

THE REPRESENTATION OF HIJAB AS SEEN IN NETFLIX'S *MESSIAH*

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Degree in English Literature



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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this thesis is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this thesis. Other writer's opinions or findings included in the thesis are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Atas perhatian Bapak, saya ucapkan terima kasih

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MOTTO

اسْتَفْتِ قَلْبَكَ

“Istafti Qolbaka”

Mintalah fatwa kepada hatimu sendiri



DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my beloved family,
the people who support and trust me,
and the readers.



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Lastly, I realize that this graduating paper is not perfect and needs many corrections. Nevertheless, I hopefully expect that this graduating paper will be helpful for other researchers who are interested in this field.

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Yogyakarta, 24 August 2021

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ABSTRACT

In *Messiah* movie, women in hijab are often represented negatively and related to involvement with terrorism. In this study the researcher focuses on representing the characters of Arab and Muslim women who wear hijab in this *Messiah*. The researcher applies the qualitative method and uses Stuart Hall's Representation theory and *Mise-en-scene* film theory of Ed Sikov to analyze. The results have shown three results, first, the representation of Muslim women in the hijab in this movie is as a victim, a refugee crisis, a scholar, and a civilian; second, the stereotypes of the hijab that consist of hijab in violence and bombing, and the last is discrimination of Muslims.

Keywords: *Messiah, Women, Hijab, Muslim, Representation, Mise-en-scene*

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ABSTRAK

Dalam film *Messiah*, perempuan berhijab sering direpresentasikan secara negatif dan terkait dengan keterlibatan terorisme. Dalam studi ini, peneliti fokus pada representasi karakter wanita Arab dan muslimah yang berhijab dalam film ini. Peneliti menerapkan metode kualitatif dan menggunakan teori Representasi Stuart Hall dan teori film *Mise-en-scene* dari Ed Sikov untuk menganalisis. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan tiga hasil, pertama, representasi perempuan Muslim berhijab dalam film ini adalah sebagai korban, krisis pengungsi, akademisi, dan warga sipil; kedua, stereotip hijab yang terdiri dari hijab dalam kekerasan dan pengeboman, dan terakhir adalah diskriminasi terhadap umat Islam.

Kata kunci: *Messiah*, Perempuan, Hijab, Muslim, Representasi, *Mise-en-scene*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

The breaking of Islamophobia in some parts of the world, caused by terrorism under the name of religion, has been having a huge impact on Muslims worldwide. Hijab, as the part of the Islamic dress worn by most Muslim women, also got the impact. Many discrimination issues about Muslim women who wore hijab have shown that the hijab has been a sensitive attribute related to terrorism. One of the discrimination issues happened to a Muslim woman in St. Paul, Minnesota. She had filed a discrimination complaint against Target after she said a barista at an in-store coffee shop wrote "ISIS", the acronym for the terrorist group of the Islamic State had been written on the cup of her drink order instead of her name. She wore a hijab and a mask when she ordered a beverage on July 1st, 2020, at the Starbucks inside the St. Paul-Midway Target. (www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/08/target-isis-starbucks).

Hijab is an Arabic word that means barrier or partition. According to the Oxford Islamic Studies dictionary, hijab means any partitions that separate two things (e.g., which separate God from creation) usually worn by Muslim women. Morally, it refers to the separation of women from men in public and an expression of female modesty. Hijab is also a requirement to dress modestly and avoid sexual attention by covering everything of a woman's body except the face and hands. (www.oxfordreference.com).

Wearing a hijab by Muslim women is a form of covering *aurat* for a woman. *Aurat* is the body part that is required by Islam to be covered. It is not a kind of attribute for other purposes. However, wearing hijab in some countries could lead to discrimination of terrorism recently. Wearing some attributes related or the same with the specific group could be recognized as members of those groups. Even though the function of hijab is to covering *aurat*, wearing hijab in some countries might be accused and discriminated against as a member or group of terrorists. (www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/08/target-isis-starbucks).

Movie is a kind of literary work which has commonly spread worldwide with various genres. It can be easily accessed by mainstream media through cinema, television, and now, streaming services. Some movies are portraying the actual issues which happen in true life events. Even though a movie is a work of a fiction, the movie sometimes captures the phenomenon, event, and person by mirroring the reality. The researcher finds a serial movie which portrays the situation and condition in some places in the world. The movie mirrored the famous phenomenon of ISIS in the Middle East in the last decade. The movie which captured this phenomenon is *the Messiah* movie (2020).

