

**The Representation of Muslims and Terrorism as Seen in
Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007)**

A GRADUATING PAPER

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Degree in English Literature



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Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

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MOTTO

The Devil works hard, but *Nurlisna* works harder.



DEDICATION

With love, to the people I treasure the most;

My mother, my father, and my brother.

I am sorry that the world could not keep you safe.



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The Representation of Muslims and terrorism as seen in Peter Berg's *The*

***Kingdom* (2007)**

By: Nurlisna Amalia Gempita

ABSTRACT

Many Hollywood movies have represented Islam and Muslims in the wrong way, such as only the terrorism issues are selected, a conflict or negative discourses are being highlights, how observations are framed unfairly, and how religious symbols are selected for bad representation. One of a Hollywood movie that tell about Muslims and terrorism is *The Kingdom*. This movie was produced in 2007 and directed by Peter Berg. The Muslim world gets a lot more attention from the world than it used to. Through this movie, the conflict and political issues were faced by the East were shown as is. The objective of this research is to find out how the Muslims and terrorisms act are represented in *The Kingdom* (2007). The theory that the researcher use to analyze this movie is the Representation theory by Stuart Hall and a Movie Theory by Amy Villarejo. The result of the research is that in *The Kingdom* (2007) Muslims are depicted as bad people in Western media after the 9/11 attacks. In this movie, Muslims in Saudi Arabia are represented through negative stereotypes such as dependent, notorious spenders, conservative, and ruthless Muslim terrorists. However, Peter Berg also represented the Muslims better in this movie, such as religious and good Muslims to the positive representative of Muslims where these points are critical but very rare to find in Hollywood movies.

Keywords: *Representation, Hollywood, Muslim, Terrorism, Peter Berg*

The Representation of Muslims and terrorism as seen in Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007)

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ABSTRAK

Banyak film Hollywood yang merepresentasikan Islam dan Muslim dengan cara yang salah, seperti halnya hanya memilih isu terorisme, menyorot konflik atau wacana negatif, bagaimana observasi dibingkai secara tidak adil, dan memilih simbol agama untuk representasi yang buruk. Salah satu film Hollywood yang menceritakan tentang Muslim dan terorisme adalah *The Kingdom*. Film ini diproduksi pada tahun 2007, dan disutradarai oleh Peter Berg. Dunia Muslim mendapat lebih banyak perhatian dari dunia dibandingkan dengan sebelumnya. Melalui film ini, konflik dan isu politik yang dihadapi Timur Tengah ditampilkan apa adanya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan bagaimana Muslim dan tindakan terorisme direpresentasikan dalam *The Kingdom* (2007). Teori yang digunakan untuk menganalisis adalah teori Representasi oleh Stuart Hall dan Teori Film oleh Amy Villarejo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa di film *The Kingdom* (2007) Muslim digambarkan dengan buruk oleh media barat setelah serangan 9/11. Dalam film ini, Muslim di Arab Saudi digambarkan memiliki stereotip negatif seperti pihak yang bergantung kepada barat, pemboros terkenal, kaum konservatif, dan juga teroris Muslim yang kejam. Namun, Peter Berg juga menggambarkan Muslim dengan representasi yang lebih baik dalam film ini, seperti misalnya bagaimana Muslim adalah orang yang baik dan religius. perwakilan positif dari Muslim dimana poin-poin ini sangat penting namun juga sangat jarang ditemukan di film-film Hollywood.

Kata Kunci: *Representasi, Hollywood, Muslim, Terorisme, Peter Berg*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

After the tragedy of 9/11, Al-Qaeda, an Afghan-based terrorist organization was blamed for the attacks. Subsequently, Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded by US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces (Morris, 2009: 4). Though it has been a long time since the tragedy of 9/11 happened, Islam is viewed as inferior. The 9/11 narrative has offered a huge content for stories from the perspective of hero and villain, or good and evil. The divergent, confused, and antagonistic representations of Islam in the media led to a misinformed public opinion, and as a result, Muslims are also perceived as a threat to the western cultures, norms, and values.

