discussed above, in the scene before the finale, when Zul comes to jail to pick up Noriah, he promises to marry her, and she accepts with a smile. This scene somehow sublimates their once corrupt relationship by a promise of legal binding as redemption in the future; after the couple arrives at Azman's home, however, such a sublime redemption is evaporated immediately when Nordin greets them by pushing Zul into a pond and punching him repeatedly and then knocking Noriah down to the ground when she tries to stop him (See Figure 7). It is Azman who runs into the frame moments later and stops Nordin; then Noriah kneels down in front of Azman, wailing for his forgiveness, while Zul sits down on the edge of the water pond, lowering his head in full frustration. All of a sudden, the illusionary, idealistic sublime emanated in the previous scene is transposed into a disillusioned, ridiculous farce, which marks the final melodramatic 'rise-and-fall' plot movement and the 'up-and-down' emotional fluctuation for the two characters, Noriah and Zul. More importantly, the intentional exaggeration of the couple's fall and down juxtaposed with Nordin's hysteria in this hilarious, melodramatic familial reunification finale contrastively underscores Azman's firm and righteous moral standing, which appears predominant in any future reconciled negotiation and coexistence among the three siblings.



Figure 7. Nordin (Harun Md. Dom) pushes Zul (ABD. Kadir Cheku) into the water pond and then hits Noriah (Jamaliah Abu) when she tries to stop him in the open-ended finale scene. Image courtesy of Mervin Espina

The Social and Cultural Implication

As the first Bruneian feature film, *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was actually commissioned to National Film Department of Malaysia to produce. In other words, the main production crew including the director and cinematographer all came from Malaysia. Some Bruneian local talents, many of whom were officers of the Department of Religious Affairs, joined the performance roster with Malaysian actors and actresses. However, Espina found ‘it’s funny that the “bad guys” were portrayed by Malaysians and not locals’ (2013, p. 69). Perhaps it was not a coincidence that Malaysian actors and actresses played the ‘sinful’ roles (e.g. Nordin, Noriah and Zul; the two pop singers who symbolize decadence are Malaysian as well), while Bruneian locals played the faithful characters (Azman, Mr. Hassan and all the government officials), even though most of the local performers were not professional actors. Such a line-up may be explained by a retrospective on the historical relationship between Brunei and its two fraternal neighbours – Sarawak and Sabah, states of Malaysia.

Brunei had ruled Sarawak and Sabah for a long period; however, after World War II, with the British priority of forming up a ‘Northern Borneo Federation’, ‘Sarawak-based officers were seconded to serve Brunei’ from 1948, including the British Resident himself (Hussainmiya, 2011, p. 19). ‘This stirred a great deal of indignation--by creating an inferiority complex in Brunei—that made it virtually impossible to promote any common understanding with the Sarawak administration. The Sultan felt it as an affront to his dignity’ (Hussainmiya and Mail, 2014, p. 16). In another account, Hussainmiya (2011) continued to address the issue: ‘More importantly, their [Bruneians’] subservience to the Sarawak administration from 1948 onward had sharpened their consciousness of themselves as the scions of the Malay, Islamic and Monarchic culture’ (p. 19). That is perhaps the precise reason why all the ‘sinful characters’ in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) were played by Malaysian actors and actresses while the ‘faithful characters’ particularly the old brother Azman were portrayed by Bruneian locals. Another plausible reason for such a casting roster in the film may be because of the Malaysian connection to the 1962 nationalist rebellion in Brunei.

In the film, Azman regards himself as an orthodox, devout believer of Islam; Nordin and Noriah represent the unfaithful, who consider Azman a conservative throwback. In the end, Azman accepts Nordin’s repentance, lecturing him: ‘Let’s forget the past, Nordin. Take it as a lesson for you.’ Later, Azman presumably accepts Noriah’s appeal for forgiveness in the open-ended finale scene. Such a ‘delicate’ sibling relationship between Azman, and Nordin and Noriah is symbolically comparable to the realistic relationship between Brunei and its two neighbouring states of Sarawak and Sabah, both of whom had joined the Malaysia Federation a few years before *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was produced.

Nowadays, Brunei enjoys a harmonious and coexistent relationship with Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysia. But half a century ago, Bruneians considered themselves the orthodox successors of the Malay, Islamic and Monarchic cultural over the neighbouring Sarawak and Sabah, thus treasuring more of its religious orthodoxy and political autonomy (Hussainmiya, 2011; Hussainmiya and Mail, 2014). Metaphorically, the historical reality that Brunei dodged during its intimate relationship with Peninsular Malaysia to resist the potential Federation association with Sarawak and Sabah, and Brunei’s power gaming with both the British Colonial representative and the brotherly Sarawak’s supervision, very much resembles Azman’s relationship with his two younger siblings and their parents in the film. For example, Azman’s intentional prevention of his religious belief being stained by the lifestyle of Nordin and Noriah, Azman’s strong conflicting views about both religion and finance contrasted with Nordin’s, and his restrained disagreement with his mother Timah and his father Hj Bahar (whereby the former spoils the two younger siblings while the latter always acquiesces with her decisions).

It is also worth noting that Azman's close communion with Mr. Hassan is just like the once warm personal relationship between the Bruneian Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III and Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of independent Malaya, before the Sultan tried to shun the British notion of Brunei's association with Sarawak and Sabah³. Later, after the duo became two states of Malaysia Federation, the Bruneian ruler intentionally cozied up with them in order to counter Tunku's 'enlarged Federation plan' – 'a possible Brunei-Malayan merger' (Hussainmiya and Mail, 2014, p. 37). Therefore, Brunei's power gaming with its British protector and Brunei's dodging around its two Borneo neighbours Sarawak and Sabah, and Peninsula Malaysia, in the 1950s and 1960s, are figuratively allegorised by the protagonist Azman's delicate and restrained relationship with his family members – his younger siblings Nordin and Noriah, and their parents Timah and Haji Bahar.

Conclusion

When analysing the social structure of Brunei, King (1994) summarised: 'The sultanate therefore provides us with the most direct example of a sociopolitical system whose constituent elements, both ideological and non-ideological, demonstrate process of, on one hand, transformation and innovation and on the other, continuity and the celebration of tradition' (p. 176). *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) is a perfect pictorial footnote for King's commentary in its unfolding of an intense and fluctuated melodramatic family tale, so as to visually invite the now and then audiences to interpret the Brunei society via multiple lenses culturally, politically, and ideologically, during a specific time when Brunei was going through a rite of passage.

More interestingly, the allegorical relationship between the protagonist Azman and the antagonists – Nordin and Noriah – his two younger siblings, mirrors the historically complicated intimacy between Brunei and its two neighbouring states Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysia. Azman's ultimate forgiveness of both Nordin and Noriah also accentuates the religious tolerance of Islam and its willingness to negotiate and coexist with the Westernised secular trend among the Bruneian populace in 1960s. As a result, Brunei's first feature film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) foreshadowed the long-standing negotiation between, and the harmonious coexistence of, the predominant sacred MIB tradition and secular popular culture in the sultanate from the 1960s onwards.

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Technologizing Islam, Islamifying Technology: The Use of Modern Technologies in Brunei's First Film, *Gema Dari Menara* (1968)

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Abstract

Historians of technology have for the past decade begun to recognize the important role that technology plays in nation-building. From the development of the steam locomotive in Britain in the early 19th century that was integral to the Industrial Revolution to America's emphasis on its technological progressiveness in its national narratives in the 20th century, studies have shown that the history of technology is necessarily the history of nations as well. While the majority of previous research focuses primarily on Western nations (and unsurprisingly so, considering that a greater proportion of technological advancements have happened in these countries in the recent past centuries), less have studied how other countries have dealt with the rise of modern technologies in the development and maintenance of their national identity. This paper seeks to expand the critical scope by examining Brunei's stance on technology in the 1960s – just after the 1959 Constitution was established declaring the nation an independent, sovereign Sultanate – a time when Brunei was still in the early stages of defining its own identity. I propose that Brunei used modern technologies in order to further solidify its Muslim identity as a response to modernization and globalization, which is distinct to many previously-studied countries that focus more on boosting their military and/or industrial prowess. Brunei's approach, then, notably counters oft-perceived contradictions between religion and technology. This study will focus on Brunei's first film, *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), which was tellingly commissioned by the Religious Affairs Department, and will examine the portrayal of modern technologies that seek to break the binary between religion and modernity to show an image of Islam that is compatible with a developing Brunei.

Introduction

Brunei's first feature film, *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), opens with a panoramic shot that sweeps over the city centre in the nation's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. It is an area that includes several important Bruneian landmarks namely the historical water village, Kampong Ayer, and the gleaming golden dome of the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin (SOAS) mosque, standing as a testament to modern Islamic architecture. This scene juxtaposes the old and the new, which sets the theme for the rest of the film: the necessity of a harmonious co-existence (marked by the accompanying melodic tune in this opening scene that transitions to the call for prayer from the mosque's minaret) between religion and modernity – particularly technological modernity. This inclusive and unifying scene, after all, is only made possible by film technology.

Indeed, as I will demonstrate in this paper, the religion-modernity relationship is rendered necessary especially at a time when the Bruneian government was striving to establish the nation's identity as Islamic amidst a globalizing and increasingly technologized world. It was in the best interests of the government to make use of technology to propagate Islam and to "package" it in such a way that it would be more palatable to a population increasingly aware of and influenced by Western and globalizing forces threatening to dismantle national values. At the same time, the use of technology itself needed to be guarded as media technologies, for example, would increase encounters with cultures and attitudes beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Unsurprisingly therefore, a sense of anxiety about clashes between Islam and modernity underlies the opening scene and *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) as a whole. A sense of authoritarian control can also be detected: the unifying opening scene could also be construed

as panoptic, especially when we bear in mind that the sweeping, all-encompassing view is captured (and manipulated) specifically by those (in power) behind the camera. New technologies thus also facilitate greater control, particularly over narratives.

This paper explores the Bruneian encounter with, and approach towards, technological modernity as it simultaneously seeks to establish a stronghold with its Islamic, national identity. I will focus specifically on *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), which was commissioned by the Religious Affairs Department (since then evolved to become the present-day Ministry of Religious Affairs), as a reflection of the government's attempts at shaping the nation's attitudes towards Islam as well as technological modernity, particularly transport and media technologies. Questions that will be addressed include: how did Brunei reconcile the two seemingly opposing desires for modernization and a stronger Islamic identity? How did Brunei move past this dilemma to justifiably use technological advancements in building an Islamic nation? In attempting to answer the latter question, this study also addresses the gap in knowledge concerning "how new technologies impact on the experience of the sacred and the divine in Asian societies [which] is scarcely documented" (Lim, 2009, p. 1). By studying Brunei's management of the proliferation of technology using *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) as a case study, this paper offers some insight into how this small Asian nation managed to grow both Islamically and technologically in comparison to other nations within the region.

