



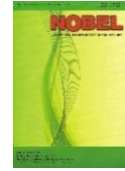
UIN SUNAN AMPEL  
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# NOBEL

Journal of Literature and Language Teaching

Volume 14, Number 1, April 2023, 84-101

available at <http://jurnalfahum.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/nobel/article/view/700>



DOI: 10.15642/NOBEL.2022.14.1.84-101

## ABSURDISM AND SUPERSTITIONS: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES IN ALBERT CAMUS'S *THE PLAGUE*

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### Article Info

Article History:  
Received January 2023  
Accepted March 2023  
Published April 2023

Keywords:  
absurdism, isolation,  
superstitions, Islamic  
studies, pandemic  
literature

### Abstract

Many scholars discussing the pandemic issues tend to use Western perspectives. To question this hegemony, this paper investigates Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947) by using Islamic perspectives to challenge the dominant views in evaluating literary canon and pandemic studies. By engaging with postcolonialism and pandemic studies with the frameworks of Islamic studies, this research investigates what differences in pandemic issues are explored in Camus's novel and how Islam advocates for Muslims to deal with the pandemic problems. The focus of this novel is mainly on European culture and perspectives, although the setting of the novel is Algeria, which is one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Thus, it is essential to apply the Islamic perspectives in investigating this novel to understand how Islam encourages Muslims to believe and worship God as a way of living instead of being atheists, selfish, and hedonists, as this novel reveals. This research found that the author uses the ideas of absurdism, isolation, and superstitions by depicting the characters as struggling to face the bubonic plague. However, the characters still live in atheism and believe in superstitions instead of worshipping God as Islam advocates.

## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Muslim and Islamic perspectives have been excluded from world literature and global debates, including pandemic issues, which have become the hottest topic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In world literature, many American or British writers have produced texts about the pandemic, Robin Cook's *Pandemic* (2018), John Kelly's *The Great Mortality* (2006), and Stephen King's *The Stand* (2011). However, not many Muslim writers produced or published their writing about Pandemic literature. Raising pandemic discussion from Muslim or Islamic perspectives is essential to challenge this Western dominance in world literature and global contexts.

Hasan (2016) argues that it is important to understand English literary texts from Islamic viewpoints to "shield learners and practitioners of Muslim backgrounds from un-Islamic values that many English texts may proliferate" (p. 7). Hasan's book inspires the researcher to investigate English literary texts exploring the ideas of a pandemic, especially Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947), which depicts their characters as atheists and absurdists who disbelieve in God but believe that human beings have no purpose in this world and fail to link the existence of individuality and the universe. However, Islam teaches Muslims that human beings have a meaningful life if they have a purpose of worshiping God and being the most beneficial person for the ummah.

Historically, atheism and absurdism believe that life exists the way it is without God's hands, and people die as life is meaningless, and there is no life in the hereafter. To challenge the limited views of death and absurdism, Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947) explores pandemic issues by depicting its characters as doctors and pastors to emphasize the meaning of life and death when people face pandemic and animals, the rats, which haunt humans' life night by night. Camus's protagonist, Dr. Rieux, is depicted as a doctor who has no fear of challenging the plague and building solidarity with his community to help many suffering patients. As a result, many inhabitants of Oran in Algeria want to volunteer to help Dr. Rieux face the plague or the regime.

Moreover, by setting *The Plague* in Algeria, one of the French colonies, Camus complicates issues of the plague after World War II and the era after colonialism, which poisoned colonized people ideologically. Thus, the novel reveals how totalitarian rulers use their power to oppress powerless groups, but they become powerless when they face death and animals, which are ready to take their lives anytime. In doing so, Camus's *The Plague* reveals the ideas of atheism and absurdism by depicting the characters as believers and heroes who work together to support powerless groups threatened by the pandemic or the regime.

To challenge the ideas of absurdism in Camus's *The Plague*, this project uses Islamic perspectives by engaging with postcolonial studies and pandemic studies as this novel explores absurdism and pandemic issues from Western perspectives. Moreover, the meaning of human life or the goal of human beings to live should be understood from the Islamic perspective to protect the ideology of Muslims, especially Muslim students who read Western literature texts that might include Western ideologies, such as neoliberalism and absurdism, as the novel explored. The researcher argues that Camus's *The Plague* explores the ideas of absurdism, which believes that humans exist purposelessly in a chaotic universe. Instead, human beings exist to worship Allah as Islam inspires Muslims, as this project seeks to address.

