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Clarifying the Misconceptions about Islamic Restrictions on Entertainment and Performing Arts in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Muslims as a community have had issues and debates whether entertainment and Performing Arts are permissible in Islam. While some orthodox Muslims today totally ban any type of Performing Arts, claiming it's *haram* (forbidden) and shun themselves, others have argued that Muslims are allowed to have some entertainment with some guideline from the Holy Quran and Hadith (words from Prophet Muhammad passed down). This paper was part of a project/research to see how the Muslim community misunderstood this issue with arguments from the Quran and Hadith. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the political debate and confusion on the subject in Malaysia and the country's arts and culture policy. Whilst the study is focused on Malaysia, the study also hopes to foster a better understanding between non-Muslim and Muslim communities globally. **Objective:** The main objective of this research is to look at how Muslims misinterpreted passages from the Quran, while debating whether entertainment and Performing Arts is allowed in Islam or not. The second objective is to show examples how a moderate Muslim should assimilate with non-Muslim to foster more understanding and respect towards different religions. **Results:** In Malaysia, orthodox Muslims through the political Islamic party has managed to influence moderate Muslims to follow "their Muslim way" of practice. However, in recent years, Muslims in Malaysia through their scholars known as Ulama opened up on the discussion and debate towards this issue. In return, most of these scholars believed that Islam allows entertainment and Performing Arts as long as the guidelines in the Quran are followed. **Conclusion:** Islam allows entertainment with several historical incident were recorded in Hadith. However in Malaysia, Muslims scholars were divided into 2 different school of taught thus making them express this issue in different views. Muslim Sunnis which consist of more than 80% of the population Muslim community around the world including Malaysia are the most tolerance with many of them became scholars in various areas including entertainment business and Performing Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

Muslims have been stereotyped as an insular community who don't socialise with non-Muslims. Muslims are seen as conservative people who observe a strict puritanical lifestyle and do not know how to entertain themselves. It is generally believed that Islam disallows any form of entertainment or performing arts, whether it is music, drama or dance. Following this misconception, there have been many instances in Malaysia where radical and orthodox Muslim groups have begun to ban entertainment and performing arts. Although the Quran does not contain a direct injunction relating to the ethics of entertainment and performance arts, radical Islamist movement and Islamic puritans have often misused passages from the Quran and the Hadith on these

issues to argue that Islam forbids any form of arts that is meant for entertainment. In Malaysia, Islam as a religion became important after the Islamic revitalisation beginning in August 1979, which has resulted in the growing dominance of Islamic issues in the public sphere. With the support from many Muslim scholars and jurists, some radical Islamic political parties Pan Asean Islamic (PAS) have pledged to Islamicise Malaysia. This has also led to the rise of orthodox views on the issue of performing arts in the country, with PAS imposing a ban on many venues of arts and entertainment sector. Unlike PAS who implement such radical policies on entertainment, the Federal Government under Barisan National (BN) promotes Islam in a more moderate way investing in arts, culture and entertainment sectors in the country. However, the

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