

**INTERLOK: TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH,  
THAT IS THE QUESTION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Interlok was written by a famous Malaysian laureate, Abdullah Hussein which is seen as a multiculturalism narrative story that developing the process of the building of a national identity that develops out of a rigid ethnic identity. Interlok is one of the compulsory texts to be read by secondary school students in Malaysia, is a novel that claimed to contain 'sensitive' elements which has arisen the anger and inconvenience among some groups of people in Malaysia. The polemic and stigma have made this issue become over-politicized and left without solutions. The gradual formation of a national identity that gradually develops in a multicultural space, is the vision of the author that he tries to present through the social situation depicted in Interlok. The researchers embark on this qualitative study to investigate the novel from the aspects of literature, education and social responsibility. The main objective is to come out with a proper and rational discussion and solutions to clarify the issues in more mature and intellect ways. The research involves an extensive analysis from various credible sources in order to be just and equal in order to form an ideal national culture of nation building or identity. The findings show that a lot of criticisms produce false identity that differs from the social identity of the real world, in which totally differs with the author's vision that concern over the formation of an ideal national identity in this multicultural society is one that is visionary and forward-looking due to his effort to promote positive values in society through literature.

**Key words:** Interlok, Abdullah Hussain, literature, sociolinguistics, nation building

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**Please tick (√) the following items.**

- 1) Mode of Presentation  Oral  
 Poster
- 2) Language of Presentation  English  
 Arabic  
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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Interlok is a great literary work by Abdullah Hussain. It describes the life in Tanah Melayu (Malaysia) during the colonial period. It is a story of three main races in Malaysia which are Chinese, Indian and Malay. The colonial history of the country might be one of the reasons that led people's perception towards social justice to obey some unnecessary rules that bides by the 'sensitivity' that created by Malaysians themselves. The negative side of this sense of this 'sensitivity' is, it has become a fragile point where it easily jeopardized in political fights or sentiments.

A unique corporate governance mechanism of IFIs is the Shari'ah Supervisory Board (SSB). This board attempts to enhance the corporate governance structure of Islamic banks. In Malaysia, the SSB must comprise at least three scholars in Islamic jurisprudence. In practice, these scholars are sometimes supported by Islamic banking experts who are also well versed in Islamic jurisprudence. The main function of this board is to direct, review and supervise the activities of Islamic banks. In other words, they have to ensure that the Islamic banks comply with the religious requirements as expected by the public.

Although Islamic banking commenced more than two decades ago, research on Islamic banks in Malaysia is still in its infancy. Most of the studies in Islamic finance and banking have been descriptive, theoretical or normative (Akacem & Gilliam, 2002; Al-Saati, 2003; Farooq, 2007; Kamali, 2007). There are a few studies on Islamic accounting which discuss the framework of accounting for Islamic financial institutions (Archer, Karim, & Al-Deehani, 1998; Gambling, Jones, & Karim, 1993; Karim, 1990, 2001; Maurer, 2002; Naser & Pendlebury, 1997) and accounting from the Islamic perspective (Kamla, 2009; Mirza & Baydoun, 2000). Studies of corporate social responsibility disclosures in the annual reports of Islamic banks worldwide have found that corporate social reporting is still below the benchmark of what is expected of financial institutions founded on Islamic principles. In fact there is great variation of disclosure among the banks, with some banks reporting 35% of expected social disclosure while others make no disclosures (Maali, Casson & Napier, (2006). On the other hand, Farook & Lanis, (2005), in investigating the determinants of corporate social responsibility disclosure in Islamic banks, found that the characteristics of the SSB (proxied by existence of SSB, number of SSB members, cross memberships, doctoral qualification of SSB and reputable scholars) influence the level of social disclosure. This was probably achieved by greater monitoring of the accounting practices of Islamic banks by the SSB.

## **2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Interlok received a great disapproval from the groups or organizations that representing Indian race. They claimed that the novel contains the ideologies and words that stereotyping and making fun of the Indians. The groups kept on repeating that the word 'paria' in Interlok where it only mentioned twice as something that insults them and portrays a negative perception towards the Indians in Malaysia.

