

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Research

Exploitation, is an act of exploiting, comes from the word exploit. Exploit, according to Merriam Webster dictionary, is an act to make use of something to help you unfairly. In this case, we can say that exploitation is an act of taking advantage out of something unfairly, whether for own agenda or for other purposes. Exploitation of religion in *Alamut*, happened because of several factors; the participants were teenagers, the setting which is war is very helpful in shaping their mindset, and the modified religious teachings which uses to control and directs them anywhere 'the powerful' wants. For later the powerful ones will get the benefit by exploiting the belief of the followers.

Religion that is exploited in the novel claimed to be a branch of Islam. Even though, some of their acts were not considered Islamic according to majority of Muslims. The exploitation works very simple, the leader gathers teenager from different regions then teaches them the Islamic teaching. The thing is, it is mixed with other teaching that will lead them to believe that there is a new prophet to follow. The new prophet will give orders to obey, which is if they die because of it; means they have died for the religion. Despite the fact that the novel looks very Islamic, the writer believes that the ideas, faiths, and motivations of characters in the novel are not supposed to be taken as a representation of Islam or any branch of Islam, or sort of proof that Islam allows violence or suicidal attacks. The teachings presented in this novel, including the motto 'nothing is true, everything

is permitted' do not correspond to the beliefs of the majority of Muslims since it was founded, but only to a small and heretic sect.

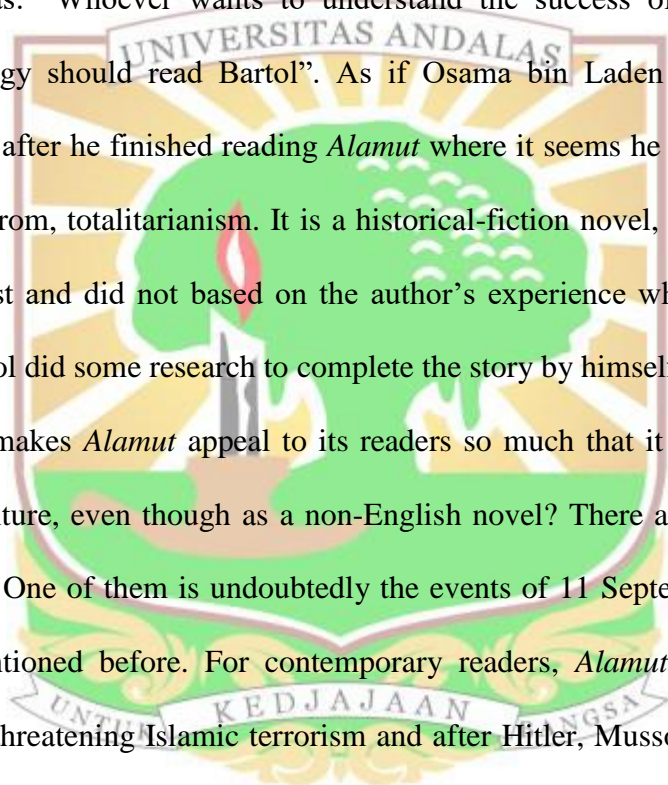
For readers in general, what makes a literary work –a novel appeal to them? Why do they read it? It could be the story, the theme, or other particular reasons. For us scholars, why do we study it and what can we learn from it? Basically, reading a novel can help us to understand what it must have been like to live in a particular time, under certain conditions, in different parts of the world. Actually, there are more benefits to the study of literature. Understanding a story through the experiences of a character enables us to feel what it could have been like and helps us consider the impact of events and gaining a broad view of society.

Understanding the past does, we hope, prevent us from repeating the mistakes of our predecessors but, more than that, it promotes a deeper understanding of why we are who we are today. After reading a novel, then we determine which one is the right side and know where to stand, and we will avoid the bad situation that we have learned from the novel. When it comes to a religious novel, we can foresee what is coming if thing goes like in the novel we read. *Alamut*, a novel by Vladimir Bartol for example, provide us a story where an exploitation of religion is conducted, what are the supporting elements, and what are the results.

