

# Guilt trip case study assignment



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Guilt -rnp Abdul Rahim Said (C) February 2013 An old red Jeep rushes through the streets of a small community outside Kuala Lumpur in the direction of its only neighbourhood Surau. The driver clad in a dark green Juba with a white turban over his head and a Bedouin checkered scarf around his neck flapping in the wind, is oblivious to others observing him from the roadside stalls as he passes by. The windows of the Jeep are down and you can hear Cat Stevens' " Morning has Broken" blazing away.

The driver is singing along repeating the lyrics and tapping his fingers on the steering wheel in sync with the music. His head nodding and moving from side to side rhythmically enthralled by Stevens' melodious voice. " There goes Leman! " says a newspaper vendor to his brother as he passes by their delivery stand. " Late again for his morning prayers! " The Jeep moves quickly into the Surau car park on a beautifully landscaped hillock. Leman steps out of his Jeep just as Stevens' song comes to its appropriate ending, " Praise with elation, praise every morning.

God's recreation of the new day". He scans the horizon for the glimmer of the dawn early light and sees the fading moon about to be outshone by the rising sun, hanging low in the Western skies and quietly expresses his gratitude to the Creator for a chance to enjoy yet another blessed day. From nearby mosques he hears the Bilal calling the faithful to prayers. At his own Surau, the Bilal is nowhere to be found. Reaching into his Juba pocket, he finds the keys and opens the doors. Groping in the dark, he switches on the lights one after another.

He sees the amplifier, turns it on, presses the button of the microphone, frees his mind of the lyrics from Stevens' song he was humming earlier, clears his throat and in a clear melodious voice calls out to his fellow Muslims to prayers: " Allah Akhbar...! " Leman, an influential secretary of a Surau elected to office for his popularity by a small group of Muslim residents a few years ago, loves Cat Stevens. He adores his songs, memorises the lyrics and attended many of Stevens' concerts in Chicago, New West of the United States.

His congregation is amazed over his admiration for the singer. He makes no secret of his profound knowledge of the artist's life and proudly displays all records ever produced by the soulful singer to everyone who drops by. In his house, there is a special air conditioned room to store works by Stevens. Walls of his home are covered with pictures and posters of Stevens' performance in London, Chicago and elsewhere. He often gets complaints from his own family about having no place on the wall for their own photographs.

His wife of thirty years repeatedly expresses her concerns that he is " really excessive" in his obsession with Cat Stevens. She gently cautions him on Islam's prohibition of over idolising another human. But this does not deter Leman who is a devout Muslim who seldom misses prayers at the Surau. Externally, he seems successful at keeping his musical preference apart from his religious life without any guilt, until someone like his wife makes a remark about his obsession. This sparks lengthy discourses Justifying his ability to separate religion and music.

It often ends with him arguing alone for and against separation of religion and state that anyone listening finds utterly incoherent. Lyrics of “ Morning has Broken”, “ The First Cut is the Deepest”, “ Moon Shadow”, “ Wild World” are always on his lips. In his bathroom he belts out the words at the top of his lungs acting out scenes of the singer performing on stage. Immediate neighbours initially annoyed by the awful rantings have grown accustomed to his antics. It is so quiet when he goes out of town that sometimes, the woman next door is prompted to ask the wife “ Is Leman alright? I didn’t hear any singing this morning! Leman’s admiration for Stevens’ music heightened when the latter converts and takes on the name of Yusuf Islam. He wants his collection of Stevens’ music to be complemented by other works of the recent convert. Nowadays he refers to Yusuf as “ our brother”. Lately, he is busy collecting Islamic style ballads recorded by Yusuf with a choir from Eastern Europe. Pictures of Long haired Stevens now hang side by side with Yusuf wearing a turban at charity events and at an Islamic school he founded in England. One evening Leman returns from the Surau after his night prayers earlier than usual.

