

THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS IN *MIDNIGHT*
MASS MINISERIES (2021)

Graduating Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Department



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Tugas Akhir dengan judul : The Representation of Muslims in *Midnight Mass* Series (2021)

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Atas perhatian Bapak Dekan, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

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ABSTRACT

Despite the relative accuracy in the depiction of Muslims in the drama-horror miniseries *Midnight Mass* (2021), it is still lacking in some aspects that detract from its relatively respectful depictions of Muslims. Thus, the researcher aimed to discover how the miniseries depicts and constructs Muslims. Therefore, the researcher utilizes the qualitative descriptive method and constructionist approach in the theory of representation by Stuart Hall to better understand how the miniseries represent and construct the Muslim main characters. The researchers found that the miniseries depicted Muslims in an accurate and respectful way and genuinely tried to create a relatable, positive and respectful depiction of Muslims in America. The researcher also finds that in trying to depict Muslims in a positive light by projecting western ideals and values on them, the creators of the miniseries intentionally or unintentionally cast their depiction of Muslims in a bad light. The final findings of the researcher are that the miniseries, at the end of the day, wanted to normalize the good depiction of Muslim-Americans so that they would be viewed and recognized and finally accepted as the way Muslims are. Finally, the researcher recommends that this research, if possible, be explored further through the usage of other theories relevant to the depiction of Muslims in *Midnight Mass* (2021).

Keywords: Representation. Muslim. Midnight Mass, Western Values, Normalize



ABSTRACT

Meskipun penggambaran umat Islam dalam drama-horor *Midnight Mass* (2021) relatif baik, masih ada beberapa aspek atau hal yang akurat dalam penggambarannya, sehingga mengurangi penggambaran umat Islam yang positif dalam miniseries tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana *Midnight Mass* (2021) menggambarkan dan mengkonstruksi umat Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan teori representasi Stuart Hall dengan pendekatan konstruksionis, untuk lebih memahami bagaimana miniseries merepresentasikan dan mengkonstruksi tokoh-tokoh utama Muslim yang ada didalam *Midnight Mass* (2021). Peneliti menemukan bahwa Miniseries *Midnight Mass* (2021) mencoba menciptakan gambaran yang relevan, positif, dan autentik mengenai umat Islam di Amerika. Tetapi peneliti juga menemukan ketika pembuat miniseries mencoba menggambarkan umat Islam secara positif dengan menggunakan ide-ide dan nilai-nilai Barat dalam penggambaran umat Islam, mereka secara sengaja atau tidak sengaja memberikan gambaran yang negatif tentang umat Islam. Temuan akhir dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa *Midnight Mass* (2021) ingin menormalisasi gambaran baik tentang Muslim-Amerika, sehingga mereka akan dipandang, diakui dan pada akhirnya diterima sebagai Muslim yang normal dan baik.

Kata Kunci: *Representasi. Muslim. Midnight Mass, Nilai-Nilai Barat, Normalisasi*

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MOTTO

“Live Long, Live Faithfully.”



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise to Allah SWT, the Lord of the universe, who always gives me His blessing and mercy to help me finish my graduating paper. I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals for the people.

1. Prof. Dr.Phil. H. Al Makin, S.Ag., M.A. as the Rector of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
2. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Wildan, M.A. as the Dean of Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
3. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S. M. Hum. As the Head of the English Department. Thank you for your guidance and your endless support Ma'am.
4. I also wish to give immense gratitude and thanks towards Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum, for being my thesis advisor and all the help the esteemed professor has given to reinforced my graduating paper. Thank you sir, for being my thesis advisor and for all that you had given me.
5. Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S., M.Hum. as my academic advisor.
6. For all lectures in English Department, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta: Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari SS., MA, Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S. M. Hum, Dr. Witriani, S.S. M.Hum, Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum, and others. Thank you for your dedication.

7. My dear parents who never give up on me. I am sincerely proud and glad to be your ever-loving son
8. My ever-loving and caring siblings, whom has given me countless advice and help in assisting me on creating this thesis, I thank you and I am forever proud to have ou both as my siblings.
9. My many good friends. Hassan Sholahhudin, Syaiful Rizal, Annas, Majid, and my old best friend, Maulana. Thank you so much for the emotional and spiritual support. I am so blessed to have all of you in my life.



