

Quranic Approach in Portraying Crime Stories

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Abstract: This article attempts to examine how crime stories portrayed in the verses of Quran. Three stories consisted of Habil and Qabil, the story of Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha and the story of Prophet Lut and his people were critically studied using content analysis and inductive method. The results show that Quranic approach in describing the crime stories is enormously emphasized on two major elements which are the punishment and the lesson from the consequences of crime. Thus, the portrayal of crime stories for contemporary context i.e. films, drama, books, megazines, are proposed to emphasize the same elements.

Key words: Crime • Crime stories • Film • Quran • Islam and Shariah

INTRODUCTION

There are previous study that shown the Quran is not just a revealed scripture which is narrated only for religious obligations. Instead, the Quran provides high inspirational values for human thinking, attitude and actions [1, 2]. This includes on how the Quran presents crime related stories to its readers. Allah S.W.T says in the Quran:

“And we have explained to man, in this Quran, every kind of similitude: yet the greater parts of human refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude!” (*Surah al-Isra*’ (17): 89).

Thus, stories or narratives in the Quran are one of the unique styles utilized to convey message from Allah. The stories are not mere informations instead it contain dialogue, situations, issues and experiences of different

characters for the readers grab the messages [3, 4]. Among the aim of the Quran is to present human issues through different examples. The aim should be clearly studied then the Quranic story can be proved to be the most successful methods of achieving its end result by manifesting the virtue of notion in live and the dynamic of real life setting [5]. Therefore, this aspect will be studied further in this work and relevant elements will be proposed to be employed in contemporary context. It is crucial as nowadays, there are numbers of films depicting extreme of crimes in films. In addition, numerous studies have noted that media representations of violent crime do not correspond to actual levels and features of violence in society [6]. Directors are seems preferred to portray ugly, scary and contrived world that panders to violence to boost ratings of films viewers [7]. This made the situation worse as media is a powerful and persuasive institution that could dramatically alter the perceptions and beliefs of the public [8].

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Problem Background: In recent decades, issues concerning the representations of crime in media and the effects on the public's views of crime and the criminal justice system have become an interesting area among scholars and researchers [9]. Lord Winston's article illustrates a long-standing concern about mass media representations of crime, deviance and disorder. It is perceived for long that the media are a significant cause of offending and fundamentally subversive [10].

There were also numerous theories has been made to clarify the media impact on viewers such as social cognitive theory of Bandura [11]. According to this theory, viewers turned violent, acted aggressively or tend to commit crimes due to the influences of televised violence films and under the right circumstances, televised violence will increase level of aggressive behavior. Its opponent, the catharsis theory [11] in the other hand stated that the televise violence give the positive side to the viewers as they will be more aware of their safety in the reality world as impact on the response towards the elements of crime present in films they watch. Viewers also can release their stress through their watching as some of the aggressive feelings that are generated by the ordinary conflicts and frustration will be purge through vicarious participation in the violent fantasies that abound on the televise. Empirical studies, however, on the position of Islam towards crime elements in films are scarce and therefore, this study would fill such void.

The relationship between films and crime is also studied by Muslim. Ruqayyah Sa'id Salamah in her unpublished paper entitled *Dawr Wasa'il al-Islam fi Mukafahat al-Jarimah min Manzur al-Islami* highlights television programs and films that explain or reveal the substantial aspects of the commission of crimes (*al-Rukn al-Madi*) can influence the viewers to emulate and act in the same manner especially in the case of children. The author, however, does not support her discussion with evidences from Quranic verses, al-Sunnah, or other related sources [12].

The relationship also can be understood from Marwan Kajak's report [13]. He identified the television programs do encourage commission of crimes. He reported a group of teenagers burned seven schools in Helwan State, south of Qahirah in Egypt in 1984. According to the officer who witnessed the incident as well as other Muslim psychiatrists, the act was motivated by American movies aired on the television channels in

Egypt a few weeks before the incident [13]. This group of teenagers, as alleged, had watched the American movies which were said to be loaded with crime scenes.

Abd al-Rahman 'Iswi [14] conducted a survey to gauge the effects of television programs in Jordan. The survey reveals that 41% of the respondents agree that television is one of the major factors which contribute to crime being committed [14]. Both Kajak and 'Iswi quote Muslim scholars views in reporting and discussing crimes in the media in their studies but did not focus to substantiate their discussion with Islamic Jurisprudence sources and its principles.

In the other hand, in Malaysian context, according to Saodah Wok in her article 'Media Effects on Muslim Society' [15], the negative effects of films or television programs are minimal because children are guided by their knowledge of Islam. They do not easily become aggressive after being exposed to violent television programs. The author however does not explain the survey which she refers to in detail. She also admits though the changes of attitude and behavior are still within the domain of parents and the Muslim society, old traditions, cultures and beliefs are threatened [15].