Technology in nation-building

For the purposes of this discussion, I borrow Suzanne Moon's definition of national identity as, [...] a set of ideals and characteristics meant to define the essence of a nation and to provide the foundational logic for a coherent, enduring, and most of all, legitimate political order. To define the reasons that a group of individuals should see themselves as part of a nation, proponents will cite characteristics that give reasons for social solidarity, such as shared geography, shared cultural practices and values, shared histories, and shared political aspirations [...] (Moon, 2009, p. 254)

This definition highlights the importance of a sense of community that is reinforced by the idea of a shared history or narrative as well as purpose in moving forward. It agrees with Benedict Anderson's view of national identity and sense of nationhood as "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (Anderson, 2006, p. 4), which also emphasizes how integral continuity with a particular historical narrative is in making up the foundation of how a particular national community views or "imagines" itself. Technology, as widely acknowledged by historians of technology, has the capacity to continue or sustain that narrative and thus has a significant role to play in the defining and redefining of national identity. David E. Nye, for instance, contends that, "Since the early nineteenth century the technological sublime has been one of America's central 'ideas about itself' – a defining ideal, helping to bind together a multicultural society" (1994, p. xiv). In America's aim to set itself as one of the most advanced nations in the world, it idealized technological progress, which became synonymous with "the progress and welfare of the nation as well as of the individual" (Simon, 2003, p. 102), thus garnering support from the majority of the population. "For almost two centuries," Nye states, "the American public has repeatedly paid homage to [...] bridges, skyscrapers, factories, dams, airplanes, and space vehicles" (Nye, p. xiii). A sense of national solidarity was thus born in large part due to this shared belief in the nation's technological advancement.

Technology does not only help to strengthen national identity symbolically, but also materially, which is the case in France and the establishment of its electrical network. In studying the factors that influenced the rebuilding of French national identity, Gabrielle Hecht shifts the focus from "pre-twentieth century symbols and events [such as] monuments, literature, and revolutionary events" to modern technologies – the development of nuclear

power in particular (Hecht, 2001, p. 253). In one “vignette”, Hecht demonstrates how *Électricité de France* (EDF) emerged from an agreement that the “new France” would have a standardized electrical network under one public utility, thus “unit[ing] France symbolically as well as technologically: complete electrification would enable all French citizens to participate in the modernization of their nation” whilst also “embrac[ing] an ethos of public service” (p. 264). Establishing a standardized electrical network, in this case, helped to reinforce the sense of community, involvement, and progress among French citizens, thereby strengthening their national identification.

Technological artifacts may also eventually constitute part of the national identity, which is the case in Portugal where technology “became a fundamental element for the invention of a new shared culture” (Saraiva, 2007, p. 264). Proposing that technology does not just facilitate nation-building, Saraiva shows how, particularly in Portugal at the end of the 19th century, technology itself became part of that nation’s new identity. As technology was presented “side by side with historical monuments” – for example, “the new central railway station recovered the architecture of the expansion period of the 16th century,” and “the headquarters of the Geographical Society combined iron structures with imperial decors” – these “technological artifacts became urban landmarks, symbols of Lisbon’s identity” (Saraiva, p. 270). It is important to note that while these technological landmarks are newly established, they are nevertheless incorporated with significant pieces of Portuguese history, thus simultaneously preserving that history and modernizing the nation.

As these studies show, Western nations have come to place significant value on technological power and its role in nation-building. For nations beyond the West, nation-building with the help of technology thus means that they are able to demonstrate their own power and identity on similar, comparable terms. Moreover, the project of defining national identity becomes especially pertinent for postcolonial nations such as Indonesia, which Moon argues was (and still is) struggling to unite and redefine itself after independence in 1945 especially considering its “geographic and social fragmentation” (Moon, 2009, p. 255). Indonesia thus presents fertile ground for research into technology’s role in nation-building and there have been several studies on the different kinds of technologies (such as communications technologies and transport technologies, most notably the National Airplane project) employed to help unify Indonesia. Moon focuses on the development of a steel factory, *Trikora Steel Plant*. Although the factory does not seem to have the capacity to unite the nation in the more obvious ways of transport technologies or electrical networks, it nevertheless enabled the nation to produce and process its own raw materials for both domestic use and export, which is a significant marker of the nation’s economic independence post-colonization. As Moon argues, “industry therefore carried connotations of domestic strength and international power, making it possible for a steel mill to become a potent symbol of national strength and a defining characteristic for a postcolonial nation” (p. 263). So great was this symbolization that it surpassed the “practical shortcomings” of establishing the factory in the first place such as choosing Cilegon as its site, which had limited access to fresh water as well as raw iron resources (Moon, p. 265). The fact that the project had sufficient support for it to proceed highlights how highly technology was regarded in building a nation’s identity.

Technological modernity and Islamic identity in Brunei

Technology thus plays different roles in uniting the nation as well as strengthening the national narratives or identities. The case of Brunei, in this paper, centers on the technologically-facilitated bolstering of its religious, Islamic, identity, which became officially established as the religion of Brunei Darussalam in the Constitution of Brunei Darussalam in 1959. Thereafter, the Brunei government can be seen to have made significant steps towards fortifying this aspect of its national identity – a project that was perhaps made even more urgent after the arduous,

conflict-ridden process towards promulgating the Constitution – one of which was cementing Islam in the national philosophy of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), Malay Islamic Monarchy, on the day of its independence, 1st January 1984. Added to that was the earlier 1962 Brunei revolt that must have continued to haunt the government. Taking these events into consideration, it is unsurprising that *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) places so much emphasis on sermonizing (Azman delivers lengthy lectures to his younger siblings) and tightly controlling the heavily didactic narrative.

As religion is commonly perceived to be incompatible with the processes of modernity, with which technology is highly associated, how to attain a balance between the two, as a nation seeks to excel in both arenas, becomes a major concern. Secularization theory, in particular, argues that, “modernization leads inevitably to secularization, and that religion is negatively affected by the consequences of rationalization, technologization, and functional differentiation, by an increase in the level of prosperity, education, and urbanization” (Pollack and Rosta, 2017, p. 2). At the same time that Brunei was struggling to become a constitutional Islamic monarchy, after the discovery of oil in 1929, the nation also found itself with great wealth and prosperity. As Hussainmiya notes, due to this increasing awareness of Brunei’s burgeoning wealth, nationalist sentiment also heightened within a nation that felt “stung by feelings of deprivation” during the British residency and Japanese occupation in 1941 to 1945. This was a nation that became hungry for modernization, which is evidenced by nationalists’ calls for “proper educational, social and political facilities” (Hussainmiya, 2000, p. 6).

In the 1960s, the government was discernibly taking simultaneous leaps towards modernization and strengthening Brunei’s national, Islamic identity. At the start of the decade, for one, a nationwide electrical network was in the process of being installed (“Ranchangan bekalan listrik”, Aug 1961, p. 1) and a few years after, increased water supply was provided to more remote areas such as Labi in the Belait district (“Ranchangan perbekalan ayer”, June 1965, p. 3). Additionally, students, teachers, and government officers were frequently being sent abroad for further training and higher education, which shows the degree of investment in producing a highly-skilled local workforce. At the same time, steps were also being taken to study the country’s own unique characteristics to make better-informed decisions about national development. For instance, in 1967, the then-Director of the Language and Literature Bureau stressed the need for more scientific studies of the land to be published in order to help make informed decisions about how best to develop the country’s infrastructure (“Buku ilmu alam negara”, May 1967, p. 5). To this end, help was sought from University of Malaya researchers in an effort to expand local knowledge and expertise. Further indicating the broad scope of the government’s efforts towards modernization, entertainment in new media was also brought to the population. For example, *Pelita Brunei*, the “*Akhbar Rasmi Kerajaan Negeri Brunei*” [“Official Newspaper of the Brunei Government”], also began publishing schedules for films, which under the Information Department’s initiative, would be shown in viewings held across the country in various venues such as schools.

As technological modernity, catalyzed by processes of globalization, continued to permeate the nation on many levels, a question appeared to be brewing regarding potential clashes with the Islamic values that Brunei was also trying to instil and reinforce within its identity. This question seemed to have become more urgent as the country strove towards independence in 1984, and was acknowledged by Abdul Aziz Umar, the last Chief Minister in 1983, in his reflection on the birth of Brunei’s national philosophy. He notes that at the time, in order to stave off “the tides of globalization” Brunei needed to “perform a balancing act, aiming to preserve our distinctiveness as a people while at the same time embracing the ever-changing world culture” (Abdul, 2013, p. 95). Thus, “MIB was proposed as a solution” (*ibid.*).

Even before the implementation of MIB, Brunei was already performing this balancing act between technological modernity and Islamic beliefs and values. In fact, technology itself was

deployed in order to strengthen those beliefs. In May 1963, for example, the prayer timetable began to be published in every edition of the then bimonthly *Pelita Brunei* (“Waktu sembahyang”, May 1963, p. 4), pointing towards the usefulness of print media in disseminating necessary religious information to the rest of the country whilst also reinforcing with every edition the centrality of Islam to the nation. The Department of Religious Affairs (now Ministry of Religious Affairs) also utilized print media to their advantage, publishing educational articles on Islamic history and principles (“Benarkah Islam di-siarkan dengan pedang?” April 1967, p. 3) and even broadcasting religious talks on national radio (“Siaran Jabatan Hal Ehwal Uagama”, Jan 1963, p. 6). Alongside the development and modernization of the country, the government sought to expand Islamic knowledge as well by awarding scholarships to students under the Department of Religious Affairs to continue their studies abroad (“20 orang penuntut2 sekolah2 uagama Brunei”, April 1967, p. 2). All these efforts to strengthen Brunei’s Islamic identity were clearly only possible with the help of modern technology and it thus became necessary to dissolve the perceived binary between religion and modernity and to keep emphasizing and effecting a beneficial relationship between the two.



Figure 1. Image included in news article covering the return of the Crown Prince, Duli Pengiran Muda Mahkota Hassanal Bolkiah, from Malaysia (“Do’a untok selamat balek”, April 1963, p. 1).

A symbol of this constructive relationship can be seen throughout images portrayed in the media, such as a front-cover photo of the then Crown Prince, Duli Pengiran Muda Mahkota Hassanal Bolkiah and other officials reading prayers in front of an airplane after his safe return from Malaysia (“Do’a untok selamat balek”, April 1963, p. 1), thus visually uniting modern progress in the form of transportation technology, future leadership as symbolized by the Crown Prince, and the centrality of Islam as represented by the prayers. Notably, print media, as exemplified by the publication of this image, also proved to be one potentially effective way of repeatedly declaring the nation’s alignment with the pillars that would go on to constitute the national philosophy.

Rethinking Islam and technological modernity in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968)

The values and tensions of the relationship between technological modernity and Islamic values are played out between the siblings in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968): the eldest brother and protagonist, Azman, is a Western-educated man who has managed to hold on to his Islamic faith and is thus portrayed as the ideal Bruneian citizen working hard to spread Islamic awareness in the country. In contrast, his younger siblings, Noriah and Nordin, are shown to be reckless and disrespectful to their brother and parents, constantly transgressing Islamic laws by drinking alcohol, gambling, and partying. In the end, Noriah and her partner are caught by the authorities engaging illegally in pre-marital sex and are sentenced to prison. Nordin ends up in a debilitating car accident after driving under the influence, having lost most of his parents' money by gambling. Their parents, the film suggests, are also to blame for neglecting to discipline their two youngest children¹ and they end up living with Azman and his family in a modest home, in stark contrast to their previous modern, luxurious home sold recklessly by Nordin. Their "punishment" is perhaps a reminder of the necessity for parents as authority figures within the family unit (and extensions of the nation's governing body) to guide (and discipline) their children.