Messiah movie (2020) is an American thriller streaming television series directed by Michael Petroni. This movie was released by Netflix and has ten episodes in season one. The movie tells us about the mysterious man called Al-Masih or *Messiah*, who first appears in Damascus, Syria, in the terror of ISIL. ISIL

or sometimes referred to ISIS in the movie, represents ISIS in reality that terrorizes and attacks the people for territory expansion. (Episode 1, 02:15 → 02:47). The main character in the movie, Al-Masih or *Messiah*, is described as a man who has many followers worldwide because of his appearance and performs miracles.

The researcher has found many criticisms and controversies about this movie. The criticisms came from the controversy of its narrative as said in metro.co.uk post. After releasing and starting the debut this year, *Messiah* also got criticisms and got banned in some countries because of its narrative controversy. (metro.co.uk/2020/03/27/netflix-cancels-messiah-anti-islamic-controversy-12464000/). The same media source also said that The Royal Film Commission of Jordan called on Netflix to ban the program from airing. In response to the controversy and the claims, Netflix explained that *Messiah* is a work of fiction and it is not based on any characters, figures or religions.

Other criticisms to the movie came from Evelyn Alsultany, Associate Professor at the University of Southern California who said in fromthesquare.org post, Muslims were convinced that the Messiah would turn out to be the anti-Christ, aka Dajjal, further fueling Islamophobia. (www.fromthesquare.org/will-netflixs-messiah-spark-outrage-at-the-portrayal-of-Muslims/). She said that the character of Al-Masih or Messiah who is the main character of this movie is considered to be the character of Al-Masih *Dajjal*, an evil figure in Islamic eschatology.

The criticism not only came from the Muslim viewers, some Christians also criticize this movie, as said in metro.co.uk post, viewers who had seen the trailer

claimed the show would have been anti-Islamic and disrespectful to their beliefs. Some Christians also accused the Messiah of being blasphemous. (<https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/01/is-messiah-anti-islamic-jordan-calls-on-netflix-to-axe-controversial-drama-11985430/>). The criticism also informed that the controversy of this movie did not stop from the viewers with the same ideology, it also came from the viewers with different ideologies.

Controversy of this character in *Mesiah* caused many protests. Over 4,000 people signed up to a petition calling for the show to be banned or face a boycott as a result. (<https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/27/netflix-cancels-messiah-anti-islamic-controversy-12464000/>). This result showed that the controversy of this movie was difficult to be accepted by the viewers. The same source also added an Instagram posted by a cast member of the movie, Wil Traval, who said that Netflix informed the serial would be no season two. Wil was a cast who played the role of Wil Mathers, a JTTF police officer who caught Al-Masih or Messiah.

The researcher finds the discrimination issue of terrorism committed by Muslims in the movie. The terrorism scene is shown by a Syrian boy named Samir. He is portrayed as a victim of the extremist ideology of his Shaikh (a leader) who commands him to bomb a mosque. In this bombing plan, the Shaikh also arranges the Muslim woman in hijab to be Samir's wife in the future. The Muslim woman has come to Samir's room several days before he commits suicide to bombing in a mosque. (Episode 8, 32:00 → 32:50). The involvement of Muslim woman in hijab

in this movie makes the hijab as the attribute worn by the Muslim women gives negative image to the viewers of this movie.

The portrayal of women in hijab in this movie appears in some scenes in this movie. Some scenes of the portrayal of hijab are represented mainly by Arabs Muslim women characters. However, in some scenes, the portrayal of hijab is represented by a Non-Arabs Muslim woman character. The researcher also finds the Non-Arabs and Non-Muslim character who wear hijab in this movie. The hijab in those scenes is portrayed by the character of Eva Geller. She is a CIA officer who investigates Al-Masih or Messiah in the sites of Al-Aqsa Mosque or in the movie mentioned as Temple Mount.

Beside the controversy and criticisms that the researcher mentions above, it needs to know that this movie also represents the good side of Muslim men and women. Some of the good sides are portrayed in this movie. First, their strong religious side can be seen when they are still praying even though in a tough situation in the desert without enough food and water. (Episode 5, 16:50 → 17:45). Second, they are patient when they must struggle in hard conditions. It can be seen when the Muslims are represented as the victims of ISIL. (Episode 1, 02:15 → 02:47). The last, the good side is seen when a Muslim woman is represented as a scholar and a lecturer in a U.S. University.