This research contributes to challenging Western hegemony or orientalism in world literature and promoting Muslim perspectives in the world. In doing so, this project works as the pioneer in pandemic literature by incorporating the Islamic perspectives, which have been likely excluded in pandemic studies and world literature. Thus, this research not only aims to promote Islamic perspectives but also to challenge the ideas of absurdism. This philosophy believes that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for meaningful life creates conflicts between individuality and the universe.

To challenge this idea, the research engages with pandemic studies and Islamic studies to understand the meaning of human existence: to worship Allah instead of meaningless or created conflicts with the universe as absurdism seeks to define. In addition, not many scholars discuss pandemic literature from the Islamic perspective as this project seeks to address. Thus, by investigating the Western pandemic literature, such as Albert Camus' *The Plague*, from the Islamic perspective, this paper contributes to both pandemic studies and Islamic studies when investigating ideas of absurdism, isolation, and medicine by engaging with the Islamic tenets, especially the Quran and Hadiths of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him/PBUH)'s good deeds and words.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Camus previously claimed that "Colonialism is over" (cited in Peyre, 1958, p. 23). This Statement was declared by Camus in 1958 to criticize colonialism in the world, especially his rooted culture, Algeria, which was colonized by French Empire for more than a century (1830-1962). This criticism can also be seen in *The Plague* (1947), which criticizes the Nazi regime for providing the plague or the poison of Nazi ideology in Europe, including to the French Empire, which colonized Algeria, where this novel is set in Aron, the second largest

city in Algeria after the capital city, Algieri.

As this novel is set in colonized Algeria, this project uses pandemic and postcolonial studies to investigate Camus' *The Plague*. This approach can be related to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) as the novel can be read as strategies to question European colonialism, especially French colonialism, which created the wretch of Algerians. Kabel and Phillipson (2021, p. 4) state that "at least 20,000 Algerians and 100 European colons were killed. Freedom from French colonial exploitation (it took fifty years for military control to be imposed after the invasion in 1830) was already a central political change in the 1940s".

Algerian genocide can be linked to people genocide because of Covid-19, as both catastrophes have killed millions worldwide. This genocide seemingly questions the ideas of communism, especially Nazi, which killed millions of Jews in German. Judt (2001, p. 3) believes that *The Plague* can be understood as "Camus's own rueful reflections upon his passage through the Communist Party in Algeria during the 1930s". Arguably, the ideas of genocide and violence in this novel can be read as a way to question how modern society tends to live in hedonism and atheism, as this paper seeks to address. Haber (2019, p. 4) writes that Camus believes in the idea of "alienation had become endemic to the modern person, divested of the comforts of mass religion or faith in institutions, even rationality itself: a world capricious, unjust, even violent. Indeed, *The Plague* challenges both colonialism and communism. However, not many scholars mentioned previously focus on how this novel questions colonialism and communism by using Islamic perspectives, especially the Qur'an and Hadiths, as this project aims to discuss.

In postcolonial studies, Islam and Muslims have often been understood in limited and prejudiced ways in orientalist discourses. This view can be seen through the works of Khabeer (2017), Curtis (2009), and Chan-Malik (2018), who investigate Muslims living in the U.S. Curtis (2009) argues, "Islam is sometimes seen mainly as a political rather than a religious concern, and it is often associated with controversy rather than curiosity" (p. 2). Significantly, Khabeer (2017) claims that "*Muslim Cool* is a study of the relationship between race, religion, and popular culture. It also joins a growing body of work that has begun to explore Islam's relationship to hip hop in the United States" (p. 38). Eventually, Chan-Malik (2018) suggests that living as a Muslim in the US affects the realities of race and gender, which questions the safety for women and people of color.

Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947) is set in the 1940s after World War II when French, Germany, and Japan and their allies had war with US and UK. By setting his novel after World War II, this novel questions global capitalism, which occupies other nations through

its economic and political powers. This statement can be seen through the way Rambert asks Dr. Rieux a question: “So how is your country’s situation these days?” (Camus, 1947, p. 30). Through this question, the omniscient narrator emphasizes how Rambert represented the French Empire and wants to investigate and observe the Islamic nation, Algeria, as the French occupied Algeria for over a century.