In the post-9/11 era, the media had declared Islam as an ideology of "fundamentalism," "extremism," and "radicalism" (Mesic, 2008, p.1). This perceptions is constituted by the media. By claiming Muslims as terrorists and as threats to western security, western media tries to justify their invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, which were declared as "War on Terror." Acts of terrorism have been associate with Islam and Muslims since the 21st Century. There are the bombings of September 2001 in the United States, March 2004 in Madrid, and July 2005 in London (Karim, 2003, p.153).

Though there has been a series of terrorist attacks throughout the world, particularly the Muslim countries have been suffering. It appears that several victims of these terrorist attacks are Muslims, but Islam and Muslims are perceived as a danger and threat by the West.

One of the Hollywood movie that tells about Muslims and terrorism is *The Kingdom* (2007). directed by Peter berg, *The Kingdom* movie is loosely based on an actual event written on the memoir *My F.B.I.* by former bureau Louis Freech, which tells about the F.B.I.'s investigation of the bombing accident in 1996 at Khobar tower, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Jack Shaheen in his book found that the vast majority of Arab characters in 900 American films were depicted to be a racist characters. The image of common everyday life and ordinary Muslims in their countries are almost non-existent or distorted in the Western media (2001, p.8). A negative representation are so dangerous because it enables the invasion of countries, enables hate crimes, and enables discriminatory and racist laws being passed through movies. Muslims were either invisible or villainized.

Having the theme of struggle and cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. F.B.I. special agents, this movie is showing the conflicts and political issues which are faced by the East are shown as is. Along with the issues of mainstream stereotypes towards Muslims, and terrorism represented in a Hollywood movie, *The Kingdom* (2007) also brought up the issues that had happened since a long time ago in-between the Muslims society itself; among the Arab countries, the conflict between the Royal Saudi and radical Islamic sect, and how the U.S. interference on their political issues.

The Kingdom begins by showing general information about the summary of the last Century of the U.S. and Saudi diplomatic's relations. The scene started with a sudden bombing attack on an American housing compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where American oil company employees and their families live. The Saudi police could not have identify any of the suspicious terrorists on the attack; meanwhile, the U.S. wants to solve the case as quickly as possible. After a long and severe negotiation, Saudi Arabia finally allowed the U.S. to send a small team of four F.B.I. special agents, Fleury, Mayes, Skyes, and Leavitt, into Riyadh to help the Saudi police solve the case. The U.S. team must follow instructions from their Saudi contact, Al-Ghazi, and Haytham. The movie continues with the journey of the small U.S. team; Fleury, Mayes, Skyes, and Leavitt, investigating the actual scene of the bombing attack. They finally get along and even make a good friendship with Al-Ghazi and Haytham, the Muslim characters in the movie, which have the same rage and goal to catch the terrorist behind the bombing tragedy.

A researcher named Dimas Setiawan also used *The Kingdom* (2007) as his object in his research. His research concluded that the movie carries some patterns of Orientalism where the strong and superior F.B.I. represents the West; meanwhile, the oriental side represented by the Saudi has many conflicts and weaknesses. According to Setiawan's point of view, *The Kingdom* (2007) shows that The West is more superior against The East that is inferior (2019, p.62).

Many Hollywood movies have represented Islam and Muslims incorrectly and only the terrorisms issues are selected to highlight the conflict or negative

discourses and to know how observations framed unfairly, and religious symbols are selected for bad representation. According to Witriani, what is shown through a movie is not real, but those are someone's version of it. A movie tells a story from the perspective of its narrator or a team behind the scene, and each part has their interpretation of the images, sounds, or words that is presented. She also said that as something that is often perceived as a mass culture, the audience's pleasure is the dominant consideration in a movie (2016, p.16).

In an interview with Jason Holt in 2012, Peter Berg said that his father is a Jewish. As a non-Muslim and an American movie director, Peter Berg's point of view in *The Kingdom* is quite a different and unique way to define the Muslim's main character. This movie has many interesting points and aspects to be identified specifically, such as how this movie portrayed the friendship and the team works between Saudi police and the F.B.I. team, and also the tolerance between religions in this movie that the researcher found to be interesting.

