

Democratization in Indonesia and the Growth of Post-Islamism Through Popular Culture Media

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Abstract: This paper examines post-Islamism in post-reform Indonesian cinema (1998). We focus on Muslim-figure representation in films as a medium of popular culture through which they represent themselves as friendly, tolerant, modern, and pious Muslims. We argue this phenomenon as the form of post-Islamism. Post-Islamists are different from Islamists. Muslim figures with post-Islamism do not express radicalism/conservatism and reject the system and values of democracy because of western culture. We argue that filmmakers want to show that the post-Islamism movement in Indonesian cinema is the way to represent the compatibility of Islam with modernity, tolerance to capitalistic/western values, and non-violent. Filmmakers present post-Islamism as part of democracy in the Indonesian political system. By adopting the post-Islamism concept by Asef Bayat, Iranian social theorist, we explain the growth of Islamic-genre films in the post-reform and argue that this phenomenon is a form of post-Islamism. We collected data through in-depth interviews with filmmakers of Islamic-genre cinema. We conclude: democratization in Indonesia provides an opportunity to externalize post-Islamism through popular culture. Post-Islamists use democracy to express their identity and religiosity as Muslims


1 INTRODUCTION


After the 1998 reform event in Indonesia, the growth of Islamic groups marked the freedom to express ideas, opinions, and organize as the essence of democracy that was previously shackled for approximately 32 years during the New Order era. However, radical Islamic groups also take advantage of this freedom and use other forms of violence in society. The massive movement of these Islamic groups has links to violent practices, such