

## REPRESENTATION OF ISLAMIC CULTURE IN THE ISLAMIC DOCUMENTARY EMPIRE OF FAITH: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF ROLAND BARTHES

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### Abstract:

This article analyzes the representation of Islamic culture in the documentary film *Islam: Empire of Faith* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The film provides a historical overview of Islamic civilization, from its birth to its heyday, including its contributions to art, architecture, science, and politics. By applying Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, this study reveals how visual and narrative signs in the film construct the representation of Islamic culture in the eyes of the audience. This analysis shows that the film constructs an idealistic narrative about the splendor and glory of Islamic civilization but also carries an ideological bias that reinforces Western myths about the Islamic world, such as the image of Islam as backward and exclusive. This research is important to understand how the media shapes cultural images and religious identities and its implications for intercultural understanding. Using Barthes' semiotic approach, this study reveals how the media constructs myths that can influence the audience's perspective on Islamic culture, reinforce stereotypes, or even pave the way for more complex understandings. On the one hand, this film has the potential to introduce the beauty and richness of Islamic history. However, on the other hand, it also reflects certain ways of presenting narratives that could worsen or strengthen the distortion in the relationship between the West and Islam.

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## INTRODUCTION

Documentary films greatly shape people's understanding of history and culture. *Islam: Empire of Faith*, a documentary produced by PBS in 2000, provides a narrative about the development of Islamic civilization from its birth in the 7th century to its glory as one of the world's greatest civilizations. This documentary discusses the contribution of Islam in various aspects of life, such as architecture, art, science, and politics. Through the semiotic lens of Roland (Barthes, 1972), this research aims to explore the representation of Islamic culture in the documentary, particularly how visual signs and narratives build meanings and myths around Islamic culture.

Media representation is important in shaping public perceptions of culture and religion. Barthes emphasizes the importance of unraveling visual and narrative cues to understand how the audience produces and receives meaning. Using Barthes' theory, this study will examine how *Islam: Empire of Faith* uses Islamic cultural signs and how these signs create connotations and myths that influence the audience's understanding of Islam and its civilization.

The documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* traces the journey of Islamic civilization, from its birth in the 7th century to its peak of glory, and highlights Islam's contributions to various aspects of life, including architecture, science, art, and politics. Through the semiotic lens of Roland Barthes, it can be seen how the visual and narrative signs in this film not only serve as an introduction to information but also build a deeper meaning related to Islamic culture. Barthes emphasizes the importance of understanding signs on two levels: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural or symbolic meaning), which then form a myth (Barthes 1972). In the context of *Islam: Empire of Faith*, these signs

consciously or unconsciously help build myths about Islam and its civilization, influencing the audience's understanding.

In Barthes's semiotic theory, signs consist of signifiers and signifieds, where a sign creates meaning through association with a certain culture or ideology (Barthes, 1977). In *Islam: Empire of Faith*, the visual and narrative signs representing Islamic civilization create connotations beyond historical information.

First, Denotation and Connotation in Islamic Architectural Representation: One example of a sign in this film is the image of Islamic architecture, such as the Great Mosque of Córdoba or Hagia Sophia, which is told as an artistic and spiritual achievement of Islam. Denotatively, these pictures show Islamic historic buildings. However, connotatively, the images imply the glory and splendor of Islamic civilization while also illustrating the connection between architectural beauty and spiritual and political power. Barthes emphasizes that these signs help shape myths about past greatness, creating idealistic views tied to deeper cultural meanings (Barthes, 1983).

Second, the Use of Narrative to Shape Myths: The narratives in this documentary often portray Muslim figures such as the Prophet Muhammad, scientists such as Ibn Sina, and leaders such as Salahuddin as figures with extraordinary intelligence and high morality. Here, the denotation is a literal description of their role in history. However, at the connotation level, this narrative creates a myth about a superior and ideal Muslim figure, which helps to reinforce the view that Islam, in its golden age, "had a major asset in a highly morally, intellectually, and spiritually superior civilization" (Wicaksonowati, 2022).