It is interesting to identify the topic of Muslims and terrorism because the Muslim world seems to get a lot more attention than it used to. In this research, the researcher believes that this research deserves to be done to find out if the representation of Muslims and terrorism in *The Kingdom* (2007) is fair enough to be shown in a movie, or it is just the same as the negative representation of Muslims in a Hollywood movies. The researcher is going to identify how Muslims and terrorisms were represented in Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007), by applying the representation theory proposed by Stuart Hall, and a movie theory by Amy Villarejo.

1.2 Research Question

Is the representation of Muslims and terrorism in *The Kingdom* (2007) fair enough to be shown in a movie?

1.3 Objective of Study

The objective study of this research is to find out the way Muslims, and terrorism act represented in *The Kingdom* (2007) by using the approach of representation and movie theory.

1.4 Significance of Study

This research is conducted significantly. The first is to make the researcher understand about the movie. The second is to find out the portrayal of conflict and political issues faced by Saudi Arabia through the representation of Muslims and terrorism in a Hollywood movie, *The Kingdom* (2007). The third is to be one of the references for those who want to analyze some cases using the approach of representation theory.

1.5 Literature Reviews

The researcher finds some thesis, journals, and articles inspiring and enriching the researcher source for writing this research that used the same object: Peter Berg's movie, *The Kingdom* (2007), through the internet and libraries.

The first is a graduating paper entitled "Western Superiority Against East as seen in *The Kingdom* movie (2007)" written by Dimas Setiawan (2019) from Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga. The graduation paper is about Western superiority in important aspects against the East in *The Kingdom* (2007). Dimas Setiawan used Orientalism theory by Edward Said, and his thesis is focused on Orientalism patterns such as sociological, political, military, and ideological aspects. The thesis revealed that the movie showed that the West has superiority in many aspects, as the west manages and produces the orient sociologically, military, politically, and ideologically none other to show their superiorities towards the East.

The second is a graduating paper entitled "The Construction of Muslim Terrorism in *The Kingdom* (2007) directed by Peter Berg: A Reception Theory" written by Santoso Agung Budi (2015) from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. This graduation paper focused on the construction of Muslim terrorism based on the reader response from the movie and the reader-response theory for the thesis. The thesis revealed how the cultural reader-response is reflected from *The Kingdom* (2007).

The third is a graduating paper entitled "The Representation of Muslim Immigrants in American *East Movie* (2008)" written by Retno Dwi Wulandari (2019) from Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga. Retno used a representation theory from Stuart Hall. The researcher would also use the same approach, that is the constructionist approach. Retno also uses the concept of stereotypes as a

representational practice. This graduation paper focused on analyzing the representation of Muslim immigrants who lived in America after the 9/11 attacks.

The fourth is a graduating paper entitled "Representation of Jewish and Muslim Friendship in *Arranged* Movie (2008)" written by Iva Nadhirotun Nafi'ah (2019) from Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga. Iva used a representation theory from Stuart Hall, and the approach used is the constructionist approach. Iva also applies Semiotics to help her in finding the meaning. This graduation paper revealed that Jewish and Muslim are portrayed as special characters as believers in the movie. Iva also discovered a special meaning of Israel and Palestine of human life in diversity.

The last is a journal entitled "Stereotyping of Islam and Muslims in Hollywood Movies: An Analysis of Representation" written by Muhammad Yousaf, Adnan Munawar, and Nauman Sial (2020). The journal explores the representation of various segments of Muslims in Hollywood movies. The journal also tried to find out the image of Islam through the portrayal of Islamic countries in Hollywood movies. The journal uses qualitative content analysis and the technique of purposive sampling for the study. This journal revealed that life in Islamic countries was ugly portrayed, with troubled rather than peaceful society, and the citizens were also shown as uncivilized citizens.

After reviewing some researches above, it can be concluded that this research is different from prior research. The graduation paper with the same object was the one from Dimas Setiawan who focused on the Western superiority in important aspects against the East in *The Kingdom* (2007), and he used the

approach of Orientalism by Edward Said for his graduation paper research, meanwhile in this research, the researcher wants to focus in analyzing about the representation of Muslims and the issue of terrorism itself as shown in *The Kingdom* (2007).