Although Algeria achieved its freedom on 5 July 1962, the French Empire was seemingly still eager to control the country through its political and economic power as the journalist wanted to investigate Algerian’s conditions after WW II. However, when the journalist wanted to write about Algeria after the war, the plague haunted Algeria, making the journalist have to stay in Oran for months and even years as he could not live the city to return to Paris. By being caught by the plague, we can learn how the plague can stop the voracity of transnational capitalism, in this case, the French Empire, which represents metropolitanism.

This novel questions metropolitanism and nativism by exploring the ideas of the plague, which has more power and control than metropolitanism and nativism. The journalist lost his power to write about Algeria from his metropolitan perspective as he is surrounded by the plague, which can take his life anytime. Thus, this novel challenges the ideas of metropolitan, nativism, and absurdism by using the plague, the animals, or the rat’s fleas. In this case, the animals have power and can control the voracity of the European Empires in occupying non-European countries.

This research uses Islamic perspectives to question orientalism which tends to represent non-Europeans based on Eurocentrism, regardless of whether Europeans occupied Oran 1940s. Ironically, Islamic perspectives have been seemingly marginalized in Western culture, especially since European colonialism, including the French Empire, colonized Algeria, where Camus’ novel is set. Moreover, the way the orientalist tend to represent postcolonial people in reductionist views has been challenged by Neil Lazarus in *Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011). In doing so, Lazarus (2011) adopts two main approaches: “critique of ideas and categories that have structured the field in its dominant articulations hitherto” and “elaboration and renewal of countervailing ideas and categories” (p. 18). Lazarus’ approaches inspire the researcher to investigate colonized writings, such as Camus’ novel, to contest “the construction that has been placed upon specific concepts, historical development, and bodies of writing by influential scholars in the field” (p. 18). To challenge this dominant construction of the Muslim world, we investigate Camus’s *The Plague*, which is rarely investigated from the Islamic perspectives that this paper seeks to explore.

Albert Camus's *The Plague* discusses the ideas of religion used by the character, Father Paneloux, to question the protagonist's ideologies of absurdism, which believes that the world exists full of uncertainties, including the pandemic, without God's hands. This is also relevant to Tuffuor and Payne (2017)'s analysis in their essay as they argue that "Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest, provides critically important religious perspectives on illness, suffering, death, and dying during the epidemic; his religiosity serves as a foil to Rieux's atheism" (p. 401). Here, Camus's novel uses the ideas of sermons, priests, and religion to question the protagonist's absurdism and atheism. However, this novel mainly used Christianity in questioning the characters' absurdism and hedonism. To challenge this dominant perspective, it is important to apply Islamic principles, such as the Qur'an, hadiths, and exegesis or *tafsir tahlili* to investigate Camus's *The Plague*, which explores the ideas of absurdism, atheism, and materialism.

Similarly, Davis (2011) argues that Camus' novel articulates the ideas of absurdity by extending into "his philosophy, prose, and journalism, was an early avatar of what we might now recognize as the prevailing neo-liberal governmentality" (p. 226). Davis focuses on how Camus' text explores the idea of absurdity by connecting to the root of neoliberalism, which "can be found in the global economic crisis following World War Two" (Peck et al., 2010). Neoliberalism focuses on the individual right as an independent agent who can take profit for his/her fulfillment, so neoliberalism supports market competition, which guarantees a balanced outcome for society. Indeed, it is the mainstream society that can control the market competition.

In this case, the French government might continue its empire through the economic market in its colonized country, Algeria. Foucault (2018) who discusses the dominant government, argues that "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (p. 47). Foucault reminds us to question what the dominant government, in this case, the French regime, set certain rules and standards for marginal people, Algerians, who must resist and challenge this hegemony in Algeria. This research is different from Davis' analysis because this project uses Foucault's neoliberal government from the Islamic perspective, especially how Islam creates Syariah law to manage the relationships between human beings and their God, which is excluded in liberalism that separates between government and religion. This idea will be explored further in the section of the discussion. Some scholars, such as Peters (2020), investigated *The Plague*—though mostly focus on Human resilience. For example, Peter argues that *The Plague* focuses on the ideas of how

humans have the strength and empathies to deal with the catastrophe and “to cope with pain and discomfort and ultimately to contemplate and face death” (p. 1).