The film makes clear that Azman represents the ideal Bruneian citizen by being able to adhere to his Islamic faith whilst also being open to certain kinds of modern progress, whereas his siblings are set as prime examples of wayward youth who have abandoned their Islamic (as well as Malay) values, seeing them as incompatible with their Western-influenced perspective of what is modern. At the root of the conflict between these siblings are the opposing ideas of what being modern means: for Nordin and Noriah, being modern and being Islamic are mutually exclusive, whereas for Azman, they are mutually beneficial. These contrasting perspectives are outlined early on in the film when Nordin, Noriah, and a group of their friends, while listening to the radio, dancing and having a picnic on a beach, criticize Azman for his faith and therefore his backwardness. Someone like Azman, Nordin declares, "*sesuai hidup beribu-ribu tahun yang lalu, bukan dalam zaman kemajuan ini!*" ["may be suited to live thousands of years ago, not in this era of development!"]. Nordin thus presents the view that Islam is incompatible with modern society. According to him and his friends, modern progress means youth who know how to "*bergaul seperti kita – pandai ber-twist, pandai berdansa [...] dan sebagainya*" ["socialize like us – know how to do the twist and dance [...] and so on."]

The next scene shifts to a calm atmosphere inside their family home where Azman is having a serious conversation with his friend Hassan that undermines Nordin's view about Islam's incompatibility with modern societies. Both Azman and Hassan agree that Islam rather encourages development "*untuk kesempurnaan rohani dan jasmani. Bukan hanya kemajuan tiruan sahaja. Adakah perjuangan dalam arti kata begini bertentangan dengan dasar-dasar Islam?*" ["towards physical and spiritual perfection. Not just imitation disguising as development. Does development necessarily have to be contrary to the policies of Islam?"]. Note that Hassan uses the word *tiruan*, meaning artificial or imitation, when he describes the kind of development or modernity that Nordin and his friends embody. The word carries with it criticism of the view of progress that imitates that of the West rather than occurring under the guidance of Bruneian practices, beliefs and values. Meaningfully, in the middle of Hassan's speech, Nordin enters the living room and disrupts the atmosphere by playing a record loudly on the gramophone and dancing to the music. Evidently, the imitation of development that Hassan is referring to is Nordin's version of modern progress that equates to that of the West.

¹ Refer to Najib Noorashid, Nur Raihan Mohamad & Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati's essay in this issue, *Gema Dari Menara* (1968): Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar *As Islamic Da'wahism in Bruneian Film* which specifically investigates the role of the siblings' childhood education in inculcating Islamic values.

Indeed, as Azman points this out to Nordin towards the end of the film, “*engkau hanya mengenali kemajuan Barat. Tetapi engkau tidak tahu bahawa kemajuan Barat itu sendiri dimulai oleh pergerakan umat Islam*” [“you only know of the West’s progress. But you aren’t aware that their progress was initiated by the efforts of Muslim believers”].

The aesthetics of both scenes also serve to underscore the different views and attitudes. The outdoor setting for Nordin, Noriah and their friends appears to represent liberation from restrictions and tradition (further marked by their casual and relatively revealing clothing of swimming trunks and swimsuits), whereas the proximity to the sea and the waves on the beach signify their longing for change. Placing them on this physical border suggests their own marginality in an Islamic Bruneian society. Furthermore, the outdoor setting, with nature surrounding the characters, combined with the lack of clothing as well as their reveling in food, music, and dance suggests something primitive, thus undercutting their claims to modern progress. This is in stark contrast to the scene immediately after, which takes place inside their relatively modern and neat home, where Azman and Hassan discuss religious and current affairs rather than gossip or backbite. Azman and Hassan are even clothed in smart shirts and long pants, almost in a business-like manner with Hassan donning a tie. A connection is effectively drawn between the civilized manner of both men and their religious faith. Their Western-influenced outfits here also suggest their openness to certain Western influences as well, especially those that are compatible with Islamic and Malay values of conservativeness. Again, the film challenges the idea of being Islamic as being restricted and closed off to any notions of modern development. It is worthwhile to note here that the approach to Islam practiced in Brunei is moderate and inclusive (Kathrina, 2019; Mansurnoor, 2008), thus more open to encounters and exchanges with secular cultures.

Throughout the rest of the film, this connection between Islam and civility is repeatedly highlighted, especially by Azman. In a final attempt to persuade his siblings of Islam’s compatibility with modern civilization, he asks, “*Dan siapakah yang melahirkan temadun sekarang ini kalau bukan Islam?*” [“And who created the civilization of today, if not Islam?”] and points out how Muslims were the ones who “*mengembalikan dunia ini jadi gemilang dari zamannya yang buas dan nahas*” [“restored the world’s glory from its savage and violent era”]. By demonstrating Islam’s historic role in advancing civilization, Azman underscores Islam’s potential to help guide the modernization of the nation in addition to, and as a reciprocal effect of, using technology to help strengthen the people’s identification with Islam.

Several modern technologies are featured in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), including transport technologies (airplane, cars, boats) and media technologies (radio, gramophone, the film itself). The film demonstrates that these technologies can be used in two ways, i.e. for beneficial purposes (Islamic, national, moral) or otherwise. One of the scenes follows Azman, Hassan, and Shamsiah driving around the capital and even reaching the Tutong and Belait districts in order to learn more about, as well as facilitate, the Department of Religious Affairs’ efforts in developing and disseminating Islamic knowledge throughout the country. This scene is important for two main reasons. Firstly, without the car, these efforts would have taken a much longer time. Secondly, the automobile, which is featured prominently in the film, signifies a motorized, and therefore modernized, nation. A growing number of Bruneians were becoming vehicle owners, prompting the formation of the Land Transport Department in 1962. As the camera’s view shows the pace of the changing scenery from within the car, the audience is also able to participate in the speed that so characterizes the modern experience, like a symbolic propelling of the nation into a more modernized future. Couple this with the actions of the characters as well as the film itself helping to propagate Islamic knowledge, Islam (the Department of Religious Affairs and the Bruneian government by extension), is placed firmly on the side of modernization, rather than against it. The same can be said for the opening shot in the film of the bridge that extends from SOAS Mosque to Kampong Ayer as well as the many

passenger boats speeding along the water village – both the bridge and boats become representatives of technology seen to help ease the movement of people to and from home, work, and worship.

By opening with this particular scene, the film also alludes to the introduction of Islam to the nation and to wider Southeast Asia. Francis Gek Khee Lim notes that,

Historically, the spread of religion in Asia has always been closely linked to the growth and proliferation of new technologies. From their places of origin in the subcontinent, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam made inroads into Southeast Asia partly through the improvements that were made in means of transport, such as the sea-going vessels that allowed for long-distance trade between important centres surrounding the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. (2009, p. 1)

Without such transport technologies then, it seems much less likely that Islam would have even reached the shores of Brunei. Again, the film emphasizes that Islam and modernization go hand-in-hand. Contrast Azman's purposeful drive through Bandar with Nordin's reckless driving, particularly when he ends up in a near-fatal accident. The scene cuts quickly through different camera angles, from outside the car, to the windscreen, and to a close-up of Nordin struggling with steering, effectively emphasizing the excessive speed as well as disorientation of driving under the influence of alcohol. The scene then immediately cuts to an image of his father visiting him in hospital as he lays injured and immobile, wrapped completely in bandages. Consequently, the dangers of using these new technologies without Islamic guidance are stressed. Perhaps the strongest image in the film of the necessary partnership between Islam and modern technologies is of the Malaysia-Singapore Airlines aircraft touching down on the Brunei Airport runway bringing Azman's father home from his Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. As this is one of the five core pillars of the faith, which needs to be performed by every able Muslim, the figure of the airplane brings home the necessity of technology in facilitating this compulsory act.



Figure 2. Still from *Gema Dari Menara* showing the return of the father from his Hajj pilgrimage (Mohasbi, 1968).

Communication and media technologies such as the radio and gramophone also feature heavily in the film. As the then Head of the Department of Religious Affairs explains in the introduction, one of their department's responsibilities is to "*meluaskan perkembangan syiar agama Islam di negeri ini*" ["expand the spread of Islam in this country"]. Considering "*perkembangan zaman ini*" ["the developments in this era"], he emphasizes that doing so "*patutlah dilaksanakan menerusi berbagai-bagai jurusan [...] membuat filem adalah boleh dijadikan sebagai saluran untuk menyampaikan ajaran-ajaran agama*" ["should be implemented through various media, [hence] film can be used as one of the channels to convey the teachings of the religion"]. The department at the time recognized the potential in modern technologies to facilitate their efforts and actively sought new media to utilize, manifested in the production of *Gema Dari Menara* (1968). Besides the film itself, the radio is also shown to be advantageous in broadcasting religious guidance. At the beach scene with Nordin and Noriah, a close-up of a blue-colored radio dominates the scene for a lengthy 25 seconds as a talk on the importance of religious guidance takes place. The scene emphasizes again the connection between modern technology and the strengthening of the Islamic faith. Thereafter, a hand invades the shot to change the channel to dance music, the synecdoche perhaps implying man's propensity towards waywardness in the absence of guidance.

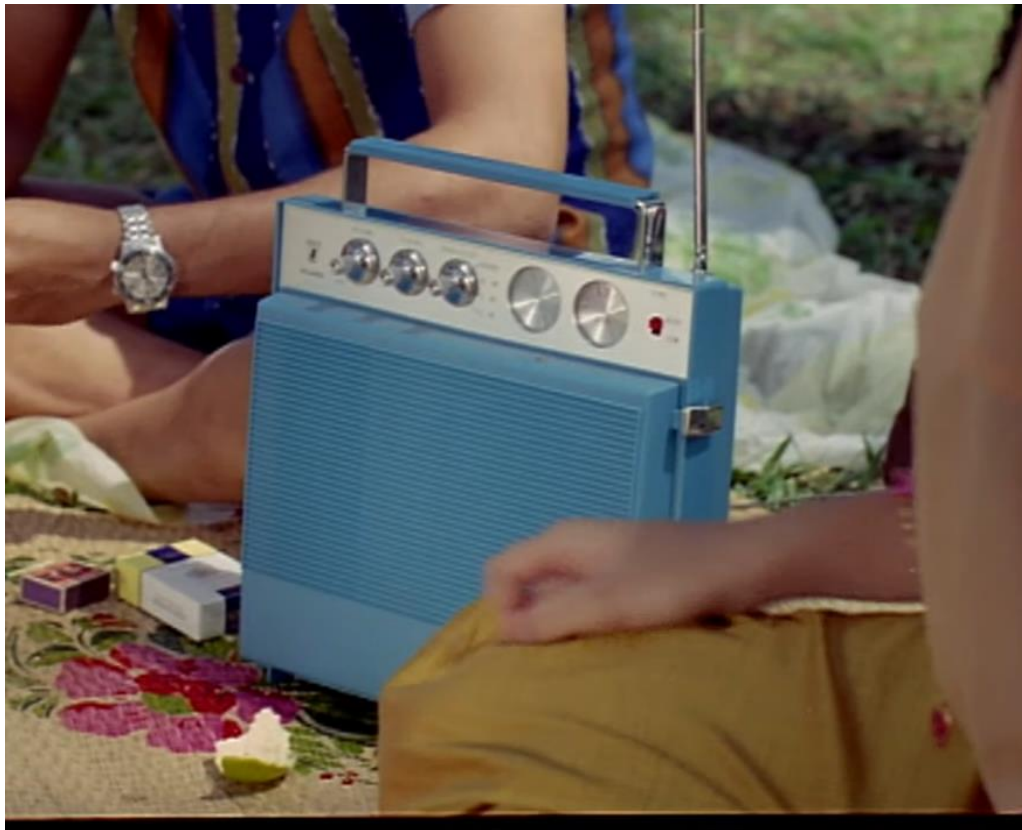


Figure 3. Still from *Gema Dari Menara* focusing on the radio used by Nordin and his friends (Mohasbi, 1968).

