STORYTELLING AS A PEACE EDUCATION IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: AN EXPERIENCE AMONG SELECTED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali[*], *Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman*[**], *Nurhanisah Senin*[***], *Sri Rahayu Haji Dollah*[*#]

[*]Department of `Aqidah & Islamic Thought. Academy of Islamic Studies. University of Malaya. 50603. Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia.
[**]Department of Theology and Philosophy. Faculty of Islamic Studies. National University of Malaysia. Bangi. 43600. Selangor. Malaysia.
[***]Department of Dakwah & Usuluddin. Faculty of Islamic Civilisation Studies. International Islamic University College Selangor. 43000. Kajang. Selangor. Malaysia.
[*#]Faculty of Usuluddin. Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali. BE 1310. Brunei Darussalam.

Email: [*]ijamh@um.edu.my

Khulasah

Kajian ini bertujuan meneroka 'penceritaan' sebagai medium untuk transformasi pengajaran dan pembelajaran dialog antara agama dalam kalangan mahasiswa universiti . Merujuk kepada cara mereka dibesarkan dan persekitarannya, para pelajar tidak mempunyai peluang untuk mengetahui lebih luas berkaitan agama dan budaya lain terutama yang hanya tinggal dalam kalangan etnik mereka semata. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menggalakkan dialog antara agama dan memupuk keamanan dan keharmonian antara pelajar-pelajar Jabatan Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Jabatan Akidah dan Falsafah, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia dan Seminari Teologi Malaysia. Melalui sesi perbualan secara berkumpulan, bengkel dan pengalaman secara lapangan bersama para pelajar,

kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa 'pendidikan damai' (pendidikan berprinsipkan kedamaian dan keamanan) melalui 'penceritaan' boleh digunakan sebagai medium kepada naratif kebenaran, yang bertujuan untuk memulihkan hubungan peribadi, penyembuhan kepada pengalaman traumatik dan mempromosikan kewujudan bersama *(ta'āyush)*. Kaedah atau model ini boleh memupuk dialog antara agama. Selanjutnya ia dapat menyumbang kepada pembangunan budaya damai, iaitu budaya 'penceritaan' dengan individu daripada 'kumpulan yang lain' dan dapat ditafsirkan sebagai keinginan untuk melantunkan suara dan perasaan 'yang tidak pernah untuk didengari' sebelum ini agar ianya dapat dikongsi bersama dengan yang lain. Proses ini menyumbang kepada menghasilkan potensi para peserta agar memahami kepentingan kewujudan bersama secara harmoni dan aman-damai. Sehubungan itu, 'penceritaan keharmonian dan keamanan' dilihat sebagai mekanisma untuk memahami 'yang lain'. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan pentingnya mewujudkan persekitaran yang kondusif untuk memupuk dialog antara agama, memperluaskan format dialog antara agama dan meningkatkan lagi kajian agama melalui pendidikan dan praktikal.

Kata kunci: 'penceritaan'; 'pendidikan damai'; dialog antara agama dan antara budaya; pengalaman pelajar; *ta'āyush*.

Abstract

The study is aimed at exploring storytelling approach as a medium for the transformative teaching and learning of interfaith dialogue among undergraduate students. Due to their upbringing and environment, the students do not have the oppurtunity to know other religions and culture better. This is especially true for those who lived only among their own ethnic. Therefore, this research is aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue as well as fostering peace and harmony between students of the Department of 'Aqidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic

Studies, University of Malaya; Department of Theology and Philosophy, National University of Malaysia and Centre for Religion and Society of Malaysia Theological Seminary. Through group conversation, fieldwork and workshop with the students, this study demonstrates that peace education through storytelling can be utilized as a tool of narrative truth-telling, aimed at restoring inter-personal relationships, healing traumatic experiences and promoting social coexistence *(ta'āyush)*. This approach enables to foster interfaith dialogue among the students thus, contributes to the development of a culture of peace. The storytelling approach with a member from 'the other' group can be interpreted as a desire to proclaim the 'unheard' voices and feelings to be shared with 'the other'. It connects with the practice of active listening to overcome prejudice, leading towards the transformative learning process. Peace storytelling may therefore, be seen as an understanding 'the others'. This study also recommends the significance on creating environments to foster inter-religious dialogue, expanding formats of interfaith dialogue and increasing religious study through education and training.

Keywords: Storytelling; peace education; interfaith and intercultural dialogue; students' experience; *ta'āyush*.

