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Conference Paper

Islam in the Digital Films — Expose the Good Sides of Muslims

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Abstract

Film studies mostly show Islam in negative representation. From streaming film website, we can easily find many films that show Muslims stories. For example, *Children of Heaven, Le Grand Voyage, My Name is Khan,* etc. Those films do not seem to show Muslims as terrorist. They show Muslims life in various cultures and stories. The problem is what good sides of Muslims in the films can counter the negative stereotypes of Muslims in Hollywood images. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, this research exposes the good sides of Muslims in films. There is an Islamic world view in *Children of Heaven.* Some things may seem bad but then turn out to be good in the long run. *My Name is Khan* has a very important message about Islam. That is Islam is a peace and love religion. *Le Grand Voyage* shows a signification generation gap of Muslims. They are secular and devout Muslims. But they can communicate moderately.

Keywords: Islam, digital films, good sides of Muslims

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1. Background

Islam and film studies have become trending research theme in Indonesia for the past several years ([4, 8, 11], etc). More movies representing Islamic symbols become widely available. More Hollywood and film industries deal with issues related to Islam. More Muslim scholars turn their attention to films. Those indications show that there is an expectation of increasing in Islam and film studies [1]. Those researches mostly show Islam in negative conclusion. Terrorists had become to represent Islam in many popular American films [9, 10, 14]. Bad representation of Islam in films is taken for granted in Hollywood films. But if we turn back and watch those films again, we can expose the diversity of Islam based on the setting of the films. There are also Islamic values that are similar to other religions. But, because of Hollywood bad portrayals effects, these values are easily missed in the films we watched in the theatre.

From streaming film website, we can easily find many films that show Muslims story. For example, there are *Children of Heaven, Le Grand Voyage* and *My Name is Khan,* etc. Those films seem not to show Muslims as terrorist. Instead they show Muslim life in

various cultures and stories. What are the good sides of Muslims in the films? Can those good things counter bad stereotypes of Muslims from Hollywood images?

The purpose of this paper is to expose various Islam practices in digital films. By exposing various Islam story in the digital films, we open our perspectives that Islam and practicing Islam are two things that have multiple sides. All religions teach good values. But practicing religion and its followers can be good or bad, right or wrong, depend on the interpretation, setting of history, culture, and other causes.

2. Method

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Since the problem of this research dealt with countering stereotype and the aimed is to expose good side of Islam from Hollywood bad discourse, the method usedis Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough defined CDA as a discourse analysis that explore connection systematically between discursive practice, text, and event [3]. The procedure of analysis includes text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation).

2.2. Data Sources

This research used three films about Muslims from three countries. They are *Children of Heaven* from Iran, *My Name is Khan* from India, and *Le Grand Voyage* from France.

2.2.1. Children of Heaven

Children of Heaven [5] is a film about two children, Ali and Zahra. Ali left his sister's sneakers out. He is afraid to tell to his parents. Then, Ali and Zahra share Ali's sneakers. Every morning, Zahra wears the sneakers when she goes to school. And when she comes home, Ali wears it and races off to school so that he won't be late. One day, there is a run race. This race gives the third winner a pair of sneakers as the prize. Ali thinks this race can solve the problem of sneakers. Then, he joins the race to win the sneakers. Ali is well trained as a runner because he runs every day to school. Of course, he wins the race. Although he does not win the sneakers, his father buys new sneakers for Ali and Zahra.

2.2.2. My Name is Khan

My Name is Khan (2010) is a film about an Indian Muslim, Khan. He marries a Hindu woman and single mother. One day, his son is killed by fellow student who hate Muslim because of the effect of 9/11. His wife blames him. She wants Khan to meet President of the United States and tells the President that he is not a terrorist. Khan finally meets President Obama. The President then says, "Your name is Khan and you are not a terrorist."

2.2.3. Le Grand Voyage

Le Grand Voyage (2004) is a film about the journey of Reda, a boy who drives his father to do pilgrimage. Reda is a secular Muslim, while his father is a devout Muslim. Reda's father wants to go pilgrimage by riding a car. The journey from France until Mecca faces many obstacles. When his father finally could do the pilgrimage, he died in Mecca.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1. Islam and Film Studies

Crane has found that Hollywood films dominate in most countries in the world (2014). It happens globally although there is protection policy in those countries. Hollywood films also spread global cultures like vandalism, action, sex, and fantasy. Totman analyzed how the viewers understand friend and enemy of United State from Hollywood films (2009). When a country is America's enemy, it is represented as bad. According to Shaheen [12], there are only 5% Arabic characters in 900 Hollywood films that represented as neutral characters, not good but not bad characters.

Bad stereotypes of Muslims obscure the good side of Muslims and Islam. But nowadays, Muslim countries produce films that counter Hollywood hegemony. Those films represent their identities and become counter culture of bad stereotypes.

3.2. Good Sides of Muslims

There is an Islamic world view in *Children of Heaven*. That is some things may seem so bad but then turn out to be good in the long run. The lesson from the film is also that sometimes things that seem good or things that we like or want very badly actually are very bad. Like Allah says in the Quran, "It may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows, but you do not know." (The Holy Quran, 2: 216). The message is that Allah knows what is good

for you and what is not, even if you do not know by yourself. "The heaven" of Ali and Zahra is that the loss of Ali's sneakers turns out to be a good thing. It led Ali to join the race and become the winner.

My Name is Khan has a very important message about Islam. That is Islam is a religion of peace and love. This film uses the 9/11 incident as the cause of people's hate to Muslims. All Muslims then become terrorist stereotypes. But this film has missions to remain world film viewers that Muslims are not terrorists. So, as Islam is not a terrorist religion. There are scenes in the film that show why and how a Muslim has to revenge other people. It is because of wrong interpretation of Islam.

Le Grand Voyage shows a signification generation gap of Muslims. They are secular and devout Muslims. Of course, they have different view about Islam. Their interpretations in doing Islamic rituals also are different. It is just only two different views. Whereas there many groups in Muslims all over the world. But they can communicate moderately. Especially when they have the same goal in doing their major ritual like pilgrimage, they must do it in mercy.

4. Conclusion

There are many Islamic ideologies in films, such as an optimistic spirit that we can expose in *Children of Heaven.* That is, some things may seem so bad but then turn out to be good in the long run. *My Name is Khan* exposes Islam as a peace and love religion and Muslims are not terrorists. It is counter Hollywood hegemony about Muslims as terrorist. *Le Grand Voyage* shows a signification generation gap of Muslims. They are secular and devout Muslims. But they can communicate moderately.

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