



A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
AL-HADAF

BY

NUR SHAKIRA MOHD NASIR

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a qualitative content analysis study of *Al-Hadaf*, a quarterly Islamic newsletter published by the Brunei Darussalam State *Mufti* Department. The newsletter is seen as an authored system of ordering, a noble action with a magnificent aim of converting the Muslim readers into the ideally perfect men (*insan-ul-kamil*) through its narratives. Theoretically, narrative is a work of social construction which represents the social reality of life-world affairs. It is certainly conditioned by social and in turn creates social influence. This study attempts to examine how *Al-Hadaf* provides readers with the appropriate Islamic knowledge, as espoused in the ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf* disciplines, on the relationship with Allah S.W.T the only one and true God, and performing good deeds and not committing evil acts and correlating *dunya* with *akhirah*. Qualitative methodology is employed as a framework of the study with the narrative theory as its underpinning theory. Analysis of data is made through the content analysis and semiotic applications, which are then categorized according to the main themes of the *al-Qur’an* as observed by Izutsu (2004). The main themes were God-man, good-evil and *dunya-akhirah*. The study found narratives in *Al-Hadaf* basically revolved around the concept of *insan* as the created and as a servant to Allah S.W.T., the Creator, whereby he/she needs to acquire the three essential religious disciplines of knowledge, namely, ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf* and putting them into total religious practices in order to achieve the status of a true knowledgeable Muslim in the real sense of the word.

ملخص البحث

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نوعياً لمحتوى (مضمون) نشرة "الهدف" الإخبارية الإسلامية التي تصدرها مصلحة الإفتاء بروناي دار السلام. وتعتبر هذه النشرة الإخبارية هدف نبيل إلى تحويل القارئ المسلم إلى إنسان كامل من خلال طريقة عرضها. ونظرياً تمثل طريقة عرض القصة هيكلية اجتماعية لواقع الحياة الاجتماعية في الشؤون العالمية؛ فمن المؤكد أنها مقيدة اجتماعياً، وتسهم أيضاً في خلق نفوذ اجتماعي. تحاول هذه الدراسة أن تدرس كيف تسهم نشرة "الهدف" في تزويد القراء بالمعارف الإسلامية المناسبة، القائمة على مبادئ العقيدة، والفقه، والتصوف، والعلاقة مع الله سبحانه وتعالى باعتباره إلهاً واحداً، والقيام بأعمال الخير، وعدم ارتكاب أعمال الشر، وربط الدنيا بالآخرة. ومنهج الدراسة يقوم على المنهج لتحليل النوعي للقصة بوصفها دعامة نظرية. وتم تحليل البيانات من خلال تحليل المحتوى (المضمون)، وتطبيقات دلالات الالفاظ والمعاني، التي تم تصنيفها وفقاً للموضوعات الرئيسية في القرآن الكريم، كما لاحظ إيزوتسو (٢٠٠٤). وشملت الموضوعات الرئيسة الإله-العبد، الخير-والشر، ودنيا- الآخرة. ووجدت الدراسة أن عرض القصة في "نشرة الهدف" يدور أساساً حول مفهوم الانسان كمخلوق، وعبد لله سبحانه وتعالى، ومن ثم فهي يحتاج إلى تجويد الثلاث الفروع الأساسية للمعارف الدينية: العقيدة، والفقه، والتصوف، ثم وضعها جميعاً موضع الممارسات الدينية من أجل صياغة مسلم صحيح، بما تعنى الكلمة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....
Che Mahzan Ahmad
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....
Mohd Yusof Hussain
Examiner

The dissertation was submitted to the Department of Communication and is accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....
Norbaiduri Ruslan
Head, Department of Communication

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....
Badri Najib Zubir
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed
Knowledge and Human Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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To my parents– Mohd Nasir Othman and Hanizan Ahmad for their devoted undivided love and wholehearted support and to my wonderful and adorable siblings, Nur Sherrina and Nur Illahi for brightening up my days.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Brunei Darussalam is a Malay Islamic Sultanate located on the island of Borneo. It is a home for 379,000 people; with the Malays (64 percent) as the largest ethnic group, followed by the Chinese (20 percent), and others (16 percent). The Sultan is both the chief of state and the head of government. Islam is the official religion of the sultanate. Officially, the Islamic Government of Brunei began with Sultan Muhammad Shah (1363 A.D) or commonly called Raja Awang Alak Betatar (Al-Sufri, 1990). Since the above mentioned date, Islam continues to grow in Brunei until today. The present sultan of Brunei is Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