1.6 Theoretical Approach

1.6.1 Representation Theory

Representation is an essential part of how meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves the use of languages, signs, and images that stand for or represent things. (Hall, 1997, p.17). According to du Gay and Hall that representation is something more than a simple or a straightforward process in understanding a culture. (1997, p.21) :

Each of us might understand and interpret the world uniquely and individually. We can communicate because we share broadly the same conceptual maps and thus make sense of or interpret the world in roughly similar ways. We build up a shared culture of meanings and construct a social world that we inhabit together.

Using three approaches presented by Stuart Hall, it can be seen how a sign of representation interpreted through the way working language used, those are reflective approach which meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language's functions as a mirror to reflect the true meaning as what already exists in the world (1997, p.24).

The second is the intentional approach which holds that the speaker or the author intends to create meaning in this world through language. It means that a

meaning of a word must be regarded to the speaker because language is not an exclusive but more as an inclusive universal language (1997, p.25).

The last one is the constructionist approach which recognizes the social character of language, which means that neither things in others nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. In this approach, we should not confuse the material world around us with the symbolic practices and processes of representation, meaning, and language because the meaning does not depend on the material quality of the sign but rather as a symbolic function (1997, p.25).

Representation can be various opinions because the result depends on who and how it is represented, while identity is an absolute thing possessed by every individuals. In this research, the researcher will use the constructionist approach from Stuart Hall's representation theory to analyze how Muslims and terrorism are represented in a Hollywood movie, *The Kingdom* (2007).

1.6.2 Movie Theory

Since this research analyzing data from a movie, the movie theory is important in this research as the pictures taken will help the researcher to find data. The movie theory is also used in the process analyzing the data itself.

Movie theory includes the moving image, dialogue, language, characterization, and many others. As to be more specific, Amy Villarejo, in her book, stated that there are six components of *mise-en-scene*, such as *setting*, lighting, costume and hair, make-up, figure behaviour, and cinematography (2007, p.28-36).

The theory that is used in this research is cinematography. There are two components in cinematography, the first is framing techniques, and the second is camera angles. There are seven types of cinematography factors mentioned by Amy in her book *Movie Studies: The Basics* (2007);

- a. The Extreme Long Shot (E.L.S.), which one can barely distinguish the human figure;
- b. The Long Shot (L.S.), which humans are distinguishable but remain dwarfed by the background;
- c. The Medium Long Shot (M.L.S.), or plan americain, in which the human is framed from the knees up;
- d. The Medium Shot (M.S.), which we move in slightly closer and see the human from waist up;
- e. The Medium Close-Up (MCU), which we are slightly closer and see the human from the chest up;
- f. The Close Up (C.U.), which isolates a portion of a human (the face, most prominently);
- g. The Extreme Close-Up (E.C.U.), which we see a mere portion of the face (an eye, the lips) (2007: 38).

The researcher combines the representation theory and movie theory to analyze how Muslims and terrorism are represented in *The Kingdom* (2007).

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

This research uses the qualitative method. The word qualitative implies emphasizing the qualities of entities and processes on meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005). The researcher uses qualitative method because the data are collected from movie scenes and the dialogue text can not be processed with calculation. Hence, the data is collected using library and literature research.

1.7.2 Data Sources

The researcher uses primary and supporting data for this research. The primary data is collected from a movie directed by Peter Berg, *The Kingdom* (2007) through the scenes and dialogues. The supporting data that are used for this research are from books, journals, articles, and reviews related to the movie and the analysis.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

This research uses observations data collection. In collecting the data, the researcher should first understand the plot of the story in the movie by watching the movie, and then write down the record of the dialogue and the scene that is related with the representation of Muslims and terrorism act in the movie. The collected data contains the dialogue text in the movie, screenshots of the movie

scenes, and variables of the theory. The next thing the researcher will do is analyzing the data with a theoretical approach.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

The researcher uses a Representation Theory by Stuart Hall with the constructionist approach. This approach is the most fulfilling to see construction in a narrative such as a movie. Constructionist approach uses sign and linguistic term on getting meaning, but the meaning does not depend on material quality of the sign, but it depends on its symbolic function. The researcher divided the data into three different variables such as symbols, practices, and discourses in analyzing the movie dialogues. The second theory used in this research is a Movie Theory by Amy Villarejo. The researcher uses the cinematography to analyze the data because there are two components in cinematography. The first is framing techniques, and the second is camera angles.