## METHOD

This research used close textual analysis in examining literary texts. The primary text used in this research is Albert Camus’s *The Plague* (1947). The secondary texts for this research include all articles discussing the primary text mentioned previously. In examining the corpus, the researcher read the completely primary text several times by focusing on issues on the pandemic, especially the ideas of absurdism, isolation, and medicine. The researcher also compared Albert Camus’s *The Plague* with Islamic tenets, such as the Quran, hadiths, and exegesis, to question the dominant views of Western culture and orientalism in defining certain topics, including pandemic issues and Islam.

In doing so, the researcher engaged with theories in postcolonial studies, Islamic principles, and pandemic studies to contribute to larger debates around pandemic issues and Islamic perspectives. The researcher also investigated pandemic issues in Albert Camus’s *The Plague* and pandemic topics based on Islamic perspectives, especially the Quran, hadiths, and exegesis. This investigation is important to study how Camus’s *The Plague* questions Western dominance in defining certain issues, such as pandemic problems. By comparing pandemic issues in Camus’s novel and the Islamic tenets, Muslim readers and Muslim students will better understand their own culture and values to create and have a meaningful life, especially when they are reading the European literary canon. Thus, Muslim students and readers will not merely accept the Western culture but, importantly, question it by accommodating their Islamic values and traditions.

This paper employed close textual analysis in examining the literary text mentioned previously to examine Albert Camus’s *The Plague* using Islamic perspectives. The secondary texts for this research include many articles discussing Camus’s *The Plague* by engaging with Pandemic studies and Islamic studies with the framework of Postcolonial studies. In examining the data, the researcher read the primary texts several times, focusing on issues on the pandemic, absurdity, and Islamic perspectives. The researcher also engaged with theories in postcolonial and pandemic studies to contribute to larger debates around pandemic literature and orientalism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Pandemic and Absurdism

In Albert Camus's *The Plague*, the Oran people mostly respond to the pandemic by neglecting the existence of God, as they believe that the pandemic emerges as the way it is instead of God's will. Dr. Rieux advises Tarrou, one of his assistants, that "God did not exist, since otherwise there would be no need for priests. Nevertheless, from some observation which followed, Tarrou realized that the old fellow's philosophy was closely involved with the irritation caused by the house-to-house collections in aid of charities, which took place almost incessantly in that part of the town" (Camus, 1947, p. 105). Here, Dr. Rieux's belief that God does not exist represents his atheist perspectives in this novel. However, his assistant, Tarrou, feels confused about either believing the doctor or his traditions, where the elder Orans have continued going to the church to collect some money for charity and the needy, including the victim of the pandemic. In this sense, this novel provides pros and contras of being an atheist as represented by the protagonist and another character, Tarrou, who is still confused about the existence of God.

In line with this, Franco-Paredes (2020) proposes that Camus's novel revisited Covid-19 as he writes "Camus's narrative reveals our contemporaneous familiarity with the concept of how our lives and our sorrows become instantly meaningless in the face of an epidemic that spreads rapidly and unexpectedly, inconveniently interrupting our daily routines" (p. 899). In the novel, Dr. Rieux believes that the pandemic happens without God's hands but merely because of the idea of absurdism or uncertainty in the world. Although the pandemic has interrupted our lives and made them meaningless, Islam sees the pandemic as evaluating ourselves and reminding ourselves of the goal of our lives, which aims to worship God. This can be related to how Islam sees pandemics as a test and punishment for sins and testing for the good of Muslims or believers. In Islam, it is clearly stated in the Quran that God exists as follows: "Allah bears witness that there is no God but He, and (so so) the angels and those possessed of knowledge kept up with injustice (bear witness): there is no God except He. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise" (*Ali 'Imran: 18*)

Indeed, the oneness of Allah can be seen through the proof of His creation of the universe and humankind, the delivery of the Quran, and the explanation through the angels to the Prophet Muhammad. All the angels also stated the oneness of Allah that is delivered and explained to the prophets. Moreover, all the prophets also bear witness to the oneness of Allah, which is supported by knowledge and experiences. Additionally, all the Islamic parsons (*ulama*) also stated the oneness of Allah and explained it. *Ulama* also bears witness to the



oneness of Allah through witnesses supported by proofs and scientific reasons. Indeed, *ulama* have higher dignity as they are placed equally with the angels, who can witness Allah's oneness. Thus, we understand that in Islam, God exists as known as the oneness of Allah, which can be seen through the existence of the universe and its contents, including nature and humankind.

