SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE TAQWACORE FILM (2010): SOCIOLOGY OF

LITERATURE

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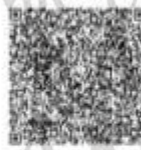
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FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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MOTTO

I want it, I can do it

- **Shella**

In order to write about life, first you must live it.

- **Ernest Hemingway**
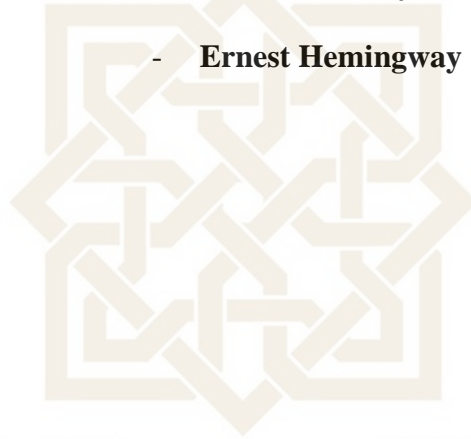
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My family

My family in English Department of UIN Sunan Kalijaga

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ABSTRACT

Social Issues in Film The Taqwacore (2010): Sociology of Literature

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This research is based on literature observations about the influence of religious subcultures in the media and how they influence people's perceptions and self-identification. This book primarily examines the social issues raised in *The Taqwacore* (2010), with a focus on the lively interactions between punk culture and Islam in United States. Using literary sociology by Alan Swingewood, this research compares the real experiences of Muslim punks with their experiences in films, highlighting social and conflictual norms. Qualitative analysis methods are used to examine how character and social interactions interact to explain how Taqwacore Muslims manage their identity and role in a diverse society. Research findings show that The Taqwacore provides an in-depth exploration of topics such as identity, religion, society, and social change, as well as providing a different perspective on the efforts of the Muslim punk community to enhance their identity and improve their social status in the eyes of the general public.

Keywords: social conditions, Muslims, punk, real life, taqwacore, literary sociology, identity, cultural studies.

ABSTRAK

Isu Sosial dalam The Taqwacore (2010) Film: Sosiologi Sastra

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Oleh: Sheylla Heti Sekar Pawestri

Penelitian ini didasarkan pada observasi literatur tentang pengaruh subkultur agama di media dan bagaimana pengaruhnya terhadap persepsi dan identifikasi diri masyarakat. Buku ini terutama mengkaji isu-isu sosial yang diangkat dalam The Taqwacore (2010), dengan fokus pada interaksi yang hidup antara budaya punk dan Islam di Amerika Serikat. Menggunakan sosiologi sastra karya Alan Swingewood, penelitian ini membandingkan pengalaman nyata Muslim punk dengan pengalaman mereka di film, dengan menyoroti norma-norma sosial dan konfliktual. Metode analisis kualitatif digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana karakter dan interaksi sosial berinteraksi untuk menjelaskan bagaimana umat Islam Taqwacore mengelola identitas dan perannya dalam masyarakat yang beragam. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa The Taqwacore memberikan eksplorasi mendalam terhadap topik-topik seperti identitas, agama, masyarakat, dan perubahan sosial, serta memberikan perspektif berbeda mengenai upaya komunitas Muslim punk dalam meningkatkan identitas dan meningkatkan status sosialnya. di mata masyarakat umum.

Kata Kunci: kondisi sosial, umat Islam, punk, kehidupan nyata, taqwacore, sosiologi sastra, identitas, kajian budaya.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Film is part of a literary work which is also a form of literature. According to Renne Wellek and Austin Warren, literature is a social institution which "imitates" nature and the subjective world of humans as it "presents life", and "life" primarily consists of social reality (Wellek & Warren, 1949).Therefore, based on the definition proposed by Wellek and Warren, it can be understood that film can reflect and become a portrayal of human's social life. The plots are possibly inspired by true events experienced by real humans.