The prominence of radio in the film is significant considering its role in nation-building. According to historian Rozan Yunos, as media technologies "allow countries to be built, and diverse societies and cultures be forged into one nation," (Rozan, 2010) the radio broadcasting service proved to be necessary, particularly in reaching non-literate groups. The first radio broadcast in Brunei happened in 1957 by the official national service, Radio Brunei. The daily broadcast consisted of Malay and English programs for 2.5 hours playing musical

entertainment, religious programs, plays, talks, and the news, both world and local (*ibid.*). By broadcasting the same content to the rest of the nation in 1965 (radio transmission began with a small radius and reached other regions in stages), the radio would help in uniting diverse groups of people separated by distance and culture. Furthermore, the mix of programs themselves was crucial. The world news, for one, helped to keep the population updated with current events beyond the borders in almost real-time, and this new experience formed part of the modernization of the nation. Besides current world affairs, the broadcasting of local news helped to unite the different groups of people in the nation by keeping them up to date with events that more directly affected them. Additionally, the religious programs would educate the public as well as reinforce the centrality of Islamic principles within the national identity.

Interestingly, mixed in with these practical programs were sessions mainly for entertainment (with an undercurrent of didacticism) such as popular drama series *Diangdangan Bujang Sigandam*. The series is based on an epic narrative about a king called Bujang Sigandam and would be sung on the radio as per its oral origins. By broadcasting such historic and familiar stories, the radio also helped to augment and root local listeners to their “shared history” as included in Suzanne Moon’s definition of national identity. These cultural programs would resonate more with listeners than exclusively informational ones, and this can be detected in the overall creative, fictional direction of *Gema Dari Menara* as opposed to filming a merely informational religious speech, for instance. The montage of several religious speeches placed in the middle of the film interspersed with enactments demonstrating the dangers of un-Islamic behaviour effectively produces a kind of affective didacticism as it balances moral lessons with entertainment for audience engagement.

Conclusion: Modernity and functionality, tradition and aesthetics

The musical prologue that welcomes viewers and introduces the themes of the film already suggests that the creative arts and entertainment need not be shunned entirely in order to abide by Islamic values. The film, itself a product of modern media technology, is able to help preserve and highlight traditional Malay musical instruments such as the *gendang* and *gambus* used in the prologue. Their accompaniment to the song emphasizing the Islamic faith as necessary guidance indicates that new media technologies do not necessarily conflict with Islamic values. Modern technologies are shown to be capable of further enhancing and popularizing Bruneian cultural practices and Islamic values. In fact, as several scenes in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) demonstrate, they can also help to highlight, for instance, the beauty and aesthetics that characterize Islamic art and architecture. The repeated panoramic shots of the gleaming SOAS mosque, standing out even more amid the houses of Kampong Ayer underscore the significant value placed on aesthetics in Islamic architecture. This mutually beneficial relationship is also highlighted in several recent studies in history of technology that demonstrate technology’s capacity to “form identities” and which find that “users embody their identities within the technologies they employ” (Brinkman and Hirsh, 2017, p. 337). Not only does technology help to capture and disseminate information and ideas, in doing so it also plays an integral role in constructing and bolstering the nation’s collective and individual identity. Modern technologies, as seen in their uses in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), thus form extensions of the Bruneian body, modernized and Islamicized.

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Notes

All translations of film dialogue in this essay are author's own.

Visualising Change: Linguistic and Semiotic Landscape of Tutong Town

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of 'linguistic landscape' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and applies it to the Tutong Town Centre, which was depicted briefly in the film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968). Due to the cursory and grainy depiction on screen, a study of the present linguistic landscape of the town featured in the film is far more practical than a detailed comparison of the linguistic landscape of Tutong town then and now. In essence the film has provided a geographical scope for linguistic/ semiotic analysis presented in this paper. The study of signs 'in a given geographical location' (Ben Rafael et al, 2006: 14), using the distributive count approach, lends itself to a greater understanding of the ethnolinguistic vitality and sociolinguistic interactions of the language groups living in what can be described as a multilingual and multiracial small town. Such evidence of language use in the public sphere results from an interplay of various factors within the town's societal context, that could be related to Scollon & Scollons' (2003:2) idea of 'the social meaning of material placement of sign and discourses'. This study challenges the notion of ethnic languages' 'disappearance' from public sphere, and instead raises questions about their 'initiation' into public use. The study also concludes that the supposed multilinguality of the Tutong Town population is not represented in the linguistic landscape.

Introduction

At 1:01:21 of *Gema Dari Menara* (1968), Tutong is mentioned for the first time by Hassan, when he tells Azman (the main protagonist), that he has a set of posters to drop off at Tutong mosque on their way back from Kuala Belait to Bandar Seri Begawan. The Tutong scene does not contribute much to the plot except to showcase the Department of Religious Affairs' then-considered 'modern' assets across the country. The actual footage is only about one minute long, and is literally a drive through Tutong town centre. It therefore depicts the centre of commercial activities in Tutong district in 1968, and provides a definable space that can be investigated through the study of its linguistic and semiotic landscape. In the scarcity of original and 'live' visual text depicting Tutong in the 1960s, this footage becomes a significant record (albeit brief) of Tutong daily life. But it is precisely this brevity that allows this study to re-trace the journey of Azman and Hassan to the Tutong mosque, so that a description of the Tutong town's linguistic and semiotic landscape in the present day can give us an insight into the development it has experienced over the last 50 years.

Linguistic and Semiotic Landscape

Landry & Bourhis were the first to conceptualise 'linguistic landscape' as 'the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration' (1997: 25). Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hecht's (2006: 14) interpretation of 'linguistic landscape' involves the analysis of 'any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location'. The notion of linguistic landscape, therefore, refers to the 'visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region' (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 23). Van Mensel, Vandenbroucke & Blackwood (2016: 423) view linguistic landscape as 'a highly interdisciplinary research domain, grounded in a wide range of theories

and disciplines, such as language policy, sociology, semiotics, literacy studies, anthropology, social and human geography, politics, and urban studies', whose object of research is any visible display of written language (a "sign") as well as people's interactions with these signs. However, these definitions focus on the linguistic texts, and exclude the semiotic texts (signs that contain little or no words), in the area of study. This study therefore posits both linguistic and semiotic evidence in so far as they are both used as 'signs' within the area under study. Inclusion of both linguistic and semiotic signs would strengthen the ecological approach (Haugen 1972) adopted in this study: to consider all signs in their various forms (notices, announcements, warnings etc) whether they are commercial, public or traffic-related in nature. The ecological approach is adopted from Haugen's sociolinguistic approach where all languages within the same geography are taken into account.

Studying the linguistic landscape of a multilingual and multicultural area can give us an understanding of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the language groups present in that area, as the linguistic landscape is considered 'the most salient marker of perceived in-group versus out-group vitality' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 45). According to Van Mensel et al the conclusions made by Landry and Bourhis (1997) 'are premised on an understanding of language and society in which language use is directly and exclusively linked to certain well-defined, homogenous groups of language users, while the visibility of a particular language is taken to be indicative of the vitality of the language and its group of users'. Van Mensel et al (2016: 426) further relate linguistic landscape to an understanding of 'the societal and official status of the language(s) and their respective communities of speakers'. Van Mensel et al (2016: 430) argue that the straightforward and direct correlation between a language's visibility in public space and its vitality, between its communicative currency and an active presence, as originally put forward by Landry & Bourhis (1997), is empirically no longer tenable in the face of globalised and increasingly complex landscapes (Vandenbroucke, 2015). Instead, language use in the public sphere reflects the outcome of a complicated interplay between various factors of ethnic, political, ideological, commercial, or economic nature in a particular societal context, perhaps more relevant to 'the social meaning of the material placement of sign and discourses' as proposed by Scollon & Scollon (2003: 2).

The data in this study was generated by employing the most common approach in linguistic landscape studies, that is counting the distribution of the signs. Van Mensel et al (2016: 426) argue that 'the distributive approach in linguistic landscape analysis gives an impression of the relative power of certain language groups - their ethnolinguistic vitality—based on the presence or absence of the respective signs in the public sphere'. The distributive analysis involves signs in different linguistic codes collected in a specified area being counted, categorised, and then compared to come up with a geographic distribution and the territorial presence of linguistic tokens (and/or semiotic tokens, in this case). The results of this distributive analysis, according to Van Mensel et al (2016: 426), can provide insight into aspects of human social activity and linguistic diversity 'that typify the multilayered, superdiverse multilingual contexts of society being studied, which in turn provides us with an empirical barometer to map and interpret both short- and long-term *change* in language and society'.

Jaworski & Thurlow (2010:3) view the concept of (linguistic) landscape as 'a way of seeing' that is not confined to the mediated representations of space in art and literature, but also subsume our view and interpretation of space 'in ways that are contingent on geographical, social, economic, legal cultural and emotional circumstances, as well as our practical uses of physical environment as nature and territory, aesthetic judgments, memory and myth, for example, drawing on religious beliefs and references, historical discourses, politics of gender relations, class, ethnicity, and the imperial projects of colonization - all of which are still present today and consistently reproduced in, for example, contemporary tourist landscapes' (Van Mensel et al, 2016).

In terms of analysis of data, linguistic landscape studies have placed great importance on the idea of agency. Landry & Bourhis (1997: 26) distinguished between commercial “private” and “public government” signs, whilst Ben-Rafael et al. (2006: 10) observed that official “top-down” signs “are expected to reflect a general commitment to the dominant culture,” whereas private “bottom-up” signs “are designed much more freely according to individual strategies.” The former thus reflects overt “power,” while the latter indexes covert “solidarity” (Backhaus, 2006). But Lou (2012: 46) rightly argues, “the distinctions between ‘official’ and ‘top-down’ signs and ‘unofficial’ and ‘bottom-up’ signs are increasingly blurred, and the power of the state is often blended with the interests of the corporate.” Kallen (2010) redefines “top-down” forces as “the civic authorities. Yet a “bottom-up category” of signage is not unproblematic, as Pavlenko (2009: 250) notes: “large multinational corporations may aim to present an internationally recognized image (global signs), local commercial enterprises may need to comply with local policies, and private individuals may make their choices based on their own linguistic competencies and those of intended readers.”

In support of the ecological approach mentioned above, Van Mensel et al (2016: 442) argue that critical changes in the linguistic composition of the public space and of what Blommaert (2013: 51) refers to as ‘the complex semiotic organisation of space’ point to the transformation of ‘social order’ (2013: 51). Pavlenko & Mullen (2015: 117) argue that linguistic landscape scholars overlook diachronicity at their peril, and they recommend that a diachronic approach to LL should include “(a) the approach of ‘all signs in one place over time’ and (b) the awareness that sign interpretation takes place not just in the context of the other signs in the same environment but in the context of the signs of the same type previously seen by the viewers.”

As an analytical tool, linguistic landscape (and by extension, semiotic landscape) can become ‘a diagnostic of social, cultural and political structures inscribed in the linguistic landscape’ (Blommaert (2013: 3). ‘Signs’ and how people deal with these signs, can inform us concurrently about macro and micro dimensions, and about long- and short-term evolutions. Indeed, when looking at signs ‘in place’, they become embedded, historicised artifacts at the crossroads of materiality and action, what Scollon & Scollon (2003) have called ‘aggregates of discourse’ (Van Mensel et al 2016: 443). Looking at it this way, any single “sign” becomes almost by definition rich and dense research material that we can explore to capture the interplay between linguistic and societal processes (Van Mensel et al, 2016: 443).

