

PORTRAYAL OF IMMIGRANT MUSLIM TEENAGER

AS SEEN IN *HALA* (2019)

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining the Bachelor

Degree in English Literature



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2020

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Tugas Akhir dengan judul : Portrayal of Immigrant Muslim Teenager as seen in Hala (2019) Movie

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saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang munaqasyah untuk memenuhi sebagian syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

Atas perhatian yang diberikan, saya ucapkan terima kasih.

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AS SEEN IN *HALA* (2019)

By Hafid Ansori

ABSTRACT

Many movies and studies about Islam in America portray the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims. One is like how immigrant Muslims are treated by non-Muslims in bad ways like discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. However, there is another perspective which discusses the personal and interpersonal relationship of Muslims themselves. Thus, the researcher perceives that it is important to analyze *Hala* (2019) because it tells how Muslims in America connect to one another. Particularly, the movie examines the internal problems of immigrant Muslim teenager named Hala which the researcher criticizes on how it is portrayed. Using qualitative method, this research applies representation theory by Stuart Hall and *Mise-en-scene* theory by Roy Thompson and Christopher J. Bowen. The researcher finds that Hala represents a cultural Muslim who conforms herself to American environment. It can be concluded that she: (1) is an unobservant Muslim for skipping prayer, masturbating, having sex, being reluctant to Islamic law; (2) is an assimilated immigrant for avoiding arranged marriage, willing to drive car, not dressing traditionally, rarely speaking her native language; and (3) remains praying but diverges from Islamic common precept by unveiling her hijab.

Keywords: *Immigrant Muslim, Teenager, Cultural Muslim, Representation*

PENGGAMBARAN REMAJA MUSLIM IMIGRAN

PADA *HALA* (2019)

Oleh Hafid Ansori

ABSTRAK

Banyak film dan studi tentang Islam di Amerika menggambarkan relasi antara Muslim dan non-Muslim. Misalnya pada bagaimana Muslim imigran diperlakukan dengan tidak baik oleh non-Muslim seperti diskriminasi, marginalisasi, dan pengecualian. Kendati demikian, terdapat perspektif lain yang membahas individu dan antar individu Muslim itu sendiri. Oleh karenanya peneliti merasa penting untuk menguji film *Hala* (2019) karena menyajikan bagaimana Muslim berhubungan satu sama lainnya. Terutamanya film tersebut membahas masalah internal remaja Muslim imigran yang bernama *Hala* yang kemudian peneliti mengupas bagaimana ia digambarkan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini mengaplikasikan teori representasi oleh Stuart Hall dan teori *Mise-en-scene* oleh Roy Thompson dan Christopher J. Bowen. Peneliti menemukan bahwa *Hala* merupakan representasi seorang Muslim budaya yang secara kultural menyesuaikan diri dengan lingkungan Amerika. Ini dilihat dari kesimpulan bahwa *Hala* merupakan: (1) Muslim yang tidak taat karena tidak salat, masturbasi, senggama di luar nikah, enggan pada hukum Islam; (2) imigran yang terasimilasi karena menghindari perjodohan, mau menyetir mobil, tidak berpakaian tradisional, hampir tidak pernah bicara bahasa ibu; dan (3) tetap salat namun menyimpang dari ajaran umum Islam, yaitu dengan melepas hijab.

Kata Kunci: *Muslim Imigran, Remaja, Muslim Budaya, Representasi*

MOTTO

“Consciousness, Growth”

•

“It always seems impossible until it is done”

Nelson Mandela



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DEDICATION

This graduating paper is dedicated to:

My Self, Family, and Readers



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

Firstly, the researcher would like to say thank to Allah SWT who has made him to reach this point. *Shalawat* and *salam* to the prophet Muhammad PBUH who shared his gratitude and universal values to us. Here the researcher would like to extend his big gratitude to people who have given support and inspiration in conducting this research. They are:

