

RETURN TO THE ALMIGHTY: DOCUMENTING ISLAMIC AWARENESS AND THE SPIRITUAL MIGRATION OF MALAYSIAN ARTISTS

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Abstract

Since 1970s, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia which initially emerges in the urban city of Kuala Lumpur has a significant impact on the Malay Muslims at every angle of their life, physically and spiritually, individually and socially. The impact of the Islamic Resurgence has been deep-rooted in the Malays at all levels of the society. Participation of the Malay middle class in the Islamic Resurgence was significantly intensified which then helps to upsurge Islamic consciousness in the society, particularly in the urban cities of Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of the spiritual migration of the Malay Muslim artists to practice Islamic way of life and to study their commitment on the Islamic teaching based on their convictions. This study also analyzes factors that contribute to Islamic awareness among the Malay Muslim artists in Malaysia and its impacts on their life. A qualitative approach is used for this multidisciplinary historical and socio-religious research. Content analysis of the primary data, such as interviews and newspaper, and also the secondary data, for example magazine and television programs was used to critically analyze the Malay Muslim artists' transformation to practice and return to Islamic teaching. The study showed significant changes or *hijrah* in these so-called "*Artis Berhijrah*" (the migrated artists) and "the Instant *Ustaz* or *Ustazah*" groups in which they present Islam in the form of redefining and representing the contemporary Muslim arts that are harmonized with the Islamic principles. The challenges and dilemmas after the *hijrah* of the Malay Muslim artists have also been described to reveal the real situation that they are facing, despite the sweet memories of their spiritual experiences.

Keywords: Islamic awareness, artists, *hijrah*, Islamic Resurgence.

1 INTRODUCTION

Islamic Resurgence and religiosity are interrelated phenomena which emerge as a result of Muslim's tendency and endeavour to restore and revive the past glory of Islamic history and civilization in a creative and innovative way that suits the current changes and challenges of the time. As the Islamic Resurgence reflects its manifestations through various levels of individual, social and international expressions of Islam, the tangible observances of Muslim behaviours and lifestyle are so apparent in the public sphere. This religious appeal espoused by Muslims has been instrumental in energising the Malay Muslims identity through their spiritual and religious bound with Islam.

Since 1970s, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia which initially emerges in the urban city of Kuala Lumpur has a significant impact on the Malay Muslims at every angle of their life, physically and spiritually, individually and socially. The impact of the Islamic Resurgence has been deep-rooted in the Malays at all levels of the society. Participation of the Malay middle class in the Islamic Resurgence was significantly intensified which then helps to upsurge Islamic consciousness in the society, particularly in the urban cities of Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur. Apart of this the Malay middle class' manifestation of religiosity is the emergence of the migrated Malaysian artists towards spiritual and religious life.

As role model for Muslim teenagers and society at large, the Malay Muslim artists' transformation to religion has gained public attention. Many issues has been addressed in media such as, they are being questioned on the commitment toward religion after the migration (*Utusan Malaysia*, 6 May 2016), being accused to be 'instant ustaz/ustazah', as tool of the opposition that would tarnished their credibility as a devoted believer after the migration. Thus, there is the need to study the phenomenon of the migrated artists from their viewpoint analytically based on their assertions.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the phenomenon of the spiritual migration of the Malay Muslim artists to practice Islamic way of life. This paper also study the Malay Muslim artists' commitment towards the Islamic teaching primarily based on their convictions and actions. The factors that contribute to Islamic awareness among the Malay Muslim artists in Malaysia are analyzed critically to prove their spiritual migration and principles of life. The impact of this Islamic awareness and spiritual migration are also discussed.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is used for this multidisciplinary historical and socio-religious research. Content analysis of the primary data, such as personal interviews and newspaper articles were used to critically analyze the Malay Muslim artists' transformation to practice and return to Islamic teaching. Several samples of secondary data, for example magazine and television programs were selected to support Malay Muslim artists' convictions on their migration towards religion. Such views and sentences were analyzed to reflect their religious commitment after the assertion of spiritual migration towards the Creator, Allah SWT.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since 1970s the progress of the Islamic Resurgence has changed the Malays culture to practice the wearing of headscarf. With progressive endeavors by local Islamic movements and voluntary dakwah organisations, and the dynamic role of the Malay-based Islamic parties, predominantly the ruling party of United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) which acts as the government, and Pan Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) as the apposition, the Islamisation process has been intensified in the public through bottom-up and top-down approaches. Among the noticeable phenomena in the public spheres of the urban city of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor are the increase number of migrated artists and celebrities; and the emergence of "the instant *ustaz* or *ustazah*" who started to transform themselves toward spiritual life.

Electronic and printed media in Malaysia also reported this spiritual migration phenomenon that more than 40 Malay female artists have transformed themselves and started to wear veil as the initial steps to show their new identity as a devoted Muslim and believer. As artists who involved in music, performance arts and entertainment, they are usually being regarded as a group of people who are habitually committing sins, evils and immoral activities; thus, their return to religious life has shocked Malaysian society. The phenomenon has been obviously arising since the last two decades, among the Malay male and female artists and celebrities. Amongst the Malay female artists who have transformed themselves to this new image of Muslim female adherents (*Muslimah*) are Fauziah Ahmad Daud (Ogy), Noor Kumalasari, Sharifah Aini, Wardina Saffiyah, Irma Hasmie Ibrahim, Hayati (Yatt) Hamzah, Catriona Noorhayati Ross Bahrin Ross, Liza Hanim, Wilma Mohammed, Heliza Helmi, Shila Amzah, Ana Raffali, Nurdiyana Amir Hashim (Diana Amir), Natasha Hudson, Sharifah Sofia, Safura, Serimah, Ramlah Ram, Aliza Bt. Abdullah (Enot), Siti Nordiana, Aida