Similar LL studies have been conducted in Brunei previously by Coluzzi (2012), Susilawati Japri (2016) and Surinah Nordin (2018). Coluzzi analysed signs on a main road in the capital city of Brunei and found that out of the 60% of signs that used mixed languages, 21% that used Standard Malay, and 16% that used only English, minority languages are absent from the linguistic landscape. Meanwhile, the study by Susilawati Japri (2016) analysed the language of signboards in a Bruneian shopping mall. She found that although the law (Registry of Business) requires the signboard to include the business’s name in Malay Jawi script (twice the size of the Malay Roman script), 42% of shops do not adhere to this rule. Surinah Nordin’s (2018) Master’s thesis on company names in Brunei complements earlier works as it found that more than 70% of new businesses tended to use English names. These names would eventually appear on signboards, a significant element of the previous two studies. However, a detailed linguistic and semiotic study of Tutong town has never been conducted before. This study takes the historic scenes of the drive through Tutong town in *Gema Dari Menara* as an inspiration for this analysis of present-day signs.

The Landscape in Question: Tutong Town Centre

Tutong District is the third largest district bordering the South China Sea to the north, Brunei-Muara District to its northern-east and Belait District to its southern-west. It covers an area of

approximately 1,166 sq. km. with an estimated population of 44,300 people comprising of the Malays (mainly Tutong, Dusun, Kedayan), Iban, and Chinese (Tutong District Office, 2019). Traditionally each group would speak their respective languages and dialects; but Tutong is well-known amongst Bruneians for their Tutong language, an Austronesian language of its own. It is widely assumed that the traditional languages of these groups are dialects of Malay although in strict linguistic terms they are all less than 40% cognate with Bahasa Melayu (Nothofer 1991). According to Nothofer, in fact a cognate percentage of 80% is the determinant between a language and a dialect in Brunei. Other traditional languages such as Dusun, Kedayan and Iban are still widely spoken, alongside Hokkien and Mandarin. Yet Brunei Malay is widely spoken as the vernacular language, whilst English is spoken or used commonly as well.

Most of the administration and business activities take place in Pekan Tutong or Tutong Town. Tutong district has eight mukim or collection of villages (kampung): Mukim Pekan Tutong (Kampung Panchor Dulit, Kampung Panchor Papan, Kampung Sengkarai, Kampung Kuala Tutong, Kampung Penanjong, Bukit Bendera, Kampung Kandang, Kampung Penabai, Kampung Petani, Kampung Serambangan, Kampung Tanah Burok, Paya Pekan Tutong, Tutong Kem.

The Tutong district's town centre, or the municipality area of Tutong Town, dates back to 13 November 1929 when the Sanitary Board was established and the area under its jurisdiction was declared a Sanitary Board Area. The Sanitary Board, renamed 'Lembaga Bandaran Tutong' (Tutong Municipal Board) in 1970, was in charge of the cleanliness and developing the town. Today the main responsibility of the Municipal Department is collecting revenue from taxation of building, commercial licence fees and rental of commercial lots in commercial centres owned by the Department.

The Tutong Town municipality or sub-district covers only 0.024 km² comprising parts of Kampung Petani, Bukit Bendera, and the main mosque Masjid Hassan al-Bolkiah along Jalan Inche Awang, which runs parallel to the Tutong River (Sungai Tutong). Kampung Petani and Bukit Bendera are village-level subdivisions, the third and lowest administrative divisions in the country, and administered under Tutong District Office, a department in the Ministry of Home Affairs (Information Department, 2013).

Albeit brief, the drive-through scene in *Gema Dari Menara*, provides an instance of rare archival material that depicts socioeconomic activity in Tutong Town. For many years, until the coastal highway was opened in the late 1980s, Tutong Town would have been a rest-stop for travellers to and from Bandar Seri Begawan and Kuala Belait going in either direction.



Figure 1: Screengrab (of the in-flow drive) from the film depicting Tutong Town in 1968.



Figure 2: Tutong Town in 2020 in a reconstruction of the (in-flow) drive through in the film.

The buildings depicted in the film are mostly still present today, 50 years on. In 1968, single-unit restaurants and shops selling daily groceries were common; and to a certain extent the businesses have remained the same. These buildings have remained relatively unchanged, until the 1990s heralded the development of new shopping complexes further inland from the riverfront, behind the shophouses shown in the film. The new blocks gave rise to 'new' experiences for the Tutong people, for example, Fast food restaurants (Express), two-storey supermarket (Teguh Raya), dedicated pedestrian zones, and even a hotel in the 2000s. In terms of population make up, Tutong Town today is certainly more cosmopolitan consisting of expatriate workers (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Malaysian, Indonesian) employed by the various businesses in and around town. The only hotel in town has also hosted long-term European expatriates working in various sectors in Brunei. Reputation-wise, Tutong is still seen by most Bruneians as a sleepy town to be skipped over.

Analysis of Signs

The area of study is the specific stretch of road (Jalan Inche Awang) beginning from just before the first block of shops in Tutong Town until the Tutong Mosque, covering a distance of 0.94 km only. All signs within street-level view along this road, in the same direction Hassan and Azman were driving in the film, were taken note of and counted. These signs include private or unofficial signs, and government or official signs, following both Landry & Bourhis (1997) and Ben Rafael (2010), but in this study the following categories (emergent patterns) will be used:

Private: Signs put up by unofficial (non-government) or commercial parties.

- Signboards: Signs that bear the name of the unit, shop or building.
- Notices: Signs that warn the public about certain activities and behaviors. or that provide information.
- Advertisements: Signs that advertise goods and services by companies not necessarily based in the location under study.



Figure 3: Private signboard with name of the restaurant in Jawi, Malay Rumi, Chinese characters, and in English. Below it is a welcome sign in Malay and Mandarin.



Figure 4: Private notices on a glass door of a restaurant informing visitors that this was not a Halal restaurant, and smoking was not allowed indoors. It also announces a telecommunication product was sold there.



Figure 5: Private advertisements stuck on a door.

Public: Signs installed by official authority or government agencies.

- Notices: Signs that aim to announce to the general public information about the building, events and activities, or to warn against certain activities.
- Traffic: Signs that are meant to orientate or direct both drivers and pedestrians installed along the roads, on or near buildings (not including road markings).



Figure 6: Public sign showing the Brunei Government crest to mark the building.



Figure 7: Public sign with Brunei Government crest and name and info on the site in Jawi, Malay Rumi, and English.



Figure 8: Public traffic signs (icons) for motorists and pedestrians.



Figure 9: Public sign (icons) for road traffic and pedestrians.

The data analysis has been conducted in two stages, based on the perspective depicted in the film:

- **In-flow:** Analysis of signs visible from the main road in the direction featured in the film.
- **Contra-flow:** Analysis of signs found in the peripheral areas, for example, those behind the shophouse buildings or the government offices, or those visible to the eye from a direction opposite to that shot in the film.

The combination of both these perspectives will provide a rich picture of the linguistic and semiotic ecology or landscape of Tutong Town.

Findings

The signs were noted from two perspectives: In-flow (following the sequence and direction of travel as depicted in the film); and Contra-flow (viewing the periphery and travelling from the opposite direction). These are discussed separately below. The texts are analysed in terms of whether they contain words, visuals or both, and whether they are presented as English, Chinese or Malay Rumi or Malay Jawi. 'Rumi' refers to the romanised script of the Malay language; whilst 'Jawi' refers to the Arabic script traditionally used to write Malay.

In-flow View

Analysis of the signs in-flow are as follows:

		Private			Public		
		Signboard	Notice	Advertisement	Signboard	Notice	Traffic
Words	Malay Rumi	18	3	4	10	36	0
	Malay Jawi	22	0	0	13	18	0
	English	14	9	21	6	23	1
	Chinese	9	1	0	0	0	0
	Mixed code	0	1	3	0	0	1
Visual	Icon	1	7	7	7	5	20
	Picture	0	0	1	0	4	0
Mixed Visual and Words		1	4 (Eng.)	9	1	19 (Mal.)	11
			1 (Chi.)			5 (Eng.)	
			Total				299

Table 1. *In-flow signs*

The in-flow analysis involves 299 signs found in and on buildings and along the road as shown in sequence in the film.

In general, there are three types of signs found on location. Firstly, signs that contain words but in various languages: Malay, English, Chinese or a mix of any of these languages. Secondly, signs that employ visuals in the form of icons or symbols, and pictures or illustrations. Out of the 299 signs, 45 mix visuals and words, but these are not double-counted.

Among the Private signs, most of the signboards are written in Malay Jawi (22) and in Malay Rumi (18), followed by English (14) with only 9 instances of Chinese signs. The fact that Malay Jawi and Rumi are most frequently found has much to do with the fact that businesses in Brunei must now display their names written in Jawi, Rumi, and as an option, in Chinese characters. Two significant points can be inferred from this finding. Business companies seem to adhere to the requirement of including Malay Jawi and Rumi spellings of their companies, in addition to their English and/or Chinese names. On the other hand, there are only four Chinese-owned businesses in the two main commercial buildings in the town centre. Interestingly, Tong Huat Company alone has four signs in Chinese characters on display. Other businesses in the two blocks, and further up the road are owned and/or operated by Malay or Indian businessmen. In relation to this, three of the Chinese companies in the shophouses (Tong Huat, Mei Fang and Hoe Hing) have remained in the same location since their establishment, and were in fact featured briefly in the film during the drive past.

There were also 34 advertisements found in the area, but the majority of these advertisements were written in English (21) without any translations or use of other languages. Interestingly three were written by mixing both English and Malay (e.g. 'Steam rambut', 'Cuci muka' and 'Leg waxing' all on one poster, meaning 'hair steaming', 'face wash' and 'leg waxing' services being on offer). These advertisements were mainly handwritten or printed sheets offering goods like cars for sale, and services like grass-cutting and their prices. This mixing of languages is either deliberate, or a bad attempt at the use of Malay language by the advertisers who do not speak it well.

In fact, the 21 private advertisements written entirely in English seem to suggest the advertisements were made by foreigners who know English well enough, and who know their

target Bruneians too use English quite comfortably. However, the fact that there are no advertisements in Malay Jawi or in Chinese might suggest either the advertisers are not literate in Jawi or Chinese, or that they think their audience would be limited if they wrote their advertisements in Jawi or Chinese characters. A third assumption is, of course, writing in English would suffice in the knowledge that most Bruneians or those in Tutong Town would be able to read and understand the English version.

There were 14 private notices about opening hours, or warnings about the spa being for female clients only, or even the tailor meant just for male clients. Nine were in English ('No entry', 'Staff only', 'Cash only'), while three were in Malay Rumi ('Untuk Perempuan Sahaja', 'Untuk Lelaki Sahaja', 'Tutup', 'Bukan Makanan untuk Orang Islam', respectively meaning 'For women only', 'For men only', 'Closed', and 'Not Muslim food'). It is worth noting that only one sign entirely in Chinese was found in the area ('禁烟' meaning 'No smoking'). These notices have been installed by the private companies themselves within their premises. However, the warnings about male or female clientele only are repeating official warnings from the government for their businesses to segregate their clients by gender.