1. Rector of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta.
2. Dean of Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences.
3. Head of English Literature Department and Research Advisor, Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S., M.Hum. Congratulation and thank you for taking this responsibility. Also, thank you so much in guiding and giving advice, time, and effort in accompanying the researcher to conduct the research.
4. Former Head of English Literature Department, Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S., M.Hum. Thank you for all guidance, time, and effort for students.
5. Lecturers of English Literature Department, Late Jiah Fauziah, M.Hum., Danial Hidayatullah, S.S., M.Hum., Nisa Syuhda, S.S., M.Hum, Rosiana Rizqy, S.S., M.A, Dr. Witriani, S.S., M.Hum., Fuad Arif Fudiyartanto, S.Pd., M.Hum., M.Ed., Dwi Margo Yuwono, S.Pd., M.Hum., Arif Budiman, S.S., M.A., Bambang Hariyanto, S.S., M.A., Aninda Aji Siwi, S.Pd., M.Pd., and Harsiwi Fajar Sari, S.S., M.A., Thank you for all inspirations and supports.

6. All people of references and data of this research, Minhal Baig as writer and director of *Hala* (2019) movie, Stuart Hall of Representation Theory, Roy Thompson and Christopher J. Bowen of Film Theory, and others who cannot be enumerated, thank you so much.
7. My Parents and Family, and big family of K. Dhofir, thank you very much for all supports and inspirations.
8. My friends of English Literature Department especially chapter 2013 and all other chapters, thanks a lot guys!
9. All my friends of Sanggar Nuun, Teater Eska, Gorong-Gorong Institute, Rimbun Budaya and State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.
10. Friends as well as Gurus of Inspiranusa. Thank you.

Finally, the researcher perceives that this graduating paper is not the perfect one that there must be things which need to be deepened and sharpened. Henceforth, it is always welcomed for readers to give corrections and/or suggestions to improve the study concerned.

Wassalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

Yogyakarta, 5th of September 2020

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

People have complexity in their life. As long as they just view things through their perspective, refuse their surroundings, and do not behave inclusively, then there will always be collisions in themselves. This also happens in religions. Since thousand years ago until now, there have been so many civilizations that bear religions. By those cultures and religions, it is also inevitable to find many rules inside. If these rules are not considered as a transcendental device and are used just on their surface, then it will be crucial because it is not done by awareness. Subsequently, the adherent only considers the religion as a mere ideology, sect which makes them think that their religion is the only truth in the world. This is the basic cause of the collisions in themselves.

Subsequently the collisions raise the complexity of religion adherents. One of its big issues happens on Islam religion whose adherents are called as Muslim. Islam is a syncretic religion that adopts its previous religions like Jews and Christian. Its adherents' complexity has been discussed and absorbed in several studies and literary works. One that is most discussed is about immigrant Muslim issue which explores how immigrant Muslims live in a country whose society largely adheres different religions. However, the issue mostly portrays the external problems and/or the complexity of Muslims which examine how they are treated by non-Muslims. Meanwhile, there are only a few that explore the internal

complexity of being immigrant Muslims. The researcher here thinks that examining this issue is important because the internal relationship is not much discussed as the other one which discusses the external problems of Muslim. Besides that, it also explores more deeply about being an immigrant Muslim, for it opens the whole portrayal of immigrant Muslim. Their mental matters, daily thoughts, and detailed behaviour are significant to be examined. One literary work that raises the topic is *Hala* (2019) movie which carries particular and unique issue of immigrant Muslims especially in America. Released in November 22nd 2019, the movie tells about a Pakistani immigrant teenage girl named Hala who struggles to balance her desire with her familial, cultural, and religious obligations.

