

## Representation of Muhammad in *The Message* 1976 and *Sirah Nabawiyah*

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i3.2563>

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### A B S T R A C T

The representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in visual media warrants further in-depth study. Previous research has focused primarily on theoretical analyses of the Prophet's portrayal, and few studies have compared his depiction in visual media with that in religious texts. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method and a comparative approach to analyze the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in the film *The Message* and *Sirah Nabawiyah* through an analysis of dialogue, narrative, and cinematic techniques. The results indicate that the film constructs the Prophet's representation through intermediary characters, a narrator, and Western dramatic structures, whereas *Sirah Nabawiyah* focuses more on historical and religious aspects. This study concludes that the representation of the Prophet Muhammad is influenced by various factors, including the author's cultural background.

**Keywords:** *Representation, Orientalism, The Message, Sirah Nabawiyah*

#### Article History:

Received 14<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Accepted 07<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Published 10<sup>th</sup> June 2026



## INTRODUCTION

Representation is a key concept in cultural studies that explains how meaning is produced and exchanged within a cultural system. In his work *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall explains that representation is closely linked to the process of meaning production through language, signs, and symbols, which are always influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Hall also cites Roland Barthes's idea that the representation of a sign is universal, global, and never neutral. Barthes also notes that a sign always carries ideological meaning depending on the context and can even be linked to power (Hall, 1997). Thus, it can be interpreted that representation not only reflects the reality of a sign in every culture but also shapes a specific perspective on a sign.

As previously mentioned, Hall asserts that representation can be linked to power. The power in question is the ability to portray a person or thing within a specific framework of meaning. This power is often manifested through stereotypes, which constitute a form of symbolic violence against certain groups. Hall also links this to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, which focuses on how the West constructs an image of the East as "the Other" perceived as irrational, static, and inferior in contrast to the West, which is regarded as rational, modern, and superior. Meanwhile, according to Said, Orientalism is not merely an academic study of the East, but a discourse that allows European culture to manage and even produce the East politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Within the framework of Western hegemony over the East, a new understanding emerged: the East was viewed as an object rather than a subject, and was subsequently studied academically by the West, displayed in museums, reconstructed within colonial administrations, and used as illustrative material in theoretical studies in anthropology, biology, linguistics, race, and history concerning

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humanity and the universe. Furthermore, the West also frequently uses the East as an example in economic and sociological theories regarding development, revolution, national cultural identity, and religious character.

In addition to discussing Said's views, Hall also notes that the form of power described by Said is closely linked to knowledge or practices that Foucault refers to as "power/knowledge." To illustrate this point, Hall provides an example through a visual representation in the form of a very popular painting: Edwin Long's *The Babylonian Marriage Market*. In this painting, the East is depicted not only as mysterious, exotic, and erotic, but also as a place where women are bought and sold. These women are lined up from right to left based on the whiteness of their skin. The woman at the far end is the one who most closely resembles Western standards of beauty, depicted with clear skin and highlighted by the light reflected on her face from a mirror.

In his theory, Said asserts that Orientalism has three main meanings: Orientalism as an academic tradition that studies the East; Orientalism as a mode of thinking based on ontological and epistemological distinctions between the East and the West; and Orientalism as an institution of power that enables the West to dominate, restructure, and control the East (Nurrachman, 2025; Said, 1995). Said also asserts that knowledge about the East is never neutral because it is shaped by power relations and Western political interests (Said, 2000).

In the book *The Edward Said Reader*, Orientalism is described as a system of representation that operates through literary texts, historiography, art, and popular media to produce images of the East based on a Western perspective. Said emphasizes that in Orientalism, the East never appears as a free subject recognized in its own right, but rather as an object defined and discussed by the West (Said, 2000). Consequently, representations of the East often reflect the West's view of the East perceived as "The Other" rather than the East as it truly is.

In this context, the portrayal of Islam in modern cultural products cannot be separated from the influence of Orientalism. Film, as one of the most popular media, plays a significant role in shaping global perceptions of history and religion. Moustapha Akkad's film *The Message* (1976) is an example of a film that recounts the struggles of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the early history of Islam using a Western cinematic approach. Although this film was made by a Muslim director and sought to respect Islamic teachings by not depicting the figure of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) directly, it still contains Orientalist representational biases because it was produced according to Western cinematic conventions. The portrayal of Muhammad in the media holds significant importance for global culture because it not only relates to the religious identity of Muslims but also influences how the international community understands Islam as part of world civilization. The film *The Message* demonstrates that the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad can serve as a means of cross-cultural dialogue to introduce universal values such as justice, peace, solidarity, and humanity to a global audience. The public response to the film demonstrates that the media wields immense power in shaping public perceptions of Islam, whether through positive reception that views the film as an educational tool or through controversies arising from cultural and religious sensitivities regarding the depiction of the Prophet. In the context of global culture, the representation of the Prophet Muhammad is of great importance because the media not only reflects social reality but also produces cultural meanings and identities that can influence relations between the Islamic world and the West.