He removes his turban, revealing locks of stringy hair that cling limply to his balding head, switches off the television left blaring by his children and plonks himself on his rocking chair in the middle of the living room. He appears disturbed and has that far away look in his eyes that the wife knows means trouble is brewing. Mrs. Leman, Norbi, an attentive Malay Muslim wife brings him his sweet Arabic mint tea that he enjoys, lights up the shishak and hands him his pipe. After a few puffs and sips of the tea, he says “ Norbi, I must go to Melbourne”. The wife meekly replies, “ If you must, then you

must! I'll drive the kids to school then With a tone of a condescendingly chauvinistic traditional Malay man, he says, " No, no, my good woman. I know you can do that". After a short pause he continues without looking at his wife, " I am really bothered by this singer in Melbourne who sounds like Cat Stevens! I heard he is singing Yusuf's Id songs like his own". " Leman, aren't you getting carried away with this Stevens or Yusuf fellow? . Anyw??? ay, it is up to you. What I'd like to know is what you hope to gain from this trip". Slowly he recounts that earlier in the evening he met a young man at the Surau who just returned from Melbourne.

Knowing his love for Cat Sevens the young man suggested that he attends some concerts of Ron Vincent in Melbourne. This singer, musician and entertainer he says has been singing Cat Stevens hits for almost thirty years. The young man also said that from his website Vincent is described as a Melbourne born resident of Maltese origins and has " an uncanny resemblance to Cat Stevens". Leman goes on " It is this uncanny resemblance to our Muslim brother that I want to see". Leman goes on to say that he plans to accompany this young man when he returns to the University of Melbourne and will stay there for three days.

His wife has to manage the kids on her own and record messages from the congregation in his absence. Before going to bed that night, he opens up his daughter's laptop and Google " Ron Vincent of Melbourne". Right away he becomes more intrigued about the singer. The escription and activities of the singer overwhelm him. One site on Ron Vincent leads to another. There is Ron on Facebook and on You Tube. Everyone seems to speak highly of the man. He watches Ron's performance mounted on You Tube one after

another. By the time he is ready for bed he is absolutely convinced he must go and see Ron Vincent's life performance in Melbourne.

Leman and the young undergraduate arrive in Melbourne early one Spring morning aboard a low cost carrier that left Kuala Lumpur at midnight. Leman knows another Malaysian Muslim family who has settled in the suburb of the city and plans to stay with them on his first day. This family is more conservative and Leman worries that they may not approve of his obsession with Stevens. His wife has called them earlier about Leman coming to Melbourne on a mission but carefully sidestepped the details. They said they will be waiting for him at the arrival hall and perhaps then Leman could fill them in.

From Kuala Lumpur to Melbourne, Leman keeps thinking of a few reasons for being there for three days without having to lie to them. As a true faithful he is obliged to confess his obsession with Cat Stevens would be tantamount to sacrilege. He is in dilemma. Leman and his former countryman hug each other in the arrival hall. He is in his old suit purchased in the USA when he was a student and the brother clad in full Juba complete with turban and a Bedouin scarf around his neck looks curiously at Leman whom he remembers hardly wears a Western style coat. The young undergraduate excuses himself and takes the airport limousine to campus.

Leman enters the ramshackle van of his Muslim brother and sits on the front seat. They have hardly moved out of the parking area when the brother asks him the dreaded question, " Leman, my dear man, what brings you to this beautiful He blurbs out, " Brother, it is complicated! ". " We have a long way

to go. I am listening”. The brother replies. Leman keeps quiet for a short while, thinking of ways to avoid offending his host and at the same time be true to himself. Then in a typical Malay way of speaking English that the former Malaysian has not heard for some time, Leman says, “ It’s like this! The brother cracks up. “ You haven’t changed, Leman. When you have a story, true or not, you always start with, ‘ it’s like this’! “ They both laugh. Just then a lorry with a sign “ Fcuk” passes them. Leman asks his host sarcastically pointing to the vehicle now ahead of them, “ Is that right? ” “ Yes, brother! Don’t change the subject”. Grinning, Leman begins by telling that he is there to listen to Ron Vincent, a singer that sings like their Muslim brother Yusuf Islam. “ Masha Allah, Allah be blessed! Music my brother is work of the Satan! Stay away. Even our brother Yusuf has forsaken it.