In addition to the textual signs, 8 private advertisements depict icons and pictures only without words. These include the 'barber's pole', the red-and-blue rolling stripes, both of which indicate hair salon or barber grooming services. The single picture advertisement found was indeed a poster picture of a trendy ladies' hairstyle.

Public signboards mainly used Malay Rumi (10) and Malay Jawi (13), as well as English (6). At the same time, the seven icons included the Brunei government's crest emblazoned on the buildings and structures.

Among the public signs, 46 notices were written in Malay Rumi, while 18 were in Malay Jawi. It is interesting that more Jawi is being used in the private signs, rather than in the official signs. But again, the legal requirement for businesses to include Jawi in their signboards is a measure that is strictly monitored and enforced. Failure to comply would result in a fine for the offending company. It would seem that government or official notices are acceptable in using Malay Rumi only, as this would be seen as sufficient in terms of upholding the official language, Malay.

In relation to this, the townscape would not be complete without the government sign in Jawi and Rumi reminding the public to 'be proud to use Malay' (Berbanggalah menggunakan Bahasa Melayu). Given the prominence of Bahasa Melayu, it therefore not difficult to see why there are no government signs in Chinese nor in mixed languages.

Likewise, it is not surprising to see public notices in English occur quite frequently (23 times), given the strong emphasis on the use of English in the national education system. Nevertheless, it is still rather surprising to see more English being used in official signs than Jawi (18 times).

11 visual signs were found in the area of study. The four picture-only signs were picture posters depicting beautiful scenes of Tutong, aimed at promoting tourism to the district.

Traffic signs, issued only by the government or official authorities, are mainly visual in nature. 20 instances of traffic icons were found in the in-flow analysis, depicting universally understood traffic symbols and warnings (e.g., zebra crossing, amber warning, give way triangle, and arrows for direction). There is one instance of a traffic sign entirely in English ('No Parking'). Interestingly, there is also a similar traffic warning that mixes English and Malay in an empty space regularly misused by undiscerning drivers to park illegally ('No Parking Arah Polis', meaning 'No Parking by order of the police'). Given that the traffic police are a government agency, they would be expected to have been more careful in their use of the official language, but these mixed-language signs suggest otherwise.

In terms of signs that mix visuals and words, 19 of the government signs in Malay (both Rumi and Jawi) were found, in comparison to five using English. These were mainly posters promoting upcoming tourist events and/or local tourist attractions.

Contra and Peripheral View

In order to provide a fuller picture of the locale under study, it would be useful to also look at it from the other side, as it were, from the opposite direction from Hassan and Azman's route in the film. This would involve driving into Tutong Town centre from the Tutong Mosque. Using the same categories as in the in-flow analysis, the following signs have been identified:

		Private			Public		
		Signboard	Notice	Advertisement	Signboard	Notice	Traffic
Words	Malay Rumi	5	1	0	7	8	2
	Malay Jawi	5	1	0	6	3	0
	English	0	6	0	0	0	0
	Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mixed code	0	0	3	0	2	
Visual	Icon	3	1	0	2	0	16
	Picture	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mixed Visual and Words		1	1(Mal.)	1	1	6 (Mal.)	5
		Total					71

Table 2. *Contra-flow signs*

There are fewer signs identified coming from municipality boundary (just before the Tutong mosque) into the town centre, as most have been recorded and accounted for in the in-flow analysis. Most striking would be the gradual increase in the number of private signs - most of these would be Shell company-related signs. A total of 71 signs were identified in the contra-flow. These exclude the signs already identified within the visual line in the in-flow analysis. 25 private signs and 51 public signs were found from the mosque into town centre, and in the adjacent areas in the backroad that parallels the main road featured in the film.

Notably, there are more public signs than private signs found as the peripheral areas are municipal-controlled and mostly gazetted for government use. The main private or commercial operation in the contra-flow is a Shell fuel station in Kampung Suran, which of course adheres to high safety standards and uses a large number of signs. On the other hand, this being a high traffic and bottleneck area, most of the public signs visible are actually traffic-related. Perhaps the most recent, and the most significant, signage is the Hollywood Hills-style 'Pekan Tutong' sign on the hill that overlooks the entire town centre and river (*see* Figure. 10). This particular sign is positioned such that the contra-flow (in this study) is the best vantage point from which to view it, but would not be immediately visible to the driver in the in-flow direction in this case. The hilltop sign is in essence a 'welcome' sign for drivers coming into Tutong Town from Bandar Seri Begawan.



Figure 10: Tutong Town landmark signage in Malay Jawi and Rumi.



Figure 11: Tutong Town riverside landmark.



Figure 12: The Tutong Jetty signage. This jetty was depicted in the film, but has since been renovated.

An aggregative in-flow inspection of the linguistic and semiotic landscape of Tutong town centre as featured in the film in 1968 shows that most of the signboards in the shops were written in Malay Jawi. It has to be noted that the second shophouse building shown in the film was destroyed by fire in the early 1970s, and was rebuilt as a 3-storey concrete structure that remains in use today. The grainy film suggests 14 shop signboards were installed in the two shophouses, mostly written in Jawi, though not all can be read clearly. Comparing these to photographic evidence from elsewhere, shop names like 'Tong Huat' (Rumi, Jawi, Chinese) 'Mei Fang' (Jawi), 'Hasbolah Yusuf' (Rumi), 'Kedai Bee Seng' (Jawi), 'Choon Seng' (Jawi) can be deciphered from the screenshot, although the latter three were burnt down in the fire as well. Some international brand names and signs that are still well-known today are also visible in the film: 7-Up (drink), Shell (oil products), Lucky Strike (cigarettes), Phillips (electronics). Given the precise location of these signs, and given what we know about these brands today, we can safely conclude that all these signs were private signs. The only decipherable public visual signs are 'No Parking' (traffic), 'Give Way' (traffic), the *Panji-panji* (Government crest), and the crescent moon and star atop the mosque dome (Islamic). Apart from the rebuilding of the second shophouse after the fire, another physical change in the built environment in the film is the demolition of the row of four bungalows (government housing) and several other wooden buildings in the immediate vicinity (government office and storage) along Jalan Inche Awang, the main road. Foodstalls, two car parks and a riverside park now stand in their place. A more detailed analysis cannot be done at this stage due to the low resolution of the film. A contra-flow analysis of film excerpt is impracticable as we can only see what is depicted on film.

Discussion

The combination of both in-flow and contra-flow sets of current signs total to 370 items altogether. These only include signs that are visible to the observer from street-level, and do not include signs inside the shop units, offices, and other buildings in the area. Yet they provide sufficient data to provide a linguistic profile of the area under study in the present time. It is clear that Bahasa Melayu or Malay features prominently (in both Rumi and Jawi fashion) in both the linguistic and semiotic landscape of Tutong town centre, as evidenced by the data presented in the in-flow and contra-flow sets. This is followed closely by English signs, which was expected because of the widespread use of English throughout Brunei. But although it had been expected that Chinese would also feature frequently in the signs, the data clearly proves this is far from the case.

This brings us to the discussion of agency. Although the general division of agency is private (business owners and operators) and public (government authorities), the make-up of business owners and operators in the area can be further analysed. An assessment of the business signboards indicates that out of 15 businesses in the main retail buildings, 12 foodstalls and 1 petrol station (totalling 28) show that only 4 businesses are Chinese-owned or -run. As the municipal requires that signboards should include Jawi and Rumi versions of companies' names, the Chinese and English versions are optional. It is assumed then that it is only the Chinese owners or operators who would elect to include their Chinese names on their signs.

Given that Tutong district has an estimated population of 44,300 people comprising of the Malays (mainly Tutong, Dusun, Kedayan), Iban, and Chinese (Tutong District Office, 2019), the linguistic ecosystem would be expected to be richly endowed with various languages. Noor Azam (2005), and Noor Azam and Siti Ajeerah (2016) have identified the following languages spoken by the populace there: Tutong, Dusun, Kedayan, Brunei Malay, Iban, Chinese (Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin), and English. And based on this, some representation of all of these languages was to be expected amongst the signs. However, the data presented here found no evidence of any signs in Tutong, Dusun, Kedayan, Brunei Malay or Iban. Perhaps more surprisingly, the Tutong people are famously protective of their traditional

Tutong language, and yet no private or public signs have been installed in the area under study. The only reference that can be made to the Tutong language is a public notice in the riverside park that explains that the Tutong word for 'riverside' is 'tatangan'. Therefore it can be said that the linguistic and semiotic landscape in Tutong Town does not reflect its multilingual ecosystem.

Conclusion

There is no question that combining linguistic and semiotic landscape analysis is a very useful approach in synchronic and diachronic linguistic studies related to a specific location. Using archival material and existing signs from earlier times, Spalding (2013), and Blackwood (2015), according to Van Mensel et al (2016), were able to explore political, economic and artistic trends, and their impact on written language practices in society. In relation to this, Van Mensel et al (2016) argue that 'change' is innate in a diachronic approach to linguistic landscape studies. They argue that this variation is often understood as either the appearance or disappearance of languages from public writing or from public places in general, and its interpretation. It is unlikely that Tutong, Kedayan or Dusun, for example, were ever used widely in signboards, notices or traffic signs in Tutong town centre, despite their native status in the Tutong district. This owes much to the spoken, rather than written, nature of these ethnic languages, as well as the fact that Malay had been elevated to official language status. Given these facts, the issue in the context of the Tutong linguistic landscape is therefore not so much about the ethnic languages' 'disappearance' from public sphere - because they never were used in signages really - rather, it is more about their 'initiation' into the linguistic and semiotic landscape via signs. When will they begin to be used in Tutong Town signages? Will they ever be?

The brief minute Hassan and Azman drove through Tutong may appear inconsequential to the plot of *Gema Dari Menara* other than for the novel inclusion of another scenic town in Brunei in this pioneering film; yet it has provided us with a glimpse into the past, and has given us some idea about the linguistic and semiotic landscape of Tutong town back in 1968, and how and why the landscape may have evolved over time. What we can affirmatively say about the landscape today is that the traditional languages are not reflected in any of the signs in place in the Tutong town – supporting Coluzzi's (2012) assertion that traditional languages do not enjoy visibility in linguistic landscapes in Brunei. But neither is the 'cosmopolitan' make-up represented, as there is little to no evidence to show the expatriate population currently living and working in the commercial sections of the town centre. Clearly more research needs to be conducted to consider the complex roles and impacts of socio-political, socio-economics, socio-historical etc. factors can have in microcosms such as Tutong.

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Malayness in *Gema Dari Menara* (1968)

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Abstract

This paper argues that the film *Gema Dari Menara* produced in 1968 reflects Brunei's attempt towards constructing a Brunei Malayness as a national identity. During the early twentieth century, the colonial powers particularly in the Peninsula, tried to help establish a sense of unity among the Malays. Although it was not clear whether this was entirely successful, it is possible that the presence of colonial powers had some influence towards fuelling Malays to be more proactive in their own identity construction. After the British began to leave Brunei, the nation-state can be perceived to have intensified its efforts in creating a national identity as a way to unify its people, including the preservation and reconstruction of its Malayness. A close analysis of the characters in the film will reveal portrayals of ideals of Malayness and how Islamic values penetrate Malayness in the Bruneian context. The main character Azman is arguably the epitome of ideal Malayness, as his behaviour, his way of thinking as well as the way he dresses complement what Brunei aspires to for its people, whereas his younger siblings' partying and wild behaviour are a cautionary tale. These findings will hopefully provide insights for further studies on the impact of the British administration on the Brunei Malay culture or identity formation in Brunei as a postcolonial state.