Upon achieving its independence in 1984, the Brunei Sultanate introduced the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIM) as the state philosophy. With that introduction, Islam becomes the reference focal point for all religious activities in the state. The Sultan of Brunei often mentioned that if Brunei wanted to survive as a peaceful nation, it is essential for all Brunei Muslims to practice the teachings of true Islam. Such realization, he said, can only be realized via the correct and appropriate Islamic knowledge, disciplines and doctrines. The Muslims believe that with the right and truthful Islamic disciplines of knowledge, believers will be able to relate themselves to God, able to distinguish between good and evil, and able to correlate *dunya* and *akhirah* in their lives. Recently, he stressed that one of the moral illnesses faced by Brunei in this age of modernity is ignorance or the lack of comprehension of the Islamic disciplines of knowledge (Syed Rory Malai Hassan, 2009). The above *titah*

(king's statement) is, indeed, in tandem with the perception that widespread globalization and modernization lead to the reduction in the role of ethnicity and religious awareness in public life (Johan, 2002). In a similar vein, Wallis and Bruce (1992) posited that modernization eventually would have a negative effect on the stability and vitality of the religious communities, practices, faith and conviction.

The *titah* and the statements as interpreted by Johan and Wallis and Bruce implied that in the present age of globalization, the religion was under a 'siege', metaphorically speaking. Such distressed state can be narratively read if we seriously take the presence of the large number of books and articles on 'the end of religion or end of religious faith and conviction' in the global society. In that position, the Muslims must equip themselves with the correct and truthful disciplines of knowledge for better futures. Indeed, the importance of knowledge in governing one's life runs deep in Islam. Moreover, it is undeniable that not all disciplines of knowledge are the right knowledge as some are 'corrupted knowledge' that can easily lead man into committing and spreading religious falsehood and religious deviations (Al-Attas, 1996).

In Brunei Darussalam, there are many bodies that 'look after' the Muslims from straying into the realm of falsehood and other forms of religious deviations which over the recent several years have been a cause for serious concern for all Muslims, locally and globally. One of these commendable bodies is the *Mufti* Department. In its effort to ensure the Brunei Muslims have the 'right Islamic life' the Department was given the responsibility to 'regulate' them through various practicable means, methods and educational approaches that can alter the course of these untenable religious deviations and unguided religious practices and doctrines. Here, we contextualize the 'right Islamic life' as a life that the Brunei Muslims can

clearly understand as how to relate themselves, transcendently if possible, to God, able to distinguish good from evil, and can be in a comfortable position to faithfully establish the corelationship between *dunya* and *akhirah*.

In light of the above, the *Mufti* Department has established a system to provide the Brunei Muslims with the ‘right Islamic disciplines of knowledge’, among others, by publishing the *Al-Hadaf*. In that religious literary practice, the right religious narratives are consolidatively authored and fully anchored on the rightful Islamic religious doctrines. It is an authoritative command on the order, if we take Malpas and Wickham’s (1995). Basically, ordering is a practice that involves the control and orderly management of a set of activities that are done by a group of people.

Al-Hadaf (the target) was first published in 1997. The newsletter contained news on the religious activities of the *Mufti* Department and ‘interesting articles on subjects related to the Islamic religion practiced in Brunei Darussalam.’ In its website, *Al-Hadaf* is known as ‘Your One Stop Brunei Islamic News’.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Islam is about a total submission to Allah S.W.T. For the Malay Muslims, including those in Brunei Darussalam, the act of submission to Allah the Almighty is incomplete without the mastery of the three religious disciplines of knowledge, namely, ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf*. The three religious disciplines of knowledge mentioned above have the perfect ordering qualities in creating a ‘perfect being’, in the philosophical sense. Those qualities, specifically, provide man, as the created, with the knowledge of how to relate himself with God as the Creator; the ability to distinguish good from evil, and the ability to correlate with the *dunya* and *akhirah*.