Why Leman? Why? ” “ Brother, I am with you. I am now collecting Yusuf’s Islamic ballads and compiling examples of his charitable works to help our Muslim community. Perhaps I may yet start a school like the one he pioneered in England. But I have to see this Ron Vincent once before I totally give up the old Cat Stevens, throw away the satanic ways and embrace his new approach. ” For the rest of the Journey they exchange news about friends and family they know in Kuala Lumpur. From then on, neither mentions Cat Stevens name or the reason for Leman being in Melbourne.

At the brother’s place, the wife cooks Malay-Aussie fusion food. They eat heartily sharing Jokes with the children. Everyone uses their fingers, as normally preferred by Muslim Malays, instead of knives and forks. They give thanks with supplication read ut aloud in Arabic by the brother requesting Allah’s blessing and protection for the visitor. That night they recite the

Koran and pray together at a nearby Surau. Back in the house, Leman already exhausted from the day's long flight, reluctantly but politely declines his favourite mint tea prepared by the brother's wife, excuses himself and retires early.

The brother breathes a sigh of relief because he does not have to endure the inquisition that his wife has prepared for the guest on his unexplained mission. After breakfast, Leman takes leave thanking his host with promises to see each other again before he departs for Kuala Lumpur. He tells them for the next two nights he will be at the young undergraduate's apartment in the vicinity of the Melbourne University. He explains to his hosts he is invited to stay in one of the three rooms temporarily vacated by a student who is away on a research trip in Fiji. Over a bag lunch he plans the night's outing with the help of the undergraduate.

Luckily for them, Ron Vincent is performing at one of the fine restaurants in South Bank that night. The young student checks out Google Map and tells him it may take forty minutes if they were to walk from his apartment. But by cab it would take only fifteen minutes. Then again, we students here walk everywhere because taxi fares are a lot higher than in K. L". To which Leman replies, " Let me take care of the taxi. Besides, it may not be good for my old knees to walk that far". They arrive at the restaurant some time after maghreb prayers and quickly order their dinner.

Leman likes linguini with fresh prawns minus the white wine and his companion loves the cod fish. Over dinner the young undergraduate points to Leman some of the major landmarks and fills him in on some historical



facts about the city. They talk about all the lovely places Lemman should visit the next day and what souvenirs he ought to buy for his wife and kids. Jacob's Creek wine is prominently displayed in the restaurant tonight. They see locals consuming bottles after bottles taking advantage of the day's promotion. They have when Lemman says to him gently that they are Muslims and do not indulge in alcoholic beverages.

He apologises and Instead brings them sparkling grape Juice tastefully packaged in wine bottles. Both men enjoy the drink clinking their glasses like old buddies. Lights are now dimmed as Ron Vincent arrives on stage. From the moment he starts singing until he finishes almost at midnight, Lemman is mesmerised by the soulful singer. He opens with " Moon Shadow" followed by " Father and Son" and ending the evening with Lemman's favourite " Morning Has Broken". Lemman sings along with the rest of the audience that ended with a loud standing ovation that no one wanted to end.

After the show Lemman says to the young student, " This guy is really Cat Stevens reincarnated. I am thrilled. How could he be so good? " The boy smiles and says " Didn't I tell you that? So, the trip is worth it, right? " Lemman nodded and appears very satisfied. All the way home they talk endlessly about this Cat Stevens look alike. " We'll have to go again tomorrow night. This time, we'll Just watch the show. I'll make salmon fish head curry at your apartment. We can do night prayers before going. I won't feel so guilty, then! " Lemman suggests and the young man agrees. " It gives me more time to finish my assignments".

He adds. “ During the day, I’ll go to Victoria Market and get some fresh fruits to take home. My wife loves the fresh black cherries. Of course, some souvenirs for my kids”. With that e retires for the night with a big smile on his face. They arrive at the South Bank restaurant Just in time for the show. The crowd is bigger tonight. The applause is even louder than the night before. Ron Vincent is motivated to do extra numbers for the encore for his final night at the restaurant. At midnight, they reluctantly walk out of the restaurant along with other local fans who cannot have enough of Ron’s version of Cat Stevens songs.

Leman left Melbourne satisfied. He calls his Muslim brother and apologises for not visiting them again but promises to return another day. On the flight bound for Kuala Lumpur, he thinks of what he ought to do to honour Yusuf Islam. He cannot sing as well as Ron Vincent who has done well for himself and glorifies the master. He does not want to sing either because he plans to give up all that music that his Muslim brother says is the work of a Satan. By the time he arrives in Kuala Lumpur, he resolves to follow the footsteps of Yusuf by staging Islamic first he must get rid of the old work by the young Stevens.