From an Islamic perspective, depictions of the Prophet serve not only to convey history but also as a means of shaping Islamic identity, values, and the image of Islam itself. Therefore, films, television, and other visual media containing Islamic elements and depictions of the Prophet Muhammad will influence how audiences understand Islamic teachings, social relationships, and the culture of the Muslim community. On the other hand, the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad is a sensitive matter in Islamic tradition due to prohibitions or restrictions on depicting the Prophet to preserve his sanctity and prevent the worship of images. In Indonesia itself, the film *The Message* was once banned from screening based on a fatwa signed by MUI Chairman KH Hasan Basri and MUI Secretary-General H.S.

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Prodjokusomo on 17 Shawwal 1408 AH/June 2, 1998 CE, which stated that “*Nabi/Rasul dan keluarganya dilarang digambarkan dalam film,*”; they rejected the presence of the Prophet in any form, whether in images or films. This fatwa refers to a hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim which reads:

مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَدًّا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

“Whoever deliberately lies to me is welcome to take his seat in the fires of Hell.”

Furthermore, this fatwa also refers to the event of the Conquest of Mecca when the Prophet ordered the destruction of images and statues of previous prophets displayed in the Kaaba (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2023). The discussion regarding the prohibition on visualizing the Prophet remains a subject of prolonged debate among Muslims, thus requiring a more in-depth study beyond the scope of this research.

In contrast, the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* by Sheikh Shafiyyurrahman Al-Mubarakfuri presents the story of the Prophet Muhammad’s life based on primary Islamic sources such as the Quran and authentic hadith. Similarly to the film *The Message* (1976), this work was written by a Muslim using a traditional Islamic historical approach that emphasizes the Prophet’s moral, spiritual, and exemplary aspects without modern narrative interventions. The differences in medium, cultural context, target audience, and epistemological framework between these two works highlight significant differences in representation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the film *The Message* and the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* using theories of representation and Orientalism, in order to understand how cultural background influences the construction of meaning in both works.

Much research has been conducted on Edward Said’s Orientalism, both in the realm of theoretical studies and in the analysis of representations of the East in Western cultural products. One relevant study is the article titled “Orientalism: Edward Said’s Postcolonial Thoughts and Theories Against the Eastern World and Islam” by Yunika Sari et al. (Sari et al., 2023). This study focuses on Edward Said’s thoughts on Orientalism and postcolonial theory as a critique of Western domination over the East and Islam. Using descriptive qualitative methods and a literature review, the study emphasizes Orientalism as an academic and ideological discourse that perpetuates Western colonialism. However, this research is theoretical and conceptual in nature and does not apply Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism to the analysis of specific cultural texts, such as films or particular literary works.

Another relevant study is an article titled “Orientalisme Dalam ‘Hujan Pertama Dari Kampung Kafir’ Karya Silvester Petara Hurit” by Innosentus Soni Konten (Koten, 2024). This study analyzes the discourse of Orientalism in Silvester Petara Hurit’s short story “Hujan Pertama Dari Kampung Kafir,” highlighting the dominance of colonial power and the hegemony of the colonizers’ religious identity in East Flores. Using a qualitative-interpretive method, the study connects the literary text with the historical context of colonialism and the socio-cultural life in East Flores. The results indicate that the short story represents the dominance of colonial power (political, intellectual, cultural, and moral) as well as the hegemony of the colonizers’ religious identity over traditional religions in East Flores. However, this study focuses solely on the representation of Orientalism within the local context of East Flores through an analysis of the short story. Furthermore, research by Firza Aulia Ningrum and Rizki Endi Septiyani (Ningrum et al., 2024) analyzed Western perspectives on the East in the novel *Helen and Sukanta* by Pidi Baiq, using Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. This study found the presence of Dutch stereotypes regarding indigenous people, discrimination, as well as notions of superiority and inferiority in the novel. However, this study focuses solely on the novel *Helen and Sukanta* set against the backdrop of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia.

The study by Ach. Jauhari and Mohammad Rifai (A. Jauhari & Rifai, 2019) examines the representation of the stories of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions in Tasaro GK’s novel *Muhammad* using a communication model approach. This

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study demonstrates that Tasaro GK employs various communication models, such as stimulus-response, one-way, two-way, transactional, ritual, publicity, and reception. The aim is to convey the history of Islam narratively and persuasively through a novel positioned as an effective medium of da'wah because it is capable of building an emotional connection between the text and its readers. However, this study still has limitations because the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in this study is understood primarily as a communicative strategy and does not yet position representation as a construction of meaning influenced by the author's ideology and the socio-cultural context.