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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Midnight Mass (2021) is a horror-drama miniseries written and directed by the acclaimed filmmaker Mike Flanagan. Mike Flanagan initially teased the miniseries as a novel written by the film's main protagonist on one of his earlier movies, the 2016 film *Hush*. The miniseries itself is a long passion project in the making that was "deeply personal" for Mike Flanagan as the miniseries dealt intimately with Mike Flanagan's upbringing in the Catholic Church and his eventual sobriety and atheism. This project has been in the making since he began his writing, directing, and filmmaking career. Mike Flanagan originally conceived the idea as a novel, then as a film script, and finally as a television series that he unsuccessfully pitched to various production companies (including its eventual distributor, Netflix) in 2014.

Midnight Mass was also awarded numerous nominations and won Best Actor in a Horror Series in the Critics' Super Choice Awards for the actor portraying the pastor Father Paul and was showered with praise for its nuanced, authentic, and accurate positive portrayal of a Muslim character, especially the scene where Sheriff Hassan, the leading Muslim character argues about religious texts in public schools has also been praised as an accurate reading of a Muslim perspective on Jesus ("*Midnight Mass: What Muslim Representation Should Look Like.*" *The Muslim Vibe.*)

Midnight Mass tells the story of the inhabitants of a remote and distant small town of Crockett Island, populated mainly by fishermen and their

families for generations. However the island and its community are slowly declining in population and income due to a massive oil spill years ago that killed and poisoned the local sea life, which was the lifeblood for the fishermen of Crockett Island. The main story begins at the whose lives are about to be rocked by strange and mysterious events that are happening at the local St. Patrick Church that coincide with the arrival of a young, new, and mysterious priest calling himself Father Paul, set to replace the local aging, dementia-ridden pastor, Monsignor Pruitt, who is currently being treated in the mainland after undergoing pilgrimage in the Holy Land.

Eventually, disappearances, strange omens, and stranger events rocked the tiny island of Crockett, accompanied by a sudden religious revival amongst the dwindling catholic community caused by the miraculous recovery of a devout paralyzed girl. As the dwindling parish of Crockett bloomed, the local Muslim sheriff, Hassan, and his son, Ali, were caught in the middle of this massive religious revival, with Ali beginning to be interested in the “miracle of St. Patrick Church” that revitalized the faith of the residents.

Ultimately, it reveals that the true source of Crockett's many strange omens, disturbances, and disappearances is an ancient, winged-vampiric creature. This creature was brought to Crockett by Father Paul, who reveals that he is Monsignor Pruitt, who reverted to his younger self after drinking the creature’s blood. Father Paul/Monsignor found the creature while being lost in the desert of Syria, in a long-forgotten ruin during a sandstorm. There, Father Paul/Monsignor, in his dementia-ridden haze, dubbed the creature an

“angel” after he was attacked and forced to drink its blood. Father Paul/Monsignor believes he must spread this “divine blood” to the world, starting with Crockett and revealing that it was the blood that cures the paralyzed girl of her condition and that the churchgoers have been unknowingly drinking the creature’s blood on every Sunday Mass. Father Paul/Monsignor then urges the churchgoers to commit suicide to finalize the transformation into becoming one of the chosen and to introduce the world to new salvation.

Fortunately, the plot of Father Paul/Monsignor and those who shared his dream of spreading the “gift of the blood” to the mainland was thwarted. The combined efforts of the remaining survivors, including Sheriff Hassan and his son, managed to stop the diseased, contagious cursed blood from ever spreading beyond the island and made sure that Crockett remained its only victim by burning any means of escape and viable shelter to force the vampiric undead islanders to be burned by the rays of the coming dawn.

The film showcases a nuanced and respectful depiction of Christianity, Islam, and the concept of religion. Despite the negative depictions of religion, the miniseries celebrate religion. It shows that most religious folks are just good people who embody the core tenets of the religion they embraced. The film shows the lives of the good people of Crockett Island, how they live, how they pray, and generally shows the religious folk of the island as usual, god-fearing and god-loving people. Most of them do not want any trouble nor create trouble, which makes the

miniseries climax so tragic and bittersweet for the many people of Crockett Island.