Directed and written by Minhal Baig, there are three variables on the movie which the researcher would like to analyze. They are the term *Immigrant Muslim*, *Muslim teenager*, and *Muslim woman*. The first term designates to a Muslim who comes to a country which is not his/her homeland. In this movie, Hala and her Pakistani family are immigrant Muslims who come to Chicago, America. The researcher perceives that this term is the core of the study because being immigrant Muslim in America rises the aforementioned complexity both in the internal and in the external dimension of Muslim. It happens because there is different value and cultural background between the immigrants and the current environment where they live.

The second term is *Muslim teenager*. Oxford dictionary mentions that teenager means as a person who is between 13 and 19 years old

(<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/teenager?q=teenager>). Here Hala is in her last grade of Harold Washington High School in Chicago in which a high school commonly consists of students who are around 15 to 19 years old. The issue of immigrant Muslim above then becomes more specific and unique because it is added by this term. It also becomes an important variable because teenager has particular and certain behaviour and thoughts which influence his/her activities and interactions towards others. Corresponded with binary concept, teenager faces dilemma because their position among society is in the middle between center and margin. Center designates to something (like power) established, fixed, and undeniable while margin designates to something demolished, temporary, and deniable. Thus, teenagers do not have the whole power that makes them occasionally difficult to reveal and express themselves towards others. At the stage of ages, they also begin to question their thoughts, manner, and environment which have been occupied and lived since their childhood. Henceforth, as this case would like to be examined, being a teenager gives more complexity towards the portrayal of Hala as an immigrant Muslim. The last term is *Muslim woman*. It contributes a significant impact to the study because woman has certain role in society. Woman also has different treatment in most religions. It is because most religions in the world adhere patriarchal system that places them to margin position in binary concept.

Hala (2019) movie is a remake of a short movie with the same title released in 2016. Nevertheless, the 2019 movie carries a different angle. The 2016 focuses on the relationship between Hala and Jesse, her boyfriend. Meanwhile, the

2019 emphasizes more on the familial relationship between Hala and her mother Eram. *Hala* (2019) movie stars Geraldine Viswanathan as Hala Masood; Jack Kilmer as Jesse Ross; Gabriel Luna as Mr. Lawrence; Purbi Joshi as Eram Masood; Azad Khan as Zahid Masood; Taylor Blim as Melanie; Anna Chlumsky as Shannon Taylor; Charin Alvarez as Principal; Sam Straley as Evan; Sonny Bhatt as Arash; Ahmed Lucan as Mahmoud; Alka Nayyar as Hina; Raven Whitley as Lucy; Bianca Corral as Sasha; Zayna Dib as Joy; Jimmy Chung as Photographer; and Birgundi Baker as Hannah. *Hala* movie obtains Futurewave Youth Jury Award nominee in Best Feature Film category in Seattle International Film Festival 2019 and Grand Jury Prize nominee in Dramatic category in Sundance Film Festival 2019.

Some reviews mention that the movie explores a young woman's journey of self-discovery and sexual-exploration. To Minhal Baig, Hala is a young woman who copes with the unraveling of her family as she comes into her own. In the movie, Hala at first is depicted as a dad's pride of her intelligence and seems to have distant relationship with her mom at the first scenes. In school, Hala has a crush named Jesse. One day Hala finds her dad having affair with a woman. This is then followed by the end of relationship between Hala and Jesse because her dad caught them dating. Hala's parents then have her an arranged marriage, but Hala runs off that she comes to her teacher to stay the night. This then leads to a problem in school where Hala's parents must overcome. The problem advances to home, for Hala's dad does not come to school. Hala's mom makes a decision to

divorce for what dad has been doing to family. In the end, Hala and her mom settle their problems. Hala prays and decides to put off her hijab in college.