Although each study has a different subject of inquiry, these studies share a commonality: they have not yet explored representation and orientalism in visual media such as film. Furthermore, previous studies on the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in literary works have largely been understood as communication strategies and tools for proselytizing, rather than as constructions of meaning influenced by ideology, culture, and power relations. Therefore, the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in visual media remains an under-researched area of study. On the other hand, a comparison between films and religious texts is important because both employ distinct representational systems in conveying Islamic history. As a visual medium, film tends to use dramatic techniques, narration, dialogue, and cinematic elements to evoke emotion and attract a global audience, whereas religious texts place greater emphasis on historical authenticity, spiritual values, and authentic accounts. By comparing the two, this study can demonstrate how modern media reconstructs religious narratives and how specific cultural and ideological contexts influence the representation of sacred figures in Islam.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, focusing on the representation of the life story of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in two different media and cultural contexts: the film *The Message* (1976) by Moustapha Akkad and the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* by Sheikh Safiyyurrahman Al-Mubarakfuri. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to describe and deeply understand the meaning, narrative patterns, and representational constructions that emerge in both works. According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to understand the meanings attributed by individuals or groups to a social phenomenon within its natural context (Creswell, 2014). This method emphasizes the interpretation of the data obtained so that the data is relevant, descriptive, and derived from an in-depth analysis of the research object.

This study focuses on analyzing the meanings, representations, and interpretations found in film narratives and texts, rather than relying on numerical data. Therefore, a descriptive qualitative approach, which is suitable for examining social and cultural phenomena through in-depth interpretation of language, symbols, dialogue, and visual elements, is appropriate for this study, as it is used to describe how the Prophet Muhammad is represented in *The Message* and *Sirah Nabawiyah* through narrative structure, cinematic techniques, dialogue, and religious texts. This aligns with the research objective, which is to understand how meaning is constructed across various media and cultural contexts using Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Since this study examines ideology, cultural influence, and representation, qualitative analysis enables the researcher to interpret hidden meanings, symbolic elements, and Orientalist discourse more deeply. Furthermore, a comparative approach also helps identify differences between visual media and religious texts in representing Islamic history and the figure of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In the chapter "The Work of Representation," Stuart Hall argues that representation is a process in which meaning is constantly shifting across cultures and periods. There is no guarantee that any object within one culture will carry equivalent meaning when interpreted by another culture; indeed, because cultures differ, such meanings can become radically distinct due to the unique codes embedded within each culture's framework (Hall, 1997).

In addition to focusing on the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the findings of this study were also obtained by comparing the film *The Message* (1976) with the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* to analyze the Western influence present in *The Message*, a film that tells the story of Timur, a prominent figure in Islam. Damono explains that comparative literature does not merely compare literary works from different countries or languages but is an approach that expands literary studies by transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries. Thus, this approach enables a broader analysis of works by the same or different authors, works with similar forms and themes, and even works spanning different eras (Damono, 2009).

Based on a comparative analysis of the movie *The Message* and the text *Sirah Nabawiyah*, there are several examples of data that show important differences in the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in both works. Heri Jauhari, in his book entitled *Panduan Praktis Penulisan Karya Ilmiah*, states that with a large population in research, sampling is necessary. The sampling method to be used is area probability sampling. He also quotes Arikunto (2002), who states that area sampling is a sampling technique carried out by taking representatives from each area within the population (H. Jauhari, 2018). In accordance with this study, the term 'area' refers to scenes/dialogues/symbols that represent the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the film *The Message* and excerpts from the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* that recount events similar to those in the film. *The Message* has a total duration of 2 hours, 58 minutes, and 15 seconds, and almost all of its scenes represent the Prophet. Meanwhile, the entire book *Sirah Nabawiyah*, translated by Kathur Suhardi, consists of 600 pages, which were then adjusted to the scenes that appear in the film *The Message*. Therefore, this study will only use certain scenes, dialogues, and symbols from the data in both works that are consistent with the theory employed.

The data sources used in this study are divided into two types: primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources consist of the film *The Message* which was obtained from YouTube and can be accessed via <https://youtu.be/Pf9jTKZDEKY?feature=shared> (Akkad, 1976), a script from the website [https://www.scripts.com/script/the\\_message\\_13671/7](https://www.scripts.com/script/the_message_13671/7) (Craig, 2018), and the e-book *Sirah Nabawiyah* by Sheikh Shafiyyurrahman Al-Mubarakfuri translated by Kathur Suhardi can be accessed via [https://archive.org/details/sirahnabawiyah\\_201911](https://archive.org/details/sirahnabawiyah_201911) (Shafiyyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997). The primary data for this study were obtained from the film *The Message* and the book *Sirah Nabawiyah*. The data from *The Message* include scenes, dialogue, narration, character portrayals, and cinematic techniques related to the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad. This data consists of Zaid's dialogue regarding the first revelation in the Cave of Hira (14:26), the portrayal of Hamzah as a heroic figure in numerous scenes including those where the Prophet delivers his open preaching and the Battle of Badr, the dialogue between Abu Talib and Zaid concerning *As-Sabiqunal Awwalun* (15:45), POV camera techniques (17:47–18:30 and 2:32:31–2:32:48), and the narrator's narration during the scene of the Hijrah to Medina (1:12:17). Meanwhile, data from the *Sirah Nabawiyah* includes narrative descriptions of the first revelation (pp. 63–66), Hamzah (p. 108), *As-Sabiqunal Awwalun* (pp. 73–74), and the event of the Hijrah to Medina (p. 190). The secondary data sources used in this study include theoretical books, scientific journals, online articles, and other writings related to this research. These secondary data sources were obtained through internet searches of various databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and other reputable scientific websites.

