



Political Dynamics in the Film *Al-Kāmin* with a Modern Literary Approach: Extrinsic Analysis / Dinamika Politik pada Film *Al-Kāmin* dengan Pendekatan Sastra Modern: Analisis Ekstrinsik

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to analyze the extrinsic elements focusing on political dynamics and their influence on the film *Al-Kamīn*. This research is descriptive-qualitative in nature with a library research method, employing extrinsic and literary-sociological approaches. The findings reveal that *Al-Kamīn*, as a form of modern literature, is significantly shaped by extrinsic political dynamics such as historical context, the production process, and the filmmaker's social position. Much like the politically charged poetry of the Umayyad period, *Al-Kamīn* was molded by political interests, as evidenced by the involvement of the UAE government, the state-owned Image Nation Abu Dhabi, and its collaboration with AGC Studios from the United States. The film highlights military heroism without questioning the political decisions behind the war.

Abstrak: Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis unsur ekstrinsik yang berfokus pada dinamika politik dan pengaruhnya terhadap film *Al-Kamīn*. Jenis penelitian ini adalah deskriptif-kualitatif dengan tipe kepustakaan (library research), pendekatan yang digunakan adalah pendekatan ekstrinsik dan sosiologi sastra. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film *Al-Kamīn* sebagai bentuk dari sastra modern, sangat dipengaruhi secara signifikan oleh unsur ekstrinsik dinamika politik seperti aspek sejarah, proses produksi, dan posisi sosial pengarang film. Layaknya puisi bernuansa politik pada periode Umayyah, *Al-Kamīn* dibentuk oleh kepentingan politik, yang terlihat dari keterlibatan pemerintah UEA, lembaga milik negara Image Nation Abu Dhabi, serta kolaborasinya dengan AGC Studios dari Amerika Serikat. Film ini menyoroti heroisme militer tanpa mempertanyakan keputusan politik di balik perang.



Introduction

The historical journey of Arabic literature in its periodization has experienced maturity from time to time; during the Jahili period, the Islamic period, the Muawiyah and Abbasid dynasties, the Ottoman dynasty, and the modern period until today.¹ Through the development process that began in *Al-Nahdah* (Arab Renaissance). Because literature is indeed dynamic. Literature is a living thing, not an artifact (dead thing) as a living work, literature develops dynamically accompanying figures such as politics, economics, art and culture.²

This form of dynamism can be seen from the literature that continues to develop, to the existence of electronic literature, namely a form of literature that emerged in the era of electronic media. According to Siminto, electronic literature includes: laser and holographic art, video art, computer art, communication art, installation and demonstration art, and performances.³ From it can be seen that film is one of the forms of modern literature in electronic form. Klarer also consider that film is included in the type of literary work because all kinds of film presentation modes are in accordance with the features of literary texts and can also be explained in a textual framework.⁴

Arabic literature in the past and films in the present certainly also have various functions in common, ranging from entertainment media, education, delivery of expression, cultural development, media for preaching and others. However, the interesting similarity here is how modern films and Arabic literature such as in the Umayyad dynasty era also have functions as political propaganda tools as well as tools for social criticism and control.⁵

The film genre that usually carries a political theme is a film with a war theme, one of which is interesting to study is the film *Al-Kamīn* from the Arab country. The film *Al-Kamīn* or “The Ambush” in english is a film that carries the genre of action, war,

¹ Rudyanton Salam Pratama and Agam Sulaima, “Aliran Sastra Arab Modern; Madrasah Diwan,” *El-Afaq: Jurnal Prosiding Fakultas Agama Islam Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram* 2, no. 1 (2023): 43–51, <https://doi.org/https://journal.ummat.ac.id/index.php/pfai/article/view/12609>.p.43

² Arinda Rahmawati, I Nyoman Diarta, and A.A. Rai Laksmi, “Analisis Pendekatan Mimetik Dalam Novel Trilogi Pingkan Melipat Jarak Karya Sapardi Djoko Damono Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pembelajaran Sastra,” *JIPBSI: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2022): 13–23, <https://doi.org/https://e-journal.unmas.ac.id/index.php/jipbsi/article/view/4150/3213>.

³ Ubay, *Teori Sastra Arab* (Malang: CV. Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2023).p.26-27

⁴ Yussi Saputri, “Analisis Nilai Moral Dalam Film ‘Jakarta Vs Everybody’ Karya Ertanto Robby Dan Hubungannya Dengan Pembelajaran” (IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro, 2024).p.2

⁵ Adam Syuja Nugraha, “Sastra Arab Pada Zaman Bani Umayyah,” *Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab UIN Syarif Hidayatullah* (2020).

patriotism, and heroism from the United Arab Emirates, telling a story about the process of an ambush by the Shiite Houthi group from Yemen against the United Arab Emirates army in a valley in Mocha, Yemen. This film is the most expensive in the Arabian Gulf region, which has the highest grossing of all time in the UAE, with earnings of more than \$ 5 million worldwide.⁶ Moreover, what makes this film very interesting is that it is based on a true story and made by a French director named Pierre Morell.

Just like poetry, prose and drama, film as a manifestation of literature, especially Arabic literature in modern times, is also composed of two elements that form a literary work, namely intrinsic and extrinsic elements, namely aspects of study or approach that are the main focus in understanding the inside and the outside of a literary work.⁷ This aspect is the basis for understanding not only the structure and language, but also the social, cultural, and values contexts that accompany a work such as a film. Of the two elements, the extrinsic element is the most suitable for use in analyzing the political dynamics in a war-themed film.

Extrinsic study (*Al-‘anaṣir al-khārijīyyah*) is an attempt to interpret literary art in relation to the social environment and the things that preceded it. For example, studying the origins of literary works, the reasons for the creation of literary works. In addition, extrinsic elements try to find the relationship between literary works and other sciences such as biography, philosophy, and so on.⁸

According to Nurgiyantoro, as quoted by Syukriady et al., extrinsic elements include: the author's subjective state, author's biography, psychological state and the author's environmental state.⁹ Meanwhile, according to Wallek and Warren, as quoted by Rokhmansyah in Fitri's research, they stated that extrinsic elements include: biographical elements, psychological elements, environmental conditions, and the author's outlook on life.¹⁰ Furthermore, according to Aminuddin in Rosmiati, extrinsic elements are elements

⁶ Wikipedia, "Al Kameen," 21 December, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Kameen.

⁷ Hamsa, Rahman Fasih, and Muhammad Irwan, *Kajian Kesusastran Modern Kisah Nabi Yusuf A.S*, Cet.1 (Makassar: IAIN Parepare Nusantara Press, 2019).p.19

⁸ Hamsa, "Analisis Tokoh Dan Penokohan Kisah Nabi Yusuf A.S Dalam Al-Qur'an Melalui Pendekatan Kesusastran Intrinsik," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 5 (2). Pp. 93-103. ISSN 2338-9974 5, no. 2 (2018): 93–103, <http://repository.iainpare.ac.id/id/eprint/3593>.

⁹ Dwi Syukriady, Herawati Arief, and Jumriati, "Telaah Unsur Ekstrinsik Cerita Pendek 'Protes' Karya Putu Wijaya," *Jurnal Cakrawala Ilmiah* 2, no. 10 (2023): 4065–80, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53625/jcijurnalcakrawalailmiah.v2i10.6574.p.4068>

¹⁰ Elsa Fitri, "Analisis Unsur-Unsur Instrinsik Dan Ekstrinsik Pada Novel Tuhan Untuk Jemima Oleh Siswa SMAN 2 Kecamatan Kapur IX Kelas XII" (Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2023).

that are outside of literary works or stories, but also determine the form and content of a work or story. Extrinsic elements include religion, politics, history and culture.¹¹

Meanwhile, according to M. `Abd al-Mun'im Khafaji in his book *al-Syi'r al-Jāhili* quoted by Ahmad Muzakki. Extrinsic elements include: instinctive readiness (*al-isti'dad al-fītri*), climate (*munakh*), a person's characteristics (*khaṣa'ish al-jins*), civilization and social (*al-ḥadārah wa al-ijtimā'*), scientific progress (*al-'ilm*), religion (*al-dīn*), political life (*al-hayah al-siyāsiyyah*), establishing relations with other nations (*ittiṣāl al-syu'ub*), and imitation (*al-taqlīd wa al-iḥtidha'*).¹²

Research that examines extrinsic elements that focus on politics in films, based on Arabic literature research, is very rare. However, a similar study was conducted by Bintang Rosada entitled *Analysis of Extrinsic Elements in Nadine Labaki's Cofernaum Film*¹³, which discusses extrinsic elements from the perspective or subjectivity of the author of the film *Cofernaum*, namely Nadine Labaki, extrinsic elements were found which include: the author's subjectivity in the form of outlook on life, beliefs, attitudes, background, psychology, and so on.

The next research is research by Elis Fitria entitled *Al-'anāshir al-dākhiliyyah wa al-khārijīyyah fī riwāyah "Imra'ah 'Inda Nuqtati al-ṣifri" li Nawāl Al-Sa'dawi*,¹⁴ it reveals that the extrinsic elements contained in the novel "Women at Point Zero" by Nawal Assadawi are the author's social status and also the social problems that occurred around Nawal which encouraged her to write this novel, and the intrinsic elements in the novel *Women at Point Zero* consist of theme, characters, plot, setting, and moral.

Similar research was also conducted by Rima Sarah entitled *An Analysis Of Extrinsic Elements In The Collection Of Short Stories Berjuta Rasanya by Tere Liye*¹⁵ it reveals that the extrinsic elements contained in *the short story collection Berjuta Rasa* by

¹¹ Missi and Ati Rosmiati, "Analisis Unsur Ekstrinsik Novel Selimut Mimpi Karya R. Adrelas," *Tuwah Pande: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 1, no. 2 (2022): 34–39, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.55606/tuwahpande.v1i1.8.p.39>

¹² Ahmad Muzakki, *Pengantar Teori Sastra Arab* (Malang: UIN-Maliki Press, 2018).p.95-105

¹³ Bintang Rosada, "Analysis of Extrinsic Elements in Nadine Labaki's *Cofernaum* Film," *El-Jaudah: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 4, no. 2 (2023): 87–98, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56874/ej.v4i2.1604>.

¹⁴ Elis Fitria, "العناصر الداخلية و الخارجية في رواية "امرأة عند نقطة الصفر" لنوال السعداوي" (Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, 2024).

¹⁵ Rima Sarah, "An Analysis Of Extrinsic Elements In The Collection Of Short Stories *Berjuta Rasanya* by Tere Liye," *Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature* 11, no. 2 (2022): 119, <https://doi.org/10.25077/vj.11.2.119-126.2022>.

Tere Liye are the author's life background, the author's psychological elements, the author's social environment, social values, religious values, moral values, and cultural values.

From several previous studies, there are similarities and differences with this study. The similarities of the research are in the analysis tools, which is extrinsic elements. While the differences in the research are in the objects of study, and the extrinsic theories used. The research uses novels and short stories, whose extrinsic analysis techniques focus on the subjectivity of the author, in contrast to this research which focuses on extrinsic analysis of its political aspects.

This study aims to analyze and extrinsic elements that focus on the political aspect of the film *Al-Kamīn*, as well as to understand how external factors that form literary works such as politics, can influence and produce a literary work such as a film. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the treasury of Arabic literary research in the digital era.

Methods

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive-qualitative research type with a library research type, research conducted by collecting information and data with the help of various materials available in the library such as reference books, previous research results of the same type, articles, notes, and various journals related to the problem to be solved,¹⁶ which aims to explore and understand the phenomenon of external factors that form literary works. This study focuses on the political dynamics contained in the film *Al-Kamīn* using an extrinsic literary approach and a sociological literature approach.

Extrinsic elements are elements whose analytical aspects are in the form of a review from outside the literary work, but indirectly influence the structure that builds or the system of the literary work's organism,¹⁷ which is found in the literary aspect of the film *Al-Kamin*. While the approach of sociology of literature emphasizes social factors as the main element, while literature itself is considered a secondary element. Which focuses on social, cultural, economic and political conditions that influence the creation of literary works.¹⁸ The sociological approach to literature used is according to Alan Swingewood.

¹⁶ Milya Sari and Asmendri, "Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA," *Natural Science: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang IPA Dan Pendidikan IPA* 6, no. 1 (2020): 41–53, <https://doi.org/https://ejournal.uinib.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/naturalscience/article/view/1555/1159>.

¹⁷ Burhan Nurgiantoro, *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2019).p.23

¹⁸ Fika Azlia Salsabila and Nur Fauziah Fatawi, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra* (Malang: CV. Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2024).p.20

Swingewood presents three concepts in the approach to literary works, which include: literature as a reflection or mirror, literature seen from the process of authorship production, and literature in relation to history.¹⁹

The type of data used in this research, based on its nature, is qualitative data. The data collection technique refers to the method or approach used to gather the necessary information for a study.²⁰ In this research, the data collection technique employed is document analysis, in which data is obtained from documents or other written sources, such as reports, records, books, and archives.²¹

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data, which serves as the main reference, is the film *Al-Kāmin*. Meanwhile, the secondary data is derived from pre-existing sources such as documents, literature, or data collected by other parties, including books, academic journals, articles, financial reports, and news. Furthermore, the data analysis technique employed in this research is descriptive analysis.

Results and Discussion

Modern Arabic Literature

In Arabic literary studies, three terms are used, namely: 1) literary theory (نظرية الأدب), 2) literary history (تاريخ الأدب), 3) literary criticism (نقد الأدب).²² These three branches of literary science are interconnected. Literary theory cannot be separated from literary history and criticism; literary history cannot be divorced from theory and criticism; and literary criticism likewise depends on theory and history. This interconnection creates mutual dependence among them. A literary work cannot be fully understood, appreciated, interpreted, or evaluated without the support of all three fields. Literary theory can never be complete without the aid of literary history and criticism; literary history cannot be presented clearly if theory and criticism are not well established; and literary criticism will not achieve its goals if it does not rest upon the foundations of theory and history.²³

¹⁹ Dhiha Juliana Marwantina, "Refleksi Permasalahan Sosial Dalam Novel Orang-Orang Proyek Karya Ahmad Tohari: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra," *Nuansa Indonesia* 24, no. 2 (2022): 149–61, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.20961/ni.v24i2.71392>.

²⁰ Zainuddin Iba and Aditya Wardhana, *Metode Penelitian* (Purbalingga: Eureka Media Aksara, 2023).p.241

²¹ Iba and Wardhana.p.249

²² Hamsa, Fasih, and Irwan, *Kajian Kesusastraan Modern Kisah Nabi Yusuf A.S.p.4*

²³ Ahmad Muzakki, *Pengantar Teori Sastra Arab* (Malang: UIN-Maliki Press, 2011).h.18

Literature is a form of human expression conveyed through written and oral works, based on opinions, thoughts, experiences, and emotions, presented imaginatively, as a reflection of reality or original data, and packaged aesthetically through the medium of language. In Arabic, literature is referred to as *adab*. The plural form is also *adab*. Lexically, the word *adab* not only means literature, but also refers to ethics (politeness), manners, philology, humanity, culture, and the humanities.²⁴

Arabic literature itself encompasses various forms, including poetry, prose, drama, *qasidah*, songs, novels, and others—commonly referred to as literary genres. According to Ahmad Badrun, literature is an artistic activity that uses language and other symbolic elements as its medium, and is characterized by its imaginative nature.²⁵

Arabic literature has continued to evolve over time. In each historical period, it experienced innovations that distinguished it from previous eras. The Abbasid era is considered the golden age of Arabic literature, while during the Ottoman period, it entered a state of stagnation until the emergence of the *al-Nahdah* phase,²⁶ which served as a vivid reflection of the social, political, and cultural transformations in the Arab world. The beginning of the modern phase in Arabic literary history started during the reign of Muhammad Ali in Egypt, following the roots of French colonization in 1801. This phase marked a shift from traditional forms of literature to more diverse genres that embraced modernity while grappling with colonialism, nationalism, and the search for identity. As Arab societies faced the challenges of modernization, their literature became a vital space for exploring and critically engaging with these complex realities.²⁷

The French occupation of several Arab regions, including Egypt, introduced various modern technologies such as the printing press, as well as new models of language and literature, which gradually sparked the revival of Arabic literature. After the French withdrew from Egypt in 1801 and Muhammad Ali rose to power, there was a significant acceleration in the development of Arabic literature. Muhammad Ali, who placed great

²⁴ Rahma Salbiah and Tatik Maryatut Tasnimah, “Menelaah Kritik Sastra Arab Masa Jahiliyah,” *Jurnal Adabiya* 25, no. 1 (2023): 101–17, <https://doi.org/10.22373/adabiya.v25i1.17120>.

²⁵ Rizkya Putri Utami, Ika Kartika, and Muhammad Al-Vizar, “Nilai Sosial Pada Cerpen ‘Tempat Yang Bersih Dan Terang ’ Karya Ernest Hemingway Yang Di Terjemahkan Oleh Muhammad Khambali,” *Education: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2022): 36–40, <https://doi.org/10.51903/education.v2i1.126>.

²⁶ Pratama and Sulaima, “Aliran Sastra Arab Modern; Madrasah Diwan.”p.43

²⁷ Noor Uddin Ahmed and Rahul Amin, “Exploring the Literary Genres of Modern Arabic Prose: An Introduction,” *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 30, no. 11 (2024): 22–27, <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i11.8233.p.22>

emphasis on science and knowledge, sent Egyptian delegates to study in European countries such as France, England, and Italy. Upon their return, these scholars initiated various innovations across multiple disciplines, including Arabic literature. The process of cultural assimilation with France and Britain, through the translation of foreign works and the imitation of foreign literary texts, served as evidence of the emergence and strength of the Arabic literary renaissance.

In the modern phase, it turns out that Arabic literature has various literary schools that have emerged one after another, both because of the motivation of criticism of the literary models that emerged previously and because of perfecting other schools that emerged in the same period. The Arabic literary schools that emerged in the modern era are *al-Muhāfizūn* (Neo-Classical), *Diwān*, *Apollo*, Romanticism, Symbolism and the last is *Hadītsah* (modern).

Not only did literary schools evolve, but literary genres also expanded. What was once dominated by prose and poetry eventually developed to include drama. Initially, drama was unfamiliar to the Arab world. During the early Islamic period, Arab scholars and writers translated literary works from other languages, but drama was notably absent.²⁸ The introduction of drama began with the theater established by Napoleon in Egypt in 1798 to entertain French troops, although it left little impression on the local population, primarily because the performances were not in Arabic language. It was only later, as literary and cultural exchanges between Arabs and the West grew, that drama began to be introduced and gradually accepted within Arab literary circles.²⁹

The tradition of drama or theater in Arabic literature has undergone significant transformation in the modern era, giving rise to drama as a distinct form of prose. This evolution has been heavily influenced by Western theatrical traditions as well as indigenous storytelling practices. The convergence of these influences has enabled Arabic drama to deeply explore various themes such as social issues, historical events, and the complexities of human relationships. Playwrights like Tawfiq al-Hakim have emerged as prominent figures in this genre, producing works that resonate with audiences while addressing pressing cultural and social concerns.³⁰ In today's era—often referred to as the

²⁸ Abdul Latif Ansary, "Development of Modern Arabic Short Story, Novel and Drama: A Brief Sketch," *Pratidhwani the Echo: Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2015): 124–29, <https://doi.org/https://thecho.in/volume-iv,-issue-i,-july-2015.html.p.127>

²⁹ Shawqi Daif, *Al-Adab Al-Arabi Al-Mu'asir Fi Misr* (Dar al-Ma'arif, 1995), p.212

³⁰ Ahmed and Amin, "Exploring the Literary Genres of Modern Arabic Prose : An Introduction." p.25

5.0 era, a term popularized by Japan in 2019 to describe a highly advanced, interconnected digital society,³¹ literature has refused to become obsolete. It has adapted by participating in the digital realm, where drama has evolved into film, serving as a modern and digital form of the classical theatrical tradition.

Like other genres of Arabic literature, film is also composed of two elements: intrinsic and extrinsic components. One of the extrinsic elements is politics. In many cases, literature and politics resonate within literary works. A clear example can be seen during the Umayyad Dynasty, where politics strongly influenced the development of literature, particularly poetry. This was due to political upheavals and the dominant role of politics in shaping the life of society at that time.³² If poetry could be heavily influenced by politics in the past, then it is only natural that film, especially in the modern era, can be similarly shaped by political forces.

Political Dynamics in the Film *Al-Kāmin*

As is already known, *Al-Kāmin* is a literary work based on a true story, not a fictional or imaginary creation. The film is a reenactment of actual events, as told by individuals who experienced them firsthand. Therefore, the setting depicted in the film is understood to reflect the real conditions and phenomena occurring at that time.

However, *Al-Kāmin* does not explicitly portray the broader socio-political phenomena in detail. The film only provides a brief explanation of the background conflict in the form of a few sentences at the beginning, specifically between minute 1:00 and 2:30, which state:

Yemen 2015. After years of civil unrest, foreign backed Al-Houthi Militia overthrew the internationally recognized government of Yemen.

They seized control of most of the country, including the capital Sana'a in the north and Aden in the south. Heavy clashes broke out between rebels and loyalist.

Innocent civilians were paying the cost in the midst of war.

The ensuing chaos consolidated many terrorist groups footprint in the region.

³¹ Adelia Finanti, "Pengaruh Perkembangan Sastra Arab Pada Era 5.0," *An-Nahdah Al-'Arabiyah* 4, no. 1 (2024): 33–40, <https://doi.org/10.22373/nahdah.v4i1.4011.p.34>

³² Bobbi Aidi Rahman, "Relasi Antara Sastra Dan Politik (Analisis Unsur-Unsur Politik Dalam Puisi Masa Dinasti Umayyah)," *Diwan: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 9, no. 17 (2017): 625–44, <https://doi.org/10.15548/diwan.v9i17.134.p.641>

The government of Yemen requested urgent help from its allies, and a multinational coalition that included the UAE intervened to bring back stability in the country.

The intervention came as a response to a direct request by Yemeni President Hadi for assistance, and was reinforced by a UN Security Council Resolution.

In the torn war zone, patrols to provide aid to the population became daily exercise for the UAE troops.

Three years later, the battle for Yemen continued.



Figure 1. *Al-Kāmīn* Film Cut (Scene 1:05)

The remainder of the film, from exactly minute 2:31 to 1:51:07, does not depict the broader conflict explicitly or from a large-scale perspective. Instead, it focuses primarily on the patriotic evacuation of three UAE soldiers who were ambushed by Houthi armed forces in a valley near Mocha. Such a complex conflict cannot be adequately described through a few brief lines of narration, which underscores the need for a more in-depth analysis that begins with a historical perspective.

Al-Kāmīn is set in Yemen in 2018, during a period marked by civil war and a severe humanitarian crisis. To understand the situation, one must trace back to the early 1990s. Phase when North Yemen (backed by the US and Saudi Arabia), predominantly inhabited by Zaidi Shia Muslims, and South Yemen (backed by the Soviet Union), predominantly Sunni Muslim, had just unified in hopes of bringing stability. The country was led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled North Yemen since 1978 and whose leadership style was largely authoritarian and centered around the northern elite.

At the same time, the Houthi movement, a Zaidi Shia group also known as *Ansarullah*, emerged in the Sa'dah region, campaigning for the revival of the Zaidi community, which they believed was under threat from the spread of Salafism. In 2004, open conflict broke out between Saleh's government and the Houthis, led by Hussein

Badruddin al-Houthi, who was killed during a military operation. Between 2004 and 2010, this conflict recurred six times and became known as the “Sa’dah Wars.” President Saleh repeatedly responded to the Houthis with military force.

In 2011, the wave of the Arab Spring sparked a peaceful revolution in Yemen that succeeded in overthrowing Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled for 33 years, though the uprising resulted in hundreds of casualties. The presidency was then transferred to his deputy, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The conflict became increasingly complex with the involvement of multiple armed groups such as the Houthis, ISIS, AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), along with intervention by foreign states and international organizations.³³

The Yemeni civil war officially began in 2014 when the Houthi Shia rebels, with ties to Iran (although Iran has denied these claims) and a long history of rebellion against the Sunni-led government, seized control of the capital, Sana’a, demanding lower fuel prices and a new administration. Following failed negotiations, the rebels stormed the presidential palace in January 2015, prompting President Hadi and his government to resign.³⁴

In March 2015, a coalition of Gulf and Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched an economic blockade and an airstrike campaign against the Houthis, supported by U.S. logistical and intelligence assistance.

On March 26, 2015, the coalition, comprising Gulf countries and regional allies, most notably the United Arab Emirates, formally launched a military operation in Yemen. The operation aimed to expel the Houthis and restore the internationally recognized government of President Hadi. Houthi positions were bombarded extensively, and by July 2015, the coalition succeeded in retaking the strategic port city of Aden, which became a key base for further operations in the north. However, the conflict soon reached a stalemate and escalated into one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises.³⁵

³³ Alif Al-Hilal Ahmad and Imam Hanafi, “The Yemeni Civil War’s Impact on The Socio-Cultural Conditions of The People in Yemen,” *Jurnal Tapis : Teropong Aspirasi Politik Islam* 19, no. 1 (2023): 145–58, <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.24042/tps.v19i1.16741>.

³⁴ Center for Preventive Action, “Conflict in Yemen and the Red Sea,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen#:~:text=Yemen’s civil war began in,prices and a new government.>

³⁵ Kali Robinson, “Yemen’s Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis#:~:text=Yemen%2C a small country on,has complicated the picture.>

Amid this multi-actor war, the United Arab Emirates emerged as a key player. The UAE was not merely a passive member of the coalition; it deployed thousands of troops and advanced military equipment to Yemen, making it a principal partner of Saudi Arabia in ground operations. In the early stages of the war (2015–2016), the UAE focused its efforts on southern and western coastal regions of Yemen. For example, Emirati forces played a crucial role in recapturing Aden in 2015 and driving out the Houthis from the port city of Mukalla in Hadhramaut, which had briefly fallen into the hands of AQAP in 2015–2016. For the UAE, military involvement in Yemen was also part of its commitment as an ally to both Saudi Arabia and the United States, particularly in combating Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the region.³⁶

Beyond its role as a coalition partner, the UAE pursued its own geopolitical and strategic interests. First, it viewed Yemen as a critical element of its maritime strategy, aiming to dominate key ports, including extending its reach to the island of Socotra. Second, the UAE sought to influence Yemen's internal politics by weakening groups that opposed its broader Middle Eastern agenda, while consolidating control over strategic assets.³⁷

From this historical context, we can understand that the political dynamics in Yemen are deeply complex, rooted in long-standing tensions, the Arab Spring revolution, foreign military intervention, and the competing interests of regional actors. This film is not merely a war-action narrative; it is rooted in the tragedy of Yemen's civil war, shaped by a wide array of socio-political factors. The United Arab Emirates, being directly involved, holds a vested interest in shaping the narrative of this conflict.

This aligns with Swingewood's view that literature is a direct reflection of various aspects of social structure and class conflict which what he refers to as literary documentation, and that literature is a manifestation of historical events and the socio-cultural conditions of a particular society. However, in the case of *Al-Kāmīn*, both aspects seem to be obscured, as the film primarily focuses on representing the viewpoint of Emirati soldiers and the threats they faced in Yemen.

³⁶ Robinson.

³⁷ Robinson.

***Al-Kāmīn* Film Production**

One of the weaknesses of Swingewood's two initial perspectives lies in the lack of emphasis on the author's social background. To address this limitation, the researcher also applies another viewpoint from Swingewood, which stresses the importance of analyzing literary works (including films) within the context of their production, particularly the social position of the author and the socio-political circumstances during which the work was created. An author's position within society and their historical background significantly influence the development of literature, as literary works are often shaped by the historical context in which they are produced.

In the case of *Al-Kāmīn*, analyzing the production process becomes especially crucial considering that Pierre Morel was appointed by the United Arab Emirates to direct this film. Morel is neither Arab nor of Arab descent; he is a French national known for his work on action films such as *Taken* (2008), *The Gunman* (2015), *Freelance* (2023), and more recently, *Canary Black* (2024). Morel did not work alone; he collaborated with Brandon and Curtis Birtell, who were assigned as the screenwriters for *Al-Kāmīn*. Brandon Birtell is recognized for his work on *Furious 7*, while Curtis Birtell is known for *Medal of Honor*. These two, often referred to as the Birtell brothers, are also neither of Arab descent nor nationality, they are both American citizens.

Pierre Morel had previously worked as a cinematographer during the National Day celebration marking the 25th anniversary of the founding of the United Arab Emirates. That event, which took place in 1996, marked his first visit to the UAE.³⁸

The Western backgrounds of Morel and the Birtell brothers influenced the way they framed the narrative of *Al-Kāmīn*. The film adopts a universal heroic style often associated with Hollywood, emphasizing themes of brotherhood, sacrifice, and patriotism among soldiers, while offering little exploration of the local political context. This is evident in the way the story focuses entirely on the experience of a group of UAE soldiers caught in an ambush, without delving deeply into the underlying causes of the Yemeni conflict.

In the writing process, the Birtell brothers reportedly worked closely with members of the UAE military who were involved in the actual 2018 incident that inspired the film.³⁹

³⁸ Razmig Bedirian, "Director Pierre Morel Says His Emirati Action Film 'Al Kameen' Is about Brotherhood," *The National*, 2021, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film/2021/11/25/director-pierre-morel-says-his-emirati-action-film-al-kameen-is-about-brotherhood/>.

³⁹ "Al Kameen Is the Largest Arabic Language Feature Film Production Ever in the GCC," *Yalla Dubai Life*, 2021, <https://yalladubai.ac/arts-culture/arabic-films-in-abu-dhabi/#:~:text=The success of the film,proven local talent.>

This collaboration ensured that the story details aligned closely with the UAE military's official version of events. However, the opposing perspective is largely absent. The Houthi rebel group depicted in the film is presented as a vague and faceless enemy, lacking any clear historical or ideological background, a portrayal commonly found in one-sided war narratives.⁴⁰

Therefore, it can be said that the film's ideological direction is oriented toward glorifying the bravery of UAE soldiers and evoking nationalistic sentiment, aligning with the intentions of its creators and the interests of local producers.

From the perspective of corporate production, *Al-Kāmin* was produced by AGC Studios and Image Nation Abu Dhabi. AGC Studios is an American film and television production company founded and launched by Chairman and CEO Stuart Ford in February 2018, serving as a platform to globally develop and distribute a diverse portfolio of feature films. The studio's Hollywood productions have a strong multicultural focus, designed to be distributed across major global platforms.⁴¹

Image Nation Abu Dhabi, on the other hand, is a film company based in the United Arab Emirates, established in 2008. Its headquarters are located in the Yas Creative Hub under twofour54 in Abu Dhabi. The studio focuses on the production of films, television series, documentaries, and entertainment content, and is recognized as the first Emirati company to have its productions featured on Netflix.⁴²

It is important to note that Image Nation is a subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Media Company, the official media arm of the Abu Dhabi government, and operates under the authority of the Media Zone Authority. The collaboration between these two production companies enabled *Al-Kāmin* to be created with full funding and support from the government and even the UAE military. All extras featured in the film were active members of the country's armed forces, and all military vehicles and weaponry used during the production were provided by the military.⁴³

⁴⁰ Eamon Tracy, "Blu-Ray Review: 'The Ambush' Is A Lazy and Predictable Pro-War Film," Irish Film Critic, 2022, [https://www.irishfilmcritic.com/blu-ray-review-the-ambush-is-a-lazy-and-predictable-pro-war-film/#:~:text=Whenever the three soldiers speak%20propelled grenades.](https://www.irishfilmcritic.com/blu-ray-review-the-ambush-is-a-lazy-and-predictable-pro-war-film/#:~:text=Whenever%20the%20three%20soldiers%20speak%20propelled%20grenades.)

⁴¹ "AGC Studios," AGC Studios, accessed April 19, 2025, <https://www.agcstudios.com/about>.

⁴² "Image Nation Abu Dhabi," Wikipedia, accessed April 19, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_Nation_Abu_Dhabi.

⁴³ "بميزانية ضخمة.. مخرج فرنسي يصنع فيلماً بدعم إماراتي عن حرب اليمن," الموقع بوست, ٢٠٢١, <https://almawqeaqpost.net/translation/65423#:~:text=ووقد تم إنتاج فيلم كامل من حكومة الإمارات وجيشها.>

Al-Kāmīn may therefore be considered a strategic national film project that involved close collaboration between filmmakers and the armed forces, aligning with the concept of the "military-entertainment complex." This state-backed support was evident in several production aspects, including: the use of actual military personnel as extras, authentic military equipment, and the involvement of official institutions for location permissions and logistical coordination.

Full support from the state gives *Al-Kāmīn* a strong sense of nationalism, so much so that it can arguably be described as propaganda. The government provided the infrastructure and resources, while the director and production teams from abroad packaged the story in an international cinematic style. The result is a collaborative film that is ideologically safe for the UAE government, as it highlights military heroism without questioning the political decisions behind the war.

Public and critical responses to the film have been somewhat divided globally. Within the UAE and the broader Gulf region, the film was celebrated as a symbol of national pride. It broke box office records as the most successful Arabic-language film in the Arab world, involving approximately 400 crew members and actors, with leading roles performed by Emirati actors. From this perspective, *Al-Kāmīn* is seen as a successful portrayal of real-life heroism, presented with high production value and international cinematic standards, thus elevating the profile of Emirati cinema. The filmmakers and even the cast have described the project as a "National Film," and considered it an honor to be part of it.⁴⁴

However, from the perspective of independent critics and international observers, the reception has been more critical. Several human rights activists and film analysts have labeled the film as propaganda. Bahraini human rights activist Maryam al-Khawaja, for example, referred to it as a military film promoting a highly questionable operation. Similarly, Dr. Andreas Krieg, a geopolitical risk analyst and strategic consultant with expertise in the Middle East and North Africa, described the film as a "next level" of propaganda using cinema to promote a favorable narrative about the UAE's controversial involvement in the Yemeni conflict.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "بميزانية ضخمة.. مخرج فرنسي يصنع فيلما بدعم إماراتي عن حرب اليمن."

⁴⁵ Rayhan Uddin, "'Taken' Director Makes UAE-Backed Film About Yemen War," Middle East Eye, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemen-war-taken-director-uae-backed-film-makes#:~:text=Government-backed project,bodies throughout the production process.>

Greg Carlstrom, a Middle East correspondent for *The Economist*, also remarked that Arab states, particularly the UAE, appear to be emulating American Hollywood culture, adopting a Michael Bay-style approach to glorify their own military operations through cinema.⁴⁶ These criticisms reinforce the view that *Al-Kāmīn* fails to offer a balanced historical perspective on the Yemeni conflict.

The production of *Al-Kāmīn* serves as an intriguing example of how socio-political context and the roles of creators, whether directors, screenwriters, or production companies can shape the ideological direction of a cultural product. The combination of foreign filmmakers and state-owned local producers creates a unique dynamic: on one hand, it ensures high technical quality and broad international appeal, but on the other, it tends to reinforce narratives aligned with the political interests of the state.

In Swingewood's theoretical framework, *Al-Kāmīn* reflects a production context heavily dominated by state patronage, encompassing funding, military involvement, and narrative control. As such, the final product functions as a socio-cultural document that represents the viewpoint of those in power. This analysis demonstrates that the study of literature, or film, is inseparable from the external factors behind its creation, and *Al-Kāmīn* offers a compelling case study of how hegemonic ideologies can be expressed through the medium of popular cinema with full state support.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the film *Al-Kāmīn* is deeply connected to the political and social context surrounding the Yemeni conflict. As a form of modern literature, the film demonstrates how politics can significantly influence narrative direction. Much like the politically charged poetry of the Umayyad period, *Al-Kāmīn* was shaped by political interests, evident in the involvement of the UAE government, the state-owned Image Nation Abu Dhabi, and its collaboration with AGC Studios from the United States. The film highlights military heroism without questioning the political decisions behind the war. Future research may explore other Arab films produced in similar political contexts or examine extrinsic aspects of modern literature through different theoretical or comparative approaches to further enrich literary scholarship.

⁴⁶ Uddin.

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