In Brunei Darussalam there are several religious bodies that act as agents for religious ordering of the day-to-day Muslim life, or to express it succinctly, “to put the Muslim life activities in good virtuous order, establishing its perfect and unique transcendental religious qualities”. As mentioned earlier, the *Mufti* Department has been performing this commendable heavy task unrelentingly. With the understanding that ordering of the Muslim life style is best done through the dissemination of the three religious disciplines of knowledge via the narratives, the Department publishes a quarterly newsletter known as *Al-Hadaf* (The Target). It is a state religious literary practice, if we make references from it. With that perspective in mind, the researcher takes the position that *Al-Hadaf* narratives are state authorized narratives and authoritatively authored by the *Mufti* Department, based on the true and appropriate doctrines of Islam. Simply stated, the Department is authoring the correct religious based narratives via *Al-Hadaf* to produce the morally appropriate religious disciplines of knowledge, namely, the ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf*, for the above said Islamic ordering system.

Our problem statement reads: How the *Mufti* Department of Brunei Darussalam, as an author, authored the right religious disciplines of knowledge via the *Al-Hadaf* strives to didactically provide readers with the true Islamic knowledge, as espoused in the ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf*, in relationship to God, performing good and not evil and correlating with the discipline of *dunya* and *akhirah*.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- i) To discover what narratives on God-man relationship are featured in the *Al-Hadaf*

- ii) To explore what narratives on good-evil are featured in the *Al-Hadaf*
- iii) To find out what narratives on *dunya-akhirah* are being featured in the *Al-Hadaf*.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is concerned with the narrative knowledge as an agent of ordering in constructing an ideology for the society. It is through the narrative knowledge that human organizes, displays purposes and establishes directions in running their daily life affairs. Plato mentioned that narratives are forces that shape human lives. Modern scholars like Bruner and McIntyre agree that narratives have the capability to capture the attention, to grip the imagination and to engender relevant action. In agreement with the above, it is clear that human lives can be organized and configured into a well structured order by the narrative knowledge.

For the Brunei Malays, like other Malays in other countries, the '*aqidah, fiqh* and *tasawuf* are essential disciplines of knowledge in their lives. Therefore, this study seeks to profile the three religious disciplines of knowledge based on the selective themes (God-man, good-evil and *dunya-akhirah*) which, incidentally, are very comprehensively and intrinsically essential for the Muslim lifeworld to be an intangible life force as explained by Izutsu.

This study also aims to understand the work of authoring the correct religious knowledge in a Muslim society as authoring should mirror the ideology and collective religious consciousness and awareness of the society and not merely the individual psychology and experiences of the author. The *Al-Hadaf*, in this regards, has taken up the role of a comprehensive and authoritative religious 'author'.

In terms of praxis, this research provides important data for the ‘author’ (the Brunei Darussalam State *Mufti* Department) in understanding and gauging the effectiveness, the practicalities, the efficiency, the competency, as well as, the desired results of their authoring work, mainly on the issues related to the ‘*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawuf*. This research work also consequently will indirectly contribute to the literature on the mass media in the Muslim world.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

The operational definition of terms and concepts used in this study

‘*Aqidah*

‘*Aqidah* is about one’s belief in the Oneness of Allah S.W.T., as well as, the belief in all His encompassing attributes. In some other literatures, it is called *tawhid*. This implies three religious sub-disciplines, namely, *tawhid uluhiyyah* (Divine unity), *tawhid rubbubiyah* (Oneness in Lordship) and *tawhid asma wal sifat* (Allah’s names and attributes)

Tawhid uluhiyyah is about believing in the Oneness of God in terms of His prerogative attributes of possessing the right to be worshipped alone without involving other deities, imagined or otherwise, the right to be transcendently loved, the right to be unquestionably faithfully and obeyed, and submissively prayed for attaining virtues, goodness and protection from misfortune in one’s life.

Meanwhile *tawhid rubbubiyah* requires the belief in Allah S.W.T., as well as, His other attributes, such as, His administering, controlling, nurturing and sustaining our solar system including our tiny world, not to mention the immensely vast universe, that He has created.

Lastly, *tawhid asma wal sifat* refers to the belief in His Holy names and their functional all encompassing limitless attributes.