Finally, *Hala* (2019) is reasonably proper to be analyzed because of its particular and different perspective about the complexity of immigrant Muslim life especially as coming of age. The complexity which arises is of course made by certain ways of the film maker. It is how Minhal Baig attempts to communicate and/or represent the portrayal of immigrant Muslim teenager that is attached to Hala. Stuart Hall remarks that there are two systems of representation:

“First, the concepts which are formed in the mind function as a system of mental representation which classifies and organizes the world into meaningful categories. If we have a concept for something, we can say we know its 'meaning' But we cannot communicate this meaning without a second system of representation, a language. Language consists of signs organized into various relationships. But signs can only convey meaning if we possess codes which allow us to translate our concepts into language and vice versa. These codes are crucial for meaning and representation. They do not exist in nature but are the result of social conventions” (1997: 28, 29).

Henceforth, it is very important to know how Minhal Baig represents the immigrant Muslim teenager by her own language through *Hala* (2019) movie. Besides the fact that is inspired by Minhal's life herself, it is then conducted to examine how a Pakistani immigrant Muslim teenager grows, lives, and navigates in her new country, America. This is then what the researcher takes a focus and limits the study.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of study above, the researcher then formulates a research question, that is “How is an immigrant Muslim teenager portrayed in the USA as seen in *Hala* (2019) movie?”

1.3 Objective of Study

The objective of study is to explore and to find out the representation of the immigrant Muslim teenager in the USA in *Hala* (2019) movie.

1.4 Significance of Study

This research is conducted to find out some significances, that are (1) to understand more deeply about representation theory and *Hala* movie and (2) to explore and find out the conclusion concerning the issue within the movie that is the portrayal of immigrant Muslim teenager in *Hala* (2019) movie.

1.5 Literature Review

Since this research analyzes the movie that was released newly a couple of months ago, the researcher can obtain literature reviews that only have the same theory that is representation by Stuart Hall. The first is written by Nurmala Rejeki and entitled *The Representation of Black Consciousness as Seen in Chappie's Movie*. The research focuses on representation of the main character named Chappie as a robot concerning its otherness and inferiority. Using qualitative descriptive method, Nurmala analyzes the movie by applying constructionist approach of Stuart Hall. The research then finds out two constructed meanings that are (1) about Chappie who struggles race freedom as it belongs to Black Consciousness in South Africa and (2) about the independency of Chappie as a

robot. Nurmala also finds out four binaries that are (1) superiority and inferiority, (2) self and other, (3) stereotyping and stereotyped, and (4) created and creation.

The second research is conducted by Wahyu Wijaya and entitled *The Representation of Erin Gruwell in the Freedom Writers Movie*. The research focuses on the representation consisting of the characteristic and created image of the main character Erin Gruwell as a teacher. Its final chapter then concludes that Erin Gruwell is represented as a strong woman and an ideal teacher.

The third comes from Iwan Prabowo which entitles *The Representation of White People in 12 Years a Slave Film*. It explores how white people are represented and constructed in the movie. The conclusion states that white people in the movie are represented in two images which are as villains and heroes. The fourth research is entitled *The Representation of Miranda Priestly in The Devil Wears Prada Movie* and written by Tri Utami Widayati. This research explores superiority in Miranda Priestly, one of the characters of the movie. Using constructionist approach of Stuart Hall, the research then finds out two constructed meanings that are (1) that women cannot share the role of the public and domestic at the same time, and (2) that career woman's life also has a dark side. It is not as it seems like success, glamour, and always being happy.

The next research is written by Retno Dwi Wulandari and entitled *The Representation of 61s in American East Movie (2008)*. It explores how Arabs portray themselves as immigrants in America especially after 9/11 attacks. The research finds out two constructed meanings that the movie maker wants to

present to its spectators. They are (1) that racialization as terrorist by Americans appears because of their Middle Eastern views, and (2) that negative image and stereotype of Muslim should be corrected by Western media. Furthermore, the last literature review is entitled *The Representation Of Friendship Between Muslim And Jewish In Arranged* (2007) which is conducted by Iva Nadhirotun Nafi'ah. Here Iva examines *Arranged* (2007) for it shows problems and conflicts of a friendship between Rochel who is a Jewish woman and Nasira who is a Muslim woman. By using constructionist approach of Stuart Hall's representation, Iva then finds discriminations towards Jewish and Muslim in America. The film maker also portrays them as special characters who are religious believers, who then emerge an intentional meaning that represents the diversity of human life, especially between Israel and Palestine woman.