Finally, from what the researcher explains above, the researcher considers that it is important to analyze this movie due to hijab as represented in *Messiah* (2020) movie by using Stuart Hall's representation theory and film theory as the

secondary theory. The Representation theory is applied in this research due to the meaning in both visual and text. The second theory *Mise-en-scene* helps to understand how the film is produced and reflected through the meaning by the primary feature cinematic representation.

1.2. Problem Statements

Based on the background of study above, the researcher tries to answer a question, How is hijab represented in the *Messiah* (2020) movie through the Arabs and Muslims and Non-Arabs and Non-Muslim women characterizations?

1.3. Objective of Study

This research aims to examine how the hijab is represented in *Messiah* (2020), including the extent to which it represents islamophobia or not. Also, it is to see the sign of hijab is described by the filmmaker.

1.4. Significance of Study

The significance of this research to the development of literature, cultural science, and Islamic knowledge is theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it is to look further about how the hijab is constructed in *Messiah* (2020). Practically this research can help academic readers as an additional source for studying, and enriching Islamic and cultural science knowledge in literature work.

1.5. Literature Review

After doing preliminary reading, the researcher could not find any researches that specifically analyzes the hijab and this movie as the object in UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. However, the researcher reviews other researches that apply the same theory. The first research is a study by Evelyn Alsultany entitled “*Will Netflix’s Messiah spark outrage at the portrayal of Muslims?*”. This research informs about the representation of *Messiah* who would turn out to be the anti-Christ, or in Islamic eschatology as *Dajjal*, further fueling Islamophobia. This study also criticizes how Muslims are represented and emerges from a 100-year history of stereotypical portrayals in the movie. She also criticizes the movie which sympathetically portrays Arabs as victims of ISIS, a refugee crisis at the border of Israel, and US military interventions.

The second research is a study by Evelyn Alsultany entitled “*Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a “Postrace” Era*”. This study mainly informs about the media representation for Arabs and Muslims that are sensitive to negative stereotyping. This stereotype represents in TV drama and news reporting, then she calls it as simplified complex representations. This study is also the compatible source to this research in order to enrich the information about representation of Arabs and Muslims in the media after 9/11.

The third is a graduating paper entitled “*The Representation of Moslem as Seen in Dracula Untold Movie*” by Afdika Rinaldi. The research focuses on how

bad and how good the representation of Muslims through Mehmed and his army. He uses data qualitative method and representation theory by Stuart Hall with a constructionist approach and Film theory as a supporting theory.

The last research is also a graduating paper entitled “*The Representation of Muslim Immigrants in American East Movie (2008)*” by Retno Dwi Wulandari. The research criticizes Hollywood movie production, which assumes that Muslims and Americans cannot live together in peace after 9/11. She uses data qualitative method and representation theory by Stuart Hall and *Mise-en-scene* by Ed Sikov. The results of this research are, first, the racialization of Muslim Immigrants by Americans that see them as terrorists is triggered by their Middle Eastern looks. Second, Western media should be responsible for the negative stereotype created towards the image of Muslims that causes them to be the target of suspicion.

In this research, the researcher wants to analyze the differences in representation from the research above, so the researcher chooses to analyze the representation of the hijab in the *Messiah* movie (2020).

1.6. Theoretical Approach

In this research, the researcher uses representation theory by Stuart Hall to analyze and also film theory *Mise-en-scene* by Ed Sikov as secondary theory. According to Stuart Hall, representation is the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of culture (Sikov, 1997:15). Representation theory helps the researcher to get meaning from the movie based on scene, dialogue, image, and the other elements that are related.

According to Stuart Hall, represent theory has three approaches. There is a reflective approach, intentional approach, and constructionist approach or constructive approach. In the reflective approach, meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world. The Intentional approach is used to get the meaning in representation argues the opposite case. The last, the constructionist approach is construct meaning using representational system-concepts and signs (Hall, 1997: 24-25). The researcher uses the constructionist approach to identify and to analyze characters.

Through the constructionist approach, the meaning is constructed and produced by the result of signifying practice. Stuart Hall states that there are two major variants or models of the constructionist approach. They are the semiotic approach and the discursive approach (Hall, 1997: 15). In this research, the researcher uses the semiotic approach to construct meaning using representational system-concepts and signs.

The researcher also uses the concepts of stereotypes which it relates to the analysis of this research. According to Stuart Hall:

Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person, those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them and fix them without change or development of eternity. So, the point is firstly *stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes differences*.

Secondly, *stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'*. It divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels

everything, which does not fit, which is different. So, another feature of stereotyping is its *practice of 'closure'* and exclusion. Stereotyping in other words is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. Thirdly, *stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power.* (Hall, 1997: 258).