Films that contain the aspect of social life in society can focus on sociology, where sociology is a branch of literature that focuses on understanding social dynamics, patterns and structures that shape human life and interactions from various aspects of society. To provide insight into the complex nature of society, sociology often draws on research, theory, and empirical data. It is surprising that the subsequent development of the sociology of knowledge largely consists of criticizing and adapting these two conceptions. As mentioned earlier, Mannheim's formulation of the sociology of knowledge continues to define his frame of reference, especially in English sociology. Therefore, the sociology of knowledge becomes a profitable approach for studying almost every aspect of human thought (Berger & Luckmann, n.d.).

Literature in the social field concentrates on understanding the relationships between individuals and groups and the broader cultural, political, economic, and

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historical contexts in which they function. Sociology of literature is effective evidence for analyzing social movements. For example, there is an interesting real phenomenon after the 9/11 tragedy which is about the many issues related to Islam, one of which is the growing Muslim punk world. In this case, the term "Muslim Punk world" refers to the analysis of how literary works, especially those related to the Muslim Punk movement or subculture, reflect, criticize, or interact with existing social dynamics and religious identities, culture, and social phenomena. "Muslim Punk World" refers to a movement or subculture in which Muslim people are involved in punk culture. This can include music, clothing styles, visual arts, political statements, and so on. It shows how subcultures can form distinct identities by combining cultural, religious, and social aspects.

It is important to understand the cultural, religious, and social contexts that shape the Muslim Punk movement when analyzing literature related to the Muslim Punk world. This approach allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how literature contributes to expression and understanding in the Muslim Punk movement, as well as how these literary works connect social aspects with expressive creativity. One of the striking phenomena in Muslim Punk is reflected on the term "Taqwacore" in the Western region, which was founded by Muslim music lovers. Taqwacore creates a significant identity in the Western region, where Muslims are a minority (Hosman, n.d.).

The emergence of Taqwacore influences United State society and culture, even the Muslim punk label imposes a classification on individuals engaging in Taqwacore with a defined Muslim identity. Label of the Muslim punk functions as

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a reminder of how people view Taqwacore. After the 9/11 tragedy, discrimination, attacks and harassment of Muslim Americans, Arabs, South Asians, and the Middle East have increased and worried Muslims in America (Hosman, n.d.).

Then, there is Knight, a film-maker and novelist writing about the phenomenon of Taqwacore, who stated that he wrote a novel about Taqwacore because he was inspired by real life and the influential experiences of the Islamic punk movement in the United States (Chris, 2010). His novel played an important role in encouraging the growth of the Muslim punk movement in America, and the Taqwacore community can hardly escape influence Knight and his literary works (Bhattacharya, 2011). A tour was held in 2007, during which a number of the band along with Knight traveled through America and Pakistan, then later this tour was immortalized in the 2009 documentary "Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam." The Taqwacore family also inspired two films—a dramatic film based on the book and a documentary by Montreal-based filmmaker, Omar Majeed (*The Taqwacores Breathes Life into Muslim Punk | CBC News*, n.d.). From this, the book entitled "The Taqwacore" (2003) which was written by Knight himself was turned into an adaptation movie with the same title "*The Taqwacore*" in 2010 as he is also a film-maker. This film marked the directorial debut of Eyad Zahra. The film basically centers around the youth and Muslim communities in America, particularly highlighting the Muslim punk rock scene. Eyad Zahra liked the novel, which made him feel that the story in the novel was needed to be shared and highlighted in term of the importance of freedom of expression in religion to many people, which was actually that simple (Chris, 2010).

According to Eyad Zahra's confession in an interview conducted when setting aside the core meaning of punk, it was comparable to asking questions about the norms and values that apply in society, and seriously seeking the highest truth. This is like the purpose of religion, the essence of the film is also to depict Islam in a completely new way (Chris, 2010). According to Eyad Zahra, he made it possible to see Islam from a new perspective and Zahra's interesting punk ideology which tackled social issues with less prejudice (Bhattacharya, 2011). Eyad Zahra also said about the novel The Taqwacore which was a real punk book and a book about Muslims, by unapologetically combining the two worlds, Even Eyad Zahra, who grew up as an American Muslim, felt that this book was the sincerest exploration of American Muslims that he had ever encountered (book, content, etc.) (Hosman, n.d.).

