

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Islam and the Middle East have been popular topic among scholars, researchers, scientists, sociologists, and even common people. Islam and Middle East have taken part in the world history since a long time ago. They are related to the Orient as Edward Said's explanation that the Orient does not always refer to the East Asia but instead it refers to the Indian subcontinent and especially to the Islamic Middle East (Parker 278). Based on Said's explanation, the Orient or the East is characterised as 'sensual, lazy, exotic, irrational, cruel, promiscuous, seductive, inscrutable, dishonest, mystical, superstitious, primitive, ruled by emotion, and as sink of despotism at the margins of the world where all people are alike and where their actions are determined by the national or racial category they belong to ("Arab," "the native")' (Parker 278).

As the Orient, Islam and Middle East are considered to have different culture and other perspectives from the non-Orient or called as the Occident (West). It means that Islam and Middle East are perceived as the other by the Occident. As explained by Tyson, 'The Other' is related to the colonisation between coloniser and colonised and that the colonisers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; native people as considered "other" different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than

fully human (419 – 420). Then, the process of identification as the Other/the Self or as ‘Them/Us’ is called *Othering*.

While the othering process occurs toward the Orient especially to Islam and Middle East, the stereotypes of both of them also emerge. Islam and Middle East are perceived as something savage and uncivilised like Edward Said explained that there has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s right that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find (xiv). It means that Islam and Middle East are considered as something strange because they have different rules in their cultures and customs, so that they are perceived as the Others by the Occident.

Furthermore, Middle East is considered as part of the Third World. The first world refers to Britain, Europe, and the United States; the second world refers to the white populations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and southern Africa (and, for some theorists, the former Soviet block); the third world refers to the technologically developing nations, such as India and those of Africa, Central and South America, and Southeast Asia; fourth world refers to the indigenous populations like Native American and Aboriginal Australia (Tyson 420). These world distinctions plus their different cultures and customs may lead to the way Middle East is perceived as un-intellectual country consciously and politically; ‘thus the Chinese or the Arabs, or whatever Asian or Middle Eastern population is

politically convenient, are defined as cruel, sneaky, evil, cunning, dishonest, given to sexual promiscuity and perversion, and the like' (Tyson 420 – 421).

Islam and Middle East actually cannot be separated with the first world countries such as America because they have had historical relationships since a long time ago. One of the most crucial historical relationships is between Iran and American. Even though America never colonised Iran but since the revolutionary Islam in Middle East explosively boomed, it became most painfully apparent to the American public and its leaders during the late 1970s not in thinly populated Libya but, rather, 2.000 miles to the east in Iran (Little 194). It means that the revolutionary Islam in Iran made the turbulence of the Shah's White Revolution, an ambitious program that modernised and westernised Iran economically and politically that was rejected by Iranian people, was over through massively by Shah's opposites. At that time, Iran was lead by Mohammed Reza Pahlavi who returned his father as previous Shah, Reza Shah Pahlavi.

In 'American Orientalism', a book written by Douglas Little (2008), it was narrated how Mohammed Reza Pahlavi got supports from America in order to go against Britain and Russia to withdraw their army from Iran after Second World War. In 1950, Iranian people elected Mohammed Mossadegh to become Prime Minister. He nationalised the petroleum oil to Iranian people previously handled by British and American. In 1953, he was caudated by Shah Reza Pahlavi because he signed a trade agreement of oil with the Soviet Union. Then, Shah Reza Pahlavi arrested him because he thought that Mossadegh did not support America. After Shah Reza Pahlavi arrested Mossadegh, he was protested by Iranian people

because he and his wife were always perceived to live hedonistically. In 1978, Iranian people held a big demonstration on the street influenced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the opponent of Shah Pahlavi, who wanted to establish an Islamic republic. On September 8th 1978, the Shah's troops killed the pro-Khomeini protesters in Tehran's Jaleh Square. By late 1979 pro-Khomeini gunmen had taken fifty-two American hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the Ayatollah's government had begun channelling Iran's oil revenues into the hands of anti-American terrorists from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon (Little 226).

In western accounts of crusade war, Islam symbolises terror, devastation, and hordes of hated barbarians (Said 59). When we are talking about Islam, it cannot be separated with the representation of Arab because Islam and Arab seem to be inseparable. Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilisation (Said 108). Based on Said's explanations, around 1990s the much-debated issue of Islam or Islamism was a threat to the West or came to be increasingly bound up with the problem of terrorism (Lockman 223).