The similarity of this research to literature reviews above is that it uses the same theory and approach; representation theory by Stuart Hall and constructionist approach. The two last literature reviews have closer similarity to this research because it also discusses Muslim and/or Islam issue. Nevertheless, by the object of this research that is *Hala* (2019) movie, the researcher finds the different particular angle of the issue in the movie. It raises a teenage girl's life complexity as a Pakistani immigrant Muslim in America which includes how she grows and navigates the two different environment and culture where she must live in both. Besides the fact that the issue of how Muslims are treated in negative ways overtime decreases, this is also perceived as an important issue because many movies about Islam or Muslim only tell the external relation between

Muslims and non-Muslims rather than the aforementioned internal relation which tells about things that happen to Muslims one another or even with themselves alone.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

This study uses representation as the main theory. Stuart Hall in his book entitled *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, briefly defines it as a “production of meaning through language (1997: 16).” Production means an act of producing, a process where in this case people use a language to say or to represent anything (whether fictional or real) to other people.

As cited in Cambridge Dictionary the word *represent* means *to show or describe something or someone* and it also means *to be a sign or symbol of something*. For instance, picture of banyan tree simply means banyan tree in actual life, but in the context of Indonesian nationality, banyan tree means *the unity of Indonesia* becoming the third principle of it. This meaning production then can be called as a process where members of culture, in this case Indonesian society, produce and exchange meaning to one another and to other society about banyan tree.

The exchange of meanings that happens among society moves within mass media, particularly the modern ones. In accordance to this research, movie is one of the arenas. There is such a meaning or significance that a script writer and film makers want to deliver to spectators. They are those who, as Hall said, share a group of images, concepts, and ideas so that people would interpret and view the

world in roughly similar ways (1997: 4). It shapes up a portrayal in which they associate or incorporate emotions, ideologies, or concepts on the movie.

There are three approaches that explain how representation of meaning works through language. The first is reflective approach where language is a mirror to reflect meaning of something. The second is intentional approach where meaning is imposed by author and speaker. The last is constructionist approach which this study uses to analyse the movie. This approach remarks that people are social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful, and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others (Hall, 1997: 25).

To support the movie analysis, as secondary theory the researcher also uses *Mise-en-scene* by Roy Thompson and Christopher J. Bowen. It is from their book entitled *Grammar of The Shot Second Edition*. Sikov remarks that to understand how film produces and reflects its meaning is firstly by getting into *Mise-en-scene* concept (2010: 05). The word *Mise-en-scene* derives from France that means *that which has been put into the scene or put on stage*. Abrams also states that *Mise-en-scene* signifies “a director’s overall conception, staging, and directing of a theatrical performance” (2009: 330). *Mise-en-scene* consists of all elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: lighting, settings, props, makeup, costumes, figure behavior, angles, and cinematography (Sikov, 2010: 5). Henceforth, *Hala* (2019) movie is made to share how immigrant Muslim teenager is portrayed and constructed. It is through detail elements which

are included in cinematography and *Mise-en-scene* of the movie that become language to communicate particular issues and/or concepts to spectators.

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

Since the research analyzes social science and/or human behaviour, the researcher uses qualitative method. In a book entitled *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques (Second Revised Edition)*, Kothari remarks that qualitative research analyzes “the various factors which motivate people to behave in a particular manner or which make people like or dislike a particular thing (2004: 3).” Henceforth, it is proper to use the method in finding the portrayal of immigrant Muslim teenager because it examines data from the movie which consist of thoughts and behaviour of Hala herself.