Data collection for the film *The Message* (1976) was conducted through intensive observation involving repeated viewings of the film to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative structure, cinematography, and visual representations. Additionally, the researcher carefully examined the film's subtitles and script to identify scenes, dialogue, symbols, and significant representational elements related to the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and indications of Orientalism. Relevant data was then recorded and documented as primary data. To support the analysis, the researcher also collected secondary data from scholarly books, journal articles, and credible online sources discussing the film and its context. Meanwhile, the data collection process for the *Sirah*

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*Nabawiyah* book was conducted through a systematic literature review by conducting an in-depth reading of the text to identify narrative sections relevant to the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) related to scenes in the film *The Message*. Key quotations were then highlighted, classified, and recorded as primary data. Additionally, the researcher collected supporting references from academic books, scientific journals, and reliable online sources to support the research process.

After data from each primary source was collected, the next step was to compare the results of the analysis of the film *The Message*, the book *Sirah Nabawiyah*, and various secondary data from journals, books, and related articles to arrive at the research findings. The final stage of the data collection process for both subjects was to draw conclusions that summarized the findings of the analysis regarding the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Orientalism in both works. The data was analyzed using a representational and comparative approach centered on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism to produce an analysis of the relationship between classical Islamic representations and Western influences in narratives about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) written by two authors who are both Muslim but have different cultural backgrounds. The analysis process began with data reduction, which involved selecting relevant scripts, subtitles, and texts from both works. Next, the data is presented by identifying forms of Orientalist representation found in both works. The presented data is then interpreted using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, and other relevant sources to support the research. The final stage involves drawing conclusions based on the results of the comparative analysis conducted.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in *The Message* is constructed indirectly through dialogue, narration, characterization, and cinematic techniques, whereas in *Sirah Nabawiyah* the Prophet is presented through historical narratives and religious texts. There are several significant differences in the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in these two works:

First, the dialogue between Zaid and Abu Talib serves as a substitute for the visual depiction of the Prophet in the scene of the first revelation to the Prophet in the Cave of Hira in *The Message* (14:26). Meanwhile, *Sirah Nabawiyah* (pp. 63–66) explains this event through a hadith narration from Aisha. This indicates that the film presents the event dramatically and indirectly, as it conveys the message to the audience without visually depicting the Prophet, whereas the *Sirah Nabawiyah* emphasizes historical authenticity and spiritual significance.

Second, the character of Hamzah in *The Message* is portrayed as a heroic figure who serves as a symbolic substitute for the Prophet Muhammad's visual absence. This representation appears in several scenes, such as when the Prophet received the revelation to preach openly and during the Battle of Badr. In contrast, in *Sirah Nabawiyah* (p. 108), Hamzah is portrayed in a more historical and chronological manner without the strong dramatic emphasis found in the film.

Third, the use of the dialogue between Abu Talib and Zaid as a means of conveying the important term *As-Sabiqunal Awwalun* in *The Message* (15:45) by simplifying Islamic terms into a dialogue that is more accessible to a global audience. Meanwhile, *Sirah Nabawiyah* (pp. 73–74) retains formal Islamic terms and historical explanations due to the absence of demands from a non-Muslim audience.

Fourth, the film employs a first-person point of view (POV) camera technique in scenes such as at 17:47–18:30 and 2:32:31–2:32:48 to symbolically depict the Prophet's presence without directly showing his figure. The camera movements serve as a substitute for the Prophet's responses and interactions with other characters.