Introduction

September 30, 2015 and March 31, 2017, 38 Muslim students from University of Malaya (UM), Nur Farhana and her five Muslim students from National University of Malaysia (UKM), Nurhanisah Senin from Singapore and Sri Rahayu from Brunei Darussalam as well as my Phd students at Department of 'Aqidah and Islamic Thought, UM, and I spent our time with 47 students from Centre for Religion and Society of Malaysia Theological Seminary at

Malaysia Theological Seminary Hall (STM), Senawang, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia lead by Rev. Dr Sivin Kit.

We spent whole day with the seminarian community where the communities are Christians. This article discusses the student community to correlate the relationship and strengthening the brotherhood of various faiths of community either those who are Muslims and Christians through the process of dialogue which we called as interfaith dialogue as well as intercultural dialogue.

This writing is based on our experience visiting Centre for Religion and Society of Malaysia Theological Seminary. The case study described in this article focuses on the utilization of storytelling as a medium for narrative and dialogical truth, reflecting a transformative conception of peace education. The study examines the creation of mutual understanding, respect and changing attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of 'the other,' to cultivate a culture of peace. This article describes the conceptual framework adopted for the research, with a brief overview of the methodology and a discussion of the relevant literature before considering some of the findings of the study followed by a reflection.

We believe that interfaith dialogue through storytelling plays an important role in promoting peace through education. It was utilized as a medium for transformative learning that fostered collective awareness. It encouraged students to practice values of a culture of peace in daily life. Thus, within the elicitive approach the greatest resource for building a culture of peace is recognized as the people themselves. Educating young people to become agents of social change is central to the task of peace education.[1]

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[1] Erna Anjarwati and Allison Trimble, "Storytelling as a Mean for Peace Education: Intercultural Dialogue in Southern Thailand," *The Journal of Living Together* (2010), 47.

As we know, Malaysia is one of the Southeast Asian countries that is known for its diversity in religion and cultural society. The diversity reflects not only at its various languages and multi-racial society but also in multi-religious adherents of the people. Malaysia, as commonly perceived, is a multi-civilize, multi-ethic and multicultural country. Being a plural society, Malaysians have experienced an intricate and multifaceted path in their historical trajectory. The formation of plural and multicultural Malaysia can be traced back as early as the era of Malacca Malay Sultanate in the early fifteenth century, when Malacca stood as one of the most important trade centres of the region. The experience of being a colony to the Western powers one after another; the Portuguese in 1511, the Dutch in 1641 and later by the British following the historic Pangkor Treaty in 1874, and of course the short stay of the Japanese (1941-1945), has paved the way for contemporary post-colonial multicultural and plural Malaysia.[2]

It was during the British era when a huge number of workers and immigrants, mostly from mainland China and the Indian subcontinent, were brought into the country and located in various commercial areas and plantation estates respectively. At the same time the Malays, who were the natives, remained in the rural areas and villages. Of course this type of social set-up would encourage segregation. As a result, polarisation and segregation took place between these ethnic groups.[3]

The 1957 independence is indeed an important landmark for Malaysian society in dealing with pluralistic society and multiculturalism. In a not-so-long experience of being together in the post independent political set-up, i.e. the adopted political system of parliamentary democracy

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[2] Zaid Ahmad. "Multiculturalism and Religio-Ethnic Plurality", *Culture and Religion*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (July 2007), 139.

[3] *Ibid*., 139-140.

and constitutional monarchy, the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, the Bumiputras (son of the soil), the Indigenous and other races and ethnic groups have shown their ability and willingness to tolerate each other on matters of difference and at the same time instill a sense of commonness, reciprocity and mutual respect within the pluralistic nature of the society.[4]

Of course this does not mean that Malaysian society is free from any racial or ethnic problems and religious tensions. We know that they inherited these old problems of polarisation and segregation. However, as far as racial and religious tensions are concerned, there were no major ones and the problems were so far successfully dealt with by the authorities and the people. Throughout the five decades of the post-colonial era, Malay Muslims as the majority have lived with plurality, shared powers, wealth and resources with other communities of various religious and ethnic backgrounds in relative peace and harmony.[5]

Osman Bakar argues that the diversity of religion in Malaysia is the main social challenge needed to be handled effectively.[6] This is more emphasized by Chandra Muzaffar who said that creating an atmosphere that is conducive to inter-religious understanding and harmony is

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[4] *Ibid*., 140.

[5] J. A Jawan and Z. Ahmad, eds., *Inter-ethnic Relations in Malaysia: Selected Readings* (Serdang: Penerbit Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2006), 15-21.

