

Violence, Religion, and Trauma: A Social Critique on the Phenomenon of Terrorism in Movies

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Abstract

The violent and religiously manipulative content of several religious movies can cause trauma to those who view them. This study uses cognitive dissonance theory to analyze how religious movie that highlight aspects of fear in the movie can affect social construction, particularly in light of the possibility of extreme attitudes. Qualitative content analysis using narrative and visual techniques to many key scenes is the methodology employed. The findings demonstrated how the portrayal of religious organizations as purveyors of threatening doctrine that emphasizes punishment affects the psychological strain of the story's characters, leading to internal conflict and a range of responses, such as rejection and extreme tendencies. The results show how authoritative religious teachings might influence psychological and symbolic pressure. To promote critical attitudes and avoid the possible detrimental effects of interpreting teachings that emphasize fear, this research helps clarify the significance of media literacy and the selective distribution of religious beliefs.

Konten kekerasan dan manipulasi agama dalam beberapa film religi dapat menyebabkan trauma bagi mereka yang menontonnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori disonansi kognitif untuk menganalisis bagaimana kisah-kisah religi yang menyoroti aspek-aspek ketakutan dalam film dapat mempengaruhi konstruksi sosial, terutama dalam hal kemungkinan sikap ekstrem. Analisis konten kualitatif menggunakan teknik naratif dan visual pada banyak adegan utama adalah metodologi yang digunakan. Temuan menunjukkan bagaimana penggambaran organisasi keagamaan sebagai penyebar doktrin yang mengancam dan menekankan pada hukuman mempengaruhi ketegangan psikologis pada tokoh dalam cerita, yang mengarah pada konflik internal dan berbagai respons, seperti penolakan dan kecenderungan ekstrem. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bagaimana ajaran agama yang otoritatif dapat mempengaruhi tekanan psikologis dan simbolis. Untuk mendorong sikap kritis dan menghindari kemungkinan efek merugikan dari penafsiran ajaran yang menekankan rasa takut, penelitian ini membantu memperjelas pentingnya literasi media dan penyebaran keyakinan agama secara selektif.

Keywords: phenomenon of terrorism in movies; religion; religious manipulation; trauma; violence

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Introduction

As a popular culture component, movies have substantially influenced public perception regarding global issues, including terrorism (Weber 2020a, 2020b). In the social constructivist paradigm, identity, reality, and perception (meaning) are not innate but rather are shaped through social interaction involving language, symbols, and narratives (discourse) (Kruljac 2022). These elements have collectively shaped social interactions concerning common global threats, including terrorism, radicalism, and religious extremism (Nurnisya, Saad, and Rahman 2021).

Global studies have shown that movies not only reflect but also influence the public regarding the issue of terrorism (Cantey 2019). Movies can be used to understand the root causes and impacts of terrorism through their visual representations and narratives (Bakker and van Zuijdewijn 2022). However, it is also necessary to be critical of the media, such as movies. Riegler (2010) in his research argues that Hollywood cinema has shaped, and sometimes distorted, perceptions of terrorism since the late 1960s. His article comparatively examines symbolic movies. Its main thesis is that Hollywood has never seriously tried to offer an accurate assessment of terrorism.

The gaps in the study of movies and terrorism can be categorized into several key areas: 1) lack of comprehensive analysis, as many studies focus only on the portrayal of terrorism in movies without analyzing the real-world influence on public perception, policy, or radicalization; 2) limited exploration of perspectives, as most movies focus on either the victims or law enforcement, often neglecting the perspectives of terrorists, policymakers, or marginalized communities affected by counter-

terrorism measures; 3) under representation of cyber terrorism, as most movies depict traditional terrorism involving bombings and attacks, with only few portraying emerging threats like cyber terrorism and digital radicalization; 4) cultural and regional bias as many studies focus on Western movies, leaving a gap in understanding how terrorism is portrayed in non-Western cinema and its impact on diverse audiences; 5) lack of longitudinal studies, over-looking the long-term effects of terrorism-related movies on public perception and policymaking, limiting understanding of their multifaceted societal impacts.