Fiqh

Fiqh is about the *shari'ah* (divine law). The content of *fiqh* finely defines the mode and method of interpretations and analysis of the *ayat* (Quranic verses) and the *sunnah* (reports about sayings, actions and tacit approval of the Prophet S.A.W). *Fiqh* is the discipline of knowledge derived from the practical rules and regulations of Islam. It acts as a human reasoning platform to understand and interpret the true divine guidance against deviations (embodied in the *Qur'an* and *sunnah*).

Tasawuf

It is basically the knowledge of making oneself spiritually closer to Allah S.W.T through the good and admirable manner (*akhlaq*). Basically, this knowledge is acquired through learning and practice over a period of time. Therefore, *tasawuf* is about enhancing one's *akhlaq*, that is, by performing the good deeds solely for Allah S.W.T. and no one else. *Tasawuf* (sufism) is about understanding the importance of generating, consolidating and intensifying *iman* (faith) and *amal* (practices) as performance of good deeds in one's life, as well as, ways of developing awareness of all things, tangible or intangible, that relate to Allah's presence. The main concern of *tasawuf* in the Muslim world, basically, revolves around the purifying and opening the door of the *qalb* (the spiritual heart and mind) with total patience through transcendental *dhizkr* and *wirid* in order to achieve *saadat* (internal and serene bliss).

Narrative

Narrative is a general term for a story of events or experiences, facts or fictions, long or short, detailed or plain that allows us to share information, express opinions and influence others. According to Genette (1980), a narrative evolves around telling, relating and narrating a story. As such, a narrative cannot exist without the narrator and the recipient of the narrative.

Narrative realities exist in the words, phrases, and sentences that have been combined to create descriptions, reports, explanations, understandings which will in turn, create what is described, reported, explained and understood (Berquist, 1993). In the above position, a narrative text uses pictures, dramatic elements, story sequence and so on to create a framework that instructs people on how to interpret a data. Contextually, a narrative produces a certain reality and favour a certain preferred meaning of the data.

Ordering

Ordering is a work of organizing, or putting things into a proper order. As a structured orderly system (Robertson, Callinan and Bartram, 2002), organizing is a process to control or to manage any known objects, events, activities, relationships or all human practices (Kendall and Wickham, 2001), singly or collectively, as to achieve a certain ordered reality in imagination and action. In some societies the ordered reality is determined by the religious beliefs and faith. For the Muslims, the ordered reality is a pure order, and it is based and fully configured by the *Al-Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

Ideology

Ideology is a human made belief or a symbolic system which relates to a social interbehavioural activities or political practices (Thompson, 1990). It serves and gives meanings in particular circumstances (Stevenson, 1995), and it can be constructed, arranged and conveyed in various forms, from simple conversations to complex images and texts, in accordance with the needs and aspiration of the society.

Authoring

An action or activity of making knowledge based on the expert systems. Expert systems are impersonal systems of knowledge and expertise whose validity is independent of those drawing on them. Drawing on expert systems implies an attitude of trust in the expectations provided by them; a belief that such systems do work as they are supposed to. In modern societies, such systems are ubiquitous and exemplified by the work of scientists, lawyers, muftis or other symbolic analysts in the various disciplines of knowledge (Reich, 1991:177-80; Tsoukas, 2005: 42)

Religious Knowledge

Religious knowledge is the knowledge that the followers of a religion are expected to know and to put into practice in the course of their daily lives. This includes religious beliefs, faith, rituals, as well as, rules, regulations and laws. For the Malay Muslims, the basic religious knowledge includes '*aqidah, fiqh and tasawuf*'. In practice, the three disciplines of knowledge are integrated and closely intertwined and incorporated. Indeed, one cannot practice *tasawuf*, for example, by neglecting the other two disciplines of knowledge. Thus, the three disciplines of knowledge work within a holistic framework; parts make the whole and the whole consists of parts.

Narrative Knowledge

Narrative knowledge is about organizing experiences with the help of a narrative scheme to display the purpose and direction in running human affairs and to make the individual human life comprehensible as a whole (Polkinghorne, 1988). In other words, narrative knowledge is about attributing meanings to individual actions and events according to their consequential effects on the whole.