Khalida, Arbaieyah Abdul Manan (Abby Abadi), Noorkhiriah Ahmad Shapie (an actress), Raja Farah Raja Aziz, Anne Ngasri, Noryn Aziz, Noraniza Idris, Akma AF, Mek Salam Pantai Timur, Aishah (the 1990s popular singer), Abby Fana (DJ and a host of television programs), Farah Asyikin, Farah AF2, Siti Fazurina, Jojie, Sheila Rusly, Nora or Wan Norafizah Ariffin, Ekin Mawi, Siti Nurhaliza, Siti Shahrizah Saifuddin (Eja), Melissa Saila, Ayu Raudhah, Ziana Zain, Neelofa, Nuremy Ramli, Sharifah Aleya Syed Zainal Rashid, Emma Maembong, Azza Elite, Ummy Nazeera, As Feminin, Mila Jirin, Ain AF, Adira AF, Sheera Iskandar and many others. Some of Malay male artists such as Azmil Ali, Sham Kamikaze, Datuk Rosyam Nor, Iwan Dangdut, Adam AF, Noh, Piere Andre, Renggo Arrow, Ali & Mael XPDC, Aerial Zafrel dan Syamsul Yusof also experience the same spiritual conversion (Akmaliah Razak, *Sinar Harian*, 4 May 2014). Figure 1 to Figure 6 visualized the evidences of their transformation towards spiritual life and culture.



Figure 1: Siti Nurhaliza before and after wearing a full head scarf.

Source: www.mediasemasa.com



Figure 2: An actress, Sarimah Ahmad

Source: <http://sarimahsignatureseries.blogspot.my>.



Figure 3: An actress Zaiton Abdullah

Source: <http://mimbarkata.blogspot.my/2014/08/seniwati-legenda-zaiton.html>.



Figure 4: Irma Hasmie, Diana Amir, Nora, Catriona Ross, Alya, Yatt Hamzah, Shila Hamzah and Fazura
Source: <http://inikisahhidupsabrie.blogspot.my/2012/12/artis-berhijrah-sekadar-trend.html>.



Figure 5: Al Mawlid group, Zaf VE, Azan Ruffedge and Pot Innuendo
Source: <http://mforum.cari.com.my/forum.php?mod=viewthread&action=printable&tid=802505>.



Figure 6: Sham Kamikaze before and after the migration to a Muslim lifestyle
Source: <http://mforum.cari.com.my/forum.php?mod=viewthread&action=printable&tid=802505>.

Most of these middle class migrated (*hijrah*) artists and celebrities always appear as role model for Muslim teenagers. Some of them received positive responses after the migration but not least negative perceptions from the Muslim society, in particular the Malays in the urban area. Some of them always appear and are being invited as speakers in commercial religious and spiritual activities organized by Islamic organisations, local communities and political parties to attract Muslims, in particular the Malays who attend these religious programmes; as to share their experience after transforming into a new Islamic lifestyle (Mashitah Sulaiman,

2016, p. 409). Nevertheless, due to the dramatic changes of life in some of these migrated artists, a number of them have been labeled as an “instant *Ustaz* or *Ustazah*”, an unpleasant call for an artist who acted as a religious preacher or talked about religious teaching at the public stage (Syed Mussaddad, 2014; *Sinar Harian*, 5 December 2012, 19 December 2014). Such label to these migrated artists always becomes a polemic which brings political and public discourses at the national level.

3.1 The Malay Muslim Artists’ Commitment towards Islamic Teaching

The Malay Muslim artists’ commitment and sincerity towards the Islamic teaching could be categorized into three stages: first, their verbal convictions to transform life towards religion; second their efforts to gradually practice Islam as what are being obliged as a Muslim. And third, their struggle to demonstrate their dedication to be a devoted Muslim.

3.1.1 Truthful Conviction on the Commitment towards Religion

Ir. Endok Sempo Mohd. Tahir (2003), wrote in her book titled “*Bagaimana Akhirnya Saya Bertudung*” - (*How I Finally wears Hijab*) which recorded a spiritual journey of Noor Kumalasari, a popular Malaysian singer and actress in 1980s. Noor Kumalasari told that she started wearing *hijab* at the age of forty where it was the beginning of her new life. She always wears headscarf even though she prepares food at the kitchen. She was an artist, singer, film and drama actress and a model previously, but now she is a fulltime house manager. Through her sincere disclosure, she explained that she is not only wearing headscarf but also need to wear what is being regulated by Allah SWT. She said that “our attires must be loosed, from the fair dark colour cloth and it is not skinny and lean fabrics.” And then she emerged with a new fashion which reflected her new identity, with loose black headscarf and robe or sometimes put on *Abaya* as wore by the Arab women. She said that all these changes are towards God and she was happy when doing that (Ir. Endok Sempo, 2003, pp. 2-3).

A popular vocal artist, Ziana Zain or her official name, Siti Roziana Zain, 46, also confirmed that her new headscarf image as a permanent migration until the end of her life. She regarded her new *Muslimah* image was the best present from Allah SWT as this is a part of prayers from her followers and friends, especially, her parents.

“Allah SWT had given what we want, since He also opened my heart to receive this religious rule (*syariat*). After for many years I put an intention [to wear headscarf], then, the day comes to cover up (*hijab*) my *aurah*. The feeling that I experienced was not a usual but it is amazing [feeling] which came from the miraculous power” (Muhammad Shamsul, *Sinar Harian*, 16 July 2014).

A famous actress and celebrity, Diana Amir, or Nurdiyana Amir Hashim explained her transformation to fully oblige with wearing the *hijab* as reported by *Harian Metro*, October 7, 2011: “During that night, Diana evaluated herself and thought of her fate in the Hereafter life”. “When [I] covered my *aurah*, all other things [such as behaviours] are protected”.