1.7.2 Data Sources

There are two data sources obtained to conduct the research. They are main data and supporting data. The researcher takes the main data from the elements of *Hala* (2019) movie which are visual and textual. Meanwhile, the supporting data are obtained from books, journals, and internet sources relating to the issues discussed.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

The researcher conducts this study in several phases. At first, the researcher reads *Hala* (2019) movie. Reading movie means watching while

concerning the intrinsic elements and issues revealed in the movie. The elements become the research data. Second, the researcher clasifies the data obtained into some variables related to the theory and the study focus.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

After obtaining data of the movie which are clasified into some categories related to the immigrant Muslim issue, the researcher then makes them more detailed and strict due to the study focus. Scenes and dialogues that are sorted to only Hala's character are then analyzed, interpreted based on categories concerning her representation as an immigrant Muslim teenager. The category is concerning the tradition and religious matter that affect her romantic life, decision making, and relationship among her parents. Subsequently, the researcher draws a conclusion of how Hala as an immigrant Muslim teenager is constructed on the movie.

1.8 Paper Organization

This paper is composed of four chapters. The first chapter is introduction to the research. The introduction elaborates background of study, research question, objective of study, significance of study, literature reviews, theoretical approach, method of research, and paper organization. The second chapter discusses the intrinsic elements of *Hala* movie which consist of plot, setting, character and characterization, and theme. The third chapter points out the analysis based on research question. The last chapter is conclusion and/or research findings.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

The researcher concludes the analysis of *Hala* (2019) by applying representation and film as main and supporting theory to obtain constructed meaning of immigrant Muslim teenager named Hala. The finding is that Hala is perceived to represent a cultural Muslim who conforms herself to her environment in Chicago, the USA. It occurs after going through problems, getting along with culturally different peers and attempting to navigate between two different cultures that are Pakistani and the USA. The finding that reveals what Minhal Baig attempts to exchange her meaning is elaborated by the fact that Hala is an assimilated immigrant and unobsevant Muslim. It is analyzed by reading her appearance, perspectives, and actions like preferring sleeveless shirt, unveiling her hijab, masturbating, having a date and sex, but remaining to perform her prayer.

The researcher also perceives that through her movie, Minhal Baig raises the idea that a Muslim has his/her self-consent to perform the religion the way she/he is comfortable, without making bad consequences to others. It is a religious performance with no attachment and compulsion from any culture and society because everyone has a right in how she/he performs, gazes at the religion, and undergoes his/her pure spiritual journey. It is a step to consider the religion as an exquisite spiritual precept and not as instituonalized precept where it needs more and more followers to justify the religion. Furthermore, corresponded with margin-center concept, the researcher also perceives that Hala's assimilation

happens because Hala's confrontation towards religion and culture's oppression places her to have a half power as a teenager and small power as a woman. On the other hand, it is natural when a teenager needs to conduct self-discovery especially when she/he faces two (or more) opposing circumstances. Thus, Hala feels imprisoned, needs to break the boundaries, and needs to discover her true expression in becoming an immigrant Muslim teenager in America.

4.2 Suggestion

Hala (2019) movie has many angles to be analyzed. The next researchers who are willing to take this movie as a research object, they can analyze the social psychology of Hala from how she copes her inner dimension to how she behaves toward her surroundings. *Hala* (2019) movie can also be analyzed on how conservatism which is portrayed in the movie with the same theory that is representation. This conservatism may also be analyzed in reader response theory as the analysis is obtained by the perspectives of certain spectators. The very angle obviously takes focus on Hala's mother Eram who is conservative at most, though she ends up reconciling to what Hala has been doing.

Furthermore, there is another angle which is compressed from the conservatism that is how religion suppresses its adherents. It obviously takes a stand from the definition of religion as a community or institution and not a precept. Radically, the researcher perceives that it can be analyzed by applying post-colonial theory, looking how religion system colonizes its adherents. Another angle which can be analyzed is the binary opposition between Eram and Zahid

who appear and represent more conservative and more modern ones at least in the family towards Hala which then determines Hala's decision.



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