[6] Osman Bakar, "Konsep Tamadun Malaysia Kesatuan dalam Kepelbagaian", in *Permuafakatan dan Kerukunan Teras Peradaban Malaysia,* eds. Hashim Ismail & Raihanah Abdullah (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu dan Pusat Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya, 2009), 1-9.

a challenge[7] to Malaysian society.[8] Creating harmony is the
main agenda for inter-religious dialogue and this can be
applied in a roundtable discussion among the religious
elites. In the modern pluralistic society of practical living
together, a dialogue aims to learn something different from
the others[9] as well as to get to know the others[10] as one
whole human family.

Getting to know the others is a dialogical relation to
promote amicable relationship with people of different
religions. It begins when one encounters, lives and interacts
with the others and participates in daily life activities
together. The social interaction marks the involvement of

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[7] It is a challenge to address some of the so-called "sensitive issues" that
impinge upon inter-religious ties. One of the sensitive issues is the
issue of conversion since it lies on the principle of religious freedom
and the right of a person to join or leave a faith without coercion or
compulsion.

[8] Chandra Muzaffar, *A Plea for Empathy: The Quest for Malaysian Unity*
(Kuala Lumpur: Zubedy (M) Sdn Bhd, 2010), 1-238.

[9] L. Swidler, "Dialogue in Malaysia and the Global Scenario", In *Siri
Monograf Pusat Dialog Peradaban*, No. 1 (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat
Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya, 2003), 69-77.

[10] To know further, please refer to: F. M. Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and Inter-
Religous Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective* (KL: International Islamic
University Malaysia Press, 2008); Osman Bakar. *The Qur'an on
Interfaith and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue: Interpreting a Divine
Message for Twenty-first Century Humanity* (KL: International
Institute of Islamic Thought Malaysia (IIITM) and Institute for Study
of the Ummah and Global Understanding (ISUGU), 2006); Khadijah
Mohd. Hambali, "Budaya 'Kenal-Mengenali' dalam Pembinaan
Ummah", in *Pemikiran Islam dan Cabaran Semasa,* eds. Mohd. Fauzi
Hamat, Mohd Fakhrudin Abd. Mukti, Che Zarrina Sa'ari (Kuala
Lumpur: Jabatan Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam, Akademi Pengajian
Islam, Universiti Malaya, 2004), 259-272; A. Berghout, "Meeting the
Challenges of Dialogue: Need for Civilisational Vision and Cultural
Transformation", in *Dialogue of Civilizations and the Construction of
Peace*, eds. T.W. Simon & Azizan Baharuddin (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat
Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya, 2008), 140-172; F.M Shehu,
"Inter-religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace Building: From
Hostility to Mutual Respect and Better Understanding", *Beder
Journal of Humanities* Vol. 1 Issue 3 (2014), 59-76.

non-elite participants in the inter-religious dialogue at the grass roots level. The non-elite participation in inter-religious dialogue is necessary to accommodate the challenge of pluralistic society. The process of social interaction in everyday activity is known as a dialogue of life.

Those activities can be seen in the life experience of living together with mix-faith family, celebrating festival and wedding ceremony as well as doing (running) business with other religious communities. Undoubtedly, there are still opputunity to get along and live harmoniously within Malaysian through story-telling as a mechanism to being more undestanding and tolerance. Thus, this paper would like to promote story telling as a peace education to encourage positive relation for the people of different religions

The Concept of Dialogue and Peace Education

Dialogue as an educative practice of evocative of John Dewey and his influence on the democratic education movement.[11] Dewey recognized that dialogue has a different purpose and approach than other method of communication. Dialogue strives to promote understanding and respect.[12] According to Buber, dialogue has its charecteristic and ethics. They are openness, appreciation of difference, acceptance of conflict, mutual respect and trust, sincerity, honesty, and willingness to admit errors.[13]

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[11] Zuniga, Nagda, Chesler et. al, "Intergroup Dialogue in Higher Education: Meaningful Learning About Social Justice", *ASHE Higher Education Report* Vol. 32(4) (2007), 1-128.

[12] A. Dessel and M. E. Rogge, "Evaluation of Intergroup Dialogue: A Review of Imperical Literature", *Conflict Revolution Quarterly*, 26(2) (2008), 199-238.

[13] As cited in M. S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Routledge. 2002), 14; R. C. Arnett, *Communication and Community: Implication's of Martin Buber Dialogue* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 96.