3.1.2 Efforts to gradually Practice Islam

Noor Kumalasari confessed that amongst the advantages of wearing the complete attire of *hijab* and robe is she always prepares to go to mosque. Wherever she goes, when she hears the call of prayer or *azan* she would immediately go to the nearest mosque and prays even without bringing the prayer attire or *telekung*. For her, putting the veil is a sign of clean or pure and love of God (Ir. Endok Sempo, 2003, pp. 4-5).

Diana Amir also added that: “In term of speech, behaviour, communication and dressing, everything [my actions] needs to be balanced consistent with the headscarf image [that I carried] because I do not want people accuse me (or to be said) that I am just wearing headscarf caused by imitation or swaying to the others” (Hellinie Sina, 7 October 2011).

Arbaieyah Abdul Manan or Abby Abadi said to *MStar* reporter that she truly decided to wear *hijab* after returning from performing *Umrah*, “Two days before returning to Kuala Lumpur, in front of the Kaabah, I decided to put headscarf and pray to Allah that He would strengthen my faith to keep up and remain [my life always in His guidance] as what I experience it now” (*MStar*, 28 March 2012; <http://beautifulnara.com/tahniah-abby-abadi-kini-bertudung-selepas-pulang-menunaikan-umrah/>).

Raja Farah Raja Aziz, a film and drama actress, on the other hand said that:

“It is my permanent migration as a wife. I switched to wear headscarf on my own free will and it's time for me to change for the better lifestyle. *Syukur* (Thanks God), because my husband also to give support to my desire to change the appearance. Regardless, I was already to set my mind to wear *hijab* since I am not

married yet. In fact, I started with the *selendang* [or a piece of cloth] to cover up my *aurah*" (Norhayati Nordin, *Harian Metro*, 16 July 2012).

Anne Ngasri acknowledged that "I actually, had long time harboured a dream to wear *hijab* but now it is the best time [to practice wearing the headscarf]". Even though she had put the headscarf but she explained that sometimes she needs to uncover her hair while seeking for sustenance to support her family (Kemalia Othman, *MStar*, 26 December 2009, p. 1).

3.1.3 Struggle to demonstrate Their Dedication to be a Devoted Muslim

As reported by *Sinar Harian*, on 28 Disember 2012 about Noor Kumalasari's spiritual experience of faith migration that Noor had left her glamour world as an artist to fully committed to serve Allah SWT. Noor ended the story about her migration, saying that "I really have no intention to become an active [actress and singer] in the art world. I'm satisfied [with my current life]. Previously, I have to rush looking for sustenance; and now let me turn rush to the mosque". Diana Amir however, took about four months to put the headscarf by stages and familiarized herself with the new *Muslimah* image. She is really confident with her decision to wear headscarf and perform her obligation as a *Muslimah*. Her dedication to be a better Muslim woman leads Diana to obey the Islamic rules and perform her responsibility to wear headscarf without any argument which it is compulsory in Islam. Diana mentioned:

"Why we must refuse it [the command by Allah SWT that all Muslim women need to cover their *aurah* and wearing *hijab*], since the Quran had explained about it in detail. So, there is no excuse for me on why should I extend this good deed [wearing the head scarf]" (*Harian Metro*, 7 October 2011).

A popular singer, Ana Raffali or Ana Nur Hidayah Mohd Raffali considered her migration to wear *hijab* was not just an attempt or trend, but regarded her intention to veil came from her sincere heart. In addition, her decision was made not by force of the family and nearest, but based on her desire to be a *Muslimah*.

"The question of headscarf is not a simple matter and it is not just an attempt or fashion. It emerged on the basis of [my] desire to be a good *Muslimah* (Muslim woman). *Alhamdulillah*, my decision to wear headscarf was supported by my family and the nearest persons." (Nurul Nazrah Nazarudin, *Sinar Harian*, 11 Februari 2012).

Sharifah Sofia explained that she experienced a new life after getting married with Syed Ismail Syed Ibrahim Al-Ali. She got a "*hidayah*" or guidance from Allah SWT to near God and study religion. She transformed her lifestyle from a sexy woman to a veiled Muslim woman when dressing. Through her latest status, Sharifah Sofia described her migration to a new image as a new chapter in her life. In fact, a mother of Ariana Sharifah Syed Ismail who is also a year old, rejected any publicity about her *hijrah* in a polite way. At the beginning, Sharifah Sofia already started to delete her old photos that showed her previous image before wearing veil in her social sites (Nor Akmar Samudin, *Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012). She described her migration as follow:

"As well as I was pregnant the first child, I started performing *solat* (prayer) and read the Quran. All my previous activities that I did before had been left. No party with friends and not to leave my prayers". Sharifah Sofia thanks to Allah SWT for giving her guidance at the young age and she always pray that her life changes would be remained forever (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012).

A comedy actress, Aliza Abdullah or her nick name, Enot is now appearing in the public with a headscarf image.

"*Alhamdulillah* my inner soul is growing calm. I am a sweated person before, but after migration to wear *hijab*, this problem did not occur. *Insyallah* (with Allah's will), I would maintain this image and ensure that I would not return to the previous image. Even though, I had migrated, I am still the same Enot. I still can act as a comedy actress, but will attempt to control my behavior, in particular my sayings" (Nuriz Ibrahim, 2012).

Shila Amzah, a daughter of N.D. Lala, a famous 1980s singer and actor, started to wear *hijab* since the beginning of Ramadan in 2011. At the beginning, she admitted that it is just a fun to wear *hijab*. The singer of a famous song "A Thousand Broken" continued to put *hijab* and she feels comfortable with this style. Her migration to Islamic *hijab* style brings wisdom for her life when she draws her success as a singer (*Sinar Harian*, 31 December 2012).