The Miniseries, as explained before, is also unique in its depiction and deep understanding of Islamic culture, customs, traditions, and lore, which is represented by the prominent Muslim character Sheriff Hassan and his son Ali, whose depiction in the miniseries is praised for its authenticity, accuracy, and respectfulness to the Islamic religion, as well as possessing a surprisingly in-depth knowledge of many Islamic beliefs commonly held by many Muslims. The miniseries is also praised for not portraying the main Muslim characters as caricatures, stereotypes, or just background underdeveloped side characters who exist in other media to mock, satirize, and appear “inclusive” and “diverse” but ultimately not at all important.

The miniseries provides a fresh perspective on Muslim Americans, particularly those born in the United States, through the character of Hassan, a former NYPD officer now serving as a sheriff on the island predominantly inhabited by non-Muslims. Hassan's patriotic nature and desire for justice, similar to any other American, are evident. However, the aftermath 9/11 has led to unjust suspicion, distrust, and even hatred toward Muslims of all nationalities, ethnicities, and beliefs. This unfortunate reality is especially pronounced for native Muslim Americans like Sheriff Hasan, who were as patriotic as any other fellow Americans but found themselves shunned by the government and distrusted by their fellow countrymen due to irrational fear and contempt.

Islamophobia is the fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, particularly when perceived as a geopolitical force or a source of terrorism (Dictionary, n.d.). This act of Islamophobia is prominently illustrated in the miniseries. A pivotal scene depicts Sheriff Hasan explaining his decision to move to a remote island, tired of facing constant distrust, anxiety, and hindrance solely because of his Muslim identity. Despite sharing the same anger and vengeance for the 9/11 tragedy as any other patriotic American, Hassan finds himself undeservedly subjected to fear, suspicion, and even hatred despite being a dedicated police officer.

The miniseries showcases instances of Islamophobia arising not only as a response to the actions of Muslims but also as a product of deep-seated prejudice held by some non-Muslim individuals (Gallup, 2023). Muslims are unjustly targeted and distrusted, even when not engaging in harmful or inappropriate behavior (Parfitt, T., & Egorova, Y, 2007). This prejudice and distrust towards Muslims, in general, intensified significantly after 9/11 when the actions of a few led to the unfounded belief that all Muslims were associated with terrorism (Mekouar, D, 2021). Consequently, the media, particularly Hollywood, perpetuated a skewed and negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam. Movies like *Unthinkable*, *X-Files*, *True Lies*, and others often depicted Muslims as militant, extremist, and violent antagonists (Mineo, L, 2021).

Midnight Mass (2021) emerges as part of a new wave of films that aim to depict Muslims more accurately, highlighting them as ordinary individuals striving to lead their lives like everyone else. But despite the

creators of the miniseries' commitment to an accurate and respectful depiction of Muslims and their religion, the miniseries still lacks certain aspects. The kind of aspect that is lacking is highlighted most predominantly with Ali, the only son of Sheriff Hassan, the sole police official on the entire island. The depiction of Ali, who is shown to be rebellious, bold, reckless, naïve, and gullible throughout the miniseries, paints a rather negative portrayal of Muslims—showing Muslims, especially Muslims in America, as disobedient, rebellious, and breaking the law to spite their parents, by indulging in illegal substances.

Ali's naivety and gullibility tie in with the Islamophobia depicted in the miniseries as well, highlighted by Ali being interested and enamored by the supposed “miracle” happening at St. Patrick's Church and ignoring and dismissing his father's advice and concerns for the sake of his newfound interest in the church. Utterly ignorant of the true nature of the “miracle,” Ali plunged headlong into slowly becoming brainwashed and subverted by his “friends” and the more Islamophobic church members. This depiction unintentionally showed Muslims being easily brainwashed and indoctrinated by a few simple sermons while not having the intelligence nor the hindsight to figure out that the supposed “miracle” is no miracle at all.

Another was with Sheriff Hassan himself, whose passivity and desire to be as accommodating, understanding, and accepting as possible would unintentionally cause his son's death. Sheriff Hassan's major flaw is his desire to win over the people of Crockett, trying to make them see that not all Muslims, especially Muslim Americans, are terrorists. But in doing so, he

became passive or reluctant to interfere in any local matters without approval from the locals. This act of passivity and reluctance to intervene in regional issues made him hampered in his job as a police officer, unable to enact his duties as Sheriff of Crockett Island and being passive in any major confrontation.

