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**THE ISLAMIC ANCIENT STORIES
PRESENTED AS MOTIVATION DURING CRITICAL CONDITION
IN KOBUN SHIZUNO'S *THE JOURNEY***

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Abstract

This research aims to explore selected ancient stories of Islam presented in *The Journey*. *The Journey* is an animation of collaborative project produced by Manga Production (Saudi Arabia) and Toei Company (Japan) in 2021. This production was inspired by the history of Abrahah, who invaded Mecca to take power there. This history is very famous because it involves Abdul Mutholib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad. The era is known as the year of the elephant in which Prophet Muhammad had been born. However, some characters and events in the narrative are composited or fictitious. The film narrative also provides some examples of struggles and tireless spirits made by prophets in facing obstacles and challenges. These stories motivate Mecca people to fight Abrahah's brutality.

This study is qualitative research focusing on the film narrative by using the descriptive-analytic method. The stories in the narrative are described one by one and analysed based on the tragedy faced by the characters. Therefore, the stories are considered as motivation for the characters who are in critical condition to fight back against the cruelty they received. The stories involved in the animation are the story of Prophet Noah with his ark to save his people from the tsunami, Prophet Moses with his people to be free from the violence under the pharaoh of Egypt, and the last, Prophet Hud with the Aad people who denied God.

Keywords: motivation, fighting, cruelty, prophets

Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas beberapa kisah-kisah jaman dahulu yang diceritakan dalam Alqur'an yang dipresentasikan dalam film animasi *The Journey*. *The Journey* adalah film produksi kolaborasi antara *Manga Production* (Arab Saudi) dan *Toei Company* (Jepang) pada tahun 2021. Film ini terinspirasi dari Sejarah Abrahah yang ingin menginvasi Mekah dan menghancurkan Ka'bah. Sejarah ini sangat terkenal karena melibatkan Abdul Mutholib, kakek Rasulullah. Jaman ini pun dikenal sebagai tahun Gajah, tahun dimana Rasulullah dilahirkan. Meski begitu, beberapa tokoh dan kejadian pada film tersebut adalah karangan belaka. Di dalam narasinya, animasi ini juga memberikan beberapa contoh perjuangan dan semangat yang tak kenal lelah yang dilakukan oleh beberapa Nabi Allah dalam menghadapi tantangan dan hambatan. Cerita-cerita inilah yang memberikan motivasi kepada penduduk Mekah untuk berani melawan Abrahah.*

Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif yang berfokus kepada narasi film dengan menggunakan metode analisa deskripsi. Kisah dalam film digambarkan satu per satu sesuai dengan masalah yang dihadapi. Itu sebabnya, kisah-kisah tersebut dianggap sebagai motivasi bagi tokoh-tokoh yang mengalami kondisi kritis dan berjuang untuk melawan kekejian. Kisah-kisah tersebut meliputi: kisah nabi Nuh dengan bahteranya, kisah nabi Musa yang berjuang melawan Fir'aun dan kisah Nabi Hud menghadapi kaum 'Aad.

Kata Kunci: motivasi, perjuangan, kekejian dan nabi-nabi

A. INTRODUCTION

The Journey is an animation produced in 2021. It was directed by [Kōbun Shizuno and](#) written by Atsuhiro Tomioka. It is a collaborative project between Japan (Toei Animation) and Saudi Arabia (Manga production). Therefore, the spectators can find the animation in Japanese and Arabic dubbed versions. The title in the Arabic version is *Rihlah*.

The collaboration of these two countries can also be seen through the characters' performance described in the narrative. The figures created in animation are like the way manga is presented. The torso of most characters is slim with short haircuts; unlike Arabic who are tall and big.

This animation itself is inspired by the history of Abrahah who attacked Mecca. He was believed from Yemen and wanted to invade Mecca to take power there (Lings, 1983, p.19). Therefore, the troops he brought were presented taller than the Arabs with dark skin and curly hair; it shows that they were from Africa. Abrahah was the vice-regent in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) who envied Mecca people because of Ka'ba. Many pilgrims visited Mecca because of Ka'ba. Consequently, he made a rival building named the Cathedral of Al-Qalis in Sana'a. He hoped that the pilgrims would change their destination to Sana'a. This building, however, failed to get people's attention. It could not compete with Ka'ba (ibid). In this case, Abrahah forgot that the place was related to history and culture. Ka'ba was built by the prophet Abraham and his son, Ismael. Abraham was believed to be the Father of the Prophets who brought down the religion of Tauhid. Those who believed in God would think that Ka'ba was the place to do pilgrimage. It made Abrahah enraged; this is also the main reason why Abrahah attacked Mecca.