Pannikar emphasized that dialogue is what happens between people, rather than the content of conversation.[14] Flores echoed the idea and pointed that dialogue is about the people and not the ideas that people hold.[15]

Basically, dialogue is a process of conversation through speech.[16] It is a reciprocal relationship in which two or more parties endeavor to express accurately what they mean, and listen to and respect what the other person says.[17] Dialogue began when one faith first became aware of the other.[18] Dialogue has taken on many meanings, but Leonard Swidler points out that dialogue is a two way communication between persons who hold significantly differing views on a subject, with the purpose of learning more truth about the subject from the other.[19] This implies that dialogue as well as interfaith dialogue is a conscious process which involves a deliberate intention of interaction and learning.

Hence, dialogue as well as interfaith dialogue aims to influence the participants not to remain static in cocoons

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[14] Pannikar, *The Inter-religious Dialogue* (revised edition) (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 29.

[15] T. N. Flores, "Encountaring the Other Through Interfaith Dialogue: a Constructive Look a Praxis of Religion" (Doctoral Thesis, retrieved from ProQuest Dissertasion and Thesis, 2006), 48.

[16] Charles Kimball, "Towards a More Hopeful Future: Obstacles and Opportunities in Christian-Muslim Relations," *Muslim World*, 94(3) (2004), 377-385.

[17] Patricia Martinez, "A Case-Study of Malaysia: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Partnership, Possibilities and Problems with Suggestions for the Future", in *Dialogue of Civilizations and the Construction of Peace,* eds. Simon, W. Thomas & Azizan Baharuddin (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya. 2008), 31.

[18] Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Illinois: Aurora University Publication, 2001), 33.

[19] Leonard Swindler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* Vol. 20(1) (1983), 1-4.

but to come out of their shells and to discover the means by which they can improve in themselves and in their mutual relationships.[20] Therefore, dialogue can be seen in variety of forms as inter-religious dialogue, interfaith dialogue, intercultural dialogue, dialogue of life, theological dialogue and so on. Multiple definitions of that types of dialogue exist. It may be concluded as dialogue is a perspective, a stance, openness, and interrelated to each other.[21]

Moreover, Heckman and Johnson stated that communication is a continuous and ongoing process without a clearly defined beginning and end.[22] They described that dialogue as interactive process. Pearce and Pearce valued that storytelling aspect.[23] This is because, they believed that relationship is the anchor to communication process. Therefore, relationship is sometimes the context for and sometimes contexualized by stories.[24]

Further, stories may function as vehicles for both socialization and education. It can also be understood as a mechanisme to foster culture for peace and harmony as well as the value of dialogical process is realized. The process

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[20] Matthew C. Ugwoji, "Interreligious Relations and Solidarity: Contextualization the Vision of Francis Cardinal Arinze for Religious Education in Nigeria" (Doctoral Thesis, Fordham University New York, 2008), 44.

[21] Ahmad Husni Haji Hasan, "An Islamic Perspective of the Interfaith Dialogue Amidst Current Inter-Religious Tensions Worldwide," *Global Journal of al-Thaqafah*, Vol. 1(1) (2011), 26.

[22] M. Z Hackman and C. E. Johnson, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 4th edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004), 7.

[23] W. B. Pearce and K. A. Pearce, "Taking a Communication Perspective on Dialogue", In Anderson, R. Baxter, L.A and Cissna, K.N (editors), *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, Thousand Oaks: California Sage. 2004, 47-48.

[24] *Ibid.*, 48.

rest on a basis beyond oral exchanged when stories are used as a form of truth-telling, reflecting peace education.[25]

The Concept of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue, also referred to as inter-religious dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect, allowing them to live and cooperate with each other despite their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interactions between people of different religious traditions, (i.e., 'faiths') at both the individual and the institutional levels. Each party remains true to his or her own beliefs while respecting the right of others to practice their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue includes human interaction and relationships. It can occur between individuals and communities and on many levels, for example, between neighbors, in schools and in our places of work- it can occur in both formal and informal settings.

In a multi-religious context, interfaith dialogue refers to "all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom" because dialogue promotes a positive perception of others. It is explained by Cardinal Francis Arinze that interreligious dialogue is a meeting of mind and heart between followers of various religions. It is a walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern.[26] Only through interfaith dialogue, we can increase our understanding and decrease prejudice and negative perceptions on the others as well as the more we can gain

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[25] Anjarwati & Allison. "Storytelling as a Mean for Peace Education", 48.