The issue of Islam, Arabs and terrorism have been well represented in popular media, as in popular books and news:

“Today, bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have

supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples over there who have been such a terrible thorn in "our" flesh". (Said xvi)

Not only in books, the issue is also found in Hollywood films. There have been so many movies representing Arab or Middle East as terrorist such as *Syriana* (2005), *The Kingdom* (2007), and *Redacted* (2007). These movies were often produced amidst or after a heightened political tension between U.S. and the Middle East. The most recent example of those kinds of films is *Argo*.

Argo was a Hollywood film in 2012 that was produced and directed by Ben Affleck, a famous American actor, film director, producer, and screenwriter. *Argo* told about an agent of CIA conducted to escape and save six staff of American Embassy from Canadian House Ambassador. The six staff of American Embassy successfully escaped from U.S. Embassy office during the incursion of Iranian people toward U.S. Embassy office. This turbulence happened in 1979 in Tehran, Iran in order to fall down the Shah Reza Pahlavi and to ask Khomeini returned to Iran. The Iranian people did not know that six American staff successfully lost and they just realised it when the Iranian soldier found the data about U.S.'s staff from broken documents that recovered again by Iranian children. The success was not possible without the effort of CIA agent Tony Mendez (acted by Ben Affleck) and Hollywood film producers who planned the escape by making a fake film production in Iran.

Ben Affleck himself was the lead male actor on *Argo* film. *Argo* won British Academy of Film and Television Arts for Best Editing, Best Picture, and Best Director; won Directors Guild of America for Best Director, Producers Guild

of America for Best Producer, and Hollywood Foreign Press Association for Best Director (*MSN Entertainment*). More importantly, *Argo* won Academic OSCAR 2013 for best film Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Writing & Adapted Screenplay, and Best Achievement in Film Editing (Neumaier and Hutchinson).

The writer decided to choose *Argo* as the object of analysis not just because *Argo* won many awards but also because the one who presented *Argo* won OSCAR 2013 for Best Picture Academy Award was the First Lady of America, Michelle Obama (Neumaier and Hutchinson). Michelle Obama made surprising Hollywood history Sunday night by becoming the first First Lady to present an Oscar — giving the Best Picture award to “*Argo*”. It means that there is something special in *Argo* film that caused the First Lady of America wanted to announce it. Although *Argo* won many awards in western country, but in reality after *Argo* was released in 2012, it caused many protests not only from Iran, but also from other countries.

There are some disagreements or critics to *Argo* from Iran. The first one can be found on the media about the critic from Iranian people about the win of *Argo* for Best Picture OSCAR 2013:

“But unlike the Academy, the people at Iran’s state TV were unimpressed. Calling it an “advertisement for the CIA,” Iranian media representatives criticized the film’s “unflattering” portrayal of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its aftermath. *Argo*’s political motivations are debatable,

but the film clearly excludes any prominent Iranian voices from its narrative". (Rice)

The other critic can be found in an article as titled 'The Argo's over-exaggeration' by Dina Y. Sulaeman, a Doctoral candidate in International Relations at Padjadjaran University and a research associate at the Global Future Institute. Dina explained that according to Ken Taylor, there were some over-exaggerative aspects in Argo film which became the common characteristic of Hollywood movies. First, actually the six U.S. Embassy employees actually did not stay at the residence of the Ambassador Ken Taylor like presented on film, but they stayed at John Sheardown's house, as Canadian embassy staff (*The Global Review*). Second, the Canadian Ambassador managed the escaping of the six U.S embassy staffs by making passports for them without Tony Mendez's help like shown in Argo film. Third, Argo narrated that Canadian government asked the six U.S. embassy staffs got out soon from Canadian ambassador house because Canadian embassy would be closed; it was not right at all. Fourth, there was no scared interrogation at the airport and no heroic action done by airport staffs or Iranian revolutionary guards like shown in Argo film. Moreover, Dina explained that according to Lee Schatz, one of the U.S. Embassy employees, the situation when they left the airport at that time was fine. The other critics can be seen as statement below:

"Interestingly, Ken Taylor (as Canadian ambassador in Tehran – Iran in 1979) considered that Argo didn't portray "a more conventional side," and

“a more hospitable side” of the Iranian society. And that is the source of the Iran protests over the film. Dr. Mashoumeh Ebtekar, who acted as a spokesperson for the students during the takeover of the US Embassy. She said: “The group who took over the American Embassy were a group of young, very orderly and quite calm men and women ... The scenes that you see in *Argo* are totally incorrect”. (*The Global Review*)

Further critics can be found at Los Angeles Times by By Ramin Mostaghim and Patrick J. McDonnell with the headline ‘Argo’s Oscar gets a thumbs-down in Iran’ (*Los Angeles Time*). One of Iranian people disagreed with representation of Iran through the *Argo* film:

“I am secular, atheist and not pro-regime but I think the film 'Argo' has distorted history and insulted Iranians,” said Hossain, a cafe owner worried about business because of customers' lack of cash in a sanctions-battered economy. “For me, it wasn't even a good thriller.” (*Los Angeles Time*)

Thus, the reasons why the writer decided to choose *Argo* as the object of analysis because: first, *Argo* was very exalted and pride upon many awards in the West, but in the East especially in Iran, *Argo* owned many critics and protests; second, because *Argo* was announced by Michelle Obama as the First Lady of America who became the first US lady presented award of a film that never happened before on the stage of OSCAR awards; and the last but not the least.