Regarding the position of Islam towards the portrayal of crimes in film, Sheikh Ahmad al-Sharbasi, a Professor at al-Azhar University has issued a fatawa on the general rules for film. The original rule of films or watching films is permissible whenever it does not contradict Islamic ethics and cultivate goodness and morality. However, if a film has literally motives to persuade viewers in doing illegal acts or anything against the norms of society the film becomes unlawful. He also stresses that the exposure of body parts in film scenes which should be covered, contradicting messages which lead to distortion of Islamic tenet are considered unlawful and therefore makes the film unlawful as according to *al-qawa'id al-fiqhiyyah*; 'what leads to unlawful is unlawful' [16]. This rule however as a legal perspective is insufficient to provide clear guidelines for filmmakers in making the crime films which is acceptable according to Islamic values. It can be questioned what elements must be emphasized and how the crime stories can be portrayed? In that reason, the study attempts to answer the question by studying how Quran presents the crime stories within its verses.

Methodology: This qualitative research is basically using a content analysis method. The approaches of the Quran in portraying the elements of crime are determined within

three stories reported. The three stories are Habil and Qabil reported in *Surah al-Ma'idah* (5) from verse 27 to 32, Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha in *Surah Yusuf* (12) from verse 23 to 30 and the people of Lut in *Surah Hud* (11) from verse 77 to 83. These three stories are selected as they contain contemporary crime aspects consist of murder, seduction and homosexual. The chosen verses of the stories are analysed inductively based on the interpretation of two prominent Islamic scholars namely Ibn Kathir and Sayyid Qutb. Their interpretations are selected as they rely on Islamic linguistic-art background in interpreting the Quranic verses and it employed reliable Islamic sources from the verses of Quran itself and al-Hadith which known as *tafsir bi al-mathur*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Quranic verses involve dialogues, situations, issues and feelings of its characters for the readers to grab the messages and imagine the situation as if they are witnessing the live occurrence of the stories. Despite of that, there are limit in portraying the elements in crime especially the substantial element (*actus reus*). This is due to the aim of the Quranic method of storytelling which is to reinforce the faith and strengthen the trust in readers and in counterpart manifested by their actions of obeying the Islamic teaching and preserving themselves from wrongdoings. The approaches of the Quran derived from three stories of crime studied are as follows:

Portray the Substantial Element of Crime Concisely: When portraying the crimes conducted, the Quran describes the substantial elements in brief but clears for the readers to understand the situation. In other words, the Quran does not portray the substantial elements of the crime on how it was done, the manner and the condition of the sinners who commit it. In this respect, the Quran is always careful in using the less risk explanation pertaining to these offences to ensure the readers are not easily indulged in wrong feeling of arousal upon the verses. Furthermore, it is to preserve its dignity and to keep the cleanliness of hearts and minds of the readers and to ensure that the main purpose of giving the lesson from the story is worth and was not polluted with dirty, vulgar and disdainful values. This approach can be seen in all the three stories studied albeit the different styles of portrayal in each stories.

In portraying homosexuality in the story of the people of Lut for instance, the substantial elements of the crime are not mention directly. Yet, it is portrayed from the expressions and response of Prophet Lut. This can be understood from the verses which explain the action of Prophet Lut who was in distressed and worried that his people might cause trouble to the angels, i.e. the messengers of Allah who have come to his place disguised as gorgeous and handsome men. The Quran starts the story stating;

“And when Our messengers came to Lut, he was distressed, he was grieved on their account and felt constrained in his power to protect them, because they had handsome faces and were dressed as [visiting] guests and so he feared for them from his people and he said, ‘This is a distressful, a very difficult, day’.” (*Surah Hud* (11): 77)

It continues to portray the homosexuality practiced by the people of Lut by explaining the emotion of the people of Lut in the statement as follow:

“And his people, when they became aware of them, came to him, running, hastening, towards him - and previously, before they came, they had been committing abominations, namely, penetrative sexual intercourse with men. Prophet Lut: “O my people! Here are my daughters marry with them; they are purer for you. So fear God and do not degrade me, [do not] disgrace me, before my guests.” The people of Lut: “You know full well that we have no right to, no need of, your daughters and you know well what we desire.” (*Surah Hud* (11): 78-79)

Meanwhile, in portraying the murder in the story of Habil and Qabil, the Quran mentions the substantial element in brief of a single word. Qabil’s action of murder is explained by the words “*faqatalahu*” (so he slew him), in the following verse:

“Then his soul (Qabil) prompted him, it seduced him, to slay his brother, so he slew him.” (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (5): 30)

Different style of portrayal however is used in the story of Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha. The substantial elements of seduction are clearly portrayed in sequences.