By understanding that God exists and God is oneness, students will question the protagonist's belief that "God did not exist, since otherwise there would be no need for priests" (Camus, 1947, p. 105). In this case, the protagonist claims that Oran does not need priests, as God does not exist, and the pandemic happens the way it is without God's hands. Indeed, the Muslim population dominates Oran or Algerian. However, the narrator never mentions Muslim characters in the novel, although Algeria is a Muslim country. This novel uses orientalist perspectives, which understand the world based on European cultures and religion, Christian perspectives. This is why Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is important and still relevant to current situations to question the dominance of Eurocentrism in describing the Muslim world and the Muslim country, in this case, Algeria.

This novel uses Eurocentric perspective through the description of how Persians congested Christians by using their dirty clothes. The narrator describes when Father Paneloux explains how the Abyssinian Christians have prejudice towards Persians as they claim that: "Persians who in time of plague threw their infected garments on the Christian sanitary workers and loudly called on Heaven to give the plague to these infidels who were trying to avert a pestilence sent by God" (Camus, 1947, p. 196). Here, the Christians have likely bigotry towards Persians by assuming that the Persians have a bad intention to throw their dirty clothes to punish the Christians as they do not believe in God. This kind of prejudice can spread hatred and prejudice between Christians and Persians. Indeed, Muslims are banned from spreading prejudice and bias in Islam, as explained in the Quran and hadiths.

Moreover, the protagonist believes that God does not exist and does not believe in the afterlife or *alam barzah*. The narrator describes when Dr. Reux likely agrees with a profane writer who writes: "A secret of the Church by declaring that purgatory does not exist. He wished to convey that there could be no half measures, there was only the alternative between heaven and hell; you were either saved or damned" (Camus, 1947, p. 195). Here, the protagonist likely rejects the existence of "heaven and hell" (p. 195), but believes that humankind only protected or rejected. The protagonist uses his absurd perspectives by believing there are no fixed measures for humankind, whether they will be punished or rewarded for their deeds and words. Dr. Rieux rejects the existence of God and the afterlife,

claiming that “purgatory could not be hoped for; ... Every sin was deadly, and any indifference criminal. It was all, or it was nothing” (p. 195).

However, in Islam, there is purgatory or believing in alam barzah as a hadith from Bukhari and Muslim explains that a believer, before entering heaven, goes to hell first. How long he stays depends on the sin he has committed during his life on earth. Many other hadiths are similar and the same as the hadith above (Baqi, 2017). From these hadiths and the Quran, we can understand how Islam teaches Muslims that there is a life after the worldly life, so Muslims should live by having a purpose for their hereafter. By comparing Camus’s protagonist, Dr. Rieux, who is an atheist, with an Islamic perspective, which inspires Muslims to believe in God and the hereafter, Muslim students or readers will understand that the pandemic exists because of God’s will or that there is a reason why God send us the pandemic whether to test or to punish us depends on our *iman*. The following section discusses how Oran people face the pandemic compared to how Islam inspires Muslims to deal with the pandemic issues.

### **Pandemic and Isolation**

In the novel, the Oran people are depicted as struggling to face the pandemic as they need to report themselves to the hospital and need to do quarantine once they are congested. The narrator describes Oran’s struggle facing the plague:

The townspeople were advised to practice extreme cleanliness, and any who found fleas on their person was directed to call at the municipal dispensaries. Also, heads of households were ordered promptly to report any fever case diagnosed by their doctors and to permit the isolation of sick members of their families in special wards at the hospital” (Camus, 1947, pp. 49-50).

Indeed, the townspeople are suggested to have a healthy lifestyle, especially often cleaning their houses and themselves. The idea of cleanliness can be seen in our current situation, where we need to always clean our hands by using soaps or hand sanitizers as the virus spreads widely from the COVID-19 virus and the rats’ fleas, as this novel describes. If a person gets infected, he/she needs to report himself to the caregivers and needs to be isolated soon. This idea can also be related to the current situation where many people have to isolate themselves once infected. The Quran also explains what we should do during pandemic times, including when we are infected. One of them is isolation, as the Prophet Muhammad explains below:

“The Prophet *Sallallahu’ alaihi wasallam* said: “Tha’un (plague of infectious diseases) is a warning from Allah *Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala* to test His servants from among mankind. So, when you hear of the disease in a land, do not enter the land. And when the plague is contagious in the land where you are, do not flee from it.” (“Hadith No: 23 Narrated/Authority of Usama Ibn Zayd”)

This hadith explains that when any disease or plague infects Muslims, it is responsible for Muslims to stay in their environments instead of traveling to other places to reduce the spread of the plague. Indeed, this hadith also explains that the plague is a warning from God to remind Muslims of their sins and their bad attitudes to nature and animals. Talking about animals, this novel exemplifies that the animals or the rats have the power to spread disease through their fleas, which makes humans powerless as small animals like fleas can kill them. Thus, this novel reminds humans of their arrogance and selfishness in this world as they tend to manipulate nature and animals by eating and exploiting them according to whatever they like.