Introduction

The film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) opens with the performance of a titular song detailing the plot of the film. In it, the singer talks about how the film will portray an example of how opposite lifestyles will impact society and individuals, and implies that the viewers should be able to decide correctly which lifestyle will lead to peace and harmony (*kemakmuran umat Islam di negara*) which is heavily implied to be the Islamic way of life. While the content of the song serves to inform, I am also drawn to the ways in which the entire performance serves as a visual representation of Malayness. All the performers – the lead singer, backup singer and the musicians – are wearing traditional Malay clothes – a *baju kurung* which is a long blouse with a *songket* (woven cloth) as the skirt for the ladies, and a *baju Melayu*, a set of matching top and pants with a *sinjang* which is a type of sarong also made from woven material. The musicians accompanying the singing play traditional musical instruments – *gendang labik*, *gambus*, *rampana* (drum, lute, Malay tambourine) – and the music is in the *nasyid* style, “a genre of Islamic popular music” with roots that can be traced to the Middle East (Barendregt, 2011) which generally contains comments on “wrongs in society and corrupt politics in the Muslim world, the glory of Allah and the teachings of His Prophet” (ibid). The definition of *nasyid* corresponds to the content of the song, which stresses the importance of Islamic values. The fusion of both Malay customs and Arabic roots sets the tone for the type of Malayness that Brunei is seeking to define.

As stated by Anthony Milner in his book *The Malays* (2008), defining who the Malays are is not a straightforward task. For Milner (2008) “although the word ‘Malay’ is used across a wide geographical region, it is clear...that we cannot assume it conveys the same meaning” (10). Milner goes on to elaborate on the variety of opinions about what features make one a Malay. From his analysis, such variation is not only influenced by geographical factors but is in some cases caused by politics and religion. The scholar Siddique has defined a Malay as someone who “professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language (and) conforms to Malay custom” (Siddique 1981 as cited in Milner, 2008, p. 2). This definition was further refined by Muhammad Taib who established that “in Malaysia itself, a Malay was

defined as someone who spoke Malay at home, was a Muslim and observed Malay culture - in dress and food preferences” (as cited in Watson, 1996, p.13). However, “adherence to Islam has not been a criterion for being ‘Malay’ in the Singapore census process” (Rahim 1998, as cited in Milner, 2008, p.2). It is therefore clear that the definition of what constitutes Malayness differs even within the region. What can be observed from the different nations is that their own version of Malayness reflects nationalistic and cultural desires. In Indonesia for example, there has been resistance in using “Malay” to describe their people. Their national priority is to encourage and promote a more inclusive belonging to Indonesia, rather than using Malayness, which is seen as divisive. It was believed that instilling the idea of Indonesianess would lead to unifying patriotic sentiments among the people (Kipp, 1996 as cited in Milner, 2008, p.11).

Therefore, defining the Malay race and the Malay identity or Malayness can be a challenge. Not least because the Malays themselves have undergone and are still undergoing a reconstruction of their own Malay identity or Malayness. The Malays were once known as a people who value customs more than anything - with customs being described as “the collective mind of the Malay peoples” (Zainal Kling 1989/1990 as cited in Milner 2008, p. 4). However, with the arrival and strengthening of Islam in Malay communities many of their traditional customs were revised and those deemed to be contrary to the teachings of Islam were removed (Milner, 2008) which has historically complicated the definition of Malayness.

Establishing a more stable definition of what constitutes Malayness is an endeavour that has historically been undertaken by colonial powers (Milner, 2008; Shamsul A.B, 2001; Hussainmiya, 2010). During the early twentieth century, the colonial powers in the Peninsula, tried to help establish a sense of unity among the Malays. It was common for the Europeans to attempt to instil a sense of structure and a unifying factor between their colonial subjects. It might be argued that this was part of the justification for colonialism, as it was believed that Europeans were more civilised than the Non-European Other, who were perceived as backward and therefore needed to be civilised (Said, 1993). As the introduction of the idea of statehood was one of the aspects of colonial rule (Fernandez, 1999), the colonial powers made it their priority for the Malay people in the South East Asian region to develop a Malay identity that they could be proud of and with which they could identify as the people of a nation. In the succeeding years, it was not clear whether the colonial powers had successfully achieved their objective in constructing a more unified Malay people. What is certain is that their attempts resulted in mixed reactions among the Malays.

However, it can be argued that colonial intervention brought positive outcomes. It is possible that the position of Malays in the world have been preserved due to the efforts of the colonial powers, thus helping to eradicate “the long-term fear... that ‘the Malays’ could actually “disappear from this world”” (Milner, 2008, p.16). There is also the possibility that the presence of colonial powers might have had some influence in terms of fuelling Malays to be more proactive in their own identity construction, as much of the reconstruction of the Malay identity was also partially shaped by the reaction against colonial influences (Shamsul A.B, 2001). I am interested in understanding the ways in which Brunei handled the influences of its own colonial power and how these influences impacted the construction of the Malay identity of the Brunei people. Bearing in mind that Malays and Malayness differ even within the region, this paper hopes to answer the questions 1) what aspects of Malayness does Brunei identify with? and 2) to what extent does Islam influence Brunei’s version of Malayness? The depiction of Malayness in the film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) offers some interesting insights to these questions.

History of Brunei Darussalam

Brunei was on the brink of “the dissolution of [its] ancient kingdom” (Hussainmiya, 1995) when the British intervened to restore the nation under the direction and initiatives of Malcom Stewart Hannibal McArthur. Hailed as a “jewel” by a British Consul who “gave a new lease of life” to

Brunei (Hussainmiya, 1995), McArthur helped the British Government see that “Brunei was more valuable than had been supposed and might even become self-supporting within a reasonable space of time” (Horton, 1986, p. 357). Being a British Protectorate meant that Brunei was safeguarded by the British, which at the time was imperative in ensuring that Brunei - “that blot on the map” (ibid, p. 358) - would not disappear completely. The British Residency period from the years 1906 - 1959 was essential if Brunei wanted to prevent further annexations of its lands by James Brooke and to regain the stability that the nation once enjoyed as an empire. In his report, McArthur outlined the lack of government institutions and policies in Brunei prior to being a British Protectorate:

There are no salaried officers...no forces, no police, no public institutions, no coinage, no roads, no public buildings—except a wooden mosque, and—most crying need of all—no gaol. There is a semblance of a judicature, but little justice... (as cited in Horton, 1986, pg. 360)

It was undeniable that much work was to be done if Brunei was to stand on its own and exist as a self-sufficient, independent nation. Under McArthur’s supervision, Brunei enacted “a Penal Code, the creation of a system of courts, and the introduction of Police” (Horton, 1986, p. 364). The journey towards that was not necessarily a smooth-sailing one either for Britain and Brunei. Having learnt of the ways in which “Malay customs had inalienable links to administration of justice and land” (Hussainmiya, 1995) from their previous engagements in the Malayan Peninsula, the British were careful to delete any clause that would prevent them from being able to carry out reforms in the traditional administration (ibid). Having said that, the benefits of the British Residency period were undisputable. Especially with a conscientious and assertive Sultan occupying the Brunei throne after 1950, the British administration could no longer remain complacent. New conditions had arisen which made it imperative for them to bring Brunei out of its stupor. (ibid)

Towards the end of the British residency, Brunei was finally deemed stable financially - mostly due to the discovery of oil in the 1920s, which also propelled the Sultanate’s development plans forward towards an existing judicial system and administration (Horton, 1986). Despite the pressure by the British to implement a democratic system of government in Brunei, for Brunei to join Malaysia and to form a federation with Sarawak and the Northern Borneo territories (Nani Suryani, 2006), Brunei did not relent. During Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III’s reign, he continued to put into action his “mission of continuing Brunei’s age-old monarchy, according to the tenets of the religion and ancient custom” and “skilfully handled the forces that threatened the stability of the Sultanate” (Hussainmiya, 1995). It was also timely for the Sultanate as the British began to leave Brunei, to intensify efforts to create its own national identity. One very important aspect of the national identity was the preservation of their Malayness.

Malayness in Brunei

Previous studies on Brunei have discussed the nation’s aspiration to create a national identity (Hussainmiya, 2010; Noor Azam, 2005; Naimah, 2002). These studies are linked in their assertion that Brunei’s most prominent period for constructing its national identity began surrounding the 1959 Constitution. With the British departing and the Sultanate having emerged from the slums of the early twentieth century, the studies contend that Brunei recognized it was finally time to focus on what defined the Bruneians as a people. The threat of extinction that Brunei had faced in the early 1900s surely urged Brunei not only to stabilize itself economically and politically, but also to sufficiently lay a foundation for the people to identify as one nation. In addition, the outbreak of a civil rebellion in 1962 might have brought with it a reminder of

the effects of disunity and discontent among the people, and of the danger of not being loyal (Pelita Brunei, 31 December 1962). Therefore, as one of the efforts to unify the people, it appeared that the government of Brunei, influenced by “Malay ideologues [who] promoted the need to preserve their race as a bulwark against alien domination of Malay society” (Hussainmiya, 2010, p. 70) and “increasing antipathy to the alien presence” (ibid) started to focus on bringing together the Malay people. Documents from the British residential period in Brunei seemed to suggest not only would this racialization of Malayness be the first step in creating a sense of belonging amongst the people, it would also give the people a national language to unify them, as opposed to the different ethnicities that could potentially divide Bruneians further. One such document was a report written by Baki and Chang in 1959, which sampled heavily from the Razak Report on Education 1956 stating the importance of having a national education system with a national language as the main medium of instruction. Another is the clause in the 1961 Nationality Act of Brunei:

The “Malay by race” label was coined in the 1961 Nationality Act of Brunei, which stated that there were seven indigenous groups within the “Malay by race” category, these being: the Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut, and Tutong ethnicities. (Azam, 2005, pg. 1)

It is clear from the Nationality Act of 1961 that Brunei was seeking to create links between the ethnic groups by grouping them together as Malay people by race. In his paper, Noor Azam also presented Braighlinn’s observation of the apparent consolidation of “a single national identity, born of convergence on a dominant Malay culture” (as cited in Azam, 2005, pg. 9). The 1959 Constitution had significant effects on the curtailing of the powers of the British in Brunei. One of which was the British Resident’s post being changed to that of Resident and High Commissioner, retaining only the role of offering advice to the Sultan and the government (Jones, 1997). There was also a trend of filling more posts with local Malay Muslims (Horton, 1986) which signifies a more concerted effort to change the dynamics of the administration to one that was more Malay-centred. Once the Malays had been established, Brunei then put more effort into reconstructing its own culture. As part of her endeavour towards unifying her people, Brunei began to bring back customs and traditions and ceremonies that had once been once forgotten (Talib, 2002). This effort was most prominent in the 1960s and the most conspicuous was the coronation ceremony of the present Sultan in 1968 (ibid).

Symbols of the supremacy of the ruler, such as the regalia, the hierarchy of officials, the titles and terms of address and other royal paraphernalia as well as court ceremonies like the *puja puspa* and *ciri gelaran*, which highlighted the sovereignty of the Sultan, were also given prominence (Abdul Hamid, 1992 as quoted by Talib, 2002, p. 143).