3.2 Factors of Spiritual Migration of the Malay Muslim Artists

Several factors contributed to Islamic awareness among Malay Muslim artists as they choose to return to Islam and Allah the Almighty. Some artists have voiced out their expressions of religious awareness towards

reverting to *Muslimah* lifestyles, especially their "*hijrah*" to put the headscarf in the quotations below based on the followings:

3.2.1 The Guidance (*Hidayah*) of Allah The Almighty

"I think at this age, this is an appropriate image for me now. Anyway, I feel calmed and relaxed after putting veil. In terms of my source of income and job prospect, I just leave it to God. I believe I can still survive and continue my life with this kind of appearance". – Serimah Mohd Sallehuddin (*Berita Harian*, 10 November 2010).

"What ever happen I trust Allah SWT and Allah SWT is the best for me. What is happening now is the best for me and Insha Allah I hope all search for the strength and my best efforts to be a better Muslim through the recitation of the Quran and gradually increase religious practice because Islam is the only way of life". – Wardina Saffiyah (TV9, 13 March 2011).

"The guidance from Allah SWT to me is not an astray guidance. I decided to participate in PAS because I want to help spreading the Islamic *dakwah*. After joining PAS, I found that I could increase and deeper my understanding about Islam and acknowledged that before the migration, I did many mistakes and did not follow the Islamic tenets (the Islamic *syariat*) as the whole". - Abby Abadi (Norafiza Jaafar, *Sinar Harian*, 13 August 2012).

3.2.2 Sincere Self-awareness

"I actually already started wearing hijab since the fasting month few months ago. My decision to wear hijab was not due solely a fashion, but this is my current image and hope it will remain indefinitely... After I did change my [new *hijab*] image, it is my responsibilities based on awareness to being a Muslim woman". - Siti Nordiana (*Kosmo*, 19 September 2011).

"I put the veil because I embarrassed seeing myself without the headscarf. Previously, I had colored my hair with brown color. Now I find that wearing a veil is the best for me". - Aida Khalida (*Utusan Malaysia*, 3 September 2011).

"I wear the veil not for the others but it comes from my heart. I hope that Allah SWT continues to strengthen my heart for change towards the betterment of my life". – Tengku Shaheera Ilani (Sheera) (*Sinar Harian*, 21 August 2014, p. 5; *Berita Harian*, 24 August 2014)

"*Alhamdulillah*, Allah SWT 'answered' my question. It is me now with a new image that led me calm. I have to leave all glamorous worlds because Allah SWT's mercy is now for me. This change is not an imitation but it was born from my heart". - Farah Asyikin (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012).

Fazurina explained her reason for wearing the headscarf: "I do not have any reason why I decided to veiled but it came from my own heart after celebrating the 30th years old birthday on June 9. Hopefully, these images will last forever because it is a matter commanded by our religion". - Siti Fazurina (Mohd Al Qayum Azizi, *MStar*, 13 June 2012).

3.2.3 Fear of Allah's Judgment

Farah Asyikin said that: "Friendly speaking that it is too personal to tell others about my *hijrah*. But I try to be an open minded person as a reminder for the Muslim brotherhood. It happened too fast. I changed and putting the veil (flushed) immediately after doing the *taubat* (repentant) prayers with sincere repentance. Believe it or not, once I finished the prayers, suddenly there is thunder along with rain falling heavily. For me that is the greatness of the Lord". "I do it for many reasons. I am afraid of Allah's return and judgments and I fear to the Day of Judgment - Farah Asyikin (Nor Akmar Samudin, *Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012; Syafiqah Jalal, 2012, <http://www.murai.com.my/berita/tempatan/article/articleid/356718/farah-asyikin-tenang-selepas-berhijrah>).

Diana Amir and Yat Hamzah also experienced the same fear of Allah's punishment:

"During that night, Diana evaluated herself and thought of her fate in the Hereafter life". "When [I] covered my *aurah*, all other things [such as behaviours] are protected". - Diana Amir (*Harian Metro*, 7 October 2011).

3.2.4 The Right Time to Change

Some artists realized that they should change they life and return to religion in the proper time, especially after returning from hajj or umrah or when they ready for it.

"*Insha Allah* (with God willing), I will remain with the veil. I went to perform hajj to Makkah for 44 days and

since then I never remove this headscarf.” - Sheila Rusly (<https://nuriman.wordpress.com/2008/01/25/sheila-kekal-bertudung/>)

Jojie's changes to the Muslimah lifestyle is remain until today. She does not intend to change back to her past image as she is comfortable with what she is now. Hopefully these changes in the physical appearance would permanently firm her hearts. She said that “My intention to wearing the hijab has long been thought but the force was not found until one day I felt the time had come to practice what has been decided [to put the veil]” (‘Hijrah dan Hijab 35 Selebriti Wanita Malaysia!’, Darul Salam Palace, July 05, 2012, <http://baytdarulislam.blogspot.com/2012/07/hijrah-dan-hijab-35-selebriti-wanita.html>).

In June 2012, the actor, Melissa Salla emerged with a veiled image. She claimed that her new *Muslimah* lifestyle is not a result of the influence by someone. A daughter of famous prima donna, Mariani explained that, “it's the right time [for me] to migrate”. Since then, more sustenance abound. From an actress, Melissa is now a publisher (*Sinar Harian*, 31 December 2012).

3.2.5 Seeking for the Truth and the Right Path

“Even though I started with the *hijrah* (transformation) of physical appearance, nevertheless, I try my best to improve my inner soul in line with my effort towards a good life. Now I understand that in the context of *Hijrah*, it is not just a physical transformation, but also give us a broaden meaning as I am determined to change [my life]”. – Yatt Hamzah (Akmaliah Razak, *Sinar Harian*, 16 November 2012).