SUMMARY

This chapter identifies the background of the study, the problem statement and, most importantly, the objectives of the study. The key terms/concepts (*'aqidah, fiqh, tasawuf*, narrative, ordering, ideology, authoring, religious knowledge, and narrative knowledge) that are operationally defined, are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part concerns with the theoretical aspect that underpins this dissertation. Discussions on the narrative paradigm, narrative knowledge and narrative ordering, narratives, literary practices and authoring of a social world are presented. The second part of this chapter concerns with the religious knowledge in the Malay Muslim world (including Brunei Darussalam) i.e., the three disciplines of religious knowledge on the '*aqidah, fiqh* and *tasawuf*'. The last part concerns with the 'knowledge about the field', such as, brief history of *Al-Hadaf* and the ordering of the Islamic knowledge in Brunei, are presented.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Narrative Paradigm

The narrative paradigm is proposed by Walter Fisher (1984). It is regarded as one of the 'theories' in the communication studies (Littlejohn,1999). This paradigm presupposed that humans are essentially story teller/narrative teller (*homo narrans*). In light of the above, messages are viewed as stories. Fisher believed that a certain criterion about the quality of the narrative needs to be established as not all narratives are authored equally. He suggested coherence and fidelity as the two most important criteria for the above mentioned purpose. Coherence is the degree to which a story makes sense and meaning to the audience while fidelity refers to the extent to which the story rings true with the stories that the audience has known to be true in their

lives (Griffin; 2000 and Littlejohn; 1999). In a similar vein, Fisher noted that narrative rationality and credibility lay within those coherence and fidelity frameworks.

Fisher (1984) formalized the narrative paradigm as an alternative for understanding communication in response to the rational world that had been introduced before the narrative paradigm. The rational world paradigm assumption is that the societal structure encourages particularly qualified individuals to argue for public decision. Fisher does not deny that people argue or persuade, however, he asserts argument is meant to be included under the dominant metaphor of narrative. In this sense he believes people are not essentially arguers, but rather story tellers and sometimes those narratives merely take the form of arguments. As such, narrative paradigm supports MacIntyre's (1981) the characterization of human as story telling animals.

This paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical, as well as, situational. The narrative paradigm believes that reasoning needs not be bound to argumentative form but may be discovered in the form of all sorts of symbolic actions. Fisher (1984) wrote,

The narrative paradigm then can be considered as a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in the history of rhetoric, aesthetic themes. ... The narrative paradigm does not deny reason or rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication (p.2).

According to Fisher (1984) the production and practice of good reason depends on history, biography, culture, and character along with the kinds of forces identified in the language morphology. Therefore, people determined rationality based on coherence and the habit of testing narrative fidelity. It is because human communication is more than its rational form as it includes the cultural context, values and experiences of the person. He concludes that the world is a set of stories, and

people choose among them to live the good life that matches the persons' values and beliefs.

Narrative Knowledge and Narrative Ordering

Narrative knowledge refers to narrative mode of knowing. In this mode, experiences are being organized with the help of a narrative scheme. The mode looks for a particular connection between events (Polkinghorne, 1988), and it moves by displaying purposes and directions in human affairs. In this sense, narrative knowledge offers a powerful influence over human life by creating mental and imaginative 'events', whereby in due course, it shapes and orients our daily life activities. Thus, it is understandable when Polkinhorne claimed that the product of the narrative scheme were everywhere in our lives, in our culture, as well as, in our social environment. For example, he said, in making decisions we used the scheme to inform our decision by constructing imaginative "what if" scenario.

As mentioned by Polkinghorne (1988), narrative ordering makes individuals events understandable by identifying the whole to which they contribute. This ordering process operates by connecting diverse events along the temporal dimension and by identifying the effect of one event to another. Both serve to render or to signify the experiences in a plausible manner. Humm (1952) pursued a similar premise when he said narratives organized things up where in real life they may be left lying awkwardly around. In a similar vein Kermoché (1967) observed that life through narrative order was much easier to handle as the mind was put to rest by the sequence and order, the appearance of causality and the look of necessity, whereby one was able to say that when one thing happened, another event would most likely occur as a sequence. At the individual level, people have a narrative of their own lives which