Zahra, the filmmaker of *The Taqwacore* (2010), acquired the rights to the film from Knight following a tour in 2007, and he was in the process of making his second film after owning the rights to the film. Several band members involved in the Taqwacore movement stated that the scenes in social life were always more complex than those depicted in the film Zahra. All this was coupled with an incredible backdrop: a film adaptation of a book detailing the fictional punk rock scene, which then spawned an entire music scene from scratch (Bhattacharya, 2011).

The film by Eyad Zahra, *The Taqwacore* (2010), tells the story of how Yusef meets a group of Muslim punks living in Buffalo, New York. Yusef meets the residents of the house and begins to learn to accept new things well. There is Umar

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who is religious but has tattoos; Jehangir who sees Islam in a different way; Rabeya who wears a burqa but does not carry out religious orders; Ayyub who is drunk but still prays; Fasiq who smokes but reads the Koran, and; Muzzamil who is Muslim but also gay. With the help of these punk Muslims, Yusef is able to discover various things that he did not know before, as shown in the film about social life in minority areas and also the life of punk Muslims.

The concept of the *The Taqwacore* (2010) film provides certainty for many Taqwacore members in real life because they can see themselves reflected in these characters. They identify as punk rockers or "Muslim nonconformists" or even just as individuals who need to embrace Islam in a way that suits their uniqueness. The main idea conveyed in this is that, perhaps, Islam, as a religion or concept, has a wide enough space to not only include but also embrace those who deviate from the mainstream, those who doubt the religion, doubt themselves, and ultimately, choose to determine for themselves the meaning of being a Muslim (Hosman, n.d.).

The Taqwacore band has intense interaction as a community, where each individual in the band knows each other not only as fellow musicians but also as friends. Some Taqwacore bands even have musician members who together support and watch each other's performances. This friendly community thrives on relationships of mutual trust, providing opportunities for its members to express their questions and conflicts regarding Islam and the United States. This belief develops among Taqwacore members who are involved in this community (Hosman, n.d.)

Using Alan Swingewood's theory of sociology of literature which focuses

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on contemporary reflections on the social conditions of Muslim society in the Taqwacore, film the researcher hopes to be able to analyze and present the results of the analysis well and in an orderly manner so that they can be comprehended carefully. The researcher chooses this theory because in the film Taqwacore, there are many social conflicts in people's lives which are depicted well so that they have many unique images of the life of this punk Muslim social community.

1.2 Problem Statements

Based on the background above, the researcher discusses the following question: How do the social conditions of Taqwacore Muslims in the United States relate to The Taqwacore (2010) film?

1.3 Objective of The Study

The objective of the study aims to further explore the social conditions of Taqwacore Muslims in the United States as depicted in the film The Taqwacore (2010) to understand how these conditions are represented in the film and how they relate to the real experiences of Taqwacore Muslims in a larger context from American society.

1.4 Significance of Study

The significant study of this research is to develop Alan Swingewood's literary sociology theory to explore the social conditions illustrated in *The Taqwacore* (2010). By focusing on the social situation reflected through the characters in the film, this research aims to understand the extent to which the cinematic representation reflects the social reality of Taqwacore Muslims in the United States. Furthermore, this research seeks to explain the dynamic interaction

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between media representations and social realities in everyday life, highlighting how although the film may idealize some aspects, it still provides valuable insight into the real lives of its subjects. This analysis not only contributes to academic discussions regarding the sociology of religion and media representation, but also enhances our understanding of complex identities within the Taqwacore Muslim community in the contemporary American context.

1.5 Literature Review

There are several literature references related to this research, such as:

Rukmini graduating paper from Ahmad Dahlan University (2010), this paper uses a sociological approach by Wellek and Waren to Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises focuses on the characteristics, life and moral values of the lost generation.

Satwika Pratidhwani Tathyalindi graduating paper Airlangga University (2015), this paper uses Stuart Hall's theory of representation to analyze Muslim stereotypes in The Taqwacore after the 9/11 tragedy.