Argo depicted images of Iran and the U.S. as representation of the Orient/the Other and the West, respectively. Throughout the movie, there were many othering processes constructed. These othering processes were delivered through the representation of Iranian characters on film, and they will be the writer's focus on this study.

Orientalism as Said's explanation is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of time) "the Occident" (2). It is dealing with citations based on Said's explanations about Orientalism in many things that can be inferred if Orientalism is a belief of how the West portrays the East as subject matter as politically, economically, socially, and culturally different from the West (2 – 6). On the other hand, othering process is considered as the way of making the Orient becomes oriental depiction done by the Occident.

There are some previous studies that related to the writer's study of Orientalism. There have been many studies conducted to reveal the orientalism in popular culture. The first is a thesis by Mahmudah Laili as titled *The Representation of Orientalism in James Cameron's Avatar*. Laili stated that "the idea of Orientalism is clearly depicted in the way human represents the native as primitive and uncivilised and human tries to educate and build the native based on their value based on her analysis" (3 – 4). Laili's statement supported the writer's study of Argo film that Iran as the Orient was portrayed as uncivilised through the representation Iranian characters and the environment appeared on film.

Second is a thesis by Amanda Rahma Febrina as titled *Racial Discrimination toward Algerian Troops by French in Indigenes Movie by Rachid Bouchareb's: An Orientalism Study*. Febrina argued that “all stereotypes between those differences, races are important for Westerners to extend their power over the Easterners; they tend to make those stereotypes fix; this explanation can be meant that stereotypes of the Orient made by the West in order to consolidate themselves to be more confident in deconstructing the East” (8). This Febrina’s statement supported the writer’s study that stereotypes of Iranian people as the Orient/the Other were made by American in order to make sure that the one who appropriately became ‘hero’ was American itself.

Third is a journal by Lila Abu Lughod as titled *Orientalism and Middle East – Feminist Studies*. Lughod stated that “the following one of the most production lines of thought made possible by Orientalism, with the division between East and West (and the representation of each) to be understood not as natural geographic or cultural fact but as a product of the political and historical encounter imperialism” (106). Lughod’s statement supported the writer’s study that representation of Iran was created and produced not because they were in different geographic state but because America wanted to produce *Argo* as one of political ways to deliver ideas about America and Iran.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on *Argo* film, there two important questions which are very useful to be made as problem statements of this study. The main problem statement are:

1. How are Iranian people represented in Argo film?
2. How does Orientalism work in Argo film?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

According to this problem statement, there appears the objective as the writer's concern which would be worthy to be analysed on this study. The objective of this study is:

1. To explore the representation of Iranian people through Argo film.
2. To reveal how Orientalism works in Argo film.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study specifically points out to Orientalism as the issue to be analysed. This study is purposed to reveal the ideology of Orientalism through Argo film by analysing Othering process which is delivered through Iranian people by applying theory of Said's Orientalism. This study explores how the way the Western perceive the Eastern by applying Western thought to reach the goal. Further, this study reveals how the relationship between Western and Eastern portrayed on this film. It means that the writer will reveal how the way Iranian people communicate and behave toward American on this film. Thus, this study is expected can give contribution to further studies or researches that bring similar issue, and can be very useful to be criticised because there are still many weaknesses and gaps that have not been analysed yet on this study. This study is also aimed to the readers who have similar concern about Orientalism. This study

is also expected to give further understanding how political issue is represented in popular culture and how certain ideology is reproduced through popular culture, especially in films.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

In analysing this study, the writer finds some important key terms that can be remembered to make more easily to the readers in reading this study. The following key terms are stated below:

Orientalism : It expresses and represents culturally and ideologically a discourse of institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and style (2).

Othering : The coloniser's treatment of members of the indigenous culture as less than fully human and as colonial oppression in all its forms (Tyson 427).

Representation : It is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth," which is itself a representation (Said 272).

The Orient : An idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and

presence in and for the West (Said 5).

The West : Including western Europe and the United States (Lockman
234).