Even though *The Journey* tells the popular history of Abrahah, his troops, and the elephants, the idea of the story is not a documentary. Some figures in the narrative are fictional. This animation explores the fighting spirit of the hero, Aws. Aws is a fictional character to highlight the struggle of Mecca people to preserve their land.

The story is meaningful because Rasulullah was born in this era. Therefore, there is Abdul Mutholib, Rasulullah's grandfather, among the figures in the animation. However, he is not the main character in the narrative. He is presented as a respected figure but not a hero. The story is not real history. It emerges a new character as a hero to get the spectators' attention, particularly those who are new to this narrative. Thus, this animation is not only for Muslims who are familiar with Abrahah's story but also for non-Muslims.

Despite focusing on Islamic history, this animation focuses more on the lessons learned or moral values to understand the importance of truth, justice, equality, and humanity. Thus, this research aims to expose how the truth is revealed, justice is enforced, equality is developed, and humanity is applied. All those are the journey of how human civilization formed through struggle. This animation presents how the fighting spirit creates human life better than the previous generation. That is, the stories contain fighting spirits that motivate the next generation to fight for a better life.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Journey is an initial project between Japan and Saudi Arabia. It is not broadcast globally so not many spectators know about this animation. The distribution of this film is done by Toei Company, Japan. People cannot find the animation in the cinema. Both Japanese and Arabic dubbed version can be found on YouTube channel.

Because of the limited access, not many researchers make studies about this film. The reviews are not done academically. Thus, it is difficult for researchers to find the previous studies to decide the research gap. As exposed in the previous heading, this research focuses on the fighting spirit presented in the narrative. The fighting spirit also gives motivation to the next generation to struggle for a better life. Therefore, to analyze the theme, this study utilizes mimetic approaches.

Mimetic theory is the theory of imitation; the original terminology is *mimesis*. This theory was, first, introduced by Plato, a Greek philosopher (Mete, 2018, p.217). Plato emphasized mimetic theory in pure imitation so that the truth would be degraded after a while; the spectators found that it was only an illusion (Kahn, 2006, p.1). That is, the work created by the author is an imitation of reality. In fact, real imitation does not match after a while so spectators cannot find the relation between the literary work and reality. They cannot even get the lesson or values in the work. Therefore, this study tends to utilize Aristotle's concept of mimetics which has a role as an interpretation. According to Sarah Worth, *mimesis* in Aristotle's concept does not stress the imitation of reality; it has direct reference to it but there is creation in it. Thus, the spectators can understand more about the basis of human learning (2000, p.335). That is, imitation for Aristotle benefits from a visible component so that the spectators can see it more objectively and relate to their lives (Heninger, 1989, p. 397).

However, this research also applies imitation as a representation that is proposed by the German philologist and literary critic, Erich Auerbach. Auerbach's concept focuses on examining several significant texts of literary work including the stories from the Bible. "One of Auerbach's main objectives in *Mimesis* is to show how the aesthetic structure of Biblical texts, namely the Gospels, provides a model for realistic representation in secular literature" (Doran, 2007, p.357). In this case, although *The Journey* is not a story from the Bible, some Prophets' stories in the narrative are well-known in the Bible. Besides that, the Qur'an is also a holy book that mentions some reality that needs to be interpreted. The stories in the Qur'an are the representation of human life in their era that can be a lesson for the next generation. Thus, the analysis of the study focuses on the representation to be interpreted since it is an imitation. Robert Doran also highlights that Auerbach's way of understanding the mimetic is through the essence of an entire period from the reading of a single text: it is a hermeneutic tour de force that has few if any rivals (2007, p.353). Doran also states that literary work is a mirror of reality since "the direct imitation of contemporary reality [has] served a timeless and universal purpose" (2003; 258). Therefore, the interpretation of the representation of reality can always be continuous.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies the qualitative method by utilizing textual analysis of the film narrative. The data used comes from the dialogue between the actors and the events in the film. To discover the motivative values in Islamic miracle stories, this study utilizes descriptive analytics by analyzing the stories one by one. It is functional since the value of the stories is meaningful in giving fighting spirit to the characters based on the critical conditions they face. The analysis starts by exposing the story mentioned in Qur'an; it is Abraham's invasion of Mecca. Then, exploring the crisis experienced by

the characters in facing the invasion. After that, the narrative exhibits some miracle stories that inspire the hero to fight against Abrahah's brutality. The last, the research interprets the meaning of the stories for Mecca people in defending the villain.