Finally, the use of a narrator in the scene of the Prophet's Hijrah to Medina (1:12:17) creates dramatic tension by emphasizing the dangers, the journey across the desert, and the

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emotional struggles. In contrast, *Sirah Nabawiyah* (p. 190) focuses more on spiritual values and Allah's protection of the Prophet during the Hijrah as a lesson for Muslims. This indicates that *The Message* adapts Islamic history into a cinematic narrative influenced by Western storytelling structures, while *Sirah Nabawiyah* prioritizes religious authenticity and historical narrative.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also indicate that Orientalism influences the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in *The Message* based on the author's cultural background. This can be seen in the process of adapting Islamic history into a dramatic and communicative narrative suitable for a global audience. Although the film's main plot aligns with the *Sirah Nabawiyah*, *The Message* still makes adaptations through the use of narrative tension, heroic characters, emotional dialogue, and the adventure-driven plot typical of Western films. This demonstrates that the representation of Islam in the film is influenced by the Western representational framework, as explained by Edward Said. Meanwhile, the *Sirah Nabawiyah* maintains an internal Islamic perspective by focusing on the use of authentic accounts, religious terminology, and spiritual interpretations, given the author's cultural background, which is rooted in traditional Islamic culture. Therefore, there is no Orientalist bias in the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in the *Sirah Nabawiyah*.

## Discussion

The film *The Message* (1976) recounts the early history of Islam's emergence in Mecca during the 7th century CE, when Arab society was still in a state of ignorance characterized by idolatry, social injustice, and the oppression of vulnerable groups. In this film, the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in *The Message* (1976) reveals a process of meaning construction that differs significantly from the texts of the *Sirah Nabawiyah*. This difference lies not only in the medium of presentation but also in narrative strategies, characterization, and the visual techniques employed in the film. According to Stuart Hall, representation is a process of producing meaning through a system of signs (language, images, symbols) that is not reflective of reality but rather constructive. In other words, the film does not merely "copy" Islamic history but reconstructs that reality according to the needs of production and the audience (Hall, 1997).

In this context, the film *The Message* employs an indirect approach to representing the Prophet Muhammad. This is evident in the fact that the Prophet is not depicted visually, but rather through camera angles (point of view), the dialogue of other characters, and the reactions of those around him. This strategy aims not only to respect the prohibitions within Islamic tradition but also serves as a form of symbolic representation that establishes the Prophet's presence through the perceptions of other characters. Conversely, in the *Sirah Nabawiyah*, the representation of the Prophet Muhammad is conveyed narratively and historically through accounts that possess scholarly legitimacy. The Prophet is not represented through visual symbols, but rather through descriptions of events, sayings (hadith), and the testimonies of his companions. Thus, the text of the *Sirah Nabawiyah* places greater emphasis on historical authenticity than on dramatic construction. This difference demonstrates that film, as a visual medium, possesses both limitations and freedoms in constructing representations. The limitation arises from the prohibition against visualizing the Prophet, while the freedom manifests in the form of cinematic techniques used to substitute for his presence so that it is easily understood by the audience.

In addition, the film employs a classic Hollywood dramatic structure that emphasizes conflict, climax, and resolution. The narrative is constructed in a heroic manner, depicting the struggle of the Muslim community from a state of oppression to ultimate victory. This structure reflects the influence of Western culture in representing Islamic history in a way that is more accessible to a global audience (Stellinga, 2015). Furthermore, the use of a narrator serves as a tool to bridge non-Muslim viewers' understanding of the historical context and teachings of Islam. Unlike the film, the book *Sirah Nabawiyah* presents the story of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) textually based on authentic hadiths without modern

narrative adaptations, prioritizing the authenticity of the information. The writing in this book focuses on historical, moral, and spiritual aspects and is intended for Muslim readers.

From Edward Said's perspective on Orientalism, the differences between these two works reveal the influence of Western discourse in the film *The Message*. Although the film was made by a Muslim, it operates within a Western cultural framework by adapting its representation of Islam to align with the expectations of a global audience. This aligns with Said's view that Orientalism is not always explicit but can manifest in representations that appear neutral or even sympathetic toward the East (Said, 1995). Conversely, *Sirah Nabawiyah* portrays Islam from an internal perspective without Western cultural intervention, thereby more authentically reflecting an Eastern viewpoint. This difference demonstrates that representations are never value-free but are always influenced by the cultural background, ideology, and interests of the creator. For example, in the dialogue at 14:26 by Zaid:

(Zaid) He was alone, in the cave. Suddenly, an angel came to him. The angel said: Read!

(Akkad, 1976, 14:26)

*Marilah kita dengarkan penuturan Aisyah yang hendak meriwayatkan kepada kita kisah ini, .....Dia berkata, " .....tatkala beliau sedang berada di Gua Hira Malaikat mendatangi beliau seraya berkata, "Bacalah!"*

(Shafiyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997, pp. 63–66)