The Film theory *Mise-en-scene* by Ed Sikov also applies in this research as the supporting theory. *Mise-en-scene* is the step to understand how the film is produced and reflected through the meaning. *Mise-en-scene* describes the primary feature cinematic representation. This theory consists of all the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed such as lighting, setting, props, costumes, make up, and figure behavior. In addition, *Mise-en-scene* includes the camera's action and angles and cinematography. (Sikov, 2010: 16).

1.7. Method of Research

1.7.1. Type of Research

The type of research used by the researchers is a qualitative type research. The research uses this method because the researcher wants to analyze the representation of hijab which appears in the *Messiah* movie season one through the Representation Theory and Film Theory.

1.7.2. Data Sources

In this research, the researcher uses movies as an object, so the data sources from the scene of the movie *Messiah* are from season one. It can be from the plots,

dialogues, and events that appear in the movie. The supporting sources are from literature review and some past research using the same theory.

1.7.3. Data Collecting Technique

There are some data collection techniques that the researcher uses. First, the researcher watches all of the episodes of *Messiah* in chapter one carefully. Next, the researcher collects all of the data that is possible to find in the movie. The data consist of the plots, the dialogues, and the picture of scenes. Then the researcher arranges them into lists. The data must relate to the representation of hijab. Second, the researcher searches for other data references such as journal, article, and other references that support the research.

1.7.4. Data Analysis Technique

The researcher analyzes the data by using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Film Theory *Mise-en-scene* by Ed Sikov to find the result of the analysis. First, the researcher watches *Messiah* movie season one from episode one until episode ten. Second, the research collects all of the data that is possible to find in the movie such as the plots, the dialogues, and the picture of scenes. The data sources are from the characterization of Arabs and Muslims who wear hijab and Non-Arabs and Non-Muslims who wear hijab. Then, the researcher arranges them into a list and separates them into specific groups. Last, the researcher searches for other data references such as journal, article, and other references and summed up the research.

1.8 Paper Organization

The research consists of four chapters. Chapter one is Introduction. It consists of background of study, research questions, objectives of study, significances of study, literature review, method of study, theoretical approach, and paper organization. Chapter two consists of character and characterization, setting, and plot. Chapter three discusses the analysis of the representation of hijab through Arabs and Muslims and Non-Arabs and Non-Muslims characters as seen in *Messiah* movie season one by using Representation Theory and Film Theory. The final chapter consists of the conclusion from the analysis and suggestion for future researchers.



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research that has been analyzed in the previous chapters. This research shows the representation of the hijab, which appears through the character and the plot of the *Messiah* movie. The researcher divides the characterization into two categories. The first is the representation through Arab and Muslim characters. Arabs and Muslim women are portrayed as the figures who almost in every scene are wearing hijabs as their identity. From the characterization of Arab and Muslim characters who are wearing hijab, the researcher finds some representations such as Muslim women in hijab as victims, Muslim women in hijab as a refugee crisis, Muslim woman in hijab as a scholar, Muslim women in hijab as civilians, and the stereotypes which belong to Muslim women who wear hijab. The stereotypes of the hijab consist of hijab in violence and bombing, and the discrimination of Muslims.

The representations of hijab through Arabs and Muslims in *Messiah* movie are often identified as negative images rather than positive images. From the representations that the researcher mentions above, most of the representations portray the negative images of Arabs and Muslims. One of the positive images that the researcher could find is the representation of a Muslim woman in hijab as a scholar. She is described as an American Muslim woman who is lecturing in a United States University.

The second is the representation of the hijab through Non-Arabs and Non-Muslims character. The character is represented by Eva Geller. She is one of the main characters of the movie. She is an American agent who wears a hijab for her investigation purpose. At this point, the hijab is represented as a cultural attribute that is well known by the people, especially in Middle East countries. This representation of Non-Arabs and Muslim character wearing hijab shows that hijab is not only Muslim's exclusive attribute. In some Middle East countries, the hijab is a part of the culture used by the people as daily fashion.

4.2. Suggestion

The researcher realizes that this research is still far from perfect for a graduating paper. The researcher has not explained the whole representation theory by Stuart Hall in the *Messiah* movie. The researcher could only use a piece of representation theory to analyze the representation of hijab in the *Messiah* movie. Therefore, the researcher expects some suggestions and feedback from the readers to improve the quality of this representation research. The researcher also suggests that the next researcher who wants to analyze the *Messiah* movie as the object of research to find another representation by using Stuart Hall's representation theory.

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