[26] Michael Fitzgerald, http:www.sedos.org/English/dev fitz.html.

knowledge of 'the other', the more we increase the opportunity to better understand each other.[27]

There are verses from the Quran advocating the believers of faith the call for religious dialogue. Allah says in the al-Quran: "We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures"[28] Meaning that; in Islam, Muslims are told to deal with non-Muslims kindly and justly. Moreover, al-Quran also inspires inter-religious dialogue. This important point has been stressed in the curriculum. All people come from one God alone; regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religious beliefs, and they are descended from one pair of parents; Adam and Hawwa, and extending from one exalted soul, *nafs wahidah*[29].

In Surah al-Hujurat (49): 13; Allah states the following: "O Mankind, We (Allah) created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the best honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you" [30] This verse indicates that there is no basis for racism, that all people came from one source, and that people should understand the differences and diversity of others and gets to know each other for cohabitation. Furthermore, Muslims should take into account and be able to foresee the different backgrounds of human beings and Islam had teach its followers ways and means to deal with these diverse and mixed society. [31]

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[27] Adam BadrulHisham & Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Konsep Roh Suci Menurut Islam dan Kristian," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam (AFKAR)* Vol. 20(1) (2018), 2018, 85-108.

[28] Surah al-Isra' 17:701.

[29] All human beings are greatly created with the body into which is blown an exalted created soul which is Allah attributed to himself for its gloriousness (Surah al-Hijr: 29), (Surah al-Tin: 4).

[30] Surah al-Hujurat 49:13.

[31] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (with Arabic Text) (Lahore: Pakistan), 4933.

The Quran also denounces the non-acceptance of unbelievers in other religions. It states; "O ye that reject Faith! To you be your Way, and to me mine"[32]. It assured that Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. "Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity".[33]

According to Fatmir Shehu, the nature of interfaith dialogue is very genuine. The reason is that; it promotes mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence, better understanding and humanity at large among different communities of different religions, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and levels of education.[34] Moreover, in all inter-religious dialogue activities, the rejection of exclusivism and the promotion of inclusivism may promote and sustain peace.[35] Through the promotion of inclusivism, a climate of friendly relationships, where mutual understanding and respect as well as better understanding will prevail as well as created.

In addition, inter-religious dialogue does not reject the exclusivism related to the fundamental principles of the religion of one the participants. Rather, it rejects engagement promoting hostility, violence, and hatred.[36] It is a fact that both Muslims and Christians, for example, engaging in dialogue, feel an obligation, that is, to safeguard the particular revelation that they believe that they came from one God and had to be loyal to their own faith and religious community. Indeed, similar to many

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[32] Surah al-Kafirun 109: 1 & 6.

[33] Surah al-Mumtahinah 60:8.

[34] Shehu, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace Building", 62.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin, "Kajian Kritis Hubungan Agama dan Pemikiran Terorisme," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam (AFKAR)* Vol 19 No. 2 (2017), 73-106.

Christians, Muslims have a fear of risking their faith if they enter into inter-religious dialogue.[37]

Therefore, to ensure that interfaith dialogue activities go smoothly, Swindler emphasizes the ethics and principles of dialogue. The dialogue participants perhaps learn and change their attitudes, understand each other's belief system and religion, and open room for mutual respect and better religious understanding.[38]. Moreover, in practice, in interfaith dialogue activities, we need to limit the topics.

The Scope of Interfaith Dialogue Activity

In reality, interfaith dialogue comprehends topics and issues of various natures. In this activity of interfaith dialogue, the participants may not engage in promoting violence and, hostility but be more concerned with leading the dialogue activity towards peace, mutual respect and harmony. Fatmir Shehu emphasizes that the scope of inter-religious dialogue does not cover theological issues related to the world's religions. Rather, it comprehends all aspects of peoples' live. Gerrie Te Haar and James J. Busuttil stress four main elements concerning religion. They are religious ideas, which involve religious belief, religious practices, which involve ritual behavior, social organization, which involves the religious community, and religious and spiritual experiences, which involve psychological attitudes.[39]

Furthermore, the objective in inter-religious dialogue activities is to solve any problems with harmony, peacefully and without trying to convert those of other

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[37] *Ibid.*, 65.

[38] Leonard Swindler, "Understanding Dialogue," in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grassroots,* ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays (Pennsylvania: Ecumenical Press. 2008), 338.