This novel not only reminds human beings of their selfishness towards animals but also describes that humans can kill animals as long as they are dangerous, like spreading contagious diseases. The narrator describes when Dr. Rieux explains how to kill the rats that spread their fleas: “The notice outlined the general program that the authorities had drawn up. It included systematic extermination of the rat population by injecting poison gas into the sewers and strict supervision of the water supply” (Camus, 1947, p. 49). Indeed, the Oran government uses water pipes to kill the rats in the water supply. In this sense, this novel suggests that humans can kill and poison animals if their existence is dangerous. Indeed, Islam teaches Muslims to care for and love animals as they deserve to live like human beings. Allah gives human beings rewards if they treat animals tenderly and carefully, as one of the hadith states below:

“Surely Allah will reward all good deeds against all things. If you kill, then kill it in a good way. If you slaughter animals, then slaughter them in a good way. Among them, sharpen your knives, and make the slaughter animals calm.”  
 (“Hadith no: 3170 narrated/authority of Shaddad Bin Aws”).

Indeed, in this hadith, Allah suggests that all humans treat animals in good ways. If they have to kill animals, human beings should also kill them in a very good way, such as starting manslaughter with the name of Allah and sharpening their knives so the animals will not get hurt. However, suppose the animals are disturbing and dangerous for human beings, such as the rats’ fleas, as discussed in this novel. In that case, people can kill them for purposes as killing dangerous animals is permitted in Islam, as hadiths previously explained. Thus, caring for human beings is prioritized over loving animals, especially if the animals are risky for human life.

By comparing how Islam inspires Muslims during the pandemic with how the characters respond to it, we can understand that both Muslims and the characters perform isolation and clean themselves during the pandemic. However, when discussing cleaning, the way Muslims and the characters clean themselves are different, as Muslims have to take ablution every day,

and even five times a day. In comparison, the characters do not have to clean themselves five times as they do not have to perform prayers (*salat*) every day. By comparing the characters in the novel and the way Islam inspires Muslims in the Quran and hadiths, Muslim students can learn *hikmah* from the ablution and praying five times, not only to clean themselves physically but also mentally and spiritually by practicing and praying five times a day to be protected from the pandemic. By having ablution five times a day, hopefully, Muslims can be protected from the pandemic and avoid the stresses as they can talk to God five times a day. Thus, Muslim students can make their lives more meaningful when reading the European canon using Islamic traditions and values.

### **Pandemic, Medicine, and Superstition**

Tuffuor and Payne (2017) investigate Camus's novel by focusing on the importance of the relationships between patients and the patient's caregivers, including nurses and doctors, Dr. Rieux, the omniscient narrator in Camus's novel. They argue that "By addressing the struggle of an ailing community from Rieux's perspective, Camus allows us to feel not only the internal struggles of the patients but also the emotional effects of illness on the patient's caregivers and the collapse and revival of a community" (p. 400). Indeed, it is important to understand the relationship between the patients and the patient-caregiver to develop the collapse of a community because of the bubonic plague. However, suppose we use the Islamic perspectives in investigating Camus's novel. In that case, we also can learn that to develop the collapse of the ailing community. We can take both the patients and the caregivers to return to religion, as faith can heal the emotional distress caused by the bubonic plague.

Moreover, Tuffuor and Payne refer to the importance of religion in their analysis. However, their analysis is based on European-centric, where religion is mainly discussed from the perspective of Christianity. Tuffuor and Payne (2017) argue, "Through the dialogue of several characters, particularly Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux, Camus provides important commentary on the role of caregivers for the seriously ill and the role of religion and spirituality in healing the dying" (p. 400). Tuffuor and Payne argue that the reader can learn the urgent roles of both doctors and priests in curing and healing the pandemic as they can link worldly medicine with spiritual medicine, although Tuffuor and Payne mainly focus on the religion of Christianity, as argued previously.