This passivity is most notable during one of the significant scenes/events in the miniseries, as Sheriff Hassan attempts to convince the parents to stop Bev Keane from giving out Bibles in schools. Something prohibited in public schools, such as distributing Bibles or any other holy scripture on school grounds, is illegal. But Sheriff Hassan did not bring it up to defend his argument, nor did he try to reach out to the state government. Instead, he allowed himself to be browbeaten into silence by the likes of Bev Keane, somberly accepting the decision of the parents to continue distributing Bibles in the public school. He was allowing the likes of Bev Keane and some of the more Islamophobic parents to walk all over him, showing Muslims being easily cowed into knowingly accepting something that goes directly against their beliefs.

This passivity, open-mindedness, and accepting nature of Sheriff Hassan would also unintentionally lead his son to fall to the whims of the Islamophobic members of the church, despite his disapproval and disappointment, which highlighted his passivity in allowing Ali to go to the church. Sheriff Hassan's open-minded and accepting nature would become his undoing, as Ali would become increasingly brainwashed, indoctrinated, and subverted to the new kind of Christianity preached in the church,

eventually leading to the death of himself and his son and the destruction of the entire Island. Despite the miniseries' desire to portray Muslims more positively, it still lacks some aspects.

Even the positive traits of the Muslim main characters that should have portrayed them as good people ended up becoming one of the main reasons for their downfall. As shown previously, Sheriff Hassan's passivity and desire to prove the islanders wrong about Muslims being his flaw, and his son, Ali, being resentful and rebellious against his father while being gullible and naïve enough to be tricked into following a rather apparent heretical belief of Christianity. In this paper, the researcher seeks to analyze and explore the portrayal of Muslims and Islamophobia in the miniseries, particularly concerning its two Muslim characters. The researcher examines the depiction of the two main Muslim characters in the miniseries to discover what aspects are lacking or negative in their depiction of Muslims, despite their best efforts to portray them. As well as to use Islamophobia as a supporting concept to help examine how the depiction of Muslims and their lacking or negative portrayal ties to some of the Islamophobic depictions in the miniseries.

1.2 Research Question

1. Why are the Muslims constructed in such a way in the miniseries?

1.3 Objectives Of Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyze the representation of Muslim characters in Midnight Mass and understand how their identities are portrayed in the narrative.
2. To explore the impact of the miniseries' portrayal of Muslims on viewers' perceptions and attitudes.

1.4 Significance of The Study

This study holds several points of significance:

1. **Academic Contribution:** The research adds to the existing knowledge of media representation of Muslims by providing insights into how these themes are depicted in a specific miniseries.
2. **Social Awareness:** By analyzing the portrayal of Muslims in Midnight Mass, the study raises awareness about the impact of media on shaping public attitudes and biases towards marginalized communities.
3. **Cultural Understanding:** The research contributes to a better understanding of how popular media can influence the perception of religious and ethnic groups, facilitating dialogue and promoting cultural sensitivity.

4. Media Critique: This study critically analyses how the miniseries can challenge or perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims.

1.5 Theoretical Approach

This paper primarily uses the representational theory by Stuart Hall, more specifically the constructionist approach of his theory of representation, which, according to Hall, meaning does not come from the object or “things” but from ourselves, from culture, the language systems used by various social actors to *describe* and *give meaning* to the material world, and not the other way around. Of course, signs may also have a material dimension. Representational systems consist of the actual sounds we make with our vocal cords, the images we make on light-sensitive paper with cameras, the marks we make with paint on canvas, and the digital impulses we transmit electronically. Representation is a practice of 'work,' which uses material objects and effects. But the meaning depends not on the material quality of the sign but on its symbolic function. Because a particular sound or word stands for, symbolizes, or represents a concept, it can function in language as a sign and convey meaning- or, as the constructionists say, signify (sign-i-fy). (Hall, 1997, p 12-15)

A simple example of this would be the famous traffic lights example. A traffic light is a machine that produces different colored lights in sequence. The colored lights possessed some “traffic language,” where red means *stop*. Green means go, which is only applicable in the context of traffic, where it is

considered to be universal in its meaning. In contrast, outside of it, it differs significantly and sometimes can be changed without any particular rhyme or reason. For example, in the 'language of electric plugs,' Red meant 'the connection with the positive charge,' but this was arbitrarily and without explanation changed to Brown! But then, for many years, the producers of plugs had to attach a slip of paper telling people that the code or convention had changed; otherwise, they would be kept in the dark. Red and Green work in the language of traffic lights because 'Stop' and 'Go' are the meanings that have been assigned to them in our culture by the code or conventions governing this language, and this code is widely known and almost universally obeyed in our culture and cultures like ours.

