



HEGEMONY OF POWER AND RESISTANCE IN THE FILM ARRIHLAH: A GRAMSCIAN LITERARY SOCIOLOGY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the dynamics of power hegemony and resistance in the animated film *Ar-Rihlah*, drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explore both consensual and coercive mechanisms of domination. Employing a descriptive-analytical method within a literary sociology framework, the study analyzes selected scenes, dialogue, and visual elements through textual and symbolic interpretation. Findings reveal two main hegemonic strategies: consensual hegemony, manifested through moral posturing, deceptive diplomacy, and ideological imagery; and coercive hegemony, conveyed through violence, intimidation, and militarized spectacle. In contrast, three counter-hegemonic responses emerge: physical defiance, spiritually rooted moral resistance, and divine or supernatural intervention. This study offers interdisciplinary relevance across literary criticism, cultural and Islamic studies, media analysis, and animation scholarship. Its originality lies in applying Gramsci's hegemony theory to the animated depiction of Islamic historical narratives, highlighting how visual storytelling communicates ideological power and resistance. By bridging classical sociopolitical theory with contemporary animated media, the research provides novel perspectives on the cultural functions of Islamic animation as both a pedagogical and ideological tool.

Keywords: *Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, Ar-Rihlah, Antonio Gramsci, Literature.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is not merely a vehicle for entertainment or aesthetics; it also serves as a social reflection that records, critiques, and even shapes public consciousness regarding the realities they face (Dewojati, 2021; Lewis, 2019; Abdurrahman, 2021). Garrard (2020) asserts that literature is a living entity that evolves alongside social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Nuzula and Tasnimah (2025) further emphasize the ideological function of literature, which can either reinforce existing structures or serve as a site of resistance against dominant power. A similar view is presented by Ganaie (2018) and Lahmar (2020), who argue that literature

is a cultural document inseparable from its social context.

Over time, the medium of literature has expanded beyond written texts to include film as a narrative form (Dianiya, 2020; Syaifullah, M. A., & Perrodin, 2023). As an audiovisual medium, film conveys social messages more directly and profoundly through the integration of visuals, narrative, and symbolism. According to Weisarkurnai (2017), film is a narrative art that delivers human experience in aesthetic and imaginative ways. Therefore, film can be positioned as a form of contemporary literature that carries great potential for revealing and reflecting on power relations in

society (Aprilliany & Hermiati, 2021; Sayekti, 2019; Rahmayanti et al., 2021).

Film as a visual art form allows viewers to engage more deeply with the story and characters, creating emotional bonds stronger than those typically formed through written texts. This capacity makes film an effective medium for delivering social messages (Haq, 2023; Joesoef & Adralissman, 2023). Just as literary works encourage readers to reflect on social realities and form collective awareness, film does the same yet with a more immediate and visual impact. The use of symbols, dialogues, and narratives enables filmmakers to convey complex messages in a form that is more accessible and easily understood by broader audiences (Kroeber, 2018; Morisson, 2019; Lesiana et al., 2023). Thus, film should not be seen solely as entertainment but also as a literary work that functions to reflect social conditions and provide critique of societal structures. Like traditional literary works, film evolves with its social context and serves as a mirror of the times reflecting prevailing norms and values while also opening space for critical thought and social transformation (Mok, 2019).

One film that warrants examination in this context is *Ar-Rihlah*, an animated feature produced by Manga Productions in collaboration with Toei Animation. It depicts the heroic struggle of the Arab community in confronting the invasion of Mecca by King Abrahah (Rahmatullah & Hasan, 2024). The film is inspired by the historical event known as the “Year of the Elephant,” also interpreted in the exegesis of Ibn Kathir. In this story, Abrahah does not rely solely on military might (coercive hegemony), but also uses symbolic and ideological strategies (consensual hegemony) to legitimize his power (Gramsci, 2011). A pivotal line in the film, spoken to Aws a brave local figure resisting the invasion is:

"ان كنت تريد الحياة فيها، اعلن استسلامك"

“If you want to live, then come—declare your surrender.” (Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 94:11)

Rather than immediately executing Aws, Abrahah offers him “clemency,” using the offer of survival as a strategic tool. This approach reflects a form of domination cloaked in rationality and compromise, aimed at turning Aws into a symbol of legitimacy. This aligns with Gramsci’s concept of consensual hegemony, where power is maintained by securing the active consent of the governed through dominant ideologies that appear beneficial or “reasonable.” This consensual approach recurs in the interactions between Abrahah and the locals, where dominance is promoted through rhetoric of peace and justice while concealing deeper ambitions of ideological conquest.