Based on the sample data from the film *The Message* and the text of the *Sirah Nabawiyah* above, there appears to be a significant difference in how these two works depict the event of the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the film *The Message*, this event is conveyed through a dialogue between the characters Zaid and Abu Thalib, which serves as a narrative device to explain the Prophet's experience in the Cave of Hira. This dialogue reenacts the revelation in a dramatic form, where Zaid directly recounts how the Angel Gabriel came to the Prophet and commanded him to read. This presentation is indirect because Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not visually depicted but is instead portrayed through the perspective of another character. This technique demonstrates the use of an implicit narrator in the form of dialogue, a hallmark of Western film narrative structure designed to keep the plot communicative and dramatic. In contrast, in the text of the *Sirah Nabawiyah*, the event of the first revelation is presented through accounts derived from hadith, specifically through the narration of Aisha. The narrative in this text is descriptive, chronological, and based on sources considered authentic within Islamic tradition. There are no added imaginative dialogues between characters as in the film, but rather an explanation focused directly on the spiritual experience of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Details such as the Prophet's trembling after receiving a revelation, as well as Khadijah's response in comforting him, are presented as part of the historical narrative, not as dramatic embellishments. Thus, the text of the *Sirah Nabawiyah* places greater emphasis on the authenticity of the sources and religious significance than on dramatic elements.

In the film, the event of the first revelation is incorporated into the dramatic plot to build emotional tension, whereas in the text, it is presented as the starting point of prophethood, carrying profound theological significance. This difference reinforces the argument that film, as a product of modern culture, cannot be entirely detached from the influence of Western narrative structures, even when addressing themes rooted in Eastern traditions. Thus, it can be concluded that the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the film *The Message* and the text *Sirah Nabawiyah* reveals fundamental differences influenced by the medium, cultural context, and communicative purpose. The film tends to adapt and construct the narrative to meet the needs of a global audience, whereas the text preserves the authenticity of the account as a more normative and religious form of representation.

This difference indicates that the film *The Message* undergoes a process of narrative adaptation to tailor the storytelling to the needs of a visual audience, particularly non-Muslim viewers. The addition of dialogue between Zaid and Abu Thalib which is not found in authentic hadith suggests a narrative construction aimed at bridging the limitations of visualizing the Prophet in Islam while maintaining the film's dramatic elements. From Stuart

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Hall's perspective on representation, this demonstrates that meaning is not merely produced from reality but is also constructed through systems of signs and language tailored to specific cultural contexts. As a product of Western culture, the film tends to prioritize communicative and easily understandable narratives, thereby simplifying complex spiritual experiences into more narrative-driven dialogue.

Furthermore, the character of Hamzah in the film *The Message* is portrayed as a heroic figure of great courage and the Prophet Muhammad's chief defender. Hamzah's dialogue and actions in the film portray him as a strong, steadfast, and deeply emotional character, allowing the audience to easily recognize him as a heroic figure. For instance, in the scene where the Prophet openly preached, Hamzah served as a protector when the Prophet and his followers were tortured by the Quraish. Later, at the Battle of Badr, Hamzah acted as the Prophet's right-hand man, embodying the Prophet's role as commander-in-chief. In contrast, in the *Sirah Nabawiyah*, Hamzah is still portrayed as an important figure, but the narrative is more chronological and does not dramatically emphasize aspects of heroism. The text places greater emphasis on Hamzah's conversion to Islam and his role in Islamic history (Shafiyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997, p. 108). According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, characters in media function not only as individuals but also as symbols carrying specific meanings. In this context, Hamzah is represented as a symbol of courage and resistance against injustice. This strategy is also tied to the film's need to create a character who can serve as an emotional bridge between the story and the audience. By strengthening Hamzah's character, the film successfully presents a figure capable of replacing the Prophet's role as the central point of identification, given that the Prophet cannot be visually depicted.

In his book, Stuart Hall also touched upon Edward Said's framework of Orientalism, which is relevant to this study. The differences between these two works can be understood as a manifestation of the influence of Western discourse in representing the East, particularly Islam. The film *The Message*, produced within the Western cinematic context, demonstrates an effort to adapt the representation of Islam so that it would be accepted by a global audience. The use of dramatic structure, heroic characters, added dialogue, and an implicit narrator reflects how the East is represented through a Western framework that prioritizes linear and dramatic narratives. This aligns with Said's view that Orientalism does not always appear in explicit forms but can manifest in representations that seem neutral or even sympathetic, yet remain shaped by a Western perspective. Meanwhile, the *Sirah Nabawiyah* presents the same events from an internal Islamic perspective without external cultural demands. The narratives presented adhere strictly to authentic sources and are not adapted for dramatic effect or a global audience. This indicates that the representations in the text are oriented toward preserving religious and historical values, rather than aesthetic or entertainment needs. Thus, the differences between these two works lie not only in the medium used, but also in their cultural backgrounds, target audiences, and the ideologies underpinning the production process of each work.

Although this film was made according to the conventions of Western cinema, it does not overlook important details in Islamic history, as exemplified in the dialogue below, which attempts to introduce key figures in Islamic history, particularly the *assabikunal awwalun* (the first to embrace Islam).