“Two days before returning to Kuala Lumpur, in front of the Kaabah, I decided to put headscarf and prayed to Allah SWT that He would strengthen my faith to keep up and remain [my life always in His guidance] as what I experience it now”. - Abby Abadi (*MStar*, 28 March 2012).

“The decision to transform (to my *hijab* image) was made less than an hour. Starting with preserving five times daily prayers, I slowly left evils and began to study about Islam. In every prayer (*solat*), I pray for Allah's guidance (*hidayah*). *Alhamdulillah* (Thanks God) after a year preserving prayer, Allah SWT gave me strength to fully cover up (*hijab*) my *aurah*”. – Ummi Nazeera (*Fesyen Hijab*, July 2014, p. 17).

3.2.6 Support of the Family and Acquaintances

Astro Awani reported that Azza Elite, a singer and an actress was then wearing the headscarf after put her intention long time ago. She started wearing hijab on January 2013 and received positive feedback from her husband and family. In contrast to most of the migrated celebrities, Azza has no plan to involve in dakwah as she considered that she needs to study more about Islam. She continued to act but still need to consider a suitable character to her current image (*Astro Awani*, 4 February 2013). Ana Rafali's decision to cover up has also received supportive encouragement from her family, as she said that: “*Alhamdulillah*, my decision to wear headscarf was supported by my family and the nearest persons”(Nurul Nazrah Nazarudin, 2012; *Sinar Harian*, 11 Februari 2012).

These sincere confessions are evidences that they truly reverted to practice the Islamic lifestyles, not as a common current trends in dressing but because they really honest to understand and practice Islam as what has been revealed and commanded to all Muslims. As the role model to the public, the revert Muslim artists not just demonstrated moderate and stylish designs in the *Muslimah* fashion but also showed their commitment to study and know Islam as a complete way of life.

3.3 The Impact of Spiritual Migration to the Malay Muslim Artists

Wearing the headscarf or veil is not just a symbol of Islamic religiosity as well as a physical and visible tangible outcome of the Islamic Resurgence but also a reflection of the Muslim's commitment to practice the teaching of Islam. Wearing the headscarf is a part of *aurah* for Muslim women which needs and compulsory to cover in Islam. The impact of the various efforts by actors of the Islamic Resurgence, it has changed the Malay Muslim's character from the ignorance adherent into the pious believer.

3.3.1 Consistency in Seeking Knowledge and Improving Good Deeds

To be a pious believer, this requires internal consistency (*istiqamah*), high commitment to instill and inculcate good deeds (*amal soleh*) with religious knowledge in order to strengthen the faith. Therefore, some of the Malay Muslim artists attended a study circle group or *usrah* and religious programs organized either by the Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) or the Muslim community nearby Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Sharifah Sofia for example, studied religion through reading and asking experts in the religious field. As a Muslim woman Sharifah Sofia felt that her migration that she experienced is good and she felt comfortable and tranquil (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012). Aida Khalida too described that since she had put the

headscarf, she seriously studies the Quran, recites it congregationally (*tadarus*) and tries to increase her optional prayers like always do the repentance (*taubat*) and *tahajjud* prayers every night. Moreover, Aida also bought many religious books and always closes herself with the religious teachers or *ustazah* asking for the religious rules, especially in the recitation of the Quran. She admitted that all these spiritual activities caused and gave happiness in her inner soul and life (Abd. Aziz Itar, *Utusan Malaysia*, 3 September 2011).

Yatt Hamzah or Haryati Hamzah, 32 years old artist also committed to attend usrah under *the Movement of Usrah Fitrah*, which was found as a platform to conduct religious classes for arts activist, actresses and artists. Among artists who participated in this movement are Irma Hasmie (the first who initiated the idea of its formation), Diana Amir, Heliza Helmi, Natasha Hudson, Farah Asyikin, Iqram Dinzly, Enot, Noryn Aziz, Zoey Rahman, and TV3 personalities, Fiza Sabjahan and Teh Syuhaida (Siti Juliana Mohd Johar, *Sinar Harian*, 2 October 2012). Irma Hasmie also invited Yat Hamzah to attend religious classes to study the Quran, faith (*tauhid*) and *fiqh*, every Monday at Wangsa Melawati, Hulu Kelang which has been hosted by a publishing company, *Must Read Sdn Bhd*. From that class she began to know the objective of life, excited to change her life and began to perform the prayer for repentance which remind her about the sins towards Allah SWT especially, of not covering the *aurah* (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012).

3.3.2 Leaving Prohibited Activities and Increasing Participating in Dakwah

Some of the migrated artists made the decision to leave the world of entertainment, music and acting as they prefer to choose a normal life far from publicity and the free-social un-Islamic activities. Noor Kumalasari for instance, had left her elegance profession as an artist to fully obligate towards the submission of Allah SWT. Noor determined her final destination only for her Creator: "I really have no intention to become an active [actress and singer] in the art world. I'm satisfied [with my current life]. Previously, I have to rush looking for sustenance; and now let me turn rush to the mosque" (*Sinar Harian*, 28 December 2012). Sharifah Sofia also decided to end her career as an artist. At the beginning, Sharifah Sofia already started to delete her old photos that showed her previous image before wearing veil in her social sites (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012). She described her migration as a new episode in her life: "As well as I was pregnant the first child, I started performing *solat* (prayer) and read the Quran. All my previous activities that I did before had been left. No party with friends and not to leave my prayers." (Nor Akmar Samudin, *Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012).