To better understand the representation of hegemony in literature and media, previous research has employed Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as a central analytical framework. These studies contribute significantly to expanding the theoretical lens and understanding the forms of domination and resistance in various literary media, from novels to film (Wijaya et al., 2025; Khusniyah, 2025; Anjani, 2023). Such prior works provide a relevant foundation for analyzing how hegemonic power is portrayed and contested in *Ar-Rihlah*.

For instance, a thesis by Romadon (2022), titled *Hegemoni Aparatus Pemerintah dalam Novel Sirkus Pohon Karya Andrea Hirata*, analyzes state apparatus hegemony through Gramsci’s lens. While his study focuses on a novel, it offers valuable insight into how Gramscian theory can reveal structures of domination in narrative texts an approach adopted in this study through the medium of animated film.

Another relevant study by Muhammad (2021), *Hegemoni Kekuasaan dalam Novel Rifaat Karya Naguib Mahfouz*, categorizes domination into persuasive and violent forms and provides a nuanced classification of domination levels. Although the object of analysis differs, the methodology and focus on domination strengthen the theoretical foundation of this study.

Similarly, Mansyur (Yusuf, 2017) on *Hegemoni dalam Novel Bekisar Merah* investigates power, cultural, and ideological hegemony, albeit without addressing counter-hegemony. His analysis still contributes to understanding how power relations are encoded in literary works (Sabbila, 2022).

These studies affirm the applicability of Gramsci's theory across literary forms. However, few have applied this theory to visual narratives such as film, particularly historical animated films set in the Middle East. This study thus expands the scope of Gramscian analysis by examining both coercive and consensual forms of hegemony within a visual medium and includes an exploration of counter-hegemonic responses.

This study examines how hegemonic power is represented in *Ar-Rihlah*, as well as how forms of resistance or counter-hegemony are articulated through its narrative and visual elements. The study addresses a gap in existing literature, which primarily focuses on written texts, and offers a new perspective by analyzing animated film through the lens of literary sociology. This approach recognizes film as both an aesthetic and ideological cultural text, capable of conveying complex power dynamics and contributing to the construction of social consciousness. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need to interpret film not merely as entertainment, but as a site of ideological contestation and cultural reflection.

2. METHODS

This research employs a literary sociology approach and applies a descriptive-analytical method. The descriptive-analytical method is used to explore and describe the elements in the film *Ar-Rihlah* that are related to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Sugiyono (2021) and Fraenkel et al. (2014) states that this approach is suitable for systematically and comprehensively explaining the relationships among the elements in the data.

The data used in this study are qualitative in nature, consisting of dialogues,

scenes, symbols, and cinematographic elements in the film *Ar-Rihlah* that depict forms of power hegemony. The main data source is the film *Ar-Rihlah*, a Japanese-Saudi animated production created by Toei Animation and Manga Productions and directed by Shizuno Kobun in 2021.

Data collection was conducted using the observe and note technique, involving a systematic process to obtain data relevant to the study's focus on hegemony and resistance (Susanto et al., 2023). The researcher repeatedly and attentively watched the film to understand the storyline, characters, and the underlying socio-political context. During each viewing, the researcher noted key dialogues, scenes, and visual symbols that reflected hegemonic practices both persuasive (consensual) and repressive (coercive).

The collected data were then classified based on the types of hegemony according to Gramsci's theoretical framework, specifically the mechanisms of consent and coercion (Herdayati & Syahrial, 2019; Mauliddiyah, 2021). Data were analyzed using the literary sociology approach, which treats film as a social text rich in power relations. In this perspective, film is not merely seen as a work of art, but as a representation of ideology and structures of domination in society.