To elaborate on the analysis, this study is divided into three points: (1) the Prophet of Noah and his ark. This story focuses on faith, belief, and companionship to defuse the conflict between Aws and Zurara – the heroes in the narrative; (2) the Prophet of Moses and his fight against the Pharaoh. This miracle story emphasizes on Hebrews' struggle to get their freedom as slaves from Pharaoh's cruelty – in the narrative, Ribca is the representative of the struggle, and the last (3) the Prophet of Hud and 'Aad people who deny the existence of Allah. In this case, Thawab is the representative of a struggle for justice.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the animation of *The Journey*, there are three stories of miracles from the Prophets who are believed to be in Islam. They are Prophet Noah, Prophet Moses, and Prophet Hud. All the stories are adapted according to narrative needs so that the characters presented are fictional characters to strengthen the context of the story.

1. The Prophet of Noah and His Ark

The story of the big flood in the era of Prophet Noah is very famous. It is believed not only for Muslims but also for other religions such as Christians. This story is stated in Al Qur'an in surah Al Ankabut verse 15:

لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَكَ جُنُودًا مَّا
 نَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَجَعَلْنَا
 لَكَ الْوَاوِيلَ الْكَلْبَ وَالشَّمْلَ
 وَجَعَلْنَا لَكَ نُجُودًا مَّا
 نَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَجَعَلْنَا
 لَكَ الْوَاوِيلَ الْكَلْبَ وَالشَّمْلَ

Then We saved him and the companions of the ship, and We made it a sign for the world.

In the animation narrative, the signs of the big flood were felt by one of the figures named Naram. He was a shepherd. He saw something different in the sky that made him worried. Prophet Noah reminded his people that punishment from God would come very soon. Therefore, Prophet Noah was instructed to create an ark to save his people. Some people did not believe in him. They mocked him. Meanwhile, Naram believed in him. Thus, only Prophet Noah and his followers worked to finish the ark. They were also the ones who were rescued from the flood. Naram tried to save people who mocked him, but he almost sank because of that. One of Prophet Noah's sons, Yafet, saved him. The ark was a safe place for those who believed in Allah. This place was also saved for some animals chosen (00:28:47-00:33:13).

Naram is a fictional figure in the narrative to represent a believer. He might be an uneducated person, just a shepherd, but he believes in Allah's power. Besides that, this story teaches about cooperation and loyalty. Naram is loyal to Prophet Noah. He believes in Noah's teaching. He also works together with other Noah's followers. It

means faith in Allah is proof of salvation.

According to Joseph Campbell, some people around the world are called theists because they believe in God; God is the fact for them (1990, p.136). As Naram, the big

flood that turned into tsunami was a fact of the existence of Allah. He believed in what Prophet Noah said about God's punishment. Thus, he was safe because of his belief. The punishment happened to those who ignored Allah.

أَلْبَابِ أَيْنَ عَدُوِّ غَرُّوْنَا لَمْ

Then We drowned thereafter those who remained behind (Ash-shu'ara: 120).

This story is brought up by Aws when he met his childhood friend, Zurara (28:08). They were best friends who lived in poverty. They were kidnapped by criminals since they were child. They did something bad to survive because they lived under the bandits' control. When they planned to escape, they planned each other. Aws succeeded in escaping, meanwhile, Zurara was caught by the bandits. They were separated for a long time.

However, they remembered one another. Aws still believed that Zurara was his good friend. He became a sinner because of his life condition. Therefore, he invited Zurara to help his people facing Abrahah. Mecca people needed a lot of heroes to fight against Abrahah. As the concept of Campbell's concept of monomyth, the hero experienced: separation-initiation-return (1948, p.28). Zurara experienced separation from Aws. In this separation, either Aws or Zurara faced difficulties in life. Then, they found the solution, endured the burden, and survived. Zurara returned and reunited with Aws. Aws found that Zurara had returned from his adventure. From all experience Zurara had, Aws was convinced that Zurara had fighting skills – his fighting skills were getting better.

Campbell highlighted that the coming of the hero must exhibit his upper battle skill to the world (ibid, p.259). Zurara is not the main hero in the narrative, but he is the fit candidate to accompany Aws to fight against Abrahah. Aws is the hero representative in the narrative. It means Zurara appears as the hero's company in the story. Thus, their existence is evidence of people's power against the villain's cruelty. The story of Prophet Noah and his followers who created the ark to avoid the tsunami can motivate them to work together, hold their faith in Allah, and be loyal to friends. Abrahah's brutality is the synonym of the tsunami that threatened Mecca people.