In contrast, some artists still look at the opportunity to continue their activities in this field because they see that wearing the veil is not an obstacle to involve in the art performance and entertainments, as these also being a part of *dakwah*. They however, need to be selective and have to put a limit on the character and the role given to them which are not contradicted to the Islamic principles. As mentioned by Yat Hamzah, to *Sinar Harian*, on 7 May 2014 that:

"If before, a profession as an actor was my main source of income, but now it is not. I prefer to involve in the *dakwah* and the welfare works first. If I receive an offer of acting I need to reject it for the reason of my tight schedules. In addition, I also would be selective to choose synopsis and character which are suited to my current image" (Akmaliah Razak, *Sinar Harian*, 7 May 2014).

Enot also admitted that the new veiled image or migration required her to behave properly as she said: "Even though, I had migrated, I am still the same Enot. I still can act as a comedy actress, but will attempt to control my behavior, in particular my sayings" (Nuriz Ibrahim, 2012).

Some of the migrated artists are actively involved in a broader platform of *dakwah*, being a promoter and motivator to any commercial religious activities by the broadcasting media and television channels, the government, the NGOs and community's activities. Some artists for example, Yat Hamzah, has been elected as a "*dakwah* celebrity" or icon representing the government agency such as YADIM (Akmaliah Razak, *Sinar Harian*, 7 May 2014), while Irma Hasmie, Wardina, Heliza Misbun, Diana Amir have always been invited to host television programmes either by the government own broadcasting media channels and companies, for instance TV1, TV2 and TV Al Hijrah, or the private television media groups, like Media Prima Sdn Bhd TV3, TV9 and Astro. Though these migrated artists have received lukewarm response of acting offer, they could find an alternative to their career (*Sinar Harian*, 7 May 2014).

Farah AF2 expressed her opinion on the beauty of Islam as follow: "Some of my involvement when I hosted the Halal Orient Taste program on *Astro Oasis* gave me a wonderful dimension to closer to Allah SWT. Thank Allah SWT, I believe there is wisdom behind everything which is unfolded in front of our eyes" (*Berita Harian*, 15 August 2010).

A number of Malaysian artists also enthusiastically participated in Islamic politic as manifestation of their

religious thought and belief. Wan Aishah Wan Ariffin, for instance who was well-known as Aishah, is a singer who originated from Negeri Sembilan and joined the Fan Club of New Zealand. After joined the Pan Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), she actively participated in delivering talks (*ceramah*) at the party assembly and programs. Aishah was the PAS candidate in the Parliament of Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan in the 2013 General Election, but she lost the seat to Tan Sri Isa Samad (BN) who won with a majority (*Sinar Harian*, 2 June 2012).

3.3.3 Enriching Islamic Arts and Entertainment

Some artists viewed that Islam encourage people to appreciate their life through entertainment which is complied with the Islamic principles. Nora or Wan Norafizah Ariffin informed that her headscarf image did not prevent her to continue her involvement in the music and entertainment. She however would seek for suitable songs which reflect spirituality and concern on the concept of God. Nora described about her conversion as “everything is born from my heart and honesty”. She explained that after this, she needs to behave properly and cannot do as what have been done before (Shazryn Mohd. Faizal, *Utusan Malaysia*, 13 August 2008).

For some migrated female and male singers they tend to change their direction of music from the praise towards women and human love to the songs based on the spiritual concept of God which suite to their current image as “the migrated muslim artists”. After wearing the headscarf, some Malay female artists for examples, Ana Rafali, Ziana Zain, Shila Amzah, Siti Nurhaliza, and the late Sharifah Aini presented the concept of God’s rhythm in their songs matched to their current status as the migrated artists or singers (*Sinar Harian*, 10 September 2012; Marina Sahabudin, *Sinar Harian*, 22 Julai 2014).

As a result of this change, some of these artists have appeared with their new image and product which resembled their Islamic identity. Rahimah Rahim, Siti Norhaliza, Wan Norafizah Ariffin or Nora, Ramli Sharif, M. Nasir, Mawi and many others have comprised Islamic-spiritual songs matched to their current religious tendency and personality. Religious and spiritual tendency and migration of these artists can be sketched out through lyrics of their songs. Attached are some lyrics of Ramli Sarip’s song “Keliru” and Rahimah Rahim’s song entitled “Doa” which composed the Islamic-spiritual elements (Luqmanul Hakim, 2014).¹

Ramli Sarip – *Keliru* (Confuse)

At the edge of this junction I stopped for a moment
Imagine how my adventure begins
Leave all my beloved and love
Only to find a pure self-identity

*Ditepian simpang ini sejenak aku terhenti
terbayanglah bagaimana pengembaraan ku bermula
ku tinggalkan segala yang kusayang dan cinta
hanya untuk mencari satu identiti diri yang murni*

After being caught in a dilemma I understand
How difficult it is to know myself
I drift in the current uncertain life
Then raised the awareness that I had been mistaken

*Setelah terjerat dalam dilema aku mengerti
bagaimana sukarnya mengenal diri sendiri
hanyutlah aku dalam arus hidup yang tak menentu
maka timbul kesedaran yang aku selama ini keliru*

By the light of Your Divine Guide
I kneel pray for the grace to apply Your blessing
You cheer ease the journey of my life
I've been deceived and confused.