The incident began when Zulaykha asked Prophet Yusuf to lie down with her, subsequently she closed the door. The Quran states, “she asked him to lie with her and she closed the doors, of the house”. Then she asked Prophet Yusuf to come to her by saying: “Come!” (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (12): 23). Prophet Yusuf tried to run away from the place and both of them thereby struggled to carry the day. The struggling actions between Zulaykha and Prophet Yusuf were clearly portrayed in the Quran:

“And they raced to the door: Yusuf making for it in order to escape, while she, in order to grab hold of him, caught hold of his garment and pulled him towards her and she tore his shirt from behind, whereupon they encountered her master, her husband, at the door. She composed herself.” (*Surah Yusuf* (12): 25)

Nevertheless, the portrayal of the substantial elements is still in short, explained in a very simple statement but clear and understood manner. The action not only is less described, but the seductive emotional act is also carefully controlled and not over flogged. Furthermore, the situation or the physical conditions of the situation is not described in detail, for example, type of cloth wore by Zulaykha to seduce Prophet Yusuf and her luring actions. The Quran also does not state the condition of awrah exposed during the incidents, e.g., neither the colour nor the mature of Prophet Yusuf's body when Zulaykha tore Prophet Yusuf's garment from behind. The story also does not continue for long on the emotion conflict of Yusuf and Zulaykha as the Quran aim to depict the situation appropriate to the nature of human lives in general, not as a panoramic scene from what had occurred in the incidents [17].

Emphasize on the Consequences of the Crime Committed: This study found that the punishments and lessons in response to crimes are more emphasized in the Quran than the description of the crimes. For example, the story of Habil and Qabil in *Surah al-Maidah* (5), only one out of six verses verse, i.e., verse 30 from verse 27 to 32, describes the substantial elements of the murder within single word. Meanwhile, the rest of the verses are the conversations and actions occurred during pre and post of the incident. Before the incident took place, the Quran portrays on how Habil refrained himself from taking revenge on his brother and used the conversation to

soften the heart of his brother from killing him. As stated, “Yet if you extend your hand against me to slay me, I will not extend my hand against you to slay you; I fear God, the Lord of the worlds, in slaying you” (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (5): 28). However, Qabil proceeded to slay his brother, Habil. The story continues:

“Then God sent forth a raven, scratching into the earth, digging up the soil with its beak and with its legs and throwing it up over a dead raven next to it until it completely hid it, to show him how he might hide the nakedness, the carcass, of his brother. Qabil: “Woe to me! Am I not able to be as this raven and so hide my brother's nakedness?” And he became one of the remorseful, for having carried him; he then dug (a hole) for him and covered him up (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (5): 31).

After the incident, the Quran conveys Qabil's feeling of guilty for committing the crime. It does not include the repent of Qabil. Yet, this expression is sufficient for the readers to understand that Qabil had felt guilt, feared and sad for the death of his brother, Habil, despite of his wickedness. Qabil said:

“Woe to me! Am I not able to be as this raven and so hide my brother's nakedness? And he became one of the remorseful, for having carried him; he then dug (a hole) for him and covered him up” (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (5): 31).

These verses show that the consequences of the action of crime are more to be portrayed in the Quran than the action of the crime itself. Despite that, the punishment portrayed as response to crimes committed also should be seen as reasonable punishment imposed on culprits so that it can meet the same aspiration between human reasoning and the dignity of the Shar'iah. For example in the same previous story, after the incident of killing, Allah S.W.T has responses on the crime committed by Qabil towards his own brother:

“Because of that, which Qabil did, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever slays a soul for other than a soul, slain, or for, other than, corruption, committed, in the land, in the way of unbelief, fornication or waylaying and the like, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoever saves

the life of one, by refraining from slaying, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. Our messengers have already come to them, that is, to the Children of Israel, with clear proofs, miracles, but after that many of them still commit excesses in the land, overstepping the bounds through disbelief, killing and the like” (*Surah al-Ma'idah* (5): 32).

The verses explain the rationale behind the severe punishment imposed on the crime, where the consequences of the crime are not address solely to the victim but also to the readers in general. As stated by Sayyid Qutb in his book, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*: “The *surah* then makes use of the profundity of relating this story by enhancing a positive response to the legislation enacted to deal with such a crime. The legislation achieves the dual purpose of weakening the motive to commit a murder and establishing the just punishment for such a crime whenever it takes place” [18].

Furthermore, the Quran emphasized that the severe punishment on such crimes are crucial once it is out of control. As happened in the story of the people of Lut, calamity had been imposed on them where they were raised to the sky and turned upside down to the earth as a result to shameless practising of homosexual in the public which is against the order of Allah to ban the practise. The stern punishment is depicted in the Quran by the words, “*Ja'alna 'aliyaha safilaha*”.

“So when Our command, for their destruction, came to pass We made their uppermost, that is, their cities, the nethermost - when Gabriel raised them to the sky and dropped them upside down to the earth and We rained upon them stones of baked clay, clay baked in fire, one after another” (*Surah Hud* (11): 82).