(Abu Thalib) *Who has he told about this?*

(Zaid) *His wife, and Ali, and his friend Abu Bakr.*

(Abu Thalib) *And you?*

(Zaid) *I am his adopted son.*

(Akkad, 1976, 15:45)

*"...As-Sabiqunal-Awwalun (yang terdahulu dan yang pertama-tama masuk Islam). Mereka adalah istri beliau, Ummul Mukminin Khadijah binti Khuwailid, pembantu beliau, Zaid bin Haritsah bin Syurahbil Al-Kalby, anak paman beliau, Ali bin Abu Thalib,"*

(Shafiyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997, pp. 73–74)

In his theory of representation, Stuart Hall emphasizes that meaning is shaped by the way an event or character is presented. In the film *The Message*, information about the first people to convert to Islam is conveyed through simple, personal dialogue, such as Zaid's statement, "I am his adopted son," which portrays early Islam as a human, relatable, and emotional experience, making it easily understandable to a wide audience. The choice of dialogue that avoids religious titles or Arabic terms indicates that the film constructs a more universal meaning and is not overly bound by religious formalities. In contrast, in *Sirah Nabawiyah*, the presentation is narrative in style, using formal and religious language, such as the terms "*As-Sabiqunal-Awwalun*" and the title "*Ummul Mukminin*." This representation emphasizes the authority, sacredness, and historical accuracy of early Islam, which is positioned as part of a structured sacred history, not merely an ordinary social experience.

From the perspective of Edward Said's Orientalism, this also highlights differing viewpoints in the representation of the East. The film *The Message* tends to adapt its narrative to a Western audience through the use of simple English and the omission of complex religious terms, so that Islam is represented in a more familiar and less alienating form. This reflects a tendency toward adaptation within the framework of Orientalism, where the East is presented in a way that is more easily accepted by the West. Meanwhile, *Sirah Nabawiyah* is a form of self-representation that does not attempt to conform to an external perspective. The text in *Sirah Nabawiyah* more authentically preserves Islamic terminology, structure, and values, allowing *Sirah Nabawiyah* to serve as a comparative tool for identifying the Orientalist discourse present in the film *The Message*.

In addition to the narrative storytelling that uses other characters to stand in for the Prophet, the cinematic techniques in the film *The Message* also play a significant role in analyzing the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). While the Prophet is typically depicted visually as a male figure whose face is not shown or as a white light bearing the inscription "ﷺ" (Maharani, 2026), the film *The Message* employs POV camera techniques, framing, and camera movement as a representational system that replaces the visual presence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, in the scene occurring at 17:47–18:30, when Abu Thalib looks and speaks toward the camera as if he is talking to the Prophet about the offer from the Quraish (Akkad, 1976, 17:47-18.30), and also at 2:32:31–2:32:48, when Abu Sufyan invites the Prophet to speak, but the camera moves to the right of the audience and then to the left, as if to suggest that the Prophet is ignoring Abu Sufyan (Akkad, 1976, 2:32:31-2:32:48).

From these two scenes, it is clear that when other characters speak directly to the camera, the audience is led to understand that their communication is directed at the Prophet. If a scene requires a direct response from the Prophet, another character will deliver a monologue in front of the camera as if the camera were the Prophet, and then the camera will provide a response by moving from right to left or vice versa to indicate the Prophet's disagreement, or it will move from top to bottom and vice versa to depict the Prophet's agreement or his gesture of standing up or sitting down. This technique demonstrates that representation in film is constructed not only through dialogue and characters but also through visual language. According to Stuart Hall's theory, visuals are part of a sign system capable of generating meaning. Unlike the *Sirah Nabawiyah* texts, which rely on verbal language, film has the advantage of conveying meaning visually and symbolically. However, this advantage is accompanied by the risk of more subjective interpretation.

Finally, the use of a narrator is also an important representational strategy in the film *The Message*. The narrator serves as a substitute for the Prophet Muhammad, who cannot be depicted directly in the film. This strategy appears in various scenes, particularly at the beginning and end of the film. However, one of the most compelling scenes is the account of the Prophet Muhammad's hijrah with Abu Bakr while they were hiding in a cave. In that scene, the narrator says:

*"A few threads of a spider's web were all that stood between Muhammad and death. But he was a man who could not be killed. The Bedouin guide led him*

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*and his companion, Abu Bakr, in their escape through the untrodden expanses of the desert and the scorching heat of the June days."*

(Akkad, 1976, 1:12:17)

*"Sebenarnya ada di antara mereka yang sudah mendekati mulut gua. Tetapi Allah lebih berkuasa. Al-Bukhari meriwayatkan dari Anas, dari Abu Bakar, dia berkata, "Aku bersama Nabi di dalam gua. Kudongakkan kepala, dan kulihat kaki beberapa orang. Aku berkata, "Wahai Nabi Allah, andaikata mereka melongokkan pandangannya, tentu mereka akan melihat kita"..."*

(Shafiyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997, p. 190)