Additionally, Tuffuor and Payne (2017) also focus on Dr. Rieux's professionalism as they argue that "Dr. Rieux' journey exemplifies the complexities of doctoring in desperate circumstances; he demonstrates important aspects of professionalism, compassionate caring,

and later, emotional burnout” (p. 400). Indeed, the protagonist, Dr. Rieux, is professional in caring for his patients. For example, when his wife is sick, he still provides good service to his patients. He even sends her wife to another hospital where complete medicine and facilities are provided. Sending his wife to another institution represents how the protagonist is not only professional for his patients but also for his family and wife. However, in this novel, professionalism is only measured from worldly perspectives instead of spiritual views, as Islam suggests Muslim’s work based on *ikhlas* (sincere) to achieve God’s ways and rewards.

Moreover, in Camus’s *The Plague*, Oran people are depicted as believing that drinking alcohol is one of the best medicines to cure the bubonic plague. Many characters are drinking “a bottle of good wine” as it is the best choice to protect themselves from the dangers of the rat pandemic. The omniscient narrator describes,

The best protection against infection is a bottle of good wine, which confirmed an already prevalent opinion that alcohol is a safeguard against infectious disease. Every night, toward 2 AM, quite a several drunken men, ejected from the cafes, staggered down the streets, vociferating optimism” (Camus, 1947, p. 72).

From Islamic perspectives, it is forbidden to drink alcohol as it may lead the drinkers to lose their minds and have wrongdoing activities as the Quran states: “O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone alters (to other than Allah), and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful” (*Al-Ma’idah: 90*). In this *surah*, Allah explains that there are four forbidden deeds for Muslims: drinking alcohol, gambling, sacrificing animals for statues, and forecasting, which Arabs often practiced before Islam emerged in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Both the novel and *surah Al-Maidah: 90* discuss issues of drinking alcohol and gambling. In the novel, gambling is discussed to describe how Oran responds to the pandemic. The narrator says, “There lay the real danger; for the energy they devoted to fighting the disease made them all the more liable to it. In short, they were gambling on their luck, and luck is not to be coerced” (Camus, 1947, p. 168). The Oran people live surrounded by the plague. Whenever they go, they will meet the virus spread by the rats through their fleas. They realize that the disease threatens their lives and is at risk of being contagious. Despite being haunted by the plague, they still meet and visit their friends or relatives who have got the disease as they believe that “they were gambling on their luck” (p. 168). Although this novel describes gambling, which is not playing gambling, such as the spending of huge amounts of money, it describes how the Oran people often playfully with their luck, which is also considered

gambling. Instead, in Islam, Muslims are encouraged to take care of themselves and protect others from being contagious by the plague; instead of merely believing in their luck.

Moreover, Muslims are prohibited from doing any superstition, as it is believed in objects instead of believing in God. Bisht (2020) suggests that Camus's novel explores the ideas of superstition as he writes that "Religion is replaced by the unevaluated principles of superstition that include the forecasts of "Nostradamus and St Odilia." It is because mental sublimation acts like a metaphorical light that emerges in the act of discovery of unknown bounds" (p. 3041). In the novel, the narrator describes how the Oran people believe that the medals of St. Roch can protect them from any dangers or disease. The narrator says, "Thus, they were readier to wear prophylactic medals of St. Roch than to go to Mass" (Camus, 1947, p. 192). The Oran people believe in superstition, which uses things or objects to protect themselves rather than praying to God to protect themselves.

*The Plague* explores the ideas of sublimation that made the characters enjoy arts and nature without considering God exists. Bisht argues, "The new scope of imagination allows individuals to adjust better to adversities. This is why one of Camus's characters, Tarrou, suggests that the Saint is also possible without the experience of God. "Can one be a saint without God? That's the problem that only problem. I'm up against today" (Camus, 1947, p. 244). However, Islam teaches Muslims that God is oneness, and superstition is prohibited for Muslims as it is a part of *musyrik* (polytheist), believing in objects rather than God.

The ideas of *musyrik* and superstitions are discussed in the Quran as follows: "Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly gone far astray" (*An-Nisa: 116*). The *surah* explains that God will not forgive the sin of doing the superstition but will forgive sins except the superstition. Here, the repetitions of these statements work to assert to the believers to remind them of avoiding the sin of superstition. Muslims should grow *tauhid* in their hearts, as *tauhid* is the fundamental of religion. By applying Islamic perspectives on superstition, Muslim students and readers will understand that Islam suggests Muslims avoid superstition, which is one of the biggest sins as it is unforgivable.