The data were then interpreted descriptively and analytically by uncovering the meanings behind each character's actions, dialogues, and visual symbols. The analysis aims to reveal how hegemonic power is constructed and maintained within the narrative, as well as how resistance emerges as a response to such domination. Through this method, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of power and resistance in the cultural context represented by the film *Ar-Rihlah*.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Hegemoni in the film Ar-Rihlah*

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I. Consensual Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, in Selections from the Prison Notebooks, explains that one of the most influential forms of hegemony is the spontaneous consent of the masses to the values and social direction established by the dominant group. This consent is not enforced by coercion, but rather arises from the belief that the dominant group holds the prestige, legitimacy, and social position to lead.

Data 1

كان هدفهم غزو مكة جوهرية جزيرة العرب المزدهرة تجارياً.

(Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 2:48)

At the beginning of the film Ar-Rihlah, the narrator states that Abrahah's main objective was to conquer Mecca due to its status as the economic and symbolic center of the Arabian Peninsula. This statement reveals that Abrahah's mission was not merely military conquest but a strategic attempt to control a city of major trade and religious significance. Instead of launching an immediate attack, the narrative depicts Abrahah arriving with a highly organized and orderly army, giving the impression that his mission was to bring order and modernization to what he perceived as an inefficient and disorganized city.

This approach suggests that Abrahah sought to expand his influence and establish dominance by projecting the image of a rational leader and a bearer of stability. He did not engage in open dialogue, nor did he immediately use force. Rather, he positioned himself as a figure who would unify the region under a more structured and legitimate leadership. His strategy involved inviting submission to his authority not through violence, but through promises of centralized power and order.

This narrative represents a form of consensual hegemony, as Abrahah's initial intentions were not accompanied by overt violence but rather by a portrayal of himself as a civilizing force. The film presents him not as an aggressor, but as a visionary leader

offering stability and development. In this way, power is legitimized through image and rhetoric, aiming to create acceptance without resistance.

Data 2

نشكرك على تكبدك عناء الطريق إلينا، وأنا بنفسى أعتذر مما بدر من رجالي من سوء تصرف، أعتذر، لا أريد أن يُساء الفهم، فأنا لم أصدر أوامر بسرقة جمالكم، والذي حصل اجتهد في غير محله من بعض رجالي، هذا ما حدث، أظن أنهم سيرغمون أهل مكة إذا أخذوا منّي رأس من إيلكم. على رسلك يا رجل، لم أنته من اعتذاري بعد، هيا هوكر، أرحم الآن صدق اعتذاري.

(Ar-rihlah, 2021 18:13)

This statement reflects humility and respect. However, within the dynamics of power, this apology serves as a calculated strategic move. Abrahah does not express genuine remorse; rather, he is constructing an image of himself as a great leader who upholds justice even in the midst of invasion. He aims to present himself as wise and fair, despite the misconduct of his own soldiers. To reinforce this image, Abrahah commands his subordinate, Hawkab, to "demonstrate his virtue" by executing the two soldiers responsible. At first glance, this may appear to be an act of justice. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this is a performance of power a form of power theater. By punishing his own men, he sends a message to his enemies: "If I can execute my own soldiers, imagine what I can do to you."

This scene illustrates how power can disguise itself with symbols of virtue and justice, while conveying a deeper message of domination and intimidation. Abrahah wants the people of Mecca to believe that he is not a villain, but a just ruler worthy of obedience. He seeks acceptance of his dominance not solely through coercion, but through a carefully constructed moral image.

This moment exemplifies a form of consensual hegemony cloaked in moralism, where Abrahah manipulates his image as a wise and just leader to gain legitimacy and passive acceptance. Rather than imposing submission through direct force, he subtly

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shapes the perception of his adversaries through a staged display of false morality making his authority appear rational and worthy of voluntary recognition.

Data 3

بسهولة، ي قتلونا سوف محالة، لا سدموت
ب حياء كم ارجوا.

(Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 40: 38)

After Abrahah's military force was visually displayed particularly through his war elephants that symbolized superiority and impending destruction the atmosphere among the people and fighters of Mecca became highly tense. As the height of this intimidation was reached, panic broke out not from the enemy's assault, but from within the resistance ranks themselves. The panic was triggered by the bandits who had previously joined the defense lines but, now overwhelmed by the fear of defeat and death, began to lose faith in the possibility of victory. One of their exclamations marked the onset of psychological collapse, which quickly spread among the crowd.

This exclamation was not merely a personal reaction of fear, but a catalyst for collective disarray. Several citizens, influenced by this sudden despair, began to flee. These bandits demonstrated no sense of solidarity in defending the sacred land; rather, they prioritized self-preservation. They were not directly threatened at that moment, yet they had already surrendered mentally.

In the context of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this moment reflects the success of the enemy's ideological domination. Without a single weapon being deployed, Abrahah had already instilled fear and a perception of invincibility within the consciousness of Mecca's people. As Gramsci wrote: "The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group... is historically caused by the prestige... which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of

production." (Gramsci, 2011, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 12)

In other words, hegemony does not always rely on coercion; it can also be accepted voluntarily when the ruling class is perceived as legitimate, superior, and undefeatable. This is precisely what happened with the bandits they fled not because they were forced to, but because they believed Abrahah's power was insurmountable.

In doing so, the bandits inadvertently became agents of hegemonic dissemination. By expressing fear and abandoning their positions, they transmitted panic to others, turning fear into a social norm. This illustrates what Gramsci termed consensual hegemony a form of ideological control that operates without physical coercion because it has already permeated the public consciousness.

II. Coercive Hegemony

In addition to operating through voluntary consent, hegemonic power, according to Antonio Gramsci, also functions through coercive state apparatuses such as law, the military, and disciplinary institutions. In Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci writes:

"The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is... constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed." (Gramsci, 2011, p. 12).

This statement implies that when popular consent can no longer be obtained voluntarily, the state or in this context, the ruling power resorts to coercion to maintain control.

In the context of The Journey, this coercive mechanism is clearly manifested in the militaristic and symbolic strategies employed by Abrahah's army. The deployment of war elephants, the public delivery of ultimatums, and the use of threats

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and public executions all serve as tools of psychological warfare intended to suppress resistance. Rather than relying on ideological persuasion alone, the film demonstrates how domination is enforced when hegemony fails to secure consent underscoring the presence of a coercive regime that compels obedience through fear and force.

Data 1

من اي ان ت علم، ان المطلب، ع بد يا منك اريد
ابداي تغير ولن لم مطال بي،

(Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 19:15)

The clenched fist gesture is not merely a physical expression, but a psychological symbol of power. Though Abrahah does not issue a direct threat, his emphasis on the phrase “my intention has not changed” serves as a firm declaration that the plan to attack the Ka’bah will proceed regardless of negotiation or local resistance.

In the context of power relations, both his words and gesture represent a unilateral form of domination one that leaves no room for compromise or diplomatic engagement. Abrahah intends to assert that he holds absolute control, and that no moral, religious, or political force can deter his ambition. This moment exposes the contradiction behind his earlier portrayal as a just leader; in reality, Abrahah remains firmly committed to his imperialist objectives.

The statement is not simply an affirmation of personal resolve it is a hardline message that all paths to reconciliation have been closed. His posture and tone project pressure and invincibility that are impossible to contest.

Abrahah’s declaration and gesture reflect a model of authoritarian rule based on absolute power. He signals that his plans are non-negotiable and that he is prepared to enforce them through coercion. This exemplifies a form of authority that operates through intimidation and fear.

Data 2

اسمعوني و ج بداء، ليسمعوني انذار اخر، هذا مكة، الهى كل
هم يريد سدي ابرهه، سدي من لكم رحيم
ويريد مكانتها، على والقضاء الكعبة
نامركم التجارية، مكة مكانة على الا ستلاء
ق ذلكم نريد لانحن وسديكم، ل سدي بالطاعة
من الارض هذه اخلوا لذا الم تبجح، ايها ابا دا
اشلاء، وجعلناكم على يكم، ق ضدنا والا ثورككم،
ل تقرروا، ال فجر طلوع حتى يمهلكم سديكم
سدينا يمهلنا انذر من واعذر.

(Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 39:10)

As the conflict approached its climax, Abrahah dispatched a mounted envoy into the heart of Mecca to deliver a crucial message to its inhabitants. This envoy did not arrive as a diplomat or negotiator, but rather as a direct embodiment of the military force prepared to destroy. With commanding presence and a thunderous voice, he delivered an ultimatum to the leaders of Meccan society, as reflected in the data above.

The statement was delivered with a loud, assertive, and forceful tone. Although the envoy claimed that “they do not wish to wage war,” this line merely served as rhetorical sugarcoating to veil a brutal threat. In reality, each phrase carried an implicit ultimatum: if the people did not surrender, total destruction would follow. This act represents the most explicit form of coercive hegemony in the entire film. Power is no longer disguised through peaceful discourse or diplomacy; it is laid bare submit or perish. Abrahah’s ambition is not merely to conquer territory, but to obliterate the spiritual symbol at the heart of Meccan belief. This shows that the invasion was not only physical but profoundly ideological.

In the film’s visual narrative, the depiction of the envoy riding a warhorse while delivering threats creates a stark contrast between civilian life and imperialist aggression. The envoy is not just a messenger but a living extension of the hegemonic structure that uses fear as a tool of domination. The delivery of an ultimatum, accompanied by the threat of total annihilation, constitutes a direct act of coercion against the people. Power offers no space for dialogue, only two binary choices: submission or extinction. This is a clear assertion of authority through fear and military intimidation.

Data 3

باسمنا لنظهر هيا جيدا، اسمعوني جنود،
تقوم لاحد تى اسد قوهم تحدونا، الذين بال سذج
لهم ناصرا اننا لهم، واذا بتواقيامة لهم، ان اروها
لهم يملك لا اللهم شيئا، الامام لى.

(Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 64:44)

After feeling pleased and satisfied seeing the people of Mecca scatter in fear, Abrahah became bewildered upon witnessing them regroup and stand their ground. At this point, he no longer masked his ambition with symbolic or diplomatic language. In this moment, he issued a direct and open call to his army to launch a total assault on the Meccan population, accompanied by one of the most extreme ideological declarations in the film. This scene represents the pinnacle of coercive power, not only targeting the physical bodies and territory of the Meccans, but also aiming to annihilate their deepest-held beliefs.

The statement reflected in the data above is not merely a declaration of war it is an ideological proclamation of the most extreme kind. Abrahah did not only intend to seize territory or demolish a city; he sought to dismantle the entire belief system of Meccan society at its roots. By ordering his troops to proclaim that “their God does not exist,” Abrahah openly denied the existence of local spirituality, attempting to replace it with the supremacy of worldly power his own rule and his army.

This is coercive hegemony in its most total and frontal form: domination that leaves no space for differing beliefs, imposing acceptance not just through military force, but also by obliterating values, symbols, and even the very existence of the enemy's faith. Abrahah's planned destruction of Mecca becomes a theatrical display of power an exhibition designed not only to subjugate bodies, but to crush the souls and hopes of his opponents. He sought to ensure that when his forces attacked, they would not only destroy buildings, but also annihilate God from the minds of the people.

Abrahah's words carry a dual command: physical and spiritual annihilation. He deployed military strength to subjugate the entire system of belief upheld by the Meccans, representing the highest form of coercive domination one that enforces ideological destruction in its totality.

B. Counter-Hegemony in the film Ar-Rihlah

I. Physical/active Counter-Hegemony

Data 1

ن تحدث الذي الوقت هذا في رجال، يا اسمعوني
ديارنا نحو الجرار بجيشه ابرهة يتقدم في
الحسم وادي في اليوم نجتع لم ونحن مكة، في
مكة اهل نحن هذا، وغزوه ع بورهم نمنع لكي الا هذا،
واحدة خطوة يخطو ان وجيشه لابرهة نسمح وان
حرام ل بلد مكة وان اعقابهم على سنردهم في بها،
الاعداء على. (Ar-Rihlah, 2021, 04:31)

As the shadow of destruction loomed over Mecca and Abrahah's forces increasingly displayed military superiority, the city was gripped by fear and a growing sense of hopelessness. In this tense moment, Musab's speech emerged as a powerful response. Known as a courageous yet emotionally driven figure, Musab positioned himself not merely as a commander, but as a moral catalyst reigniting the people's will to fight. His declaration went beyond a mere call to arms; it affirmed that the Kaaba was not just a structure, but a profound symbol of the city's spiritual identity.

Thus, his call to “defend the symbol of Mecca” carried a deeper meaning it was a collective stand to preserve the fundamental values that underpinned their society. This resistance was not simply military, but also a rejection of external domination that sought to sever their religious and cultural roots.

In the narrative context, this moment represents a critical shift from fear to resolve. Musab's words mark the transition from passive despair to active defiance. Although they were aware that their military might was no match for Abrahah's, the courage rooted in faith, values, and solidarity transformed

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this moment into a pivotal expression of resistance.

This is an example of Physical Counter-Hegemony, as Musab explicitly called for a direct and uncompromising confrontation with Abrahah's forces. His speech functions as a tool of mass mobilization, invoking the collective identity of the Meccan people and rejecting subjugation through bold resistance.

Data 2

ب كلام اطلب لن رجال، يا واحدة، كلمة لكم ساقول
لا المعركة، قلب في اق تضرب وسوف تله الا
جلاميد اشداء بل رعادي، بكاء بين اريد- (Ar-
Rihlah, 2021, 08:48)

In a tense atmosphere filled with awareness of impending catastrophe, the Meccan fighters gathered in the valley to prepare for battle. Musab, who had assumed the role of frontline leader from the outset, stood before them with commanding charisma. Before entering a critical phase of the struggle, he called upon Nizar a well-known and resilient fighter to deliver a few words to ignite the spirits of the assembled troops. This moment was not just a typical rallying cry; it was part of a broader moral and psychological strategy to solidify their ranks, now increasingly aware of the immense risks they were about to face.

Musab's call, as referenced above, was a spontaneous outburst of frustration that had long been brewing. His words were harsh, direct, and unfiltered precisely what made them so stirring. Nizar was not speaking about lofty ideals or strategic plans; he was speaking about survival. Amidst the collective panic that gripped the people of Mecca, it was this raw declaration that managed to lift them from hesitation to courage. These words emerged from a state of emergency. There was no room for deliberation only one message: strike first or be destroyed. The phrase "don't die" became a cry for survival in an asymmetrical war. Behind the aggressive tone lay a brutal honesty: they knew they were the weaker

side, and the only way to survive was through preemptive resistance.

This speech was a direct and militant call for frontal resistance. It was publicly delivered before the people's militia as a form of mass mobilization against Abrahah's military power. The statement represents a pure form of rebellion, born from desperation and a deep awareness of their precarious position.

II. Humanistik Counter-Hegemony**Data 3**

كي القاتل الى تاتوا الم صديح، اوس قاله ما
يوم الى ي فارقة كم لا وسما الج بن ي كون لا
ترمون اراكم مالي ت فرون، اراكم مالي الامت،
قلب على وقاات لنا العزم عقدنا ان اسلح تكم،
فلن ثبت باس، ولا علينا خوف فلا واحد، رجل
وشجاع تهم مكة رجال عرفة عدونا، فلنري- (Ar-
Rihlah, 2021, 43:13)

After Aws's emotional outcry successfully shattered the panic and reignited the spirit of resistance among the scattered masses, Musab, as the commander of the troops, took over the speaking platform to reinforce that momentum. In an atmosphere gradually shifting from despair to collective determination, his statement strengthened the moral message conveyed by Aws, but delivered with a more militaristic tone. The commander did not merely rally the spirit of the people; he reawakened their original commitment: that they had gathered not just to survive, but to protect something greater than themselves their city, their families, and their faith.