The issue of terrorism has emerged as a significant concern in Indonesia in recent years, with the prevalence of threats fluctuating over the past five years (Admin of BNPT 2022). According to the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT), a notable escalation in terrorist activities was observed in 2019, followed by a decline in 2020 and a resurgence in 2022. A report by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEPP), titled the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), corroborates these findings, classifying Indonesia as 31st in the world for incidents of terrorism in 2023, a 22% decrease from the previous year (Institute for Economics and Peace 2024). Movies portray terrorism in Indonesia in different ways. The movie of *Alif Lam Mim* (2015) explores a dystopian future where state surveillance and technological control shape society, highlighting the dangers of excessive governmental power. The movie of *22 Menit* (22 Minutes) (2018) is based on the true events of the 2016 Jakarta bombing, portraying the rapid response of law enforcement in countering a terrorist attack. The movie of *Sayap-sayap Patah* (Broken Wings) (2022) delves into the psychological and social

consequences of radicalization, following individuals affected by terrorism. The movie of *13 Bom di Jakarta* (13 Bombs in Jakarta) (2023) focuses on a cyber-terrorism plot, illustrating how digital threats can be just as devastating as physical attacks.

A multitude of preceding studies have demonstrated the potential for religion to be exploited to legitimize terrorist acts. For instance, Dwiyantri et al.'s research (2024) revealed that the movie of *Alif Lam Mim* exemplifies the manipulation of religion to justify violence. Additionally, Bahrudin and Hamad's (2019) study illustrates how religious identification is employed to establish narratives supporting terrorist crimes, thereby enabling the attainment of power. Other studies emphasize the role of movies in shaping law enforcement officers' image and identifying new threats such as cyber terrorism (Hidayah, Hermawan, and Novianita 2024; Nurnisya et al. 2021). These studies highlight the crucial role of movie in shaping public perceptions of terrorism, religious manipulation, and security dynamics, underscoring the need for further research into how cinematic narratives influence societal attitudes and policy responses.

Previous studies on movies and terrorism have explored various aspects of the topic. Some research has examined how religion is exploited to justify terrorist acts, as seen in Dwiyantri et al. (2024) and Bahrudin and Hamad (2019), which examine religious manipulation in movies to promote violence and establish power. Other studies, such as Nurnisya et al. (2021) and Hidayah et al. (2024), have analyzed the role of movies in shaping public perceptions of law enforcement and highlighting emerging threats like cyber terrorism. Additionally, research by Mugits (2024) and Marsela and

Retnasary (2024) has explored the gender dimensions and the creative process of filmmaking, while Dewi and Pratiwi (2024), with their visual semiotic study, have shown how movie posters represent terrorism-related themes. Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in research that thoroughly examines the interaction between violence, religion, and trauma in the context of terrorism, indicating the need for further study in this area.

While many studies have explored the relationship between movies, terrorism, and religious manipulation, there remains a significant gap in research examining these narratives' psychological impact, particularly in recent movies such as Joko Anwar's *Siksa Kubur* (2024). This gap is evident in studies analyzing how movie narratives trigger cognitive dissonance in victims of terrorism, influencing their emotional and psychological responses. Additionally, there is limited research on how religious institutions are portrayed as influencing individuals' cognitive processes, potentially fostering environments conducive to radicalization or trauma. By adopting a psychological perspective, this study seeks to understand how movies construct and reinforce psychological conflicts related to violence, religion, and trauma..

This research reveals how *Siksa Kubur* (2024) portrays the psychological conflict experienced by victims of terrorism through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. The findings highlight how the movie constructs religious manipulation as a key factor in inducing psychological distress and trauma, illustrating the internal struggles of characters torn between faith and fear. Additionally, the study uncovers how the psychological horror genre intensifies the emotional impact of terrorism narratives, offering new insights into how Indonesian

cinema represents the intersection of violence, religion, and trauma. By integrating critical analysis of movie narratives with psychological theory, this research provides a fresh perspective on the role of cinema in shaping public understanding of terrorism.

Several studies have explored the intersection of movies, terrorism, and religious manipulation. For instance, research has analyzed how Arab moviemakers depict terror and religious extremism, offering counter-narratives to Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of Middle Easterners as proponents of indiscriminate violence.

Additionally, studies have examined the representation of terrorism in Post-9/11 American cinema, highlighting how movies embody collective understandings of cultural trauma. Furthermore, applying cognitive dissonance principles has provided insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying terrorism. However, there appears to be a lack of research specifically focusing on how movie narratives depict the interaction between violence, religion, and trauma, particularly through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. Addressing this gap could enhance our understanding of the psychological impact of religious manipulation and trauma as portrayed in cinema (Hamil 2021; Maikovich 2005; Wright 2016).