[39] Gerrie Te Haar and James J. Busuttil, "Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?" in *Bridge or Barrier: Religion*, *Violence, and Visions for Peace* (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 22: 3-34.

faiths or make others have doubts about their faith. Perhaps, in this activity, every participant may help others be concerned with and find a way to become better and improve their relations with one another, to make the world as a whole a better place to live. [40]

Therefore, the themes that been discussed by the participants in inter-religious dialogue activities should be of a diverse nature, given that such dialogue involves a diversity of people. Thus, the scope of inter-religious dialogue depends on the form and the dialogue participants' level of interest, understanding and knowledge.[41] Moreover, the scope of inter-religious dialogue activities should cover issues that will not create conflicts between the dialogue participants as well as the community within which the participants reside and contemporary world society. They may engage with issues that naturally increase mutual knowledge, lead to better understanding and decrease conflicts and tensions between religious groups[42] as well as create a platform to share harmony, peace and mutual respect.

The Methodology

Stories are matchless tool for inter-religious sharing and thus understanding. Storytelling provides the bridge for overcoming of some obstacles frequently encountered in interfaith dialogue by opening the possibility for a different kind of conversation.[43] Moreover, storytelling as a medium

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[40] Shehu, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace Building", 65

[41] *Ibid.*, 62; Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Though, 2007), 34.

[42] Shehu, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace Building", 66.

[43] Eboo Patel, April Kunze and Noah Silverman, "Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work", in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots,* ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays (Philadephia, Pennsylvania: Ecumenical Press. 2008), 41.

for transformative learning of peace, promoting social-recoincilation and interfaith dialogue. Furthermore, storytelling can be utilized as a tool of narrative truth-telling, aimed at restoring inter-personal relationship, healing traumatic experiences and promoting social coexistence.

This method can foster inter-religious dialogue as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Further, it may contribute to the development of a culture of peace, in which the practice of peace storytelling with a member from 'the other' group can be interpreted as a desire to proclaim the 'unheard' voices and feelings to be shared with 'the other'.[44] It connects with the active listening to overcome prejudice, leading towards the transformative learning process. Through the storytelling, students were given oppurtunities to share their lived experiences, affirm each other, and internalize new possibilities for expressing and working through both conscious and repressed thoughts and feelings together. Therefore, storytelling an important cultural practice and interfaith activity was used as a medium for transformative learning, mutual respect, mutual understanding, fostering peace and harmony.

The study was conducted in collabaration with the Department of Akidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Department of Theology and Philosophy, National University of Malaysia and Centre for Religion and Society of Malaysia Theological Seminary. The purpose of this program was to promote intercultural as well as interfaith dialogue and raise awareness of 'the other' especially those who are not in 'our' faith. Prior to the beginning of the storytelling activity, we started with an imigination in minds of participants for projecting positive images of peace and harmony in society. This visual may stimulate the whole

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[44] Anjarwati & Allison, "Storytelling as a Mean for Peace Education", 45.

range of emotions and perceptions of participants about peace which are clearly important for transformation and peace building.[45]

The participants of this study were limited to undergraduate students who self selected to attend the interfaith and intercultural dialogue at Centre for Religion and Society of Malaysia Theological Seminary (STM) on September 30, 2015 and March 31, 2017. All students were affiliated with their campus's interfaith courses and religious studies department. They were accompanied with two PhD students from Department of 'Aqidah and Islamic Thought as well as a lecturer at National University of Malaysia and University Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Further, the participants are divided to nine small groups which contains ten participants with multiple ethnicity and two different faith that were Islam and Christianity. They were Malay Muslim, Chinese Muslim, Indian Muslim, Kadazan Muslim, Sarawakian Muslim, Chinese Christian, Indian Christian, Sarawakian Christian, Kadazan Christian and Murut Christian.

The small intergroup dialogue is an important format for multicultural education that has proven to be a mechanism to improve conflict and racial strife.[46] As a communication process, small intergroup dialogue has ability to affect participants in ways that another format does not. The future of this activity is ripe for exploration. If the result that occur in this small intergroup dialogue may be translated to the greater community.[47]

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[45] Johan Galtung, "Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution: The Need for Transdisciplinary", *Transcultural Psychiatry* (2010), 2.
[46] Zuniga et. al, "Intergroup Dialogue in Higher Education: Meaningful Learning About Social Justice", 4.
[47] Stephanie Russel Krebs, *Voices of Interfaith Dialogue: A Phenomenological Analysis* (Colorado: Colorado University, 2014), 24.

They are given three topics to voice out their stories. The topics are: 1) telling yourself, 2) telling your experience dealing with 'the other' and 3) telling your hope to your country and multicultural society. The purpose of these questions as:

   i. To help the participants reach more comfortable to each 'other' and understanding the topic
  ii. To enhance participants with the skill of awareness and engage diverse religious and non-religious identities to build the interfaith and intercultural activities
 iii. To foster an appreciation among participants for the diversity of opinion that will be emerged when exchanged honestly and openly and
  iv. To take an action and helping society and country live harmony and peace.