Distinguish the Right and Wrong Aspects Clearly: The Quran distinguishes clearly the good and bad characters expressed in the story of the Quran. The readers are not left in confuse to determine the guilty side and the innocent side of the stories. This approach can be observed in the story of Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha. The Quran begins the story of Zulaykha's seduction on Prophet Yusuf by stating:

“And she, in whose house he was-namely Zulaykha-attempted to seduce him, that is, she asked him to lie with her and she closed the doors, of the house.

Zulaykha (said to Yusuf): “Come!” Yusuf: “God forbid!’ I seek refuge with God from this, truly he, who bought me, is my lord, my master who has given me an honourable place, [an honourable] residence and so I cannot betray him with regard to his family. Truly, evildoers, fornicators, never prosper” (*Surah Yusuf* (12): 23).

The verses continue explaining the feelings and the conditions of Zulaykha and Yusuf at the very unease situation:

“And she certainly desired him, she sought sexual intercourse with him and he would have desired her (too), he would have sought the same, had it not been that he saw the proof of his Lord. So it was, that We made him see the proof, that We might ward off from him evil, betrayal and lewdness, (the act of) fornication. Truly he was of Our devoted servants, in terms of obedience” (*Surah Yusuf* (12): 24).

The Story Continues:

“And they raced to the door: Yusuf making for it in order to escape, while she, in order to grab hold of him, caught hold of his garment and pulled him towards her and she tore his shirt from behind, whereupon they encountered her master, her husband, at the door. She composed herself” (*Surah Yusuf* (12): 25).

There is a lot of wisdom behind the struggle between Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha. One of the lessons we can ponder is on how Allah S.W.T portrays the character of Prophet Yusuf who had successfully ‘wrestled’ against sin and lust and stood firm to Shar’iah. He was in fear of Allah in a situation where there is no one can see him except Allah S.W.T. Thus, clear character ‘painted’ by Allah S.W.T can be viewed from the Quranic methodology in reporting of event. The readers also able to identify the guilty or innocent person in the incidents for them to draw conclusions and pass judgment on characters presented to them.

In addition, the Quran also emphasize the portrayal of the positive characters whose prevent crime from happening. This is very crucial for the viewers to get the message that such crime is contrary to the Shariah. All the preventive and rejections to the sin substitute by positive characters should be portrayed and highlighted.

This can be observed in the story of Prophet Yusuf as stated above and in the story of Habil and Qabil as follow:

“Qabil: “I will surely slay you!”

Habil: “Why?”

Qabil: “Because only your offering (*qurban*) was accepted”

Habil: “God accepts only from the God-fearing.”

“Yet if you extend your hand against me to slay me, I will not extend my hand against you to slay you; I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds, in slaying you.” “I desire that you should end up with my sin, the sin of slaying me and your own sin, the one that you had committed before and so become an inhabitant of the Fire, whereas I do not want to end up with your sin if I were to slay you and become one of them” (*Surah Al-Maidah* (5): 27).

Thus, the Quran here portrays on how Habil had refrained himself from doing crime and advised his brother not to commit such murder.

Affirm That the Truth Prevail Somehow: The truth and false always exist in human life. The Quran shows that the truth always prevail even the victim is a weak person or dies in the hands of the culprit or severely punished. The incidents stated in the stories of the Quran shows that whoever seeks the help from Allah are actually relied on the strongest support. As long as he or she was portrayed as someone who in the right position and sought support from Allah S.W.T., his or her characteristic should be shown as a person who in fact succeeded in his preference of choosing Allah S.W.T as his support. This can be seen in the story of people of Lut, where the Prophet of Lut is portrayed as a weaker person to face the disasters committed by his people yet he is in fact the strongest person when relying on Allah. The Quran explains:

“When Prophet Lut in hopeless situation on the matter happen to him, the Messengers of Allah, then start to calm him and explain that he is actually under the protection of Allah. The Messengers said:

O Lut, truly we are messengers of your Lord. They shall not reach you, with any harm” (*Surah Hud* (11): 81).

Sayyid Qutb commented that “Lut overlooked the fact that he could indeed lean on the mighty support of God who does not fail His obedient servants. When the Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H recited this verse he said: “May God have mercy on my brother Lut. He had indeed the mighty support he was looking for” [18]. Implicitly, this motivates the viewers to have a strong believe and faith on the basis that Allah is the best supporter in all kind of situations.

CONCLUSION

The results show that Quranic approach in describing the crime stories is enormously emphasized on punishment and lesson elements as both are the consequences of crime rather than the crime itself. Thus, the portrayal of crime stories for contemporary context i.e. films, drama, books, megazines, is proposed to emphasize the same elements. For further studies, the authors suggest these two elements being investigated how it can be implemented particularly in films and drama.

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