*Kupandukan cahayamu dari mu Ilahi
aku bersujud mohon doa mohon rahmat memohon restu mu
kau senangkanlah mudahkanlah perjalanan hidup ku
selama ini aku terpedaya dan keliru*

Rahimah Rahim - *Doa* - the Prayer (in *Hati Yang Rapuh* or the Fragile Heart album - 1989)

I ask Thee only, (*Hanya padaMu aku meminta*)
Surely You're generous (*Sesungguhnya Kau pemurah*)
Forgive all my sins (*Ampuni segala dosaku*)

Prosperity, peace, (*Kesejahteraan, kedamaian*)
Faith, devotion, (*Keimanan, ketaqwaan*)
I begged God from You (*Pintaku dariMu Tuhan*)

¹ See also, Luqmanul Hakim as top poster club listed 51 songs which composed spiritual-God consciousness elements posted in 21 November 2012, at 01:11 AM. See Luqmanul Hakim, 'Koleksi Lagu Rock/Metal Berunsurkan Ketuhanan, Dakwah dan Keagamaan Beserta Lirik', Retrieved on 15 November 2014. <http://www.carigold.com/portal/forums/showthread.php?t=383263>.

Peace and blessings, (*Selawat serta salam*), (1)
towards the Prophet, (*Buat Nabi Junjungan*)
To Muslim brothers, (*Kepada Muslimin*)
and sisters too (*Juga Muslimat*)

O Lord GOD, (*Ya ALLAH Ya Tuhanku*), (2)
I hear the call, (*Aku mendengar seruan*),
And only Thee, (*Dan hanya kepadaMu*),
I believe (*Ku beriman*)

Because of You I am here (*Kerana Mu aku di sini*)
I went back to You (*KepadaMu aku kembali*)
When the time comes (*Apabila tiba saatnya nanti*)

Until that moment arrives, (*Sehingga tiba detik itu*)
I only beg You, (*Ku bermohon hanya dariMu*)
You save me (*Engkau peliharalah diriku*)

By your name, (*Dengan namamu*), (3)
The Supreme God, (*Allah Yang Agung*),
The Lover, the forgiver, (*Yang pengasih, Yang Pengampun*),
To You I am sheltered (*KepadaMu ku berlindung*)

Music Break (Solo)
(repeat 3, 1, 2)

Spiritual songs by these migrated artists also received positive and encouraging feedbacks from Malaysian music industry. It is so impressive when the spiritual songs entitled “*Pedoman Vou*” and “*Doa*” which are presented by a migrated artist, Nora won “the Best Nasyid Song” in the Musical Industry Awards (*Anugerah Industri Muzik - AIM*) continuously in two years of 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 in the national musical contests (*Utusan Malaysia*, 19 December 2012).²

3.3.4 Peace and Tranquility of Life

Returning to the religious foundation and path contributes to tranquility in life as someone would leave their entire fate and future to Allah SWT. Enot, Sharifah Sofia, Aida Khalida and Serimah experienced better life; comfortable and calm after they decided to change their dressing image and culture harmonized with the Islamic principles. Enot realized these changes and saying that: “*Alhamdulillah* my inner soul is growing calm. I am a sweated person before, but after migration to wear hijab, this problem did not occur. (Nuriz Ibrahim, 2012).

As a Muslim woman Sharifah Sofia felt that her migration that she experienced is good and she felt comfortable and tranquil (*Harian Metro*, 23 December 2012). Aida Khalida described that since she had put the headscarf, she not just increased her interest in studying religion but also she felt calm when she used the name of Aida Khalida. She regarded putting the veil as initial steps to close herself to Allah SWT. She admitted that all these spiritual activities caused and gave happiness in her inner soul and life (Abd. Aziz Itar, *Utusan Malaysia*, 3 September 2011). Serimah asserted that:

“Anyway, I feel calmed and relaxed after putting veil. In terms of my source of income and job prospect, I just leave it to God. I believe I can still survive and continue my life with this kind of appearance”. – (*Berita Harian*, 10 November 2010).

3.4 Spiritual Migration through Wearing Hijab: a Culture or a Religious Commitment?

The study showed that the Malaysian Malay artists’ convictions, efforts to change and struggle to demonstrate their dedication to be a devoted believer are evidences of their religious awareness and commitment towards the Almighty. The tendency of Malay Muslim artists to choose spiritual life by adopting Islamic culture of wearing the headscarf and Muslim attire is a common phenomenon among the Malays

² ‘*Pedoman VOU*’ was sung by Nora Ariffin feat Voice of Ummi, composed by Johan Nawawi and lyric written by Ito Lara, whilst “*Doa*” was also presented by Nora, composed and lyric by Wayne Gideon. See, ‘*Rezeki Berganda Nora*’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 19 December 2012.

regardless of their income classes nowadays. For those who are not covering their head and body, however, seems to be seen as a weird person compared to majority of the female Malay women who put on the veil. Even though some may argue that the phenomenon of the veil among female artists in particular, and Malay women in general is a symbol of cultural obsession, discrimination under patriarchal interpretation (Ong, 1995; Alicia Izharuddin, 2015), nevertheless their sincerity and commitment to return to religious guidance cannot be questioned. Based on the researcher's observation at the public shopping complexes, the government offices and the annual gathering of the nationalist party of UMNO, it can be seen that almost 98 per cent of the Malay Muslims put the headscarf. The trends of wearing the veil are so apparent in the public areas, especially in the institutions related to Islam, such as, the NGOs of ABIM and IKRAM and in the annual gathering of PAS.³

Compared to the scenario of the Malay female Muslims 40 years ago, we can see the difference in the physical appearance on the awareness of wearing the veil amongst the urban Malay women whereby wearing the headscarf is recently so apparent in the public. The previous records consisted of archive pictures and documents have shown the development of the headscarf culture before and after 1970s, until the recent development of this trend which can be seen in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Mashitah Sulaiman, 2016). Although the state policies have been effective at undercutting the appeal of anti-government Islamic groups and parties at the early period of the Islamic Resurgence in 1970s (Robinson, G. 1982), but finally, the counter-back responses with pragmatic and responsive roles of the government, the opposition Islamic party, and the Islamic NGOs, assisted with the role of the printed and electronic media foster the wide-spread of Islamic awareness in the public spheres.