According to the constructionist approach to representation, colors and the 'language of traffic lights' work as a signifying or representational system. Because a language of colors consists of more than individual words for different points on the color spectrum, it also depends on how they function about one another- the things governed by grammar and syntax in written or spoken languages, which allow us to express relatively complex ideas. In the language of traffic lights, it is the sequence and position of the colors, as well as the colors themselves, that enable them to carry meaning and thus function as signs.

Representation is the production of meaning through language. In representation, constructionists argue, we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others. In the so-called 'real' world, languages can use signs to symbolize, stand for, or reference

objects, people, and events. But they can also reference imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas that are not in any obvious sense part of our material world. There is no simple relationship of reflection, imitation, or one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world. The world is not accurately or otherwise reflected in the mirror of language. Language does not work like a mirror. Meaning is produced within language, in and through various symbolic systems which. For convenience, we call them 'languages.' The practice produces meaning, the 'work,' of representation. It is constructed through signifying- i.e., meaning-producing –practices.

When applied in media, the constructionist approach must also use the practice of encoding and decoding, which, according to Stuart Hall, is a meaning or message that the filmmaker or content creator intends. The primary 'object' of these practices is meanings and news in the form of sign vehicles of a specific kind organized, like any form of communication or language, through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of a discourse. The apparatuses, relations, and practices of production are thus an issue at a certain moment (the moment of 'production/circulation') in symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of 'language.' In this discursive form, the circulation of the 'product' occurs. The process thus requires, at the production end, its material instruments, its 'means,' and its own sets of social (production) relations, the organization, and the combination of practices within media apparatuses. But it is in the discursive form that the product's circulation and distribution to different audiences (Hall, S, 2006, p 117-118). According to Stuart Hall, movies are not neutral but shaped by the ideologies

of the creators and the dominant culture and consumed within a specific cultural and historical context (2016, p. 61).

But representation must require the usage of *myth*, which, according to Roland Barthes, is a communication system that is a message. This definition allows one to perceive that myth cannot be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form (Barthes, 1957, p 108-109). This *myth* is a symbol so ingrained within the masses, with some not even realizing it. The primary myth that doubled as a significant event within the horror-drama miniseries *Midnight Mass* (2021) is the tragedy of 9/11. Though not explicitly shown, 9/11 was such a traumatic experience for all Americans that it eventually symbolized American courage, unity, and perseverance in the face of such a traumatic event. But it also represented the coming prejudice, discrimination, and racism many Muslim Americans suffered directly in the aftermath of 9/11 (Alfonseca, K, 2021).

This shadow of 9/11 looms over the Muslim main character, a native-born American patriot who loves his country and wants to defend it against Al-Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks. But he was unfortunately shunned by his government, fellow officers, and even the civilians he swore to serve and protect. The shadow cast by the 9/11 attacks would loom over the Muslim main character of Sheriff Hassan and his son. Even after they had left the big city behind them for the remote, distant, small-island town of Crockett, the shadow of 9/11 follows their every step. 9/11 is a symbol of American courage and perseverance in the face of terror while simultaneously being a symbolic rallying cry for Islamophobic hatred by painting all Muslims as

complicit or supportive of the tragedy that is 9/11 (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.).

This paper uses the film theory of *Mise-en-scene* by Ed Sikov as a supporting theory, which is a step in understanding how the film is produced and reflected through the meaning. The theory consists of all elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, such as lighting, setting, props, costumes, makeup, and figure behavior, including the camera's action, angles, and cinematography. All in all, *Mise-en-scene* describes the primary feature of cinematic representation, whether animated or live-action. (Sikov, 2010:16)

As well as utilize Amy Villarejo's Film Studies as another supporting theory. According to Villarejo, cinematography refers to what happens when a camera captures an image of an item. Cinematography is defined by seven camera distances, angles, and movements and employs a framing method to determine what is included or excluded in the camera (2007, p. 36). The film theory used in this research is the cinematography. The cinematography in the film involves various essential components, such as camera, composition, shooting angles, camera movement, line of sight, lighting, color and tone, and special effects. All these components work together to convey stories and emotions to the audience effectively. According to Villarejo, the camera is essential in capturing the scene's visuals by selecting relevant elements and ignoring others through framing (2007, p. 38). Communicating through various shot sizes creates different visual perspectives and levels of intimacy with the characters.