The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative technique by collecting every single dialogue and scene in the movie that is related with the representation of Muslims and terrorism and by analyzing it with representation and movie theory. The result of the analysis is to find out how the representation of Muslims and terrorism in *The Kingdom* (2007) by analyzing the scene that portrayed the terrorism act, and how Muslims character is characterized. For the last, the researcher concludes the analysis.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research consists of four chapters, and each of them is subdivided into the subsequent part. The first chapter is the introduction of the research that consists of a background of choosing the subject, objective of the study, significances of study, literature review, theoretical approach, research methodology, and paper organization. The second chapter contains intrinsic elements. The third is the data findings and analysis, and the last chapter is the research conclusion.



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

From what have been analyzed in the previous chapter, and based on the problem of this research paper, *The Kingdom* (2007) by Peter Berg has a negative and a positive impression about Muslims and terrorism. The researcher found that the Muslims in this movie has a better representation than any other Hollywood movies because this movie does not only focus on the villainous Muslims as a terrorists, but also to the issues inside the Muslims in Saudi Arabia towards terrorism's act itself. Peter berg's represented the better Muslims in this movie, such as the positive stereotype that represented Muslims as religious and good individuals, Muslims with good characterization, a religious person and a kind person appear in many scenes, which means, except for the terrorist scene, there are more screen time for the good Muslims than the bad Muslims in this movie. Peter Berg does not exaggerate the characterization of the religious and good Muslims. Making the impression of good and religious Muslims in this movie is natural and better conveyed.

The researcher also found that the attacks on September 9/11 tragedy slightly influenced the representation of Muslims and terrorism in this movie. The Attacks on September 11, done by Osama bin Laden, and the attacks on Al Rahmah Compound done by Abu Hamza's group have similarities where the performer is a Muslim terrorist, and the victim is the Americans. Peter Berg is

bringing the same issue from the real life into *The Kingdom* movie. In the real life, Muslims are depicted as bad people in Western media after the 9/11 attacks. The similarities that have been represented in this movie are Muslims in Saudi Arabia are represented through various stereotypes, and those are a negative and a positive Muslims' representation.

The negative stereotypes of Muslims that Peter Berg represented in this movie are: Muslims as dependent, where Saudi Arabia is incapable of making important decision for their own country and they need the help of the U.S. that is shown to be capable and excellent in handling the criminals. Muslims as notorious spenders, where the Royal Family of The Kingdom was represented to have been donating a big amount of money in secret for suspicious purposes, and also the represented of the Prince as a wasteful person living in a luxurious lifestyle. Muslims as ruthless terrorist in the movie such as the Abu Hamza's terrorist group and some other bad tempered Muslims were doing a harmful and barbaric deeds that is violating the human rights.

Another representation in this movie about Muslims is a conservatism. The Muslims in Saudi Arabia are depicted to have living in a conservative social environment, in the scene where Agent Janet had to follow the rules where women have to cover their bodies in public, or when she can not come to the invitation at the Palace because the party is only for men. It was the part of the Islamic tradition that is still be held in Saudi. Peter Berg also shows a scene where a Saudi women wearing a niqab. That can be a representation of Muslims women in a good way, but unfortunately Peter Berg gave no further description or

explanation about the scene might have the wrong impression about conservative Muslims in Saudi Arabia in a bad way. Aside from the entertaining purposes, *The Kingdom* (2007) does not represent Muslims and terrorism with only a bad representative, but also the positive ones where these points are very important, but it is very rare to find in Hollywood movies.

4.2 Suggestion

The Kingdom (2007) is a Hollywood movie that takes place in Saudi Arabia. The movie is about terrorist acts, indirectly showing the superiority of the West towards the East. The researcher has been analyzing how Muslims, and terrorism is represented in the movie. The researcher also got the obstacle in the friendship between Al Ghazi and the F.B.I. team. Moreover, the researcher who will choose *The Kingdom* (2007) by Peter Berg as their objects can apply Representation theory to analyze the friendship between the West and the East in this movie. Another suggestion is to apply Occidentalism to analyze the West images from the East and Muslim world.

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