A week after returning from Melbourne, he holds a garage sale of all Cat Stevens’ records, posters, books and pictures. The neighbourhood is a-buzzed with a large crowd looking for bargains. In three hours his life time collection is gone. He donates the money to charity, parts of it he gives away to the Surau. Against advice from senior congregation members who are more learned in religious fatwa, Leman organises a group that has fashioned itself after Yusuf Islam’s drums and balladeers from Eastern Europe.

He argues that this would bring the younger generation into the congregation that usually attracts only the old and retired. After much persuasion, the older folks reluctantly give in to Leman. However, they advise that under no circumstance should they be allowed to perform in the prayer hall. It is raining when the drummers and the singers arrive after the evening prayers. Leman uses his executive prerogative and decides to hold the singing and drumming session in the prayer hall because it is extremely wet outdoors. The older folks disappointed in the undemocratic process silently take leave from the Surau without a word.

Leman and his young protégés goes ahead staging the show with “Tala’al-Badru ‘Alayna” about the White Moon that rose over us from the Valley of Wada” by Yusuf Islam followed by other nasyid like “My Mother” and “Children of the World” till late. It is indeed a successful event in the eyes of the younger group. Leman basks in the glory of his achievement with praises coming entirely from the young ones who feel that someone has finally listened to the wishes of the youth in the community. The next day the older folks are visibly missing from the Surau. Everyone seems to have activities outside the parish.

Three days later only two of the older members make their appearance. They sit silently in the corner poring over the Koran while aiting for the night prayers. Leman smiles at them and breathes a sigh of relief, murmuring to himself, “At least they have not boycotted me for good!”. Today is the seventh day after the event. The skies open up and rain falls heavily on the neighbourhood. It is an unusually heavy tropical storm accompanied by thunder and lightning. Leman rushes to the Surau, in his old red Jeep, after

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receiving an emergency call coming face to face with two fire engines busy putting out fires at the Surau.

The Fire Chef says, “ Lightning has struck three times setting fire to the fuse oxes that quickly spreads to the curtains and wooden paneling”. The firemen employ dry powder and carbon dioxide extinguishers to put out the electrical fires. The Surau is covered in dark soot. Praying at the Surau for the next few days will be hazardous. The Fire Chief tells Lemman to advise the asthmatic and elderly folks to stay away until it is cleaned. News of the fire spread leaving the Surau empty of the humble folks that frequent the place. members of the congregation, telling them that the lightning arrester copper wire is not well grounded.

He says preliminary report from the Fire Department shows that he connection is indeed faulty. Only the young ones seems sympathetic. The older ones are silent. Some of the vocal ones are quick to point out that Islam forbids entertainment inside prayer halls and Allah has spoken. Not able to convince his elder peers, Lemman allows his guilty conscience to overpower him. He keeps telling himself and his wife “ Perhaps the older folks are right. I am being punished for my sins and arrogance. ” His popularity is now waning within the community.

Every cafe he goes to acquaintances that once welcome him, make excuses and politely move away from him. He is all alone. Lemman gives away all music by Yusuf Islam and stays away from all musical events. He sets aside the final report from the Fire Department. The guilt is so great that he resigns from his position as Secretary and now walks to the Surau, sits in a

corner by himself during prayers, saying little to everyone. He still has that far away look in his eyes. The young undergraduate who returns to visit his parents hardly gets any acknowledgement from Leman. Old congregation members remark that Leman is struck by guilt.

Everyone is advised to leave him alone and to allow him to grieve in silence. Tonight, Leman is the last to leave the Surau. Everyone is gone. It is quiet except for the whirring of the ceiling fan and the sound of a lonely solitary owl calling out intermittently to an unseen partner. As he sits meditating asking for divine guidance to find his way back into the community, Leman hears “ Morning has broken” playing at a nearby house from a record, he is certain, the owner purchased at a bargain price from his garage sale not too long ago. It strengthened his resolve on how to regain the confidence of the people in his neighbourhood.