The novelty of this research lies in the unique integration of cognitive dissonance theory with the movie analysis of *Siksa Kubur* the movie (2024) to explore the psychological trauma of terrorism victims and the role of religious institutions in radicalization. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on perpetrators or Western cinema, this research shifts the perspective to victims, analyzing their internal conflicts due to manipulated religious teachings and institutional betrayal. This multidisciplinary approach combines cinematic

narrative analysis (such as visual symbolism and psychological horror genres) with psychological theory, revealing how fear and religious doctrine create cognitive dissonance that drives extremism. The research also offers a non-Western perspective by analyzing the Indonesian context, where religion and communal identity play a crucial role in social dynamics.

This research provides innovative insights into "lone wolf" radicalization through indirect ideological exposure (such as voice recordings or texts), which aligns with contemporary terrorism trends. By exposing how the manipulation of religion in institutions (such as *pesantren*) contributes to social vulnerability, this study becomes culturally and temporally relevant for Indonesia, which has seen an escalation of religiously motivated violence. The critique of religious authority raised in "*Siksa Kubur*" also enriches the discourse on both media literacy and critical religious education as solutions to counter extremism. Thus, this research not only extends academic understanding of the interaction of religion, violence, and trauma but also paves the way for linking cinema analyses with local context-based counter-terrorism studies.

This research is intended to provide answers to three main questions. First, how the movie of *Siksa Kubur* represents the role of religious values in shaping social conditions that are prone to violence and terrorism by analyzing narrative elements, character traits, and religious symbols. Second, exploring the forms and messages conveyed by the movie related to the influence of religious institutions on violent behavior and radicalism, especially concerning the doctrine and authority of religious figures. Third, how cognitive dissonance as an Impact of religious representation in the movie *Siksa*

Kubur on victims or affected individuals, especially in the context of conflict between religious beliefs and real experiences.

This research employs a qualitative content analysis to explore symbolic and narrative meanings in *Siksa Kubur* (2024). Primary data were collected through repeated viewing and transcription of key scenes, while secondary sources included documentaries and academic literature on movies, terrorism, and cognitive dissonance (Krippendorff 2019). The data were then coded into themes such as religious symbolism, justification of violence, and psychological trauma, supported by visual analysis. The thematic analysis focused on how religious teachings and imagery in the movie trigger cognitive dissonance and justify violence. Findings were interpreted to assess the movie's contribution to discussions on religious manipulation and trauma in cinematic narratives.

The Role of Religious Values in Shaping Social Conditions that are Prone to Violence and Terrorism

The findings of this study reveal that *Siksa Kubur* movie (2024) portrays religious institutions as spaces that emphasize doctrinal rigidity and fear-based teachings. Through its narrative and symbolism, the movie highlights how religious instruction can be used as a mechanism to instill psychological distress, particularly in vulnerable individuals. A key aspect of this representation is the way religious figures, such as Ustadzah Ningsih, convey teachings about divine punishment, creating an environment where fear overrides critical thinking. The study also identifies how cognitive dissonance arises within the main character, Sita, as she struggles to reconcile religious doctrines with her personal experiences and emotions. This depiction raises questions about

the role of religious discourse in shaping perceptions of morality, obedience, and violence, offering a critical perspective on how religious teachings can be manipulated to justify extreme actions.

Ustadzah Ningsih: "Who is your God is the first question that will be asked in the grave... Do you know what the punishment will be if you don't answer? First, your graves will become narrower and narrower, squeezing your bodies until your ribs cross in the middle. *Subhanallah*, you can't imagine the horror! Then the angels will torment their bodies until they are destroyed. And with great hammers, they will crush their flesh and bones, stoned, torn by snakes. As they sleep on a bed of hellfire."

Figure 1 shows a scene from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024), where an older woman instills fear in a young daughter by telling her that angels can take her life at any time. This scene reflects the point of the study, which critiques how religious teachings that emphasize punishment and fear, such as grave punishment, are used in religious institutions to indoctrinate individuals, especially children, causing psychological trauma and cognitive dissonance. In the context of the movie, this fear-based religious approach not only creates emotional stability and inner conflict but also paves the way for radicalization and violence in the name of religion.

Figure 2 shows a girl wearing a white uniform and headscarf, with a blank and tired expression, listening to the question, "*Man Rabbuka?*" (Who is your God?). This scene illustrates the psychological distress caused by the harsh repetition of religious doctrine from an early age, which is discussed in the study. The movie of *Siksa Kubur* shows how religious teachings that are supposed to guide instead become a source of fear and inner conflict, especially when taught with a fearful approach.