2. The Prophet of Moses and His Fight Against Pharaoh

As the story of Prophet Noah and his ark, the story of Prophet Moses fought against Pharaoh is also popular not only for Muslims but also for other religions. His battle spirit is mentioned in Al-Qur'an:

ظُم طَّرُّ مِ ت كُنْ أَرْنَا أ^a رَصَاكْ أ رَبُّنْ لَى لَ أَحَ بَدَا
ق ق لَلْبُ خ ض هوس ي َّ
ق َّ و

و

كَلَّمَآ

Then, We inspired to Moses, “Strike with your staff the sea,” and it parted, and

each portion was like a great towering mountain (Ash Shu'ara: 63).

In the narrative, Rachel was the heroin. She was an ordinary girl who was born as a slave. The story exposes the failure of the harvest and the cold of the winter. Thus, all people in Egypt were lack of food. All the slaves were instructed to work harder to produce more food, more than they could. The food was served for the Pharaoh's needs. It was a cruelty.

Because of this violence, Moses led his people to escape from the Pharaoh. He wanted them to get their freedom as humans. Rachel was one of Moses' followers; she joined the group to get her freedom. In fact, the journey was so hard. With no food and a hard winter, they managed the exhaustion in escapement. Rachel almost gave up. One of the followers named Ribca reminded her that freedom was not a gift – it had to be fought for. What Rachel said in the narrative is Campbel's concept about fighting, a good fight. A good fight is not a private fight; it is a struggle that everybody can get into (1987, p.20). Therefore, the narrative does not emphasize Moses' fighting only. It also involves many people – in this cast, the slaves – in the battle (00:45:48-00:53:20). Rachel is a fictional figure as the representative of an ordinary person who strives for her liberty.

The journey to release from Pharaoh's slavery was evidence of people's power; they struggled to gain freedom from the King's brutality. The narrative shows Prophet Moses led them in the harsh desert they had to pass through. At the end of their journey, they found that Pharaoh's army chased them while in front of them was the sea. As the leader, Moses – as Allah instructed - used his staff to the sea and suddenly the sea parted. Moses' followers were saved meanwhile the pharaoh's army struggled with the seawater that came back together. The army drowned. This story is explained in Qur'an.

أَصْحَابِ عَيْنِ مِثْلِهِ وَمَنْ مَوْسَىٰ وَ
أَكْرَجَ سِينًا

أَرْبَابًا غَرَّتْ
لَهُمْ خَلْقًا
بِأَنبِيَائِهِمْ

مَوْسَىٰ وَآلِهِ
أَرْهَمَهُمْ
كُلَّ مَوْسَىٰ
لِكَيْ يَدْعُو
بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ

And We saved Moses and those with him, all together. Then We drowned the others. Indeed in that is a sign, but most of them were not to be believers (Ash Shu'ara :65-67)

The verses above show that people must struggle to get a better life. Being independent is not a gift, it is something to fight for. Besides that, this story teaches that people must have a strong will to fight. He or she has to eliminate the anxiety and fear to win.

In the narrative, this story motivates Hindun and her father to support Aws' fight against Abrahah. Abrahah is a King who wants to take over Mecca territory. As Mecca

people, Aws struggles for his freedom – the freedom of Mecca. Hindun is Aws’ wife. She is the female figure as the benefit for Aws (Cawelty, 1976, p.40). this beneficial happens because Hindun encourages his husband’s grapple. She might be afraid and worried; however, she overcomes her anxiety and fear by remembering the story of Rachel in Moses’s era. She believes that the believers will get Allah’s aid in their battle. Therefore, as Rachel, Hindun also believes that Mecca people will get their victory under Allah’s blessing.

3. The Prophet Hud and ‘Aad People

The story of Prophet Hud fighting against ‘Aad people is also stated in Qur’an. The surah even uses the name of Hud. It indicates that this story is remarkable in Islamic history.

مَفْرُونَ إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا
 وَذُكِّرُوا بِهَا لَئِيْلٌ آلُ
 هٰؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ كٰفِرُونَ
 وَذُكِّرُوا بِهَا لَئِيْلٌ آلُ
 هٰؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ كٰفِرُونَ
 وَذُكِّرُوا بِهَا لَئِيْلٌ آلُ
 هٰؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ كٰفِرُونَ

And to ‘Aad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, “O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. You are not but inventors [of falsehood] (Hud: 50).

The verse signifies that Hud was sent to ‘Aad people to remind them about the right deity, no other deity but Allah. However, ‘Aad ignored this reminder. They convinced that their belief was better than others, including Hud’s. Therefore, Prophet Hud warned:

اَلَمْ يَخْلُقْنَا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا وَاَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا
 اِلٰهًا

O my people, I do not ask you for any reward. My reward is only from the one who created me. Then will you not reason? (Hud: 51)

The verse emphasizes that what Hud did is sincere. He did not require any reward from the people because Allah had guaranteed him His reward. In the film narrative, the story of Hud and ‘Aad people is represented by Kamkam and his student, Thawab. Kamkam was a respected priest in Iram, a country in which Hud and his followers lived. He was a fair and nice leader. However, his manner made ‘Aad people furious. They

killed Kamkam in front of Thawab. Although Thawab was Kamkam's disciple, he was too young to be a leader. People did not respect him as people respected Kamkam. Thawab wanted to apply fairness in his society; he rejected the violence done by the rich people to the poor. In fact, he was imprisoned and persecuted by 'Aad. The new Priest did not act as he had to do; he collaborated with the rich to abuse the poor. He used his position to get benefits from the rich. At the end of their suffering, Hud's followers revolted against 'Aad; they freed the prisoners including Thawab. In this rebellion, Allah's punishment came. The tornado ravaged Iram, knocked down the tower of the country, and blew the disbelievers away. Those who believed in Allah were safe. Then, they were in a new era of life (01:20:00-01:29:10). The story of the tornado is also

mentioned in the Qur'an:

وَالَّذِينَ لَآئِي نَوْءٍ زَرَارًا عَلَيْكُمْ أَلَسْمَا بِئِذَا
 رَوَّيْنَا دَمْدَمًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
 لِيَكُونَ لَكُمْ سُلُوفًا
 وَإِذْ يُرِيدُ الْفِيلُ بِالْبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ
 فَجَاءَهُمُ الْغَمَامُ
 وَالْفِيلُ حَبِيبٌ أُثْمَلُ

م ج ر م ن ن ا ر و ل و ا

And o my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. He will send the sky upon you in showers and increase you in strength to your strength. And do not turn away, [being] criminals (Hud: 52).

This miracle story motivates Aws to keep his courage while he was in the lowest point facing Abrahah and his troops, including Abrahah’s elephants. Aws saw the troops beat Zurara until Zurara was helpless; this made Aws furious. Aws, emotionally, attacked Abrahah and succeeded in opening Abrahah’s mask. Aws was shocked knowing Abrahah’s face so Aws uncontrolled himself; Abrahah defeated him easily. Aws was hopeless and he thought he was lost. He did not have any energy to fight Abrahah back. All Aws remembered was only his family, particularly his wife and his son. In that condition, all of a sudden, Zubair – his father-in-law – appeared in front of him and told him about this miracle story. Aws just needed to believe that Allah’s help would come; they would definitely win the battle. In ‘Aad’s story, Allah sent a tornado to punish the disbelievers. This time, Allah sent millions of birds that brought hot pebbles. The birds dropped those pebbles on Abrahah and his troops.

Aws and his people could lose fighting against Abrahah. However, they did not fight it out. Allah took over their effort to be free from Abrahah’s invasion. The coming of millions of birds is proof that Allah helps those who have faith. This miracle is even stated in Qur’an surah Al-Fil means elephants.

Elephant is a big animal. It is certain that elephants are strong. However, in the narrative, the big elephant was defeated by the small bird. As Carl Jung examines the biggest and the tallest of things are just allusions to matureness; the hero must concentrate on his power so he can be the winner (200, p.116). Thus, size is not a matter; the matter is the power and how to use the power well. Compared to Abrahah and his troops, Aws and his people were very small. However, they had the nerve to do the battle. Although they almost lost, Allah sent the small creatures to fight against the big creatures. This story gives a lesson learned about the fighting spirit, no matter the size.

E. CONCLUSION

Some stories function as entertainment. The readers or spectators find them

interesting to view. Many times, the stories imitate the real life. They represent human experience. However, the great stories can inspire the spectators to get lesson that motivate them to get better life. The story of Abrahah's invasion to Mecca leads a lesson for the spectators that being an independent country needs some effort. *The Journey* is an animation imitating the story the year of elephants. This story is very

famous in Islamic history since it is the era when Rasulullah was born. Although this story related to the birth of Rasulullah, the imitation of the story is not pure imitation. There are some creations in it, so the characters and the plot are fictional. The fictious elements help the narrative to be coherent with the contemporary reality thus the interpretation is easy to be done and the values can relate with the recent time.

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