Third, Symbolism in the Depiction of Islamic Science and Science: The documentary also uses images and narratives about Muslim scientists' achievements in science, mathematics, and medicine to affirm the role of Islam as the "savior" of science during the European Dark Ages. Denotatively, these signs point to historical facts about Islam's contribution to science. However, connotatively, they formed the myth that Islam was a highly intellectual civilization and acted as a link between classical Greek knowledge and modern Europe. It "builds Islamic thought and has implications for civilization" Aprina (2023). Barthes would identify that this myth contextualized Islam as the center of intellectual enlightenment in its time.

Barthes argues that media representation can construct meaning and ideology in the minds of the audience (Barthes, 1977). Through a combination of visual and narrative signs, this film plays a role in shaping people's understanding of Islam as a civilization that contributes greatly to the development of the world. However, the myths created cannot be separated from the romanticized elements of the past, which can influence the audience's perception of Islam ideally, without considering the historical and cultural complexity that is more dynamic.

The study argues that *Islam: The Empire of Faith* shaped the narrative of a heroic and influential Islamic civilization, reinforcing the myth of Islamic superiority in its golden age. Barthes emphasizes that the meaning of myths is created not by what is explicitly spoken but by associations that arise from narratives and visual images (Barthes, 1977b)

The documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* plays an important role in shaping the narrative of Islamic civilization, particularly through the prominence of myths and the superiority of civilization in its golden age. In Roland Barthes's semiotic context, meanings and myths arise not only from explicit statements but also from visual and narrative signs associated with cultural and historical forces (Barthes, 1977). This analysis identifies several gaps and novelties that have not been widely discussed in academic studies related to media representation, especially about Islam.

While previous literature has highlighted media use in shaping perceptions of culture and religion, some important aspects of Islamic representation in visual media, especially in documentary formats, have been poorly studied. For example, many previous studies have focused on the representation of Islam in news media or fictional films. However, in-depth studies of how documentaries such as *Islam: Empire of Faith* shape myths about Islam have not been widely explored. The importance of analyzing media with a semiotic approach to uncovering cultural biases, the study, "encourages viewers to reflect

on common misconceptions, but can also reinforce stereotypes for some people against Islam" (Hammad, 2020).

Furthermore, visual representations of Islamic architecture, art, and science in Islam: The Empire of Faith tend to uplift the glory of Islam in the past, but few studies have linked how these signs create a myth of the continuity of civilization's greatness that may have ignored contemporary social and political dynamics. According to Salvatore (2019), most semiotic studies on Islam are more focused on contemporary representations, while the analysis of Islamic history through visual signs in documentaries is rarely examined.

This research offers novelty by providing an in-depth semiotic analysis of Islam: Empire of Faith, which serves as a historical visual document that creates a new meaning about Islamic civilization. Using Barthes' theory of myth, this research reveals how the film not only conveys historical information but also plays a role in shaping the heroic narrative of Islamic superiority. This approach is unique in associating visual and verbal narratives to create a strong connotation of the glory and glory of Islam's past, shaping the global myth of the power of this civilization.

In addition, this research also fills in the gaps by exploring how Islam: Empire of Faith presents architecture and science as a symbol of the sustainability of Islamic greatness, ignoring the broader complexity of history. Barthes (1977) emphasized that myths often simplify reality to convey ideological messages that are easier for the audience to digest. Therefore, this research explores how the film simplifies the historical narrative to reinforce the idealistic portrayal of Islamic civilization that may be at odds with the more complex, challenging contemporary reality.

Thus, the main novelty of the study is the incorporation of Barthes' semiotics with an analysis of visual representations of Islamic history in a documentary format, providing new insights into how the myths of civilization are constructed and maintained through popular media. This study identifies an important gap in the study of Islamic representation in historical documentaries, particularly in using semiotics to understand how meanings and myths are created. Through Barthes' approach, this research offers a new perspective on how documentaries such as Islam: Empire of Faith narrate history and build connotations and myths about the superiority of Islamic civilization. This research contributes to the literature by providing a more comprehensive analysis of the use of visual signs in constructing complex cultural narratives.