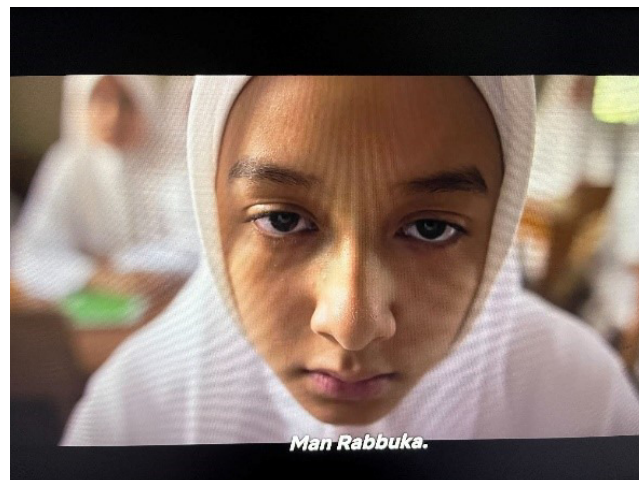
In this context, the question “*Man Rabbuka?*” is no longer a reminder of faith but a symbol of mental pressure that triggers trauma and cognitive dissonance in child characters like Sita.

Figure 1
Seriousness of Expression and Atmosphere of Religious Doctrine through Fear



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

Figure 2
Traumatized Expressions of Suicide Bombing Victims



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

To add to the tension of depicting the frightening atmosphere of the doctrinal process, the movie's presentation is dominated by minimal and dim lighting. In addition, religious institutions often lack space for open dialogue and exhibit a dismissive attitude toward criticism from their students. At the 15:00 minute mark, it is shown that Sita questions the concept of grave punishment by asking the hypothetical question,

"If someone has experienced punishment in the grave, why should she still be punished in hell?" This question provoked anger and a response from Ustadzah Ningsih to close the dialogue space by accusing Sita of the fragility of her faith and the wrongness of her question. The dialogue was then closed with the slogan: "Believe me, believe in the afterlife, the punishment of hell... will happen to you."

The representation of fear-based religious teaching, simplification of teachings, and rigid doctrine in *Horses of God* (2014) reflects how belief in grave punishment can influence the radicalization process of individuals. One of the characters in the movie explicitly attributes his motivation to commit suicide bombing to his fear of grave punishment, which he claims is reinforced by recorded screams from the grave. This phenomenon shows how existential fears are mobilized through religious teachings to legitimize violence. As analyzed by Douai (2024) in the chapter, "Fly, horses of God, and the gates of Paradise will open for you," the movie constructs terrorism and religious radicalism as a result of social and political pathologies, particularly structural marginalization in urban areas that make young people vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

Terrorist: "At first, I didn't believe it until I heard this (type of recorder). *Naudzubillah min dzalik*, don't let us see it. Die in the way of God. Fight the enemies. Don't go out, danger!"

The movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024) does not explicitly show how the perpetrator gained access to explosives or joined a terrorist organization but rather emphasizes the process of ideological radicalization through fear-based religious teachings. One of the key scenes between Sita and Ustadzah Ningsih shows how the doctrine of divine punishment can cause psychological distress that opens up vulnerability to extreme ideologies. Cognitive dissonance is illustrated through Sita's inner conflict, showing the psychological isolation that contributes to the radicalization process. Visual symbolism such as dim lighting and strict discipline in pesantren underlines the theme of obedience, while religious verses are used to justify suicide terrorism as if promising salvation from hell (Mayangsari et al. 2024).

The movie *Siksa Kubur* (2024) subtly illustrates the psychological conflict described by Hafez and Mullins (2015), where individuals involved in terrorism struggle between peaceful religious teachings and the pressures of radical ideology. It is reflected in Sita's internal turmoil as she grapples with fear-based religious doctrines emphasizing divine punishment. The movie also portrays cognitive adaptation mechanisms (King and Taylor 2011) through Sita's gradual acceptance of extreme interpretations, particularly after witnessing terrifying visions reinforcing her belief in salvation through suffering.

Although *Siksa Kubur* does not explicitly depict how individuals join terrorist organizations, it aligns with Ashghor's (2022) argument that lone-wolf terrorism is not always an isolated act. It is evident in scenes where Sita is exposed to repeated religious indoctrination, reinforcing her psychological transformation without direct recruitment. Additionally, the movie hints at the role of media and external

influences in shaping extreme beliefs, echoing Smith and Talbot's (2019) findings. For instance, a scene where Sita reads an old religious manuscript suggests that individuals can adopt radical ideas through texts and indirect teachings, much like modern radicalization occurs online. Through these depictions, *Siksa Kubur* demonstrates how fear, symbolism, and indirect exposure to extremist narratives contribute to psychological radicalization.