Wibisono Ahmad Lukman Hakim graduating paper from Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta (2022), this paper uses representation theory by Stuart Hall to analyze the Reconciliation of Anarchy and Islamic Values in The Taqwacore (2010).

Martha Lusiana Journal from Duta Wacana Christian University (2023) This article uses the sociological theory of literature by Alan Swingewood to analyze Indonesian Social Reflections in the short story "Merdeka" by Putu Wijaya.

Article by Anthony T Fiscella from Spinger Science and Business Media (2012) This article provides an outline of the historical interaction between punk rock and the Muslim world that became Muslim punk.

This research creates novelty by applying Alan Swingewood's literary sociology theory specifically to analyze The Taqwacore (2010), focusing on the way in which the social conditions of Taqwacore Muslims in the United States are reflected in the film. Different from previous research, the aim of this research is to reconcile the gap between cinematic representations and the real experiences of Taqwacore Muslims, as well as provide a different understanding of their social conditions in the context of American society. In doing so, this research provides fresh insights into academic discourse, enriching our understanding of the relationships between media representations, societal perceptions, and the lived realities of marginalized communities within the larger American cultural and social landscape. This research not only builds on existing foundations in previous literature, but also explores areas that have not been widely researched by analyzing the social dynamics and specific identities of Taqwacore Muslims through the prism of sociological literary theory, thereby developing scientific debates about religion, identity, and representation in contemporary media.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

This research analyzes social issues to understand the social conditions reflected in *the Taqwacore* film. Then, the writer uses sociology literature theory as the theoretical approach. The researcher also uses film theory as the supporting theory.

1.6.1 Sociology of Literature Theory

Sociology is considered literature that seeks to restore human relationships with family, politics, religion, society and other topics because it allows it as an aesthetic tool to adapt and change culture (Swingewood, 1987). Swingewood presents three concepts in his approach to literary works, namely; literature as a reflection/reflection of the times, literature seen from the authorship production process, and literature in relation to history. By involving theories and concepts, Alan Swingewood's approach is very useful for understanding the social dynamics faced by the characters as well as the wider social and cultural context. It also helps to understand the social conditions that existed in the era that occurred and can interpret an approach that occurs most often.

According to Swingewood (Sikov, 2010), literary works are sociocultural documents that can be used to see a phenomenon in society at that time. This is what is then termed literary documentation which refers to a reflection of the times. Swingewood places literary works as direct reflections (mirrors) of various aspects of social structure, familial relationships, class conflict, other trends that may emerge, and population composition.

Swingewood argues that the same aims are found in the literature and the main stages of sociology. Sociology is the study of society objectively, feelings and social processes to determine conditions and patterns of work. Literary works also discuss human life, change, and their desire to change. Literary works go beyond mere descriptions of objective scientific analysis that can penetrate social surfaces and even show the lived experiences of individuals in certain groups.

By using the theory of sociology of literature with the concept of reflection of era or time, the researcher understands how the concept of reflection of era is used to analyze conversations or scenes from a film and from real life that existed at the time of the film.

1.6.2 Film Theory

The researcher uses film theory to help find meaning in every film element. This film theory helps the writer understand the data and helps find the data needed in the film to be analyzed. The researcher uses mise-en-scene theory to describe all aspects of the film.

Film studies approach the issues of truth and depiction by starting with a premise and working backward. This premise is that all representations have significance. Mise-en-scene refers to the central aspect of cinematic expression. Mise-en-scene is the first stage in grasping how films create and reflect meaning. Mise-en-scene refers to the expressive totality of what we see in a single cinema picture. Mise-en-scene includes a shot's components in front of the camera: settings, decorations, lighting, costumes, makeup, and figure behavior. It means that the theory includes the gestures and facial expressions of the actors. In addition, directing includes camera and cinematographic actions and angles, which means taking pictures for film. Since everything in the shot image is under the staging title, the definition of the term is confusing, so a shorter description is: Staging is the overall expressive content of the picture. Film studies suggest that everything in a photo has an explicit meaning. By analyzing staging, we see what those meanings might be (Sikov, 2010).