This study aims to analyze the representation of Islamic culture in the documentary film Islam: Empire of Faith, identify layers of meaning (denotation, connotation, and myth) in visual and narrative representation, and explore the impact of such representation on the audience's perception of Islam. The importance of this research lies in its ability to unravel how documentary film as a popular medium can affect cultural and religious perceptions in the eyes of a global audience, as well as how biases and myths can be constructed and maintained through media narratives.

## METHODS

This study uses a semiotic analysis methodology with the Barthesian approach, which effectively analyses the meaning behind visual and narrative signs in the media. This approach explores three main levels of sign analysis: denotation, connotation, and myth. Each level provides a deeper understanding of how cultural and ideological meanings are shaped through media representation.

**Identify Key Visual and Narrative Elements.** The first step in this research is to identify the main visual and narrative elements in the Islamic documentary Empire of Faith. Some of the key elements include: 1) Islamic architecture: Historical buildings such as the Blue Mosque (Istanbul), the Taj Mahal (India), and the Alhambra (Spain) are recognized as physical representations of the glory of Islamic civilization. 2) Muslim Scientists: Depictions of figures such as Ibn Sina, Al-Khwarizmi, and Al-Razi who show the scientific contributions of the Islamic world to the fields of medicine, mathematics, and philosophy. 3) Caliphate System of Government: An Islamic political system based on sharia, which directs how power and government are run under the caliphate, as a political representation of the heyday of Islam. Each of these elements is then analyzed based on three levels of Barthesian signs:



**Denotation: Literal Meaning.** Denotation refers to what is directly depicted by visual and narrative elements. In this context, majestic architectural images, such as the Blue Mosque and the Taj Mahal, are physical representations of the achievements of Islamic civilization in art and architecture. Islamic civilization has peaked in architecture and artistic beauty Van Leeuwen (2005). At this level, visual signs are presented as objectively documented historical facts without subjective judgment. It is the stage of analysis where we only look at what is seen in the documentary. The beautiful architecture and depictions of Muslim scientists directly represent the great history of Islam.

**Connotation: Cultural and Ideological Meaning.** Connotation refers to a deeper meaning associated with a particular culture or ideology conveyed through visual symbols and signs. At this stage, the magnificent architectural images convey historical facts and reflect the impression of the power, majesty, and sacredness of Islamic civilization. For example, the Blue Mosque is not only recognized as an architectural symbol, but also as a symbol of Muslim spirituality and piety (Salvatore, 2019). In addition, in the depiction of Muslim scientists, there is a hidden message that associates Islam with intellectual sophistication. Figures such as Ibn Sina are portrayed not only as scientists but also as symbols of scientific progress in the Islamic world, often contrasting with Western stereotypes of the backward Islamic world (Zekavat, 2021).

**Myth: The Construction of Cultural Narratives.** At the mythological level, Barthes emphasizes that the media constructs certain narratives that support the dominant worldview. In *Islam: Empire of Faith*, the myth constructed is a narrative of the glory of Islam as a superior civilization, which ideologically reinforces the perception that Islam has a glorious past. The magnificent architectural representation, advanced science, and fair system of government create the myth that Islam was once a very powerful civilization and dominated the world in various aspects Barthes (1977). However, this myth also has an ideological function: reinforcing the view that the glorious Islamic civilization can or should be revived. This kind of myth is often used to influence contemporary public views, especially in the Muslim world, "the rise of contemporary Islam aims to steer modernity out of its crisis by introducing rituals, practices, socio-cultural and economic processes, as well as the development of Islamic institutions" (Ali, 2022).