The statement, "At first, I did not believe... die in the way of God. War on His enemies," reflects how perpetrators of terrorism experience cognitive conflict. To resolve this internal tension, they may delegitimize other groups as a way to align their actions with their beliefs (Silke 2008). Perpetrators try to justify violence by believing that their actions are "God's orders" or part of a holy struggle (*jihad*). In other words, they create new cognitions that justify their actions, rationalizing violence to achieve higher religious objectives. It allows them to interpret violent acts as "right" or "just" in the context of their beliefs (Doosje, Loseman, and van den Bos 2013). This process of cognitive restructuring not only reinforces their commitment to violent actions but also diminishes feelings of guilt or moral hesitation, ultimately enabling them to carry out acts of terrorism with a sense of justification and righteousness.

The Forms and Messages Conveyed by the Movie Related to the Influence of Religious Institutions on Violent Behavior and Radicalism

This scene captures the distressing experience of the main character, who a pesantren's patron sexually abuses. At the 24:50 mark, the movie explicitly depicts the patron committing an act of sexual violence. The abuse

happened not only once, but repeatedly, and it was mentioned that there were 50 victims of sexual violence among the students, one of whom died. Religious institutions, in this case, contribute greatly to the creation of an unhealthy environment for *santri* (student) through their inaction and inability to provide protection. It is shown that the religious institution seems to protect the perpetrator because he has provided "help" to the *santri* (minute 23:33).

Figure 3 explains that the scene occurs at night in front of a house with warm lighting. A man and a woman appear to be in a struggle or confrontation, as the man seems to be grabbing the woman. The subtitle "Sita!" suggests someone is calling out a name, possibly in distress. In the background, another person is standing near the house, watching the situation unfold. The atmosphere feels tense and dramatic.

Figure 4 explains that the scene appears inside a car at night. Based on the subtitle, the boy, named Adil, looks tense or deep in thought in dim lighting. The darkness surrounding him adds a sense of mystery or danger. Someone off-screen is calling his name, which could indicate urgency or concern. The atmosphere feels suspenseful as if something important or unsettling is about to happen.

It creates an inner conflict for Adil, who must accept the fact that the religious environment that is expected to provide comfort is actually a source of deep trauma for him. The permissive attitude of the religious teachers who covered up this violation (minute 24:53) shows the inability or unwillingness of institutions to protect victims, making religion a legitimizing tool untouched by justice (Burris, Harmon-Jones, and Tarpley 1997). So, from the results of

research by Alvear and Tombs (2019), sexual abuse in religious life by priests through a case

study of the Sodalicio community in Peru has had a traumatic impact.

Figure 3.
Scene of Sexual Harassment by a Pesantren's Patron



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

Figure 4
Facial Expressions of Victims of Sexual Harassment



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

As a result of this social vulnerability, Sita and Adil experience cognitive dissonance, confusion, and internal conflict about everything they experience. As Festinger (1997) noted, cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual experiences psychological discomfort due to conflicting values, attitudes, or behaviors related to two or more beliefs or actions. Trauma from terrorism and unpleasant experiences in the pesantren make Sita and Adil trapped in two beliefs that must be chosen.

Questions such as "If there's punishment in the grave, why should there be punishment in hell?" and "Angels can take someone's life or even be taken by blowing them up by people who are afraid of being tortured by angels" reflect the doubts and inner conflicts that arise in understanding the truth of religious teachings that seem to be opposite. This inner conflict is then emphasized in the dialogue between Sita and Adil at minute 44:37, where Sita attempts to prove that the recording of grave torment, which motivated the suicide bomber who killed her parents, is fabricated, arguing that the belief is a myth manipulated by others.

The discomfort of the two main characters is reflected in several scenes and dialogues that question the validity of religious teachings. At 17:50, the movie illustrates Sita and Adil's discomfort with fear-based religious doctrine. Sita asks, "Why does religion like to frighten people?"

This research also found that the boarding school where the rehabilitation of post-terrorism victims, Sita and Adil, takes place is located in the countryside, far from the hustle and bustle of the city. In this isolated setting, Sita and Adil attempt to leave the school. What stands out in this scene is Sita's narration, where

Adil asks her about her reasons for wanting to escape.

Adil: "You must want to find the grave where the bomber recorded the sound, right? What do you want to prove?"

Sita: "I want to prove that the voice is fake and that there is no sound from the grave."