According to Eric Hobsbawm (1982), traditions are invented to “inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition” to “create the illusion of primordality and continuity” (Edensor, 2002). It appears that the revival of these traditions and encouragement of traditional arts and crafts are rejuvenated for the same purposes. The affirmation that such practices are Malay practices can serve to unify the people of the nation-state and reassert their identity as Malays.

In his essay, *Melayu Islam Beraja Sebagai Falsafah Negara Brunei Darussalam* (Malay Islamic Monarchy as Brunei Darussalam’s Philosophy), Pehin Haji Abdul Aziz Umar stresses that the philosophy sums up a way to live peacefully in communities and as a nation, under the Malay government, guided by Islam with monarchy as the form of government (1992). Hussainmiya (2010) asserts that Malayness is “a fundamental component of the essence of Brunei Darussalam along with two other related components, namely Islam and Monarchy” (p. 67). Siti Norkhalbi (2005) contends that Malay is not just a race, but also an official language

that is “the main mode of communicating collective cultural values and virtues, such as solidarity, loyalty and respect, which are considered as significant attributes of the Bruneian” (Hashim, 1999 as cited in Siti Norkhalbi, 2005, p.8). All of this can be traced back to the Malay Islamic Monarchy philosophy that the nation adopted on the eve of its independence on 1st January 1984, when the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III decreed that:

...Negara Brunei Darussalam, with God’s Grace, will forever be a Malay Islamic Monarchy nation, sovereign and democratic, in line with the teaching of Islam of the Ahlussunnah Waljama’ah, based on justice, trust and freedom... (Titah, 1st January 1984)

Together, these sources outline that Malayness within the Bruneian context will always be connected with Islamic values. As stated earlier, the Malay identity is contested by various communities and often influenced by a nation’s priority. To some, Malayness can be seen in the dress code and in the customs of the people, and others have placed importance on the ability to speak the language. Since the film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) was a government-endorsed project initiated by the Department of Religious Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, and one that is undertaken very much as a sermon to its people, this paper attempts to show that the portrayal of the characters and the classic storyline of the good and the evil are in line with the message that the government wished to communicate to the people: embrace the Malay lifestyle and there will be peace and harmony. It is undeniable that Islam has influenced many aspects of the Malays’ daily lives, in terms of family, politics and economy. With the arrival of the British in the early twentieth century, Brunei might have made light of the importance of some of the Malay values. However, one might argue that in preparation for its independence, the Sultanate recognized once again the urgency of creating a foundation to unite its people by re-establishing and refining common values. This study hopes to explore the ways in which the film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968) portrays ideals of Malayness. An analysis of the characters as well as the storyline will reveal not only Brunei’s definition of Malayness but also how Islamic values penetrate Malayness in the Bruneian context.

Analysis

The main character in the film, Azman, is the voice of reason as well as the vehicle through which many of the messages about Malayness are delivered. Throughout the film, he is the only constant in his family who upholds Malay moral values. As a Western-educated individual, he is described as his father to be a model child as he has managed to synthesise modernity with a dedication towards Islam: *Azman yang berpendidikan barat kenapa juga boleh patuh kepada ajaran-ajaran Islam?* [Despite being Western-educated, Azman is still able to comply with Islamic rules] which the film suggests is the ideal characteristic of a Malay. The opening scene sees him leaving a school where he is presumably a teacher, which helps form the impression that Azman is a trustworthy individual. The audience can hear the call to prayer as Azman is leaving his workplace, and as soon as he arrives home, he is seen promptly completing his midday prayer. Afterwards, he has lunch with his parents, where he first shares his concerns about the unseemly conduct of his siblings, Nordin and Noriah. In this first scene, the audience is shown the first aspect of Malayness in terms of the way Azman dresses. All three characters - the father, the mother and Azman - wear traditional Malay clothes with Azman’s home clothing of *kain pelikat* (sarong for males), the father’s *songkok* - a traditionally Malay woven hat worn for official and family functions as well as for prayers and the mother’s *baju kebaya*, an Indonesian-based traditional clothing, with a blouse and sarong, which is commonly worn by Malay women across Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei as well as other parts of Southeast Asia. Meals are shared, and as in the first scene, eaten by hand, as generally done by Malays. Hence,

quite early on, the audience is informed of the importance of piety and familial relations. Because familial relations are also considered important in the Islamic teachings (with there being an emphasis on respect for parents and elders, and also maintaining *silaturrahim*, which means the ties between people in the name of friendship or family), the interaction between Azman and his parents in the first scene show that the filial piety that Azman displays towards his parents is the desired behaviour that the government would like to encourage among young Bruneians. The urgency with which Azman and his father complete their midday prayers (as it is generally advisable to complete the prayer soon after the call to prayer is made) also indicates the aspiration that the government has for its people with regards to their commitment to Islam.

According to Milner (2008), “in the wider [Malay] community the stress is on refined (*halus*) public behaviour – and it is often said that there is a desire to avoid the crude (*kasar*)” (p.195). Through Azman, the film reveals further instances of this aspect of an ideal Brunei Malay. An example of this is during a house visit by Azman’s friend Hasan. In the middle of their discussion about how Islamic teachings would improve society as a whole, Nordin, Azman’s younger brother, walks in, puts on music on the gramophone and starts dancing to the music. This causes Hasan to leave immediately and Azman reprimands Nordin for putting on loud music in the presence of his guest. Later on, their father also sides with Azman and agrees that Nordin had crossed a line. Nordin’s disrespect towards their guest is seen as crude behaviour, and the scolding reflects the government’s sentiments towards such behaviour. It is also significant that the scene is a contrast between a philosophical discussion - where Hasan and Azman ponder over what society should do to improve their quality of life - and Nordin’s dancing - which is an expression of ‘Western’ influence. By juxtaposing these, the government sends a clear message about the kind of values that it would like its people to assimilate in their everyday lives.

The portrayal of Nordin is crucial for showing the type of behaviour that is denounced by the government. Apart from his dancing and crude behaviour, the film shows him celebrating his birthday lavishly, which is the opposite of the modest and humble nature that Malays are presented to aspire to. Azman, who arrives at the party quite late with his complete *baju Melayu*, is confronted by Nordin who mocks him for turning up at all to his party, as he knows that Azman does not like to be involved in his parties. However, Azman hints that there must be a different way one can celebrate such events without sacrificing one’s own identity: “*Majlis seumpama ini barangkali boleh kita sesuaikan dengan keperibadian kita sendiri*” [Events such as this perhaps can be adjusted according to our personality]. The live band, with their electric guitars, modern percussion instruments and trendy sunglasses, are a contrast to the musicians in the opening scene, who play traditional instruments, which further shows the disparity between the Malayness that the government is trying to promote versus the form of entertainment that supposedly does not reflect the nation’s identity. Such comparisons further exemplify how Nordin and Noriah’s lifestyle preferences are contradictory to the Malay lifestyle that Azman upholds. In contrast, Nordin and Noriah represent a refusal to uphold Malay values and respect Islamic teachings. The film is clear in its message that the behaviour of Nordin and Noriah is undesirable. Zainal Kling (1995) describes behaviour in the Malay community as:

...regulated by the traditional values of *budi* (etiquette) and *bahasa* (language). The term *budi bahasa* summed up the kind of proper behaviour an individual should display both in the privacy of family life and in public. This is much in line with morality (*akhlak*) as enjoined by Islamic teachings. To this extent then, adat and Islam are in complete agreement. (p. 64)

For over half of the film, Noriah and Nordin are shown to be getting increasingly wild: “*Noriah dan Nordin sudah terlalu liar nampaknya*” [Noriah and Nordin, it appears, are becoming too wild], an observation made by their mother after their house was sold and she was forced to move into a much smaller house. In yet another confrontation between the siblings, Noriah also reveals that she and Nordin have been spending time attending parties, which Azman denounces as something that is against Eastern and religious values: “*parti yang langsung tidak berunsur timur dan ugama itu bukan?*” [a party that does not have elements of the East and its (Islamic) religion]. There is also an allusion to the idea that Noriah and Nordin’s behaviour is too foreign and forgetful of Malay values: “*meniru pengaruh asing dan melupakan keperibadian kita sendiri*” [imitating foreign influences and forgetting one’s own personality] which Azman warns will lead to the destruction of society: “*masyarakat kita akan runtuh*” [our society will collapse]. Noriah, despite recognising the danger of being in the same room alone with a man who is not a family member (a behaviour called *khalwat* which is against the law in some Muslim countries), has premarital relations with Zul. Nordin also becomes more uninhibited in his partying which leads him to pass out in his car after one particularly excessive night of drinking.

The word “*keperibadian*”, which can be translated as identity, is repeated by Azman on more than one occasion. On all occasions, his reference to *keperibadian* is not distinctly stated as only Malay or Islamic, but is a combination of both. Hence, it is clear from the film that Bruneians identify their moral code as one that is inextricably Malay and Islamic. Towards the end of the film, Noriah and Nordin’s trespasses become more pronounced. As a way to warn the community against such unchecked conduct, their deeds are immediately punished: Noriah and Zul are caught in the act of *khalwat* by religious and police officers, and Nordin, in a hungover state, drives himself off the road, leading to a serious injury. This humiliation (Noriah and Zul are imprisoned and sentenced to community work, and Nordin is confined in the hospital and abandoned by his friends) act as a reminder to the audience and society in general that renouncing one’s own values will only lead to degradation.

It can therefore be assumed that the government of Brunei had chosen to promote the importance of a Malay and Islamic way of life as a way to preserve the nation and ensure its stability in a globalizing world. The decision was pivotal in the process of its nation-building where “royal supremacy [would be] sustained and an ideological framework that is both modern and Islamic [would be] institutionalized” (Talib, 2002, p.145). The observations from this film may help us understand the reasons for such effort and why the government would continue to promote such a way of life as one of the strengths of the nation and a fundamental part of its identity.

Conclusion

As previous studies have shown, defining Malayness is not a straightforward task. Malays from different regions have shown different definitions of Malayness as well as what they value as a race. Another challenge in defining the Malays is also because of the ongoing reconstruction of the Malay identity as well. Often, this task falls onto the colonial powers to help not only define but also unify the Malay people, as part of their efforts in introducing the idea of statehood (Fernandez, 1999) in their colonies. Brunei was part of that effort at the beginning of the twentieth century when its dying kingdom (Hussainmiya, 1995) was forced to seek help from the British. It was proven that the only way for Brunei to revive itself was by getting the British to install administrative posts and putting in place judicial and educational systems in its government. Luckily, Brunei was in a position to support itself after the discovery of oil in the 1920s. Thus, it slowly allowed the nation-state to focus on nation-building. One important aspect of its nation-building, as studies on Brunei have suggested (Hussainmiya, 2010; Noor Azam, 2005; Naimah, 2002; Siti Norkhalbi, 2005) was its attempt to establish a national identity

that will seek to unify its people. The formulation of the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) concept was one such effort and this paper analyses the early attempts of the emphasis on the Malay identity as presented in the film *Gema Dari Menara* (1968). This paper has argued that Brunei Malayness as an identity is closely connected to Islam and the analysis has indicated that the government of Brunei, through the Department of Religious Affairs propose that a combination of the two values is to become the moral guide for the nation. An issue that was not addressed in this study was a closer scrutiny on the values of Malayness in Brunei prior to the arrival of the British as a point of comparison to see whether they were different from the values portrayed in the findings. Further research might explore the impact of British administration on the Brunei Malay culture and its identity formation as a postcolonial state.

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

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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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