*Alamut* is written by Vladimir Bartol, a Slovenian Writer, and the novel is the most well-known literary work from Slovenia. The English version is available since 2004, translated by Michael Biggins, an American language professor that

received the Literary Translators' Award in 2015. It was firstly published in 1938, as an imagery of fascist government, which makes the novel famous from 1960s to 1990s during Josip Broz Tito's reign in Yugoslavia, where Tito fought against fascism. It was famous again after the terrorists attacked on September 11, 2001 due to its depiction of suicide bombers in a fanatical sect. On the very first page of the English edition of Bartol's *Alamut*, we can find quite a few problematic quotes such as: "Whoever wants to understand the success of the Al-Qaeda leader's strategy should read Bartol". As if Osama bin Laden assembled Al-Qaeda's army after he finished reading *Alamut* where it seems he got ideas worse than fascism from, totalitarianism. It is a historical-fiction novel, where the story sets in the past and did not based on the author's experience which means that Vladimir Bartol did some research to complete the story by himself.

What makes *Alamut* appeal to its readers so much that it became part of global pop culture, even though as a non-English novel? There are at least three reasons for it. One of them is undoubtedly the events of 11 September 2001 that has been mentioned before. For contemporary readers, *Alamut* has become a metaphor for threatening Islamic terrorism and after Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, Hassan Ibn Sabbah found another echo, Osama Bin Laden. The second reason for its popularity is the fact that *Alamut* is a novel with an unique plot that deals with unusual themes and readable as an adventure novel, historical account, love story, psychological study of a man in power, a philosophical representation of nihilism, or as the writer found out that *Alamut* can be used as an object for study of discourse. The third reason for its cultural impact, *Alamut* was the inspiration for



the famous Assassin's Creed video games.<sup>1</sup> Both readers of novel and players of the game will find many elements of the novel's plot, and the phrase "nothing is true, everything is permitted" as the main principle of the order of the assassins – the fictionalized descendants of Hassan Ibn Sabbah.

*Alamut* is based on the life and legend of the original "assassin" and world's first political terrorist, 11<sup>th</sup> century Ismaili leader Hasan ibn Sabbah. The novel later translated into other languages, and up to now, it has been translated into more than 19 languages and has been widely read across the world. As a non-English work, it is important for western and the whole world to know the real story of Assassins before it inspired a popular video game. It was not the whole point, because by reading the novel in English, readers across the world will see and understand that, religion can be used as a tool to control, and when it comes to a religion that has many followers, one small sect's doing will affect believers on other side of the planet. So they cannot just blame the whole religion just because a small branch of that particular religion has done evil things.

The novel tells story about Ismaili leader Hassan ibn Sabbah and his followers, where he made stronghold at a fortress named Alamut, Iran nowadays. The story sets at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> century, where Hassan is planning to eliminate his enemies, in which his great and final target is a grand vizier<sup>2</sup> and the Sultan of Seljuk Empire. Hassan had two childhood friends; Omar Khayyam and Nizam al-Mulk, they made a promise that if one of them fulfilled his ambition, and became

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<sup>1</sup> See

<<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2007/oct/19/assassinscreedinterview>> an Assassin's Creed video game interview.

<sup>2</sup> Vizier is a high-ranking political advisor or minister in Islamic states. Further reading: Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Wazir". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 28 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

famous, he should help the other two to reach the same glory. Nizam was the first one that succeeded on his career; he became a *vizier* for the sultan of Seljuk at the time. To complete the promise, he offered Hassan and Omar the position for empire's court. Omar refused the offer and ask for help to continue his study instead, Nizam granted his wish and built an observatory for him. Hassan, on the other hand accepted the offer and became an important person in the court. But later he was forced to leave and sent to exile for plotting against Nizam. Hassan believed that Nizam was the one that arranged his exile, and he began to establish plan for vengeance, which is after went to one place and another, Hassan ended up in Alamut fortress, trained his young soldiers there, and sent them to assassinate those he considered as enemy, including Nizam al-Mulk.

In ruling his followers, Hassan dictated everything, more than the religion itself. Their routines during the day or night, time to eat or sleep, and teach them anything that he considered important for them, a perfect example for totalitarianism. Paul Corner, an European History teacher at the University of Siena, Italia, states in his book *Popular Opinion In Totalitarian Regimes* that, totalitarian refers to a governmental that applies a system where one person or group of people controls the whole thing, including the rule of law and social aspect. Some strategies that the totalitarian usually does to gain its goal are employing one ruling party, ruling through fear, and the most important and clear to be seen is, censorship of media. Totalitarian system was first conceptually developed in the 1920s by Italian fascist named Giovanni Amendola. Then the history spread out all around the world which includes but not limited to: Joseph

Stalin (1920-1953), Benito Mussolini (1922-1943), Adolf Hitler (1933-1945), Mao Zedong (1949-1976), and North Korea as the only remaining totalitarian nation until now.

In the novel, the boys have no option but to learn anything that their teachers taught them, and the girls have no option but to learn how to 'behave' from their teachers too. Hassan forbids them from anything what would make them question him and his doings. He tells them that he is a prophet, the successor of Muhammad (pbuh) and has been granted by God to hold the key of paradise, which makes him capable to send anyone he wants to the paradise. Like Hitler, Mussolini, and Mao Zedong, Hassan attempted to gain not only obedience, but also an understanding what good students and Muslims were about. So he threw out some discourse about it. Wareing (2004), a Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience at London South Bank University and a Professor of Teaching in Higher Education, writes in a chapter of a book titled *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction* that "the values and beliefs we hold seem to be normal and common sense are in fact constructs of the organizations and institutions around us, created and shared through language" (1).

Hassan managed to make his followers believed that he is the successor of Muhammad, and he possesses the key to the paradise as well. For the boys, he trained them, makes them did anything he told them to do, and he made them his living daggers, assassins that could reach anyone he want to assassinate. For the girls, he makes them believe that they are *houris*, the virgins of paradise. They are being prepared to entertain the selected young men, in order to make them believe

that they are truly in paradise. The paradise itself actually is a garden behind the fortress. He filled it with delicious foods, luxuries, and decorated the garden as paradise-alike as possible, which is later when the training is done, the girls will be sent to live there, waiting for the young men to entertain. When the young men coming in, drugged, they would believe that Hassan were actually really sent them to the paradise, or at least that is what he told them once they gained their consciousness again. This kind of experience made the young men fully under his control. They would happily do a suicidal attack for him or even kill themselves as they believe that they will be sent to “the paradise” if they went martyr or “killed in action” –guaranteed since they have seen it.

## **1.2 The Identification of the Problem**

*Alamut* famous for its supreme motto ‘nothing is true, everything is permitted’. It says that objective truth is unknowable because our senses can be deceiving. So truth is not absolute, but is a matter of perception, and perception can be controlled by the powerful. Thus, every means of attaining power and alter perception is allowed. The writer believes that, this point of view led to a decision to establish a totalitarian system in a form of religion, where everything is dictated and indoctrinated.

This research is to show how the exploitation has been done on a religion to generate fanatics in the end, how they see only their own point of view, and how dangerous they are to people around them. They try to compel their philosophy on others through terrorizing and are glad to break the law and commit religious blasphemy, including, kill for the sake of their God or belief. In other

words, this research reveals how dangerous human can be when they manipulate religious devotion for their own purposes through other's passion for pleasure and desires.

### **1.3 The Scope of the Research**

The writer limits the research to analyze how the exploitation has been done. In order to complete the purpose of the research, there are some particular works and writings that the writer will talk about, for certain. Based on the topic, here are some writings that the Researcher will be discussing in this research; the *Alamut* novel itself, related articles, books or writings on exploitation of religion and Foucauldian discourse along with Islamic studies, and any other materials that are relevant to support the analysis. For the books that are used in this research, some figures are not as famous as the others, so the writer gathered information from any sources and books available, as long as the author is known by the world so their work can be used as references. Since the object of the research is a religious novel, some books are written by Muslim scholars, it is inevitable for the writer because the source from western author is limited on this topic.

### **1.4 The Research Questions**

In the interest of investigating more about the exploitation and the novel itself, this research is conducted mainly to answer these two questions:

1. What religious teachings that have been modified to make the exploitation happened?
2. What kind of totalitarian system that is applied in the novel, as the result of the exploitation?



## 1.5 The Objective of the Research

Exploitation of religion in *Alamut* interests me to analyze it and spread out how important it is for us to read and think more wisely. By analyzing the exploitation that has been done may help us to see how fanaticism leads to ignorance. Based on research questions that have been mentioned above, this research will focus on finding what are the Islamic ideas that have been modified to make the exploitation happened that generate fanatic followers in the end, and to discuss the type of totalitarian system that is applied in the novel as the result of the exploitation. As a non-English work, *Alamut* showed up in English after a review of the French translation in November 2001 where it says “if Osama bin Laden did not exist, Vladimir Bartol would have invented him”. The event of 9/11 made most of reviewers recognized the novel as something else, the Al Qaeda handbook<sup>3</sup>. It is a good thing for westerner to read this novel so they can see that those who have been called fanatics are brainwashed and they cannot blame the whole religion of Islam because of some wrongdoings by some brainwashed soldiers whose their belief on religion have been exploited.

## 1.6 The Review of Related Studies

Few critics –not many but enough wrote about *Alamut*, Islamic studies, totalitarianism, exploitation on religion, and how exploitation of religion has been done in *Alamut*. First, an article that was published in 2016 by Tahereh Ahmadipour, a Language and Linguistic student at Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan, Iran, entitled “On the Simplest Reading of Bartol’s *Alamut*”. He writes

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<sup>3</sup> See <<http://www.tol.org/client/article/9158-vladimir-bartol-prophet.html>> for further reading. An article published by a journalism site titled “Vladimir Bartol, Prophet”.

in his article that, Hasan ibn Sabbah is a leader with intolerable disgusting dispositions, sometimes immoral and dissolute, a big liar with different faces, a dishonest person with some false instruments such as drugs for deceiving and making a fool of his followers to improve his plan (221). He is unfaithful towards women and regards them as mean creatures and exploits them. Not so strict about Islamic guidelines and regulations, since he easily changes them in different situations such as drinking wine that sometimes can be permitted. This article is exactly the one that I should make a good use of it for this research; it provides points of exploitation by Hassan in *Alamut*.

The next article, is “Orientalism in Bartol’s Novel *Alamut* – Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted” written by Mirt Komel in 2012. Currently he is an assistant professor in philosophy at Faculty of Social Sciences, and researcher at the Center of Cultural and Religious Studies at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Komel states that Hassan is a metaphor for totalitarian regime, he has exploited the religion of Islam and dictate his own version of Islamic law, including activities –public and private activities in the novel. The exploitation has been done in beautiful and unique way, an exiled man with his followers set himself at the fortress of Alamut, he built a garden, filled with luxuries, tasty foods and beautiful girls (slaves) –he made it as close as the Quran portrayed the paradise.

In the evenings he invited the young soldiers to his nearby chamber, drugged them so they are unaware of almost anything, and then leads them through a secret way to the garden, where they were told that they are experiencing paradise. After they gained consciousness again, he tell them that he

could showed it to them because he has the key, and if they keep the secret and serve his cause they will be sent to paradise again (359). This article is a must-read writing for my research; since it describes how the exploitation has been done by Hassan and how does it work. Komel reveals some exploited teachings (without stating they were modified), and he didn't mention anything about the prohibition of those teachings in Islam. This is what my research will provide, the exploited teachings along with its prohibition, to straighten the misled stereotypes towards Muslims –for instance; Muslims should kill every non-believer they met in the name of God.

The third article was published in 2014, still from Komel, entitled “Re-orientalizing the Assassins in Western historical-fiction literature: Orientalism and self-Orientalism in Bartol's *Alamut*, Tarr's *Alamut*, Boschert's *Assassins of Alamut* and Oden's *Lion of Cairo*”. Komel claims that *Alamut* is the key to understand the puzzling phenomena of the exploitation of Islam. The novel gain further popularization through its first translation into English in 2004. The 9/11 Al-Qaeda attack gave an excellent pretext for the novel to be published in the United States, where Hasan Sabbah this time becomes the mirror image of Osama bin-Laden and the Assassins of Alamut that of Al-Qaeda. The article also says that stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in general worked in favor of the worldwide read English edition of *Alamut* (534). The article is the opposite of my research, which is by reading this novel; a reader should understand that a religion can be exploited in a very creative way, and how one small part of exploited religion affects the religion as a whole.

The last is a thesis written by Fella Mutiara from Andalas University in 2015. Her thesis entitled “Totalitarianism versus Democracy in The Hunger Games Trilogy: Foucauldian Discourse and Power Relations” which explains about democracy and totalitarian, and how democracy disguised as totalitarian system in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The thesis is guidance for me since it has almost similar topic and using the same approach. It gives me a better understanding on both Foucauldian Discourse and Totalitarianism.

### **1.7 The Theoretical Framework**

There are three variables in this research; exploitation, religion, and discourse. As for religion, the writer believes that the term has been known for centuries without research by scholars for explaining what precisely defines a religion. We can just say it as forms of cultural systems, practices, organizations that relates humanity to supernatural elements<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, it would be acceptable if we jump to the other two variables instead; exploitation and discourse. According to by Richard Arneson, an American philosopher specializing in political philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, in his article that was published in 2013, entitled “Exploitation and outcome”, where he explains as the title suggests, the definition, concept, types and the outcome of exploitation.

Richard argues that exploitation is taking unfair advantage of another person. In other words, it is using another person in a way that it unfair to that person. Once exploitation happened, the exploiter gains a benefit for him or herself by a course of action that wrongfully harms the exploited person. Even

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<sup>4</sup> Morreall, John; Sonn, Tamara (2013). "Myth 1: All Societies Have Religions". 50 Great Myths of Religion. Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 12–17

though there is another type of exploitation, where the exploiter gains a benefit by a course of action that also benefits the exploited person, but the benefits gained by the exploiter are excessive by comparison to what the exploited person gains. In this case, for my study, if it is an exploitation of religion then it would be someone that taking advantage out of religion. He used religion to benefit himself and worsening the position of others in bettering his own.

In conducting this research, the writer applies the theory of discourse by Michel Foucault. Foucault (1970) in *The Order of Discourse* says that, it is not matter of measure; discourse can appear in the smallest amount (52). There are two things to consider on discourse, about what discourse is in society as language and about its existence which is destined to be effective. It creates prohibitions in which desire and power attached to the discourse itself. Foucault believes that discourse's role is not only to manifest or hide desire; discourse tends to be the object of the desire itself. According to Foucault, discourse is not just a device which interprets struggles and domination, it is said to be the power which is to be seized (54).

In addition, Linda J. Graham (2005), a professor in the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology believes that discourse analysis is a flexible term. She says in her article *Discourse Analysis and the Critical Use of Foucault* that one is doing is greatly dependent on the epistemological framework being drawn upon (2). However, Foucauldian discourse analysis is a form of discourse analysis based on the theories of Michel Foucault about discourse. The approach has colossal weight on control

relationship, in which is communicated through language. Foucauldian discourse analysis means to uncover how various sources of power influence social life. In addition, this approach is regularly utilized as a part of politically situated studies in light of the fact that the approach tends to see discourse in its connection to power and individuals in that power.

Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson (2005) states in their book *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literature Theory* that, people cannot just speak the truth without minding the unspoken rules to take a look at intellectual or political authorities of the day (158). It is as if saying that there are no, not right or wrong because to say it would be problematic, genuine opinions. Besides, there is no such absolute true or right discourse, only more and less powerful ones (161). To put it more simply, foucauldian discourse analysis is an approach in literature which argues that language interrelated with power that everything echoed everything else, nothing stood on its own.

## **1.8 The Method of the Research**

There are three steps to follow in conducting this research:

### **1.8.1 Collecting Data**

There are two kinds of data used in this research, they are primary data and secondary data. Primary data are taken from the *Alamut* novel itself. Since the writer focuses on how Hassan designs discourse about his own version of truth and install it to his followers. The secondary data are taken from trusted articles and eBooks about the novel, the approach and

Islamic studies that the writer uses in analyzing this research, as listed in works cited.

### **1.8.2 Analyzing Data**

Analyzing data started with reading and re-reading the novel, articles and all the books so that the writer will have a better understanding on the story, theory and the approach. Which will lead to a finding on how powerful discourse is and how religion can be exploited and run it as a totalitarian system.

### **1.8.3 Presenting the Result of Analysis**

This research is presented descriptively. According to C. R. Kothari (2009), an author of books about social research & statistics, sociology, social studies, social sciences, writes in his book *Research Methodology* that, descriptive research is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group, whereas the research will determine the frequency with which something occurs or its association with something else (37). This research is concerning whether certain variables are associated, with specific predictions, narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation.