

# The Construction of Terrorism Issue in Indonesian Movie Entitled 3 (*Alif Lam Mim*) by Anggy Umbara

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**Abstract**—This study aims to explore Peircean semiotic text analysis with *mise en scene* concept. Researcher use a *counter hegemony* approach to see the ideology of filmmaker. For This combination is used to identify terrorism issue constructed by an Indonesian movie entitled 3 (*Alif Lam Mim*) by film director Anggy Umbara. The film puts the issue of religion against secularism in the midst of high-tech times to construct a major issue of terrorism in Indonesia. 3 (*Alif Lam Mim*) wants to convey a message to the public that the issue of terrorism was not created by a religious group (Islam) which was considered radical as told by widespread discourses in society. This study applies Peircean semiotic analysis using icons, indices, and symbols. About the unit of analysis, it is based on the concept of *mise en scene*, that is, through setting, costume and make-up, lighting and motions in frames such as acting and gesture of film players that construct the issue of terrorism. With this method, this study not only looks at the contents of the film but also how the contents of the film are constructed by the filmmaker in the production process. Logical reasoning used by filmmakers shows that constructed stories provide truth about the issue of terrorism created by individuals who want to gain power.

**Keywords**—film; 3 (*alif lam mim*); semiotics; *mise en scene*; counter hegemony; terrorism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the incident of two aircrafts crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, United States on September 11, 2001, the issue of terrorism has often been associated with Islamic identity, including in Indonesia. This was mainly because the perpetrators of the crime were allegedly committed by the al-Qaeda network. Hidayat and Gaus [1] mentioned that it is undeniable that the aftermath of a terrorist attack on the WTC building in the United States has caused a turning point in the Islamic world.

The massive news about terrorism in the media seems to point out that Muslims are the main actors in every bombing event, including in Indonesia. In fact, in 2005, the government (through the Ministry of Home Affairs) deliberately made a coaching program by holding Halaqah Kebangsaan (Forum for Nationalism), especially in Islamic boarding schools in East and Central Java with the aim of preventing terrorism. This prevention program collaborated with various Islamic community organizations. In East Java, the government appointed PP Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah (RMI) targeting 350

Islamic boarding schools in East and Central Java. On December 16-17, 2005 the program was held in the Al Hamidiyah Bangkalan boarding school and on December 27-28 2005 was held in Sidogiri Pasuruan [2].

Sahrasad and Chaidar [3] see terrorism as a result of rash and violent actions from the United States (West) to Iraq and Afghanistan. This event increasingly multiplies Islam as an alternative ideology for the military of the United States (West), which is currently touted as Muslim-populated countries. Terrorism as an ideology is interpreted as a value order and is used as a tool to carry out joint actions. Value order can be derived from traditions, customs, and can even be derived from a religious teaching.

Dugis [4] summarizes a number of opinions from scholars, among them are Hardiman [5] who explained that word 'terror', entered into the word politics in the compilation period of the French Revolution. While at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as well as the days of World War II, 'terrorism' became a revolutionary tactic of struggle. Widjanto [6]. Terrorism is a "weak group" way to wage war, which now appears is the phenomenon of terrorism in the framework of David-Goliath asymmetric conflict. However, Chomsky [7] writes: we have to qualify the definition of 'terrorism' given in official sources: the term applies only to terrorism against *us*, not the terrorism we carry out against *them*".

Chomsky [8] sees two approaches in seeing the concept of terrorism, namely literal and propaganda. In a literal approach, we begin to demand what is called terrorism. Pursuing the literal approach, we begin by determining what constitutes terrorism. We then seek instances of the phenomenon—concentrating on the major examples, if we are serious—and try to determine causes and remedies. Whereas in the propaganda approach, we see the concept of terrorism as a weapon to be exploited in the power system. We begin with the thesis that terrorism is the responsibility of some officially appointed enemies.

From these definitions, the author takes the red thread that terrorism refers to acts of violence committed by non-state actors due to problems of poverty and justice as well as from state actors to society as oppression. But in this study, it was seen that terrorism with a propaganda approach, or state power.

This reality was later captured by a number of film industries to construct terrorist events, especially in Indonesia. Indonesian film themes related to terrorism events in various regions in Indonesia include films titled *Long Road to Heaven* (2007), *3 Doa 3 Cinta (3 Prayers 3 Love)* (2008), *Khalifah* (2011), *Tanda Tanya (Question Mark)* (2011), *Mata Tertutup (Closed Eyes)* (2011), *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* (2015), and *Bid'ah Cinta (Love Bid'ah)* (2017). In general, terrorism-themed films construct the message that radical Islamic groups are the main actors in blasting bombings in Indonesia, except for film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* which constructs terrorism differently. The construction of the message in this film explains that the main actor in the act of terrorism in Indonesia is the government (state).

The reality of terrorism is constructed as an action triggered by individuals who are obsessed with political positions, someone's bad experiences in the past, and other psychological problems which then infiltrate state institutions (law enforcement officers). This is then used by world crime agents to fight between the state and religious groups in the community. In turn, the community becomes a phobia of religion (Islam) and its symbols such as clothing, Islamic boarding schools, prayers, mosques, or sentences related to Islam.

The use of symbols in this film is what forms the signs that give birth to meaning for the audience. The symbols are constructed by the filmmaker to convince the audience that what was conveyed through film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* is a truth.

As a medium, films have audio-visual power that other media do not have. The strength of the film lies in the visualization of moving images, visuals and sound effects, settings, lighting, make-up, costumes, and body gestures. These are what the filmmaker uses to construct his ideology through messages packed in a screen. Even though film is a fiction but the story that is built through the scenes is able to make the film look real.

The capability to reconstruct reality into a screen through the structure of stories is based on reality in the community and is influenced by the background of the filmmaker, either in terms of social, political, or cultural one. This research is essential in terms of seeing how filmmakers represent their ideology through signs that are built to achieve their goals. One of the central issues in the reality of society that has been in the public spotlight in the past two decades is the issue of terrorism.

Research on film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* was conducted by Dzikriyya [9] with the title of "Terrorist Islamic Stereotypes in the film '3: Alif Lam Mim'". The focus of this study is to see how filmmakers use symbols about Islamic stereotypes that are considered negative by the state by using Barthes's semiotic analysis. With connotation, denotation, and myth devices, Vina succeeded in identifying negative stereotypes from the community described in the film's scenes. Vina also saw how Islam was seen as a radical religion and was therefore seen as a trigger for suicide bombings in every event of terrorism.

But Vina's research did not explore the causes of film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* which was ideologically constructed by

filmmakers. Vina did not look for more details about the reasons for Anggy Umbara's partiality towards Islam which was considered negative. Vina only saw films as representations and confirmed that film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* had constructed the country as an enemy of Islam by seeing negative stereotypes in each scene. The label of radicalism that is pinned to Islam by the state is worriedly considered to be a new myth in society.

While researchers see a gap that must be revealed in seeing the film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)*, which is a resistance from subgroups in the community (in this case filmmaker) which becomes a group hegemony in information related to the issue of terrorism. Therefore, in this study the researcher used Gramsci's counter hegemony perspective to see how the filmmaker explores the scenes contained in film *3 (Alif Lam Mim)* using Peircean semiotic analysis through icons, indices, and symbols. Thus this study not only looks at the contents of the film but also how the contents of the film are constructed by the filmmaker in the production process.

The counter hegemony concept sees organic intellectuals in the body of society. Therefore, the masses, for Gramsci, need to develop a revolutionary ideology. However, the masses cannot do it alone. They need help from social elites. It is believed that the masses will move towards a social revolution when these ideas are raised by organic intellectuals. The concept of hegemony was defined Gramsci as a cultural leadership run by the ruling class. Gramsci emphasizes hegemony and cultural leadership. This is different coercive hegemony carried out by legislative and executive forces [10,11].

The relevance of this research, the growing information about terrorism in Indonesia which is supported by Islamic groups is believed to be a form of cultural hegemony. This resulted in the community being easily exposed to the subtle and not feeling the victim of coercion of state power.

## II. METHODOLOGY

To see the meaning, researchers use a triangle of meaning, namely signs, objects, and interpretants. It is important to understand the structure of sign.

According to Peirce [12], we can simply think about significant signs, for example, written words or animal traces. On the other hand, object is any significant thing. For instance, object is represented by written words or animals in the picture. Interpretation is an understanding of what is resulted from sign/object relationship. For example, word or utterance is meant to detect where an animal was when it was being created. The importance of an interpretant for Peirce is the significance rather than the simple relationship between sign and object: a sign of an object is significant only if it can be interpreted that way.

Specifically, Peirce postulated that sign probably exist to signify its purpose, and to produce an interpretant using the three entities called icon, index, and symbol. Therefore, the method of this study applies these three to see how signs are operationalized in movie *3 (Alif Lam Mim)*.

Icon is defined as a sign that signifies qualities of similarities between something and its object. For example, portrait or mathematical diagram. Likewise, color, sculpture, and so on.

Index is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really effected by that object. For example, a fever as a sign of an illness or a smoke as a sign of a fire.

Symbol refers to a sign that designates its object based on law. There is convention, agreement, custom or law that back them up.

About the unit of analysis, it is based on the concept of *mise en scene*, that is, through setting, costume and make-up, lighting and motions in frames such as acting and gesture of film players that construct the issue of terrorism.

The analysis unit chosen consisted of scenes about (1) Head of Law Enforcement Detachment 38: 80-83 Colonel Mason was giving a suspension to Alif (minutes 00.10.05), (2) Alif is talking with the soldiers of state law enforcement in the locker room (00.28.02), and (3) Marwan (Rangga Djoned), one of the refugees living in Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School is committing a suicide bombing in the court (minutes 01.01.23).

This scene was chosen because it was considered to represent a scene related to the concept of terrorism, namely seeing the concept of terrorism with a propaganda approach, or state power.

The scenes is analyzed based on icons, indexes, symbols, then the researcher will see how the director constructs based on the counter hegemony concept.

### III. DISCUSSION

Film 3: *Alif Lam Mim* tells the story of Indonesia's future in 2036. The plot of the story in film 3 (*Alif Lam Mim*) refers to the three main characters namely Alif (Cornelio Sunny), Herlam alias Lam (Abimana Aryasatya), and Mimbo aka Mim (Agus Kuncoro). The name Alif Lam Mim is taken from the verses of the Qur'an contained in surah Al Baqarah, Ali Imran, Al Ankabut, Ar Rum, Luqman, and As Sajdah.

In the story, Alif became an elite member of Detachment 38: 80-83, Lam became a journalist in the Libernesia media, and Mim became an ustadz at Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School. All three uphold idealism based on Islamic values.

With the background of the revolution in Indonesia, this film was directed by Anggy Umbara and illustrated the condition of Indonesia as a liberal country by upholding post-revolutionary Human Rights (HAM) in 2026. At this time law enforcement official were prohibited from using live bullets. So as a substitute, officials can only use rubber bullets to arrest criminals and terrorists who roam in Indonesia. Consequently, the community or law enforcement officials must have martial arts expertise.

Liberalism applied in Indonesia at this time gave rise to suspicion of religious symbols. In this case it is a symbol of Islam. The prohibition on using religious symbols is mostly applied in public places. One of them is in a cafe and restaurant. In this place there is a prohibition for customers to

use religious symbols. For example, robes, turban, prayer beads, and so on.

Likewise, the symbol of the prayer movement for Muslims. People who still carry out prayers are considered "strange" creatures like those that occur in schools and offices. No exception at the Libernesia media office, where Lam worked as a journalist.

Islam is a religion that is suspected by the wider community, including by government institutions, in this case law enforcement officers or the police. This suspicion led to the arrest of the leader of the Al-Ikhlas Islamic boarding school because he was suspected of being the mastermind of bombing and acts of terrorism in various places in Indonesia.

Film 3 (*Alif Lam Mim*) is a counter to a country that is considered to oppress Muslims, especially in relation to acts of terrorism. Labeling terrorism in the face of Muslims seems to be a justification. As organic intellectuals, filmmakers propose strong evidence that Islam, especially Islamic boarding schools, is not a place for terrorism printers as many have been accused by the government. The description of a peaceful and diverse society in Islamic boarding schools provides evidence that Pesantren is not a nest of terrorism, rather than printing a terrorist.

These symbols are represented by Anggy Umbara (as a filmmaker) through scenes packed in sound and visual effects, costumes, make-up, lighting, settings, and movements in frames so as to convince the audience that Islam is not a religion that has been considered radical and threatening the survival of a country. On the contrary, the acts of terrorism that have occurred so far have been designed by the state who infiltrated the state apparatus such as the police institution. As in the scene in figure 1.



Fig. 1. Head of law enforcement detachment 38: 80-83 Colonel Mason is giving a suspension to Alif (minutes 00.10.05).

The icons used in the scene are red and white flags, photos of the president and vice president, oversized corps of detachment 38: 80-83, black jackets worn by Colonel Mason (Piet Pagau). In this scene, Colonel Mason looks for Alif's mistake which is considered to violate human rights because he is considered to use firearms while on duty to arrest criminals. Even though Alif did not do, Colonel Mason argued that he had evidence that Alif could not refute. Because in fact Colonel Mason is behind the scenario of killing criminals by using firearms through his men.