The current minister of Education of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has formed a special committee to do a research regarding Interlok as a literature textbook in secondary schools of three states on 6th January 2011. The committee decided that Interlok should be remained to be the school textbook but some changes have been done to the offending phrases, as a result, an independent panel has been form to do a research upon the changes of the phrases on 16th February 2011. Sadly, on 8th January 2011, around one hundred emotional Malaysians of Klang, burnt the poster of Interlok and the pictures of Abdullah

Hussain (the author of *Interlok*). At the same time, there were also groups of authors that against the action of changing the phases in the novel as they considered that action as against the freedom of speech and violating the originality of a literary works. They urged that *Interlok* should be withdrawn from the school bookshelf. Moreover, more than 200 nongovernment organizations were united under one pact called National *Interlok* Action Team (NIAT) where they were threatening to internationalize *Interlok* Issues.

Based on the above aspects, the major aims of conducting this research are to investigate the progress of the issue from the beginning until present, and to find out the contributing factors of the issues pertaining to this novel. Eventually, the purpose of this research is to understand and evaluate the impacts of the controversial issues to the society from various aspects of academic genre such as literature, sociolinguistics and education.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Pradl (1996), the major purpose of learning literature is for enjoyment; without that, it is unlikely that readers will achieve any secondary benefits from a literary work. Recognizing that literary enjoyment leads to the development of an educated imagination and there is no single meaning or right interpretation of a literary work and this recognizing that such resources cannot provide adequate background information to deal adequately with sensitive issues. Sometimes people need to learn back what we were taught to make sure that our consideration of the world is more comprehensive, more multicultural, and gender-fair. A crucial issue that Malaysians appear to have is that they have the tendency to over-simplify and lock up their point of views to only one perspective, and we have been filled with the unfortunate attitude of “Don’t ask, don’t question.” This is something that Malaysians seems to teach the children even in schools (Peletz, 2005). Malaysian style of education is mostly examination-based and hence tends to be revolved around following instructions and swallowing textbooks rather than being an individualistic exploration of the subjects. Worst situation happened when the subjects taught in schools are more to general subjects, and only focus to their interest when they are studying in high education level. Not all subjects are like literature, where discussion is extremely encouraged as they need to develop their own interpretations and back them up with textual evidence. With all of this in Malaysians mentality, we reached at the condition of the majority of Malaysian society now are having the attitude of being ignorance, where they tend to become very defensive and attack every time they think that their territory is being threatened regardless of the truth and the rationality. Sadly, they are also not open to even consider others’ views or considering on solving the problems in different perspectives. This is clearly something bad for the society’s intellectual growth.

### **4. RESEARCH METHOD**

Our sample consists of the total population of Islamic banks in Malaysia whose 2008 annual reports are available on their website and/or in the Islamic Financial Information Services (IFIS) database. All the annual reports were published in English. The year 2008 has been selected due to the global financial crisis that hit the world during the period. It is argued that this event could influence the disclosure of accounting information by financial institutions worldwide. The second justification is the process of convergence to IFRS. Malaysia is currently involved in the convergence process which is predicted to be completed in 2012.

The process is expected to bring about changes in the reporting practices of companies in Malaysia including banks.

There were 17 Islamic banks registered with the Central Bank of Malaysia as at 31 December 2008. For each bank, annual reports are first downloaded from the bank's website. Any unavailable documents are subsequently extracted from the IFIS database. For the purpose of this study, similar to Md Rahin (2009), the sample is further segmented into local Islamic banks, foreign Islamic banks, Islamic subsidiaries of local commercial banks, Islamic subsidiaries of foreign commercial banks and commercial banks with an Islamic window. However, as noted, two of the banks (Alliance Islamic Bank Berhad and AmIslamic Bank Berhad) do not have full annual reports for the year 2008 because they only transferred their assets to the Islamic subsidiaries in 2008. In this case, the Islamic bank financial statements will be studied as commercial banks with an Islamic window. Under the requirements of the Central Bank of Malaysia, the holding banks are supposed to disclose the financial statements of their Islamic banking divisions or an Islamic window separately in their notes to the accounts. Thus in this case, information is extracted from the notes to the accounts of the holding banks of the Islamic banks. The Islamic banks are segmented in order to detect similar traits among these banks. See Table 1.