If Muslims believe in superstition, their hearts or souls will get darker as God states that He will not send His *hidayah* or guidance to *musyrik* who perform superstition as Allah states in *surah An-Nisa: 116*. It is important to use Islamic perspectives when evaluating a European canon to protect Muslim readers from staying in Islamic ways and values and from being pious Muslims. Indeed, learning literature is about not only English and British cultures but also how

to find the meaning of our lives by understanding our own culture and values first, then other cultures, to develop our students' critical thinking. In this case, in Muslim student contexts.

Moreover, to respond to the pandemic, the Oran people believe in superstitions and even kill themselves as they are distressed and desperate for the plague. While in Islam, believing in superstitions is considered a *musyrik* who believes in an object instead of believing in God as the oneness. To cure themselves of the bubonic plague, the Oran people are doing the following things: they drink alcohol to be stronger and to make their bodies warmer so the plague will not affect them. In the Quran, Allah bans Muslims from drinking alcohol or wine as the wine can make Muslims lose their minds, so they can do irrational and illegal activities, such as robbing, stealing, or even killing themselves or others. In the novel, the Oran people are also depicted praying to God, but not many go to mass or the church as some are atheists. While in Islam, Muslims need to go to the mosques to pray and wake up at earlier times, such as at two AM or three AM, to pray *tahajud*, which is a direct call to God asking for anything, including protection from any diseases and dangerous things. However, in this novel, the Oran people are depicted as going to the nightclub and bar early to get drunk and protected from the plague. By applying the Islamic perspectives in Camus's novels, Muslim students and readers understand the importance of going to the mosque and praying *tahajud* to be protected and stronger during the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how Islamic perspectives are applied in Albert Camus's *The Plague*, which explores the struggle of the Oran people in facing the pandemic in Oran, Algeria after the rats spread their dangerous fleas. Indeed, this research has found some Pandemic issues in Camus's *The Plague*, which can be engaged with Islamic Perspectives and values. This paper has investigated how the Oran people in the novel are depicted as struggling to respond to the Pandemic and how these responses relate to Islamic perspectives. In the novel, the Oran people are depicted as atheists who believe in superstitions and are afraid of the plague.

However, in Islam, Muslims believe in God and the oneness of Allah, and they are prohibited from believing in superstitions. The Oran people are also depicted as feeling afraid of the plague and desperate as they are scared of being infected by the rats' fleas. While Islam teaches Muslims to be patient and calm during the pandemic, the plague can be considered a test or a punishment for Muslims. It is considered a punishment if the Muslim has enormous

sins, so this punishment serves to remind Muslims of their sins, and Allah sends the plague to reduce their evils. At the same time, the plagues are also sent as a test from Allah SWT for pious Muslims, whether they are patient or get closer to God during the hard times. By comparing how the Oran people in Camus's novel respond to the novel with how Islam teaches Muslims to face the Pandemic, Muslim students or readers can understand and relate with their Islamic values how to live with the full understanding of Islamic principles so that they can apply it in their daily lives.

After reading this paper, it is suggested for Muslim students or readers apply Islamic perspectives while reading European literary canon to question Orientalism, which tends to dominate world literature when discussing certain issues, in this case, the pandemic issues based on Eurocentrism, instead of accommodating Islamic perspectives regardless Islam is the second-largest religion in this world. To challenge the hegemony of Eurocentrism in defining any knowledge and any issues in this world, it is recommended for young Muslim students and researchers to continue to apply and engage with Islamic perspectives and Islamic studies when evaluating European literature or European canon. Thus, Muslim students and readers can improve their critical thinking by applying their Islamic values in analyzing European texts instead of accepting whatever the Orientalist people acknowledge and define Muslims, including Muslims who live in Oran. Algeria. Indeed, Algeria is one of the most Muslim populations in the world. However, in Camus's novel, the narrator almost fails to mention any Islamic tradition and culture but mainly describes how Oran people are mainly Christians, and most of them go to mass and the Church. Thus, it is important to further research European canon by engaging with the Islamic perspectives and Muslim cultures to challenge this Eurocentrism.

### **Acknowledgment**

The researcher would like to thank the Research Center at Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta for supporting and funding this project.

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