In an effort to bridge the participants communications, they must be 'open' to the 'other's' mind and faith. This only comes through a sense of self-awareness and understanding the diverse religious and non-religious identities among them.[48] At the end of this program, all the participants and lecturers singing "Sejahtera Malaysia" together.

Result and Discussion

Intercultural activity, as well as interfaith activity including storytelling, has been one of the principals means through which people can engage with peace education[49] as it offers

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[48] Mohd Farid Mohd Sharif & Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Respons Pelajar Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam Terhadap Pluraliti Agama di Malaysia," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam (AFKAR)* Vol. 19 No. 1 (2017), 1-40.

[49] K. Kester, "Developing Peace Education Programs: Beyond Ethocentrism and Violence", *Journal of South Asian Peace Building*. Issue 1 (2008), 37.

participants the opportunity to bridge the gap between experience and understanding. Through its participatory and dialogical processes, participants not only learn about the necessity and intrinsic value of peace; they are also offered support in guided practice. This had been pictured from story telling session and intercultural activities among UM's students, UKM's students and STM's students.

Every participant had discussed every question that had been given among their own groups (10 groups discussions) and one or two partipants on behalf of their friend in each group had voiced their discussion and personal views. Here are their voices:

i. One of the UM student shared her story that focused on her social and political experiences. She also made the statement during the session: "I would like to help people from various ethnic and religion. I also truly want to learn about the cultural differnces between us. This is very important to know each other and to unite among us, so we will ensure that we live in peaceful and harmony and without prejudice".

ii. The young man from UKM who had witnessed the harmonious life among his society feel so grateful and praying that it will continuously forever.

iii. Whereas the young Malay Muslim student felt worried when she was selected to join the session. She felt unsecured until she met and joined the session. She fell calm and comfort. She feel sorry to had that kind of feeling because she never mix with 'other faith' and various ethnicity. She also truly would like to learn more about the 'other'. She stated: "To me, it was such a new experience entered this kind of seminary and church but finally the session helped me to understand the 'other' more. I'm so doubt about this kind of session. Story telling? What is that? When I sat in between friends from various ethnicity and different faith, that are Islam and

Christianity and the story telling began among us; then slowly the relief came. Meaning that I had to mix with 'other' people and understand them more and do not feel that kind of prejudice and bias to them".

iv. "Every human being has love, understanding to each other, unity and charity. This kind of feelings had been honoured by Allah. We live together although we are different in diverse nationality, ethnicity, religion, faith, language, cultures. We should feel grateful and appreciate each other's differences to live in harmony and peaceful. This is my hope for peace of my lovely country. When we live in harmony, peaceful and happiness as well as have a truly love and great understand to each other, for sure the feelings of prejudice, hatred and jealousy will never exist in our society. This is a rich experience that I had during my stay in Malaysia", stressed PhD student from Brunei Darussalam.

v. A young Indian-Christian girl stated that she feels more alive and encouraged in her faith as well as she can see the bright future for live together with 'other' people with differences faith, religion and ethnicity. The most important that every people had to appreciate each other and understand the differences.

The storytelling and intercultural experience helped the participant to recognize the reality as well as a powerful way of helping every participant present their experience and feelings. As a result, we believe that the storytellers experienced acceptance, understanding, and support, which transformed the experience they carried into the future and would like to ensure live with the 'other' in happiness, harmony and peaceful.

vi. A young Chinese-Muslim described the 'peace' he felt in intercultural and storytelling session as the same peace he felt when he is praying on his own. He

said: "It's just a sort of peace of we are all gathered here in this seminary hall, the same goal and the same sense of togetherness and it's like warm, nice and comfort".

vii. UKM Malay-Muslim girl stressed that: "I learned other faiths and religions in classroom. I'm more understand the 'other' after I talked to a person who actually believes his or her religion. It has shown me the value of talking with other people as well as developing personal relationship with them".

viii. For one of STM student, the building of individual relationship was central to his definition on interfaith dialogue as well as including building human relationship across the religious and non-religious landscape. Further, he emphasized to develop relationship, there must be authentic interest in learning about other religion and other individual.

ix. A young man and he is Christian from Sarawak believed that his Christian faith calls him to build relationship with others and help them as he could. He believed that when he accepts someone else's faith, they will be accepting his faith.