Once the main elements have been identified and analyzed through the Barthes sign level, the analysis process continues to test relevant data and facts in the field. Researchers collected data from historical sources and compared visual and narrative representations in films with historical facts to identify possible biases or oversimplifications. For example, the film may ignore the diversity in the Islamic world, such as the theological differences between Sunnis and Shiites or how the caliphate often experiences political divisions. These facts are important to be explored further in this study so as not to rely only on a single narrative about the glory of Islam (Said, 2020).

The Barthesian semiotic method allows us to explore the layers of meaning behind the visual and narrative signs in the Islamic documentary *Empire of Faith*. By identifying the key elements and analyzing them through three levels of Barthes' signs, denotations, connotations, and myths—this research reveals how the documentary not only tells the history of Islam but also builds a complex and ideologically meaningful cultural narrative. This approach shows how media representation shapes public perceptions of civilization and religion and how cultural and political meaning can be created through seemingly simple visual and narrative signs.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* offers a mesmerizing narrative of Islamic civilization, from its early days to its heyday as one of the world's greatest civilizations. Through a rich visual approach and historical narrative, the film underscores the contributions of Islamic civilization to art, architecture, science, and politics. Visual representations such as the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Taj Mahal emphasize the beauty of Islamic architecture, which denotatively reflects the monumental achievements of Muslims in building art. However, behind these images, some connotations and myths emphasize the superiority of Islamic culture that has ruled for centuries. The era of the Ilam

Independence lasted almost five centuries. It was an extraordinary period in the human race, which was marked by achievements in the fields of art, humanities, science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, finance and monetary systems" (Renima et al., 2016).

In addition, the film also explores the contributions of Muslim scientists such as Ibn Sina and Al-Khwarizmi, which denotatively show that Islam values science. At the connotative level, Islam is described as a significant and influential intellectual civilization in the development of global science. This view reinforces the myth that Islam has an important position in the history of the intellectual world (Zekavat, 2021). Meanwhile, the narrative of the spread of Islam in different regions of the world depicts a rich cultural diversity. This representation reinforces the myth of tolerance and pluralism in Islamic civilization (Said, 2020).

However, according to Barthes (1977), myths created by the media can carry ideological biases, which in this case can be seen as an attempt to idealize Islamic civilization without examining the internal complexity and conflicts that occurred in its history. Barthesian's semiotic approach helps to unravel how the visual and narrative representations in this film construct historical facts and cultural constructions that shape the public's perception of Islam.

**Representation of Islamic Architecture.** In the documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith*, Islamic architecture such as the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Taj Mahal represent the majesty of Islamic civilization. In his semiotic theory, Roland Barthes helps us understand how meanings and myths are constructed through these visual representations. Denotatively, the images of the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Taj Mahal show the majestic physical structure of the building. However, connotatively, they reflect the splendor of Islamic culture and spirituality that dominated the world in the past. The myth that emerges from this representation is that Islamic civilization is a great cultural and political force that bases its glory on harmony and monumental achievement (Barthes, 1977).

In the study of Islamic art and calligraphy shown in this film, the documentary reinforces the impression that calligraphy is the highest art form in Islam. Calligraphy, closely related to the Qur'an, is an expression of art but also a symbol of the majesty of religion. Other decorative elements, such as miniatures and Persian carpets, showcase the aesthetic beauty highly valued in Muslim culture (Mitchell, 2020). The Barthesian analysis sees that this visual representation of calligraphy builds a deeper meaning, namely that Islamic art is not only visually beautiful but also has a deep spiritual meaning. The influence of Islamic art on the West, especially in art and architecture during and after the Crusades, is also interestingly discussed in this film. Using domes, towers, and Islamic geometric patterns was adopted in Europe and influenced Renaissance art. Islamic architecture has the following characteristics:

"Arches, an important architectural element since early civilizations, allowed for the construction of lighter walls and domes, often covering large spans. Visually, it is an important decorative feature transmitted from architectural decoration to other art forms worldwide. At the beginning of the Islamic period, Muslims accepted many civilizations, which they upgraded and reintroduced to bring about the Renaissance. Arches appeared in Mesopotamia, the Indus, Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and the Holy Tribes, but the Romans applied this technique to various structures. The Muslims mastered the use and design of arches for structural and functional purposes, progressively fulfilling both decorative and symbolic purposes. Islamic architecture is characterized by arches used in all types of buildings; The most common use is in arcades" (Rahman, 2015)

The denotation of this influence is the West's adoption of physical elements of Islamic art. At the same time, its connotation shows admiration and respect for the aesthetics and technical superiority of the Islamic world. The myth formed is that Islam not only thrives in isolation but also has an impact on global culture, especially through trade routes and cultural contacts (Smith, 2021). The Islamic art, architecture, and science discussed in the documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* ultimately created the myth of the superiority of Islamic civilization. As Barthes argued, myths arise from what is presented

explicitly and through connotations and associations built into visual narratives (Barthes, 1977). The documentary forms an ideal picture of Islamic civilization, "Islamic values deserve serious consideration to improve the quality of life of the average citizen while avoiding the worst offenses, as they are not solely based on Western ideals" (Mazrui, 1997). The emphasis on grand architecture, decorative arts, and scholarly contributions suggests that Islam has a major role in shaping the modern world. However, such representational biases must be acknowledged in a more in-depth analysis.

In this film, Islamic architecture, such as the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Taj Mahal, symbolize the majesty and glory of Islamic civilization. Denotatively, these pictures show the beauty and grandeur of the building. However, the connotation of this architectural element is the greatness of Islamic culture that dominated the world for centuries. The myth emerges from the view that the Islamic world is a great civilization that builds its glory through harmony and monumental achievements. Islamic Art and Calligraphy in this documentary also discusses the importance of art in Islamic culture, especially calligraphy and decorative arts used in architecture and Qur'anic manuscripts. Calligraphy is considered the highest art form in Islam because of its relationship with the scriptures. In addition, Islamic miniatures and textile arts, such as Persian carpets, show a cultural aesthetic highly valued by Muslim communities.

This documentary covers the spread of Islam and cultural diversity, including how Islam spread to various parts of the world, such as Southeast Asia, North Africa, and Southern Europe. In its spread, Islam absorbed various elements of local culture, resulting in a rich variety of Islamic culture. For example, Islam in Indonesia combines preexisting elements of Hindu and Buddhist culture, creating a unique form of Islam in the region.

**Contribution of Islamic Science and Philosophy.** The documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* provides an in-depth representation of the contributions of Muslim scientists such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Khwarizmi in the history of global science. This representation can be analyzed through three levels of Roland Barthes' semiotics: denotation, connotation, and myth. The influence of Islam on Western art in this film also explores how Islamic culture influenced Europe, specifically during the Crusades and subsequent periods. Islamic art and architecture, such as domes and minarets, began to be adopted in the West. This influence is also evident in Renaissance art, which borrowed heavily from elements from the Islamic world, including geometric patterns, mosaics, and color. Muslim scientists such as Ibn Sina and Al-Khwarizmi are highlighted as major contributors to global science. The denotation that emerged was that Islam valued science. The connotation is that the Islamic world is an intellectual civilization equal to or superior to the West at that time. The myth created was that the Islamic world was an important intellectual force in world history, which Europe then passed on.

**Denotations, Connotations, and Myths in the Representation of Islamic Science.** On a denotative level, the documentary explicitly showcases the great achievements of Muslim scientists in fields such as medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Ibn Sina, for example, was introduced as the "Father of Modern Medicine" thanks to his work in *The Canon of Medicine*, which became a medical reference in Europe for centuries. Meanwhile, Al-Khwarizmi is considered a pioneer in the field of algebra, where the word algebra itself comes from his book, *Al-Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi Hisab al-Jabr wa'l-Muqabala*. In this narrative, the denotation of the representation shows that Islam not only absorbed knowledge from other civilizations but enriched and contributed to the world. However, at a connotative level, this documentary conveys the message that Islamic civilization is a civilization that highly values science, art, and technology. It is in line with the connotation that the Islamic world, in its golden era, is equal to or even superior to the West in science. By highlighting this great achievement, the film creates a narrative that Islam is not only a religion but also a center of global culture and knowledge in its time.

At the level of myth, the documentary builds on the idea that Islamic civilization was the main intellectual force that contributed greatly to the scientific foundations of the modern world, which Europe then passed on through the Renaissance. As Barthes explains, myths are not only shaped by what is explicitly stated but also by the visual and ideological narratives that underlie these representations.



The myth created was the idea of the intellectual superiority of Islam at that time, which seemed to indicate that the Islamic world played a dominant role in the history of science, with little or no recognition of the internal dynamics or intellectual conflicts within the Islamic world itself (Barthes, 1977a).

**The Spread of Islam and Cultural Diversity.** In the narrative of the spread of Islam, this documentary shows how Islam developed from the Arabian Peninsula and spread to various regions of the world, including Southeast Asia, North Africa, and Southern Europe. Here, the documentary denotatively portrays Islam as a religion that is flexible and open to cultural assimilation, absorbing local elements in the various societies in which it spreads. On a connotative level, the spread of Islam is seen as evidence of the flexibility and inclusivity of this religion. For example, the documentary shows how Islam in Indonesia integrates elements of preexisting Hindu and Buddhist cultures. Thus, this documentary conveys that Islam is a global religion that can adapt to various cultural contexts without losing its core identity. It creates an image of Islamic civilization as a civilization that is very tolerant and able to dialogue with other cultures.

The myth built through this representation is that Islam is a dynamic, inclusive, and influential cultural force shaping world civilization. This narrative is often used to reinforce the view that Islam has a history of harmonious and tolerant cultural diversity, which may ignore the internal conflicts that occurred in some Muslim regions of history. Often, the narrative is given by "Western scholars who present a distorted and exaggerated picture of Islam and the Muslims, describing them as primitive and inferior 'others'" (Deeb, 2014). The representation of Islamic civilization in Islam: Empire of Faith can be compared to the contemporary study of the intellectual history of the Islamic world. "The Islamic historical tradition emerged as a response to the opposition faced by society as a hegemony of society" Donner (1998). The documentary presents an almost uncritical narrative of the internal dynamics in Islamic civilization, such as political conflicts, sectarianism, or gender roles, which are an important part of the history of the Islamic world.

Meanwhile, in the study of science, Esposito (2019) argues that although the intellectual contribution of Muslim scientists is significant, too often, this narrative is presented in isolation from the broader global context, such as the relationship between the Islamic world and the non-Muslim world in the exchange of knowledge (Esposito, 2019). Therefore, it is important to see that while the representations in this documentary are valid from a certain side, more research is needed to dig deeper into the internal dynamics of Islamic civilization and its interactions with other civilizations.

Overall, a semiotic analysis of the film Islam: Empire of Faith shows that the film builds on the myth of the superiority of Islamic civilization through visual and narrative representations that highlight Islam's cultural and intellectual greatness. Using Barthes' theory, the film presents historical facts and constructs narratives and myths that affect the public's understanding of Islamic history. However, as with any historical narrative, it is important to know these representations' potential for bias and simplification.

**The Myth of the Superiority of Islamic Civilization.** The documentary Islam: Empire of Faith provides a narrative view that builds myths about the superiority of Islamic civilization through an emphasis on contributions in art, science, and politics. Using Barthes's theory, we can decipher how these representations combine denotations, connotations, and myths, in which visual and narrative elements are used to create a harmonious and idealistic picture of civilization, although often ignoring aspects of internal conflict and more complex historical dynamics.

**The System of Government and the Caliphate Study of Denotation and Connotation.** At the denotation level, the film shows how the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman caliphate ruled a vast territory with an organized and tolerant system of government to other religions, such as Christianity and Judaism. The sharia legal system and efficient administration developed in this caliphate became a model for other kingdoms, including in Europe. However, the connotation built is that the Islamic world is politically successful and excels in creating social stability and multiculturalism. This idea is often reinforced by the visual representation of tolerance and harmony emphasized by the film. As pointed

out in one of the studies, the Islamic caliphate is often seen as a symbol of religious harmony, even though there were many challenges, such as political upheaval, civil wars, and internal divisions that accompanied its heyday (Hassan, 2020)

The myth built by this film is that Islamic civilization is a model of a superior and tolerant system of government. However, as Barthes expressed, myths are often used to support a dominant worldview or ideology. This representation of the caliphate has the potential to be biased by ignoring internal conflicts, such as sectarianism or the role of more complex non-Muslim groups in the dynamics of the caliphate. In other studies, the socio-political complexity of the caliphate, including tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and the role of religious minorities, provides a richer but rarely explored perspective in popular narratives (Lings, 2019)

**Trade and Economic Networks Denotation and Connotation Study.** The film also highlights how Muslim traders played a role in developing a global trade network, which spanned regions from the Middle East to Africa, Asia, and Europe. Major cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus are described as trading centers that connect diverse cultures and religions. The denotation of this representation is that trade played a huge role in the spread of goods and technology and Islamic culture. The implication is that Muslim trade brings economic progress and helps spread Islamic civilization as an influential global power. It aligns with the study of Islamic economics and history, which shows that trade is one of the pillars of Islamic civilization's strength, especially in the Abbasid era (Lapidus, 2020)

The myth created here is that Islam plays a central role in the global trade network and thus spreads its influence in a peaceful and civilized manner. This could ignore the fact that Islamic trade networks often involve conflicts, competition, and territorial colonization. For example, trade in the Indian Ocean is not purely harmonious and stable but more complex and full of tension, including conflicts with European powers (Pearson, 2019).

Overall, the film *Islam: Empire of Faith* encapsulates the history of Islamic civilization with an emphasis on the contributions of art, science, and politics that create a harmonious and progressive image of Islamic civilization. Using Barthes's semiotic analysis, we see that the film creates a myth about the superiority of influential Islamic civilization, but often ignores the aspects of internal conflict and the complex dynamics that underlie its history. Contemporary studies, such as those shown by Hassan (2020) and Lings (2019), provide a more balanced view of Islamic history, richer than the narratives depicted in this film.

The film builds on the myth of the superiority of Islamic civilization by highlighting its contributions to art, science, and politics. Although the film provides a positive picture of Islamic culture, Barthes cautions that myths can also carry ideological biases. This film attempts to place Islamic civilization in an idealistic frame without much exploration of internal conflicts or historical complexity. This film's System of Government and Caliphate describes how Islam formed large and complex government systems, such as the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman Caliphate. The caliphate not only administered a large territory but also created an efficient legal and administrative system and instilled tolerance towards other religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, in their territory. The Islamic system of government became a model for many other kingdoms, including in Europe.

Trade and Economic Networks highlighted One of the important aspects of Islamic cultural heritage discussed in this documentary is the great role of Muslims in developing global trade networks. From the Middle East to Africa, Asia, and Europe, Muslim traders helped spread goods, culture, and technology. Major cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus became centers of international trade that brought together diverse cultures and religions.

## CONCLUSION

The film *Islam: Empire of Faith* provides a rich and positive representation of Islamic culture, highlighting the contributions of Islamic civilization in various fields. However, using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, it can be seen that the film also creates a myth about the greatness of Islam that sometimes ignores the complexity of Islamic history and cultural diversity. This research shows the



importance of semiotic analysis in understanding how media shapes cultural and religious perceptions. As a recommendation, further studies can deepen the analysis of how these documentaries affect Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in various cultural contexts.

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