The index contained in the scene shows that the red and white flag mounted on the table and mounted on a pole behind Colonel Mason is undeniably the setting is the office of Indonesian law enforcement officers. The black jacket worn by

Colonel Mason refers to Indonesian law enforcement officers who often wear it behind official clothes.

From the strength of the icon and the index, this scene confirms that there are Indonesian law enforcement officers who play behind the actions of crime and terrorism in Indonesia. But they just argued that the act of terrorism in Indonesia originated from radical Islam hiding behind boarding schools. As the scene in Figure 2

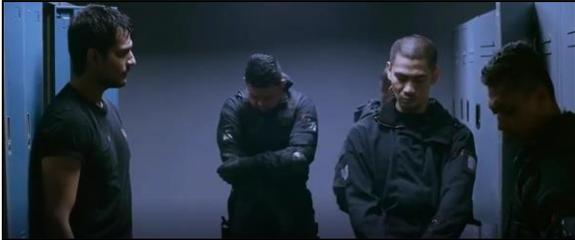


Fig. 2. Alif is talking with the soldiers of state law enforcement in the locker room (00.28,02).

The icons used in the scene in figure 2 are state law enforcement officers, oversized uniforms, weapons mounted on uniforms.

The index in the figure shows that state law enforcement officers are ready to crush terrorism with official state uniforms and a set of weapons.

While the symbol that appears in the scene is the sincerity of law enforcement officers to crush terrorism that occurred in Indonesia. This was confirmed in a dialogue between Alif who was suspended and Bima (Dony Alamasyah) as the head of the arrest team.

"Where are you going?" Alif asked

"District 9. I have to crush it there. The problem. Religious-clad terrorists. One dies ten rises. We have to finish it to the roots of Lif, all of them. If necessary, get to their children. I will run out of religious terrorists in our country. "Religion is just a mess," said Bima.

Nevertheless, the filmmaker could not argue that there were a number of individuals in the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) who were separated from the kiyai's observance so that they took revenge on the state by detonating suicide bombings amid the injustice of Indonesian law enforcement to Muslims. For example, when Kiyai Haji Muchlis (Arswandi Nasution), the head of the Al Ikhlas Islamic boarding school was tried in court. Kiyai Haji Muchlis was handcuffed and treated rudely even though his status was still a witness.

As a result, one of the refugees at Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School committed a suicide bombing in the crowd while in court. Anggy Umbara seems to say that this person is part of a community that feels oppressed by the government (state). Marwan (Rangga Djoned) became angered because of the arbitrary treatment of law enforcement officers against his community, especially to Kiai Haji Muchlis.



Fig. 3. Marwan (Rangga Djoned), one of the refugees living in Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School is committing a suicide bombing in the court (minutes 01.01.23).

Marwan committed a suicide bombing when he saw Kiyai Haji Muclish being interrogated in the court as a witness. Marwan could not resist the emotion of seeing harsh treatment towards Kiyai Haji Muchlis. Marwan was one of the victims of injustice from the country and had to flee to Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School.

The icons used in this scene are robes, white cap, turban, and beard. This icon is to emphasize that the intended index is a refugee in Pondok Al Ikhlas that committed suicide bombings in court due to dissatisfaction with the state. However, Lam (as a representative of peaceful Islam) was suspicious of Marwan's presence. Lam and Kiyai Haji Muchlis regretted that they felt powerless to prevent Marwan's actions which were considered detrimental to many people and were not sinful.

The symbol shown in the scene shows that the filmmaker wanted to emphasize that if there were people who decided to commit suicide bombings using Islamic identity, then that did not mean as a Muslim representation. Lam's existence and those who did not like Marwan's actions showed that the suicide bombings had not actually been part of the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) which intentionally carried out acts of terrorism. They are purely from individuals who feel dissatisfied with the state but are separated from the kiai's observations.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The construction carried out by the filmmaker in film 3: *Alif Lam Mim* asserted that the state carried out hegemony to the community, especially Muslims. Terrorism events that have taken place in various parts of Indonesia have so far been part of the government's evil actions towards society. The state uses Muslims as the mastermind of terrorism in Indonesia. On this basis, Anggy Umbara (as a filmmaker) wants to counter state hegemony by constructing his messages through the use of icons, indices and symbols. He wants to emphasize that the country is the brain behind all acts of terrorism. By using the counter hegemony approach, the combination of Peircean semiotics and the *mise en scene* concept produces a clear interpretation that terrorism in Indonesia is a public dissatisfaction with government injustice. This can be seen from scenes that show that the state, through law enforcement officials, carried out arbitrary acts by labeling Islam as a terrorist religion and became the brain of a series of murders that were packaged in the event of terrorism.

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