In the phrase "then why did you throw down your weapons?" there lies a sharp rebuke against the surrender of fighting spirit brought on by fear. The commander rejected the defeatist narrative instilled by the enemy's dominance and, instead, constructed a counter-narrative: that Abrahah's strength was not as overwhelming as it seemed, and that it could be resisted if the people stood united.

This declaration marked an escalation of resistance from a previously passive and psychological stance to an organized

collective action. The commander reignited a flame that had nearly died out. He instilled a renewed belief that survival did not depend solely on physical might, but on the will to endure together. His statement was an explicit call to arms. He summoned the people to unite in direct confrontation against Abrahah's army. Though grounded in awareness, this message was militant in nature and encouraged physical resistance as a means to overturn the entrenched domination.

III. Supernatural Counter-Hegemony

Data 4

ما الأمر؟ لم أكن أعي ما يجري من حولي في تلك اللحظة. رأيت الفيلة تمتنع عما اقترب منها، وتراجع وكأنها لا تفرع منه. وفجأة، اتجهت الفيلة كلها في اتجاه واحد، ثم بدأت تسجد، الواحدة تلو الأخرى. (Ar-rihlah, 2021, 94:39)

Towards the climax of Ar-Rihlah, when Abrahah's power appears absolute and the resistance of the Meccan warriors has been largely crushed or dispersed, a supernatural force begins to intervene. Amidst a battlefield fully dominated both militarily and psychologically by Abrahah, unusual signs emerge war elephants, once the symbol of hegemonic power, suddenly refuse to advance and instead bow in unison toward the same direction. This moment coincides with the arrival of small birds descending from the sky. The visual narrative is accompanied by Aws's voice recounting the extraordinary event in a tone filled with wonder and awe.

The narrative above illustrates a form of physical counter-hegemony and stands as the film's most powerful representation of supernatural counter-hegemony. After Abrahah commands the execution of Aws using Mahmud the largest and most fearsome war elephant as an embodiment of absolute military might, an intervention emerges that transcends human logic. The arrival of flocks of small birds launching burning stones marks the onset of divine resistance.

The elephants, previously the primary coercive instruments of hegemonic power, now reject their orders not due to defeat by

human strength, but in response to a higher authority: divine will. They even symbolically "prostrate," indicating their refusal to obey a human command that violates a spiritual directive.

Within Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this phenomenon may be interpreted as a form of non-human physical counter-hegemony (i.e., supernatural resistance) a type of defiance against dominant power not enacted by the people, but emerging from a realm beyond the control of hegemonic structures. While Gramsci primarily emphasized the role of civil society and the state, this narrative positions supernatural intervention as a substitute for a silenced populace.

This moment reinforces the notion that even the most brutal hegemonic regimes have limits. When the people are powerless, ideology has been broken, and coercive force reaches its peak, what remains is divine intervention representing justice and the protection of sacred symbols such as the Ka'bah. The birds in this narrative are not merely agents of destruction; they symbolize spiritual resistance against the desecration of religious values. They signify that within the belief system of both pre-Islamic and Islamic Arab society, oppressive human power can be overthrown not only by the people, but also by God.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ar-Rihlah effectively portrays various forms of hegemonic power and resistance in the context of the historical invasion of Makkah. Using Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the film demonstrates how consensual hegemony is constructed through symbolic diplomacy, moral imagery, and ideological manipulation especially in scenes where Abrahah seeks legitimacy by offering clemency and portraying himself as a just ruler. Meanwhile, coercive hegemony is shown through threats, executions, and the use of military force to impose domination. The resistance (counter-hegemony) is also represented in layered forms: physical

(through direct armed resistance), humanistic (through collective moral awakening), and supernatural (represented by the divine intervention of the birds). These layers reveal how the narrative not only depicts the domination of power but also the persistence of belief, identity, and collective spirit in the face of oppression. The study successfully meets its objectives by identifying and analyzing the mechanisms of power and counter-power in the film through sociological literary analysis. Furthermore, it highlights how visual storytelling becomes a medium of ideological discourse, enabling the audience to critically reflect on the nature of authority, resistance, and faith.

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