1.6 Literature Review

The first research that corresponds with the researcher's main idea is the thesis entitled "*Western Stereotype Towards Somali Muslim Portraying Islamophobia as Seen in The Black Hawk Down (2001)*" by Evans Ardi Pratama in 2022, a student of the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. *Black Hawk Down* is a war-themed action film directed by British director Ridley Scott. This film shows two groups, namely East and West. The East was represented by Somalia, especially the Aidid's militia, and America represented the West, especially America's Elite Soldiers. America's Elite Soldiers are portrayed as heroes trying to restore the situation in Somalia due to years of civil war that resulted in severe famine.

In contrast, Aidid's militia is portrayed as criminals who wreak havoc in Somalia. They are also displayed as followers of Islam with a cruel, violent, and inhuman nature. They do not hesitate to kill other people, so they must be defeated and conquered because they are dangerous.

These two differences strongly indicate the issue of orientalism. Therefore, this study uses the theory of orientalism by Edward W. Said as the basic theory. The researcher also uses the stereotypes theory further to explore previous theories about stereotypes between East and West. The last film theory is used to understand the meaning behind each frame in this film. This research is qualitative. As a result, the researcher found the issue of orientalism contains a clear depiction of East and West stereotypes. In addition, this film also emphasizes the issue of Islamophobia, in which the

film director intentionally inserts elements related to the Islamic religion in describing Somalia, especially the Aidid militia. They were described as Muslims or followers of Islam who have cruel, violent, and inhuman natures so that they must be defeated and conquered as they are dangerous.

The second research is “*The Representation of Muslims and Terrorism as Seen in Peter Berg's The Kingdom (2007)*.” By Nurlisna Amalia Gempita, a student of the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Hollywood movies have represented Islam and Muslims incorrectly, such as only the terrorism issues are selected, conflict or negative discourses are highlighted, observations are framed unfairly, and religious symbols are selected for lousy representation. One of the Hollywood movies that talk 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 faced by the East were shown as is. The objective of this research is to find out how Muslims and terrorist act is represented in *The Kingdom (2007)*.

The theory the researcher uses to analyze this movie is the Representation theory by Stuart Hall and the 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 described 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.

The third and final research is “*The Representation of Muslims as Seen In Five Minarets in New York (2010).*” By Wibisono Yudhi Kurniawan, a student of the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. His study discusses how Muslims are represented in Five Minarets in New York through the portrayal of the movie's main character, Hadji Gumuz, and other Turkish Muslim characters. The researcher uses Stuart Hall’s Representation Theory to analyze this Muslim representation, particularly the constructionist approach. Moreover, film Theory as supporting theory is also applied in analyzing this movie. This research is qualitative research with descriptive data analysis techniques. The data are obtained from the scripts, dialogues, and scenes in the film related to Muslims. The result of this research shows that the portrayal of Muslims by portraying the main character, Hadji Gumuz, and other Turkish Muslims is both positive and negative. The positive image of Muslims can be seen from their being tolerant. Hadji Gumuz is also represented as a patient, moderate, and religious *Muslim*. Meanwhile, the negative representation of Muslims is shown through the other Turkish Muslims. They are described as terrorists and impostors.

This study differs slightly in scope and scale compared to the previous three studies by placing every major event in a singular place (The Crockett’s Island) with a balanced focus on both being a compelling commentary on religion and a horror narrative that brings faith into the mix. This study also

differs significantly in its portrayal of Muslims, with the other two, *The Kingdom* and *Black Hawk Down*, which generally portray Muslims negatively. The final one shows Muslims in both positive and negative light but ultimately differs significantly due to how the film correlates Islamophobia with the actions of said Muslim antagonist. At the same time, this study researches a film where Muslims are not always the cause of Islamophobia.

Another reason this study differs significantly from the three studies is that it sheds light on the fate and plight of the experiences of the many Muslim Americans alienated not just by their government but also by their fellow Americans, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and superiors. Ultimately, what makes this study of a horror-drama miniseries stand out from the rest of the previous three studies is that it contained a rare, accurate, and respectful representation of not only Muslims, specifically native-born American Muslims, but also an in-depth, respectful, accurate, and deep knowledge of Islamic customs, traditions, and beliefs. But being balanced out by their flaws or negative traits further emphasized that these Muslims, while good people are still human beings with shortcomings, biases, and weaknesses.

And it is these differences from the three studies previously mentioned above. That makes this particular study stand out because despite being a horror-drama miniseries involving vampires of all things, the creators wanted to give an authentic, respectful, balanced, and accurate depiction of Muslim Americans and their religion of Islam. The Muslim-Americans who starred in the miniseries are not background characters, nor are they side

characters or immigrants recently coming to America. They are native-born Muslims, though descended from immigrants; their cultural identity is most resoundingly American.

Unlike the previous three studies, whose researcher's main object of study involves a stereotypical depiction of Muslims or non-American Muslims who came to America and suffered Islamophobic discrimination. This study deals with the tragic fates of many native-born Muslim-Americans, who were patriotic in wanting to defend their country against further attacks by terrorists but, unfortunately, suffered immense distrust, discrimination, prejudice, and racism following the aftermath of 9/11.

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the horror miniseries *Midnight Mass* (2021). The data analyzed in this research comprises words, moments, and scenes from the miniseries containing multiple signs and symbols that depict or represent Muslims. The miniseries is a rich and comprehensive resource, offering various elements that contribute to constructing meaning concerning these themes.

This research employs the constructionist approach of Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation. This approach emphasizes the significance of culture and language in shaping meaning, suggesting that purpose is not inherent in objects or signs but constructed through social practices and language systems.

Within Hall's theory, the semiotic approach plays a crucial role, involving the examination of signs, symbols, and cultural codes associated with them. This study uses the semiotic approach to analyze the diverse signs and symbols employed in the miniseries to represent Islamophobia and Muslims. These signs and symbols encompass visual elements, dialogues, costumes, and other narrative devices that carry meaning and significance related to the portrayal of Islamophobia and Muslim characters

1.7.2 Data Collection

This study's primary data are collected directly from the horror miniseries *Midnight Mass* (2021). The researcher carefully watches all the episodes of the miniseries, paying close attention to its intricate details, dialogues, visual cues, and narrative elements that pertain to the representation of Muslims. By thoroughly immersing in the content, the researcher aims to understand how the miniseries constructs and portrays these themes comprehensively.

During the data collection process, the researcher takes meticulous notes, transcribing relevant dialogues, describing significant scenes, and noting any visual symbols or signs contributing to the depiction of Muslim characters. Each moment that contains multiple signs and symbols related to the research topic is documented.

In addition to the primary data from *Midnight Mass*, secondary data are gathered from other relevant and scholarly sources. This secondary data includes academic journals, articles, book chapters, discussions, and critical

analyses related to the representation of Muslims in media and popular culture. The secondary data provide a broader context and theoretical framework for the study of the miniseries.

To ensure accuracy and reliability, the researcher cross-reference the primary data with the secondary sources, enhancing the validity of the findings. The research aims to strengthen the overall analysis and draw more robust conclusions by triangulating the data from multiple sources.

1.7.3 Data Analysis

The next step is data analysis after gathering and collecting all the data from the primary and secondary sources. The preliminary data, obtained directly from the horror miniseries *Midnight Mass*, can primarily be categorized as Events, which encompass important and specific occurrences, actions, and incidents depicted in the miniseries related to the depiction of Muslims, which can include instances of discrimination, and prejudice, due to its relation to the portrayal of Muslim characters and their experiences within the narrative.

As the researcher began to put the many essential scenes in the miniseries into Events, the researcher further analyzed each event for the usage of symbols. Symbolism focuses on identifying and interpreting visual and symbolic elements used in the miniseries to represent Muslims. This act of representation included analyzing the use of specific colors, religious symbols, camera framing, or cultural artifacts that carry meaning and contribute to representing these themes.