The use of a narrator in this scene serves as a bridge between the film and the audience, allowing this significant event to be conveyed even without showing visual depictions of the Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr. Furthermore, the use of a narrator in this scene not only serves to explain the plot but also builds a dramatic and emotional atmosphere surrounding the Prophet Muhammad's struggles during the Hijrah. The use of the phrase "between Muhammad and murder" highlights the emphasis on the threats and tension present in that situation. Meanwhile, in the *Sirah Nabawiyah*, the primary focus lies on the spiritual elements and Allah's assistance to Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr. Thus, the film constructs a more dramatic meaning compared to its source text. Viewed through Stuart Hall's theory, media possesses the ability to encode specific messages to make them more accessible to the audience. In this context, the narrator serves as an encoding strategy to simplify historical events into a more cinematic and communicative narrative. Viewers not only grasp the facts of the Hijrah but are also guided to experience the tension, danger, and the Prophet's struggle through a powerful narrative language.

Furthermore, the use of the narrator can also be analyzed using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Edward Said explains that representations of the East in Western media often undergo a process of simplification and dramatization to align with the expectations of Western audiences. In the film *The Message*, the narrative of the Prophet's flight through the desert marked by threats of assassination and a journey across the sand constructs an image of the East as a place of danger, mystery, and adventure. This depiction illustrates how the exotic elements of the East are brought to life through the narrator's language. The desert, the long journey, and the threat of assassination serve as dramatic elements frequently employed by the West to represent the East. Although the film aims to present Islam in a positive light, this narrative construction still reflects an adaptation to Western storytelling patterns that emphasize suspense and heroism. On the other hand, the *Sirah Nabawiyah* places greater emphasis on the religious dimension than on the dramatic one. The text's primary focus is the Prophet's faith in God's assistance, as seen in the statement, "...Dua orang, dan yang ketiga adalah Allah." (Shafiyurrahman Al Mubarakfuri, 1997, p. 190). This phrase underscores the spiritual values and trust in God that lie at the heart of the event. However, in the film, this spiritual element is not the primary focus; instead, it is shifted toward a more visual and emotional narrative tension. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the use of a narrator in the film *The Message* constitutes a form of representation constructed through dramatic and cinematic strategies.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the film *The Message* and the *Sirah Nabawiyah* is influenced by the differing cultural backgrounds of their respective authors. The portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in *The Message* is constructed through various systems of signs, such as dialogue, intermediary characters, cinematic techniques, the use of a narrator, and dramatic structure, all of which are shaped by the filmmaker's background as a Muslim living and working within a Western cultural context. Conversely, *Sirah Nabawiyah* was written by a Muslim who, in the writing process, adhered to the internal principles and perspectives of Islam; thus, the representation of the Prophet Muhammad draws more heavily on sources considered authentic, historical, and rich in Islamic spiritual values which naturally differs from the representation in the film *The Message*. When viewed through Stuart Hall's theory of representation, these differences indicate that the film *The Message* not only attempts to reflect

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the historical reality of Islam but also reconstructs meaning according to the needs of the medium and the audience. Meanwhile, through Edward Said's perspective on Orientalism, this study finds that the film *The Message* still exhibits the influence of Western representational frameworks, even though it was made with the aim of introducing Islam positively to the global community.

This study differs from previous research in that it not only focuses on the representation of the Prophet Muhammad but also analyzes the influence of Orientalism on the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad based on the authors' backgrounds. The film *The Message*, as a product of cultural representation, is compared with the text of the *Sirah Nabawiyah* to examine the process of meaning construction, narrative adaptation, and the potential emergence of Orientalist discourse. Thus, this study contributes to the field of Islamic literature and film studies, particularly in understanding how modern visual media represent Islamic history and sacred figures through specific cultural and ideological perspectives.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in *The Message* is constructed indirectly through dialogue, narration, heroic characters, and cinematic techniques such as camera angles and camera movement. The event of the first revelation is presented through a dialogue between Zaid and Abu Thalib, whilst the character of Hamzah serves as a symbolic heroic stand-in for the Prophet's visual absence. Furthermore, the use of a narrator in the Hijrah scene reinforces the dramatic tension and emotional atmosphere of the story. Meanwhile, the *Sirah Nabawiyah* represents the Prophet Muhammad through authentic historical narration, hadith, and Islamic spiritual values that emphasise the purity of religious values rather than dramatic construction. Furthermore, this study also found that the use of emotional dialogue, heroic characterisation, and dramatic storytelling patterns constitutes a form of Orientalist influence on the representation of the Prophet Muhammad in *The Message*, aimed at making Islamic history more accessible to a global audience. Thus, this study contributes to film, literary, and Islamic studies by providing a comparative analysis between visual media and religious texts through Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. This study also contributes to understanding how cinematic techniques and Western cultural frameworks influence the reconstruction of Islamic history and the representation of sacred figures in modern visual media.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author declares that this research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

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