Table 1: Segments and list of sample of Islamic banks

Segment	Segment description	Islamic banks
Local Islamic banks	Full-fledged Islamic banks operating in Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bank Islam Malaysia Berhad (BIMB)</li> <li>• Bank Mumalat Malaysia Berhad (BMMB)</li> </ul>
Commercial banks with an Islamic window	Commercial banks participating in the Islamic banking scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alliance Bank Berhad (Alliance)</li> <li>• AmBank Berhad (Ambank)</li> </ul>

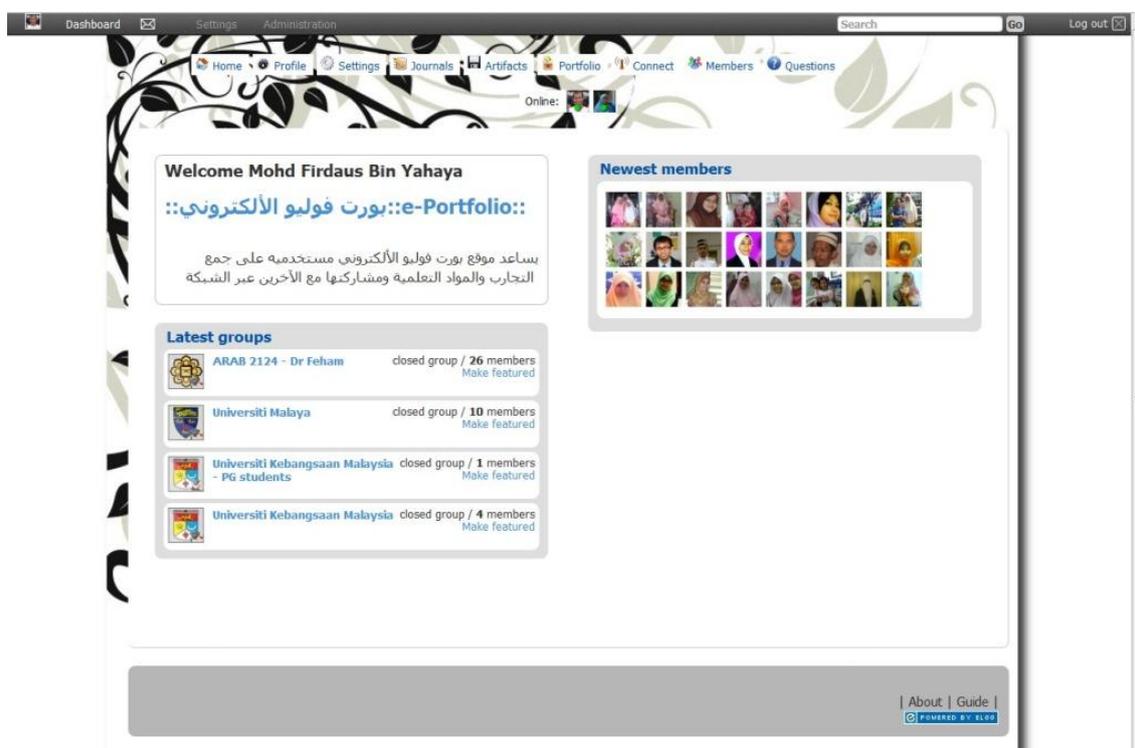
In our study, similar to other studies on accounting disclosure, we will use the content analysis method. Content analysis has been widely employed in prior studies of financial accounting, environmental and corporate social disclosure (Gray, Kouhy, & Lavers, 1995a; Guthrie & Parker, 1989). There are three vital processes of content analysis normally employed in this type of research (Abdul Hamid, 2004). The first stage is the determination of the document to be analysed in the study. In this study, annual reports will be used to measure the extent of disclosure of Islamic value information that has been disclosed. Despite the fact that there are other media communications used by IFIs, annual reports are used in this study because they are available to all the stakeholders including the public as their main source of information and the annual reports have been subject to audit (Belkaoui & Karpik, 1989; Deegan & Rankin, 1997).