1.7 Methods of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

The type of this research is qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on the search for the meaning of the result of the analysis. The writer collects the data from the library as a reference. Then, the additional sources are from the internet, books, articles, and journals. The current research uses Alan Swingewood's theory of sociology of literature as the leading theory to answer the research problem.

1.7.2 Data Sources

The primary data in the research is the Taqwacore film. The study uses the data from the scenes and dialogues in the Taqwacore film. The secondary data in this research are taken place from sociology books, journals, articles, and websites related to the issue.

1.7.3 Data Collection Methods

The researcher uses two steps in collecting data. First, the researcher uses data from watching the Taqwacore (2010) film and writes the dialogue and scenes. Second, the researcher uses data from journals, books, and the internet to complete the research.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Methods

The researcher does four steps in analyzing the data gathered in collection methods. The first step is to explore based on the scenes and dialogues in the Taqwacore (2010) film. Second, the researcher analyzes the data using Alan Swingewood's theory of sociology of literature. Third, the researcher analyzes the

results. Fourth, the researcher draws conclusion based on the analysis of the results.

1.8 Paper Organization

This paper is composed of four chapters. The first chapter is about the background of this study, the problem statement, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, the literature review, the theoretical approach, the methods of this researcher, and the paper organization. The second chapter describes the intrinsic elements of this movie. The third chapter analyzes the data using Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature theory and film theory. The fourth chapter is the conclusion and the results of the research.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter combines or processes the results of analysis of the social conditions depicted in the film 'The Taqwacore' (2010), as previously discussed in the previous section. This analysis shows that a literary sociology approach can use moral and spiritual values as a framework for understanding film content in more depth. The analysis explains the differences in the depiction of how punk and Islamic communities interact, showing how Taqwacore Muslim individuals, who combine their Muslim identity with the punk subculture, manage their social lives.

4.1 Conclusion

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the film The Taqwacore (2010) is a real depiction of social conditions in the United States which is processed with various views from aspects of religion, freedom, women's rights, social interaction and sexuality. This film also reflects the reality where Muslims in the United States have very diverse beliefs, practices and even identities, expressing themselves widely and freely. It reflects the complexity of identity negotiations within the Taqwacore movement, showing how its members forge friendly relationships that transcend religious boundaries, face discrimination, and explore controversial issues such as sexuality in the context of their unique identities.

This research, using Alan Swingewood's literary sociology theory, provides a new understanding by linking film representations to the reality of Taqwacore Muslim life. This shows how the film reflects and idealizes their social conditions, which in turn enriches academic discussions about the intersection of religion,

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identity, and subculture. This research highlights the importance of media representation in shaping people's perceptions of marginalized communities, as well as supporting a more inclusive and complex depiction of Muslim identity in society.

4.2 Suggestions

Suggestions presented in research on "The Taqwacore" (2010) highlight the complexity of the interaction of social issues, and suggest several future research directions:

1. Use of Diverse Theoretical Approaches: Future research could explore the benefits of applying multiple theoretical perspectives to deepen understanding of how films depict identity, culture, and society.

2. Exploration of Wider Social Themes: Investigation of additional topics such as mental health, gender differences, and the influence of digital media can broaden our insight into the Taqwacore community.

3. Cross-Cultural Analysis: Comparison of the experiences of Taqwacore Muslims in different cultural contexts can help understand the global relevance and local variations of this movement.

4. Study of Musical Influence: Focusing on the music of Taqwacore bands and their lyrics can provide an understanding of how punk music plays a role in expressing religious and social identity.

5. Research on Audience Response: Examining how various audiences interpret the film can reveal its impact on perceptions of the Muslim punk subculture, using methods such as interviews or focus groups.

6. Application of Gender and Queer Theory: Through the use of gender and queer theory, an exploration of the experiences of Muslim women and LGBTQ+ members at Taqwacore can provide new perspectives on empowerment and identity.

By exploring these suggestions, it is hoped that future research can enrich discussions about the intersection of religion, subculture, and media representation, thereby expanding understanding of the complexities of the Taqwacore movement.

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