Some television TV3 celebrities and personalities such as, Nurul Syuhada, Azizah Ariffin, Habsah Omar or Abby Fana, and the news readers, like Ezzah Aziz Fawzi, Hamidah and Hajjah Wan Chik Daud have also changed towards reverting to Muslimah lifestyles and wearing the headscarf (*Sinar Harian* 31 December 2012). The well-known TV1 news reader, Hamidah Hamzah also thanked the Information Minister, Datuk Shabery Chik who has allowed headscarf women in headscarf to appear on air to read the news on *Radio Television Malaysia* (RTM), the government mainstream channel. She was the first female news reader who has been permitted to wear headscarf while reading the world news, *Dunia Hari Ini* and has broken traditional practice in the 62 years of the history of RTM which previously did not allow Hajjah Wan Chik Hashim@ Daud to appear on air after her return from hajj in 1984 (*Utusan Malaysia*, 16 July 2008). For the last 40 years, no headscarf image appeared on air of the broadcasting stations, but now the veiled Muslim women image can appear on air and become a common culture and phenomenon in the private and government television programmes. The veiled Malay Muslim women also frequently appear as a cover story in popular magazines and newspapers or as ambassadors of commercial beauty and women products.

In the early emergence of Islamic revival in Malaysia 1970, wearing the headscarf was a very weird culture in the Malay society in the urban area as well as in the rural village. In fact, if it were not outrageous to say that ABIM as the voluntary Islamic movement which began its initial activities through PKPIM, has sparked the evolution of a creative idea of headscarf until they were called as "the *dakwah* people". According to the former First President of ABIM, Prof. Dr. Razali Nawawi, he suggested to women wing of ABIM known as HELWA ABIM to create 'a type of clothing' which can cover up women's *aurah* as suggested by the *shariah* (Razali Nawawi, 10 May 2012).⁴ In the mid-1980s, most of the Malay women wore "*mini telekung*", or at least wore the veil with a long dressing which covers the whole body and the visible face and hands. The headscarf culture and trends introduced in Malaysia in the early 1970s was growing popular in Indonesia around 1980s. Indonesia is now well-known as the triumph in the contemporary Muslim fashion industry and the Indonesian veil trend is highly respected in this region (Mashitah Sulaiman & Mohammad Redzuan Othman, 2014: 203- 215).

In short, even though the headscarf culture and the Muslimah fashion have been progressive promoting at national and global arena, the awareness towards understanding the command of God's revelation is needed. The wisdom behind religious obligation, commands and rules need to be reached at all level of the society. Despite the sweet memories of their spiritual experiences, the Malay Muslim artists also faced challenges and dilemmas after the migration (*hijrah*). The spiritual migration is one of the best decisions in the life of Muslims, but for artists and celebrities, they certainly would face various problems at the early

³ Observations and field works during UMNO's annual general gathering 2013, 3-6 December 2013 at Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), Kuala Lumpur, PAS's Annual General Muktamar 2013, 22-25 November 2013, ABIM's Muktamar Sanawi 2013, 6-8 September 2013 at Auditorium Jubli Perak, Bangunan Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam, Selangor and IKRAM's Annual Gathering 2013, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

⁴ Interview with Prof. Dr. Razali Nawawi on 10 May 2012, 9.59am at Akademi Quran-Medik Malaysia, Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor.

period of their conversion. At some point, some of these celebrities admitted to being humiliated and denied friends when deciding to change their lifestyles. In fact, independent actors and speakers, Catriona Rose and members of the Al Mawlid group, (such as Pot Innuendo, Azan Ruffedge, Zaf VE), have also received great pressure from unfavorable friends. Not only the reception of friends, but most migrated artists also experienced difficulty to accept the opportunity to play and act on the screen. Not only that, the frequency of their invitation to share their spiritual experiences in the public has been mistakenly understood, until they are often labeled as an apparatus of the opposition party and being accused to be an "instant ustaz and ustazah (Akmaliah Razak. *Sinar Harian* 7 May 2014).

4 CONCLUSION

Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia has significantly transformed the Malay Muslim artists' character from the blurred-lost identity caused by colonialism and westernization to strongly attach to the Islamic belief and practices. The tendency of Malay Muslim artists to choose spiritual life by adopting Islamic culture of wearing the headscarf and Muslim attire after the migration must be appreciated and respected as a manifestation of their spiritual commitment towards Allah the Almighty. The chances should be given to them to share their thoughts and experiences in the proper platform of dakwah, not to be condemned and labeled with unpleasant call which could demotivate their sincere efforts and aspirations. Their convictions, efforts to change and struggle to demonstrate their dedication to be a devoted Muslim are evidences of their religious awareness and commitment towards the Almighty.

The signs of Islamic Resurgence in the urban centre of Kuala Lumpur and Shah Alam can be seen everywhere. The wearing of the veil by the young women which was regarded as controversial at the early formation period of the Islamic Resurgence is now accustomed in the society and being accepted as part of the Malays' attire. If in the 1980s, Chandra Muzaffar and Zainah Anwar observed that about 60 to 70 per cent of all Muslim female above adolescence wear such apparel, now an average of 90 to 95 per cent of Muslim woman cover up their hair and the whole body (*aurah*) and they are considered odd and weird persons if they do not cover it. The wearing of *kopiah* or *songkok* with a jacket and executive coat is a common Malay male Muslim middle class's style in dressing. With the Malay's resilience which is always being questioned, comparing to the other ethnic groups, Islamic Resurgence in the 1970s has succeeded to rebuild the Malays, in particular the migrated artists with the inner strength and new outlooks. With the refreshment in the worldview of Islam as *ad-deen*, Islamic Resurgence at least has attempts to minimize the dramatic impact of the 21st century globalization which could deteriorate their identity and personality.

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