The second process in the content analysis is to decide on the measurement for the Islamic value information theme. There have been three measurement methods used in the past literature of accounting disclosure and corporate social and environmental reporting. These are words (Zeghal & Ahmed, 1990); sentences (Hackston & Milne, 1996; Mitchell, Percy, & McKinlay, 2006; Tsang, 1998) and pages (Gray, et al., 1995a; Gray, Kouhy, & Lavers, 1995b). In this study, the number of sentences is used as the measure of disclosure. The use of a sentence as a measure of disclosure is chosen due to the difficulty faced in using

pages and number of words in the study. A sentence is considered as one disclosure without taking into account how long the sentence is. However headings are not considered as one disclosure (Mitchell, et al., 2006).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Our country's colonial history has led us to a point in time where our perception of social justice is heavily dependent on the developments that took place in the past. We have built our entire political system around the diversity of our races with the acknowledgement of certain social and political privileges incorporated within. Five decades later, it does not take significant powers of observation to conclude that there is an underlying theme of racial discontent in many, if not all, aspects of Malaysian politics. Just months ago, we saw this reflected in reactions of different political and social stakeholders to the Bersih 3.0 rallies. When even a campaign for free and clean elections becomes a spectacle of accusatory racial slurs, one is inclined to ask what the real issues in Malaysia are. Since strong opinions regarding these sensitive issues already exist in the public sphere, would it then not be better to present them with reasoned facts and debate rather than leaving each of us to our individual prejudices?



Picture 1: e-portfolio welcome screen.

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Pendlebury, 1997) and accounting from the Islamic perspective (Kamla, 2009; Mirza & Baydoun, 2000). Studies of corporate social responsibility disclosures in the annual reports of Islamic banks worldwide have found that corporate social reporting is still below the benchmark of what is expected of financial institutions founded on Islamic principles. In fact there is great variation of disclosure among the banks, with some banks reporting 35% of expected social disclosure while others make no disclosures (Maali, Casson & Napier, (2006). On the other hand, Farook & Lanis, (2005), in investigating the determinants of corporate social responsibility disclosure in Islamic banks, found that the characteristics of the SSB (proxied by existence of SSB, number of SSB members, cross memberships, doctoral qualification of SSB and reputable scholars) influence the level of social disclosure.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

While talking about such a sensitive issues like sensitive elements that contained in Interlok, sensitivity could be subjective but a proper discussion and the understanding of accepting the differences between cultures and beliefs could be the best solution that Malaysian should come up to. The lack of having a discussion about books in our country could be the major reason why people reacted in such a way when an issue like Interlok jeopardized and there are no proper and wise solutions were found to solve it. According to a book ‘The Aims of Argument’ written by Timothy W. Crusius and Caolyn E. Channell, people argue with one another because they are not able to see the world the same way, and they do not see the world the same way because of different backgrounds. It is some kind of reflection towards the situation that we faced in Malaysia as regardless of living on the same land for decades with friends from different races, it does not meant the we have made peace with the differences of others. This has been proved by reminiscing Interlok issue. It seems like the whole system was interrupted because of the issue. Therefore, in dealing with how people differ, a book about argument must deal with what make people different, with the source of disagreement itself. It includes gender, race, ethnicity, class sexual orientation and religion. Rather than just ignoring or glossing over difference, or the readings.

First of all, in order to have an effective argument, Malaysian should probably understand the argument. The aims of argument are based on two key concepts, which is argument and rhetoric. Unfortunately, these days, the terms arguments and rhetoric have required bad reputations. The popular meaning of argument is disagreement where when we are picturing it, we think of raised voices, hurt feelings, winners and losers. Most people think of rhetoric too in a negative sense. People think of it as the language that sounds good but evades or hides the truth. Rhetoric is basically the language we hear from the politician who says anything to win votes, the public relations person who puts ‘positive spin’ on dishonest business practices, the buck passing bureaucrat who blames the foulup on someone else, the clever lawyer who counterfeits passion to plead for the acquittal of a guilty client. The words argument and rhetoric then are commonly applied to the darker side of human acts and motives. This darker side is real argument where they are often pointless and silly, ugly and destructive, all too often, rhetoric is empty words contrived to mislead or to disguise the desire to exert power.

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