x. One of UM students shared from his Islamic belief, the example from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) shows that he was friend with people who were not Muslims, but he treated them very respectfully. Therefore, we as a Muslims should all strive to be like that too.

xi. Moreover, one brother from STM shared his experienced: "I thought that this storytelling session was just people sitting and talking about their identities. But then, I realized there are lots more than just sitting and sharing our believes. Actually, it's more of getting to know someone and living together to make our community and country as a better place".

xii. UM student shared an example of an interfaith program that her lecturer mentioned as promoted relationship building. She created groups of three and four students each with various ethnicity and faith and meet informally. So, they hang out in cafeteria, dining hall in hostel and any places in campus with the goal of talking about religion. In the course of semester, they build deeper relationship and friendship and they will be talking and discussing deeper in theological aspects.

xiii. UKM students agreed with UM students experienced and said that by sharing our experiences and backgrounds and at the same time willing to pay listening to other people on the human beings' level will develop deeper relationship and respectful.

This sharing is a key compentant of storytelling. This is because everyone had his or her own story and something that people want to talk about. But they dont have the opportunity to share with. Therefore a storytelling session like a stage as well as interfaith supportive environment that giving the opportunity to them. Listening to them may make a huge difference for people in just a way that they experience religion and their own identities and their relation to the others.[50]

Moreover, storytelling may assist in clearing up misscommunication and lack of understanding in lies of pay listening to the stories without come out with misconception. Further, the power of storytelling in terms of peace education lies with the active listening on the part of the other participants. The skill of active listening is fundamental to this process, because it enables the audience to hear not only the words of the narrator's story and his or her 'truth,' but also to feel the feeling necessary for self-transformation.

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[50] *Ibid.*, 91.

The intercultural dialogue provided by storytelling can give individuals and communities a sense of hope. Such a participative dialogue and reflection process constitute a transformative learning component of peace education allowing 'the other' to listen deeply and show respect, as well as to increase feelings of respect and solidarity.

Another important and quite unique dimension of doing this transformative teaching activity through storytelling and singing was the collective dynamic that developed between the young people. The participants supported each other during the focus group and singing choir; they suggested that this bonding gave them hope and courage to live in harmony, understanding and peaceful and to stand up for their dignity. In the longer term, activities like the one described may also assist participants and communities to develop new strategies for living together in harmony in a more peaceful environment. Moreover, through the use of storytelling, participants can be given an opportunity to share their lived experiences, affirm each other, and internalize new possibilities to create a culture of peace.[51]

Besides, the environment also impacted the participants. Spaces that welcoming, casual and comfortable contributed to the participants. 'Circle' environments created a sense of belonging as well as a safe spaces with an emphasis on respect, trust, honesty created a foundation for productive conversation and fertile for intercultural and storytelling engagement.[52] This is support by the participants' voices that stated that the spaces that were comfortable helped them fully engage in the lived-experienced intercultural dialogue through storytelling.

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[51] Anjarwati & Allison, "Storytelling as a Mean for Peace Education", 51.

[52] Stephanie Russel Krebs, *Voices of Interfaith Dialogue: A Phenomenological Analysis* (Colorado: Colorado University. 2014), 74.

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The location itself did not seem to make the differences, rather; it was the feel of the space that more important.[53]

Moreover, storytelling would also stress on the practicing of tolerance that is a culture that founded the co-existence of pluralistic society in Malaysia. The culture of tolerance can only be built if ethnic tolerance and religious tolerance is accepted as a common practice-Muslim and non-Muslim alike.[54] The storytelling session and interfaith activities end by singing together among participants and lecturers. We may see the joyness and respectful among us.

Conclusion

Storytelling is an effective activity in interfaith dialogue to adress areas of concern in fostering transformative learning in peace and harmony among various ethnicity and faiths. Social lives were enriched by social, cultural, and religious activities that enabled students to widen their worldview and better understand 'others'. Yet, the practice of storytelling and intercultual activities requare transparent meaning as well as genuine expression and sincere building the relationship among nation.

Stories are not just stories. But real experiences of students that were constructive in sharing emotions and feelings as well as experiences; empowering students to serve humanity and bulding peace and harmony. Stories can be seen as joint action between the storyteller and audiences or participants to create a peacework which is vital in transformative learning in peace and harmony and conflict resolution studies especially in interfaith dialogue or inter-religious dialogue.

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[53] *Ibid*.

[54] Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali et. al., "*Al-Wasatiyyah* in the Practice of Religious Tolerance among the Families of New Muslims in Sustaining Well-being Society", *Humanomics* Vol. 33 Issue 2 (2017), 211-220.

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