Adil: "So if it is proved that there is nothing, then what does it mean, Sit?"

Sita: "It means that Mom and Dad were not killed by evil people who believe in the devil, but by people who believe in religion."

This scene is symbolic of what Festinger calls the flow of dissonance reduction efforts, which show the search for new information that supports the victim's actions or behavior. In this stage, the victim is likely to avoid any information that contradicts the victim's beliefs. These elements are summarized in Table 1.

Figure 5 shows the inner conflict of a character who feels that violence comes from fellow believers, reflecting cognitive dissonance due to the mismatch between the value of solidarity and the experience of violence. Meanwhile, Figure 6 features an explicit critique of religious institutions perceived to sow fear and encourage extreme actions, highlighting how repressive doctrines can fuel distrust and radicalism. At this stage, trauma victims begin to seek information that reinforces their new perspective while rejecting any information that contradicts it. Thus, this search for new information is directly related to justifying behavior that is different from most people's. Individuals in this stage may resort to any means to achieve psychological balance or harmony. Table 1 shows several examples of the cognitive dissonance experienced by Sita and Adil and their responses to reduce the dissonance.

Table 1
Presentation of Processed Data Derived from the Codification of Scenes and Dialogues
using the Cognitive Dissonance Theory Approach

Cognitive Element 1	Cognitive Element 2	How Actors Reduce Dissonance
Belief in religious institutions	Experience of sexual violence and victims of faith-based terrorism	Doubt religion, hate institutions, suppress memories
Fear of grave punishment	Wanting to prove oneself	Taking extreme measures, seeking reassurance
Hope for a just life	Failure of institutions to provide a sense of justice and understanding	Revenge, become apathetic, seek their own form of justice
Love of family	Loss of family members due to terrorism	Isolate, blame victims, seek replacement

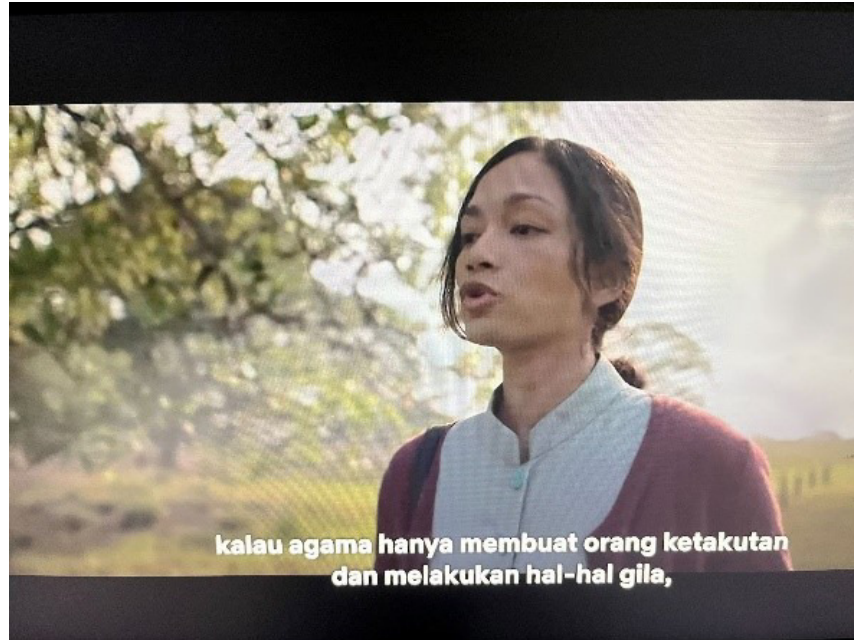
Source: Analysis Data from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

Figure 5
Dialogue Snippet Showing Cognitive Dissonance



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

Figure 6
Distrust of Religious Institutions



Source: Screenshot from the movie of *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

In the first case, Sita and Adil's strong belief in religious institutions slowly began to fade, and they experienced inner conflict when they were confronted with experiences of sexual violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion. To rebalance their psychological harmony, Sita and Adil are shown in different forms in the future course of their lives. Sita begins to strongly doubt the validity and authority of religion, hates religious institutions, and begins to suppress memories of the good teachings of religion. Her distrust of religion is shown in narrative form in a dialogue between Sita and Adil at a funeral.

Adil: "I know you've spent years researching the punishment of the grave, but this is crazy, Sita."

Sita: "So that people don't believe in superstition, Dil."

Adil: "But we are witnesses. We saw it ourselves, Sit, in the tunnel. We saw the ghost, Sit."

Sita: "At that time, we lacked oxygen, so we hallucinated... And someone has to prove that religion only makes people afraid and do crazy things, including suicide bombings."

This dialog shows how Sita rejects information that contradicts her new beliefs, saying that what she saw in the old tunnel while escaping from the boarding school was a hallucination due to lack of oxygen. This dialog also explains two other forms of dissonance: the fear of grave punishment that conflicts with the drive to prove the truth of beliefs (Kimble and Hyatt 2019). As a victim of terrorism, Sita shows an obsessive tendency to repeat thoughts about the attack (Bonanno 2004) as well as an urge to keep checking sources of information related to

security or terrorism issues (Przybylski et al. 2013). To relieve this tension, Sita took the extreme action of burying herself in the grave of someone who was believed to have committed a great sin and deserved punishment. This action is an attempt to seek social consensus as described by Festinger (1997), as well as a response to the failure of religious institutions to provide a sense of justice and understanding.

Finally, the love of family and the experience of losing family members to acts of terrorism create a strong inner conflict. To relieve the pain and tension, Sita chooses to isolate herself and blame the terrorists. Her efforts to find psychological balance are symbolized through the back-and-forth action of Sita's memories of family harmony, the blaming of Adil, and the scenes that always show Sita being alone in the dark.

Cognitive Dissonance as an Impact of Religious Representation in the Movie *Siksa Kubur* (2024)

The above findings suggest that an approach to religious teaching that focuses on fear (punishment) has the potential to be a fertile ground for radicalization. Instead of teaching religion and morality to students in a way that provides a sense of security (good news) and understanding, the movie shows the opposite; religious teachings are taught through a rigid and threatening doctrine of severe punishment, indicating religion as a means of control. The research conducted by Odo (2021) found that religious teaching based on fear creates excessive religious fanaticism, which in turn leads to radicalism. An egocentric and dogmatic mindset where individuals see things in black and white, *haram* and *halal*, narrow religious interpretations, especially of jihad verses, are the main characteristics of individuals towards radicalization (Sukabdi 2022; Sukabdi et al.

2024). Religious radicalization marks the initial stage of religious extremism (Adnan and Amaliyah 2021; Rohman and Nurhasanah 2019). *Siksa Kubur* effectively depicts how religious teachings are manipulated to trigger extreme actions and terrorism, and the movie also reveals the human side of the victims of terrorism and religious-based indoctrination. This portrayal invites the audience to see how radicalism can be born out of excessive fear, insecurity, and manipulation by trusted religious figures.

The act of abuse of power or authority by a pesantren patron in religious institutions, pesantren, shown in this movie, correlates with the rampant phenomenon of violence in the realm of religious institutions in Indonesia. Data from the Coordinating Ministry of Human Development and Culture (Kemenko PMK) indicate that the educational environment and pesantren are the focal points of violence, with approximately 15,120 cases of violence in 2023 (Admin of Kemenko PMK 2024). Even the National Commission on Violence against Women stated that Islamic boarding schools or Islamic religious-based education ranked second in the report on cases of violence in 2015-2020 (Komnas Perempuan 2020). The cases of pedophilia depicted in the movie also occurred in several orphanages and Islamic boarding schools, demonstrating the abuse of power and public trust under the pretext of religion (Caniago 2024; Singgih 2024). Cases like those presented in *Siksa Kubur* tell a social critique of the deep crisis of trust in religious institutions, which are increasingly difficult to trust as safe and moral places. This phenomenon underscores the vulnerability of religious institutions when exploited by those in power, creating social conditions where individuals feel pressured or misled by authorities who are supposed to uphold moral values.

Research in many countries also shows that the manipulation of religion, both its teachings and its authority, creates social conditions that are prone to breed extremism and terrorism. This manipulation creates conflicts within society that further emphasize group exclusivism, deepen the gap between "us" and "them" who support terrorism, trigger distrust between religious and cultural groups, and undermine social stability (Minderop 2019; Odo 2021; Smith et al. 2018).

Religious manipulation not only worsens social conditions but also damages the reputation of religious institutions, diminishing public respect for their teachings and deepening distrust of these institutions (Ellis et al. 2022). Suppose the trusted religious authority is indeed morally deviant. In that case, individuals will look for other alternatives and seek new authorities that are more credible, with the potential to generate anti-authority movements such as terrorism (Nilsson 2022).

