

A Fairy Tale with a 'Happy Ending'

Just like a fairy tale, the initial decision to ban Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* has been reversed in Malaysia. The Film Censorship Board of Malaysia had initially made the decision that the film will not be allowed unless a gay scene is cut. According to the chairman of the Film Censorship Board in Malaysia, Abdul Halim Abdul Hamid, scenes promoting homosexuality are banned in the country. "We have approved it, but there is a minor cut involving a gay moment. It is only one short scene but it is inappropriate because many children will be watching this movie," Abdul Hamid told the Associated Press. The censorship board does allow for the depiction of homosexual characters onscreen, but only if they are shown in a negative light or repent for their actions. However, Disney refused to cut the scene and apparently, after appeals, the Board agreed that the film be released in Malaysia with a PG13 rating, without any cuts.

Comment:

When the Film Censorship Board of Malaysia decided to deny the showing of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, there was a barrage of criticisms on the decision. There was even a blog that collected the criticisms targeted at the Board. And it is not an exaggeration to notice that many of the criticisms were made by Muslims. Among the criticisms thrown were, "There is only one character in the film that is openly gay – only one...it is not even pornographic in nature", "If you don't like it, don't watch", "I really hate Malaysia when it comes to this. Too sensitive. When are we going to develop with this mentality?", "Are you worried that you will be influenced? Is your faith as thin as the skin of an onion?", "The world has moved on and it is time we equip our young children with the facts of life of this present day and age", "Our self-appointed guardian of morality — the Censorship Board. They think they're doing the parents a favor, not realizing they're a bit behind time" and many other comments. From these comments, we cannot help but notice that they emerge from a framework of thoughts that currently dominates the Malaysian society – the secular liberal framework. It is worth noting though, that this is not the first time decisions made by the authority on issues that go against the idea of freedom, as purported by the West, had been severely criticized by Muslim Malaysians.

However, this is far from saying that the Malaysian authority in any way exemplifies a 'moralistic' institution free of liberal and secularistic tendencies. In fact, the very framework that dominates the thoughts of the people of Malaysia is a direct consequence of the liberal secular system implemented by the government of Malaysia. The implementation of the democratic political system aspires the people of Malaysia to venerate the idea of freedom and this is manifested not just in the kind of criticisms deliberated here, but is also observed in various policies and decisions of the government. Under the name of 'moderation', Islam is always at the losing end in any issues associated with *shariah*. Worse, political decisions are justified in the name of moderation. Implementation of Islam in its totality is rejected in the name of moderation. And moderation is justified using the Words of Allah (swt). ﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ﴾. **"And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people..."** [al-Baqarah 143]

The word 'wasata' is identified by those who had been misled as that which represents the midway point of two extremes, whereas the real meaning is that 'wasata' signifies the Islamic Ummah being a just society, a just witness in front of other Ummah in the Day of Judgement. Consequently, those who misunderstood the meaning of 'wasata' justifies anything that is opposed to what the West defines as being 'Islamic', to be an extremist idea. Hence anything that looks and feels Islamic, and is truthful to the core, can be easily cast aside, as an extreme way of thinking. Until now, the reason why the film has been allowed to be shown in Malaysia is still a mystery. What is clear is that the ending of this fairy tale is most definitely a result of the liberal virus that has permeated this 'moderate' society.

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