Furthermore, the researcher categorizes the collected data systematically. The primary and secondary data are organized according to specific themes, such as visual representations, dialogues, characterizations, and instances of Islamophobia depicted in the miniseries. This categorization facilitates a more focused and structured data analysis, enabling a comprehensive exploration of how the miniseries constructs meaning around the portrayal of Islamophobia and Muslims.

Next, the researcher dissects and analyses each category deemed most relevant to the research topic. The semiotic approach from Stuart Hall's representation theory is applied during the analysis. This approach involves examining the signs, symbols, and cultural codes associated with the data to understand how meaning is constructed and conveyed.

During the analysis, the researcher closely scrutinizes dialogues, visual cues, character behaviors, and narrative contexts to decipher the underlying messages and implications regarding the depiction of Muslims in the miniseries. The researcher also observes how these signs and symbols interact, coherently representing the themes under study.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher adopts a comprehensive and in-depth approach to understand the complexities and nuances in the miniseries' portrayal of Muslims. The data analysis involves critical thinking and interpretation, aiming to draw meaningful insights and highlight the key findings.

Finally, after thoroughly analyzing the data using the semiotic approach and Stuart Hall's representation theory, the researcher concludes the findings. The conclusions are based on the insights derived from the data analysis, providing a comprehensive and well-supported understanding of how the miniseries construct and represent Muslims.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that consists of the Background of the Study, Research Questions, Objectives of the Study, Significance of the Study, Literature Review, Theoretical Approach, Method of Research, and Paper Organization. The second chapter concerns intrinsic elements such as character, characterization, setting, and plot. The third chapter is the analysis and data discussion, and the fourth chapter is the conclusion and suggestion of the research.

IV. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The researcher, after thorough analysis and dissection of the miniseries content and overall depiction of Muslims, and has concluded that the miniseries overwhelmingly depicted Muslims, specifically Muslim-Americans, in a positive light. Depicting Muslim Americans as usual, everyday people capable of great kindness, understanding, and patience while being reasonable, fair, open-minded, and intelligent, portraying them not as stereotypes, caricatures, barely developed side characters who exist simply for diversity points, nor as mad, frothing at the mouth, suicide bombing zealot, who hates the concept of America and wants to kill any “infidels” that they can find.

Instead, the miniseries do the opposite and show a deep understanding, respectful and refreshingly accurate depiction of Islamic traditions, customs, laws, and ideas. It also indicates Muslim-Americans as the loyal patriots that they are, who are just as affected by the tragic events of 9/11 and were as driven to serve and protect their beloved country as so many Americans affected by the tragedy. Sadly, most Muslim Americans who just want to protect their land against terrorist encroachment were branded by their government as a threat, a potential risk towards national security. As a result, many Muslim Americans were demoted, replaced, or outright fired, suffering discrimination and prejudice from their co-workers. Sheriff Hassan represents the plight of many Muslim-American patriots who their

government and fellow compatriots, unfortunately, shunned based on sharing the same religion as the perpetrators that conducted the attacks on 9/11.

The researcher concludes that the miniseries depicts Muslims in a mostly positive light and that despite the creator's best efforts in making a respectful, accurate and authentic representation of Muslims that is rarer in the western world, they still have several errors and mistakes that can be interpreted as negative depictions of Muslims and their religion of Islam. Although the researcher must say, that for the most part it is genuinely respectful, in-depth, and surprisingly knowledgeable in their depiction of Muslims and Islam. The miniseries wanted to normalize the good depiction of Muslim-Americans, so that they be viewed and recognized and finally accepted as the way Muslims are.

4.2 Suggestion

The researcher has only some suggestions to further the research to enrich the analysis of Muslim representation in the horror miniseries *Midnight Mass (2021)*. The first is a comparative analysis by comparing the representation of Muslims in this miniseries with other Western media made in the post-9/11 world. The second, is an identity analysis by analyzing the way the Muslim main character identified themselves, amongst a close-knit community of non-Muslims as their desires and obligations contests with one another. While the final and third suggestion is a character development analysis that further discuss how the two main Muslim characters are shown to be, and developed to be. The researcher hopes these suggestions would

further enrich the overall analysis of the miniseries in its depiction of Muslim Americans and the Islamophobic treatment they suffered and promote more positive depictions of Muslims and Islam in both popular media and general entertainment.



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