This movie also shows how cognitive dissonance is repeatedly used to justify acts of extremism by both perpetrators and survivors of terrorism (Farber 2024). Justifications for actions are made to overcome cognitive dissonance, and individuals are more likely to maintain religious views or values that conform to the narrative provided by religious leaders or groups. The effects of such justifications can exacerbate social vulnerability, as individuals may dismiss outside views or evidence to preserve the psychological stability their beliefs provide (Burris et al. 1997). For example, in the dialogue:

Wahyu: "Why can't we lie if it's not forbidden by religion? ... My value system does not forbid lying, stealing, and even killing. I do what I want. In fact, some of what I do is not in line with the values of many people. But out of my actions and what I do, there is what they call good".

Sita: "Including funding a boarding school, but raping its students? Your victims are 50 children, and one is missing.

Wahyu: "I give people a chance for a better life, including the people you consider victims."

The trauma victim of a suicide bombing, represented by the figure of Sita, also suggests that the effects of terrorism are pervasive, with acute and chronic symptoms of anxiety and depression, changes in health behaviors, and prolonged stress and tension. The impact of such events are long-lasting, even after the media spotlight has faded (Grieger 2006). Barus et al. (2023) explain that victims' experiences and coping mechanisms vary widely. Some live in constant fear of repeated attacks, while others manage to move on with their lives despite the harrowing experience.

Sita's journey of grieving and coping with the aftermath of terrorism is a very personal process, and support systems must be adaptable to individual needs, including recognition and assistance tailored to each victim's unique circumstances (Cancrinus and Netten 2008). Sukabdi (2016) explained that the issue of rehabilitating victims of suicide bombings is easy from various perspectives. Victims of bombings often face fundamental questions about why they are victims of acts committed by "saints" who are supposed to exemplify virtue, as well as questioning the presence of the government in these events (Hatzis 2023). Victims often blame the police, viewing them as representatives of the government, which in turn makes the police a scapegoat, receiving little sympathy from the public, even when they are the targets of terrorism (Sukabdi 2016).

The movie illustrates how Sita and Adil face the grief and impact of terrorism as a personal journey that requires moral support and

understanding from those around them. The depiction of trauma, terrorism, and violence in the name of and within religious institutions reflects the need for an adequate safety net or social support in the trauma healing process. Victims' resilience to terrorism is not just a personal achievement but reflects the strength of community ties and the importance of social support networks (Cancrinus and Netten 2008). The movie *Siksa Kubur* not only presents narratives and discourses about the trauma of victims of terrorism and religiously motivated violence but also attempts to provide an understanding of the negative impact of religious manipulation. The analysis shows that fear-based religious teaching (punishment) not only harms the mental and spiritual state of its adherents but can also pave the way for radicalization and extremism. Suppose cognitive dissonance experienced by a victim is not properly addressed. In that case, it can create resistance to religious authority, with the potential for religion to lose its dignity and authority in society.

This research attempts to offer a new perspective on understanding the phenomenon of radicalism by viewing it as the result of emotional and spiritual manipulation by religious authorities. However, this study has limitations, particularly in examining variations in individual responses to fear-oriented religious teachings, as well as the role of the media in amplifying or mitigating these effects. Further development can be achieved by exploring the experiences of victims of radicalization from a psychological perspective, as well as how movies or media can be an effective tool for raising public awareness of the dangers of religious manipulation.

Conclusion

This research concludes that *Siksa Kubur* presents a critical portrait of religion as an

instrument of doctrine and fear, especially through the depiction of rigid and punitive teachings of religious institutions. This representation shows how manipulated religious narratives can cause psychological trauma and cognitive dissonance in individuals, especially victims of terrorism. The inner conflicts experienced by the characters, such as Sita and Adil, show how fear-based indoctrination can trigger radicalization or even total rejection of religious authority.

This finding has important implications for understanding how religious-based violence not only causes physical damage but also deep social and psychological wounds. The movie shows that the trauma experienced by victims does not only stem from acts of terror but also from systemic violence perpetrated by religious institutions themselves. In this context, dissonance reduction strategies such as denial, reinterpretation of teachings, to extreme actions as a form of self-justification become a defense mechanism used by victims. The movie also highlights that the process of radicalization can occur as a result of emotional betrayal of religious authority, not solely through recruitment by extremist organizations.

However, this study has some limitations. This research has not fully examined the diversity of individual psychological responses to trauma and doctrinal pressure, nor has it explored how audiences interpret or are affected by movie representations. In addition, the role of the broader media ecosystem in sustaining or challenging religious extremism has also not been analyzed in depth. Further research could be directed toward longitudinal studies of audience responses or comparative analysis with other media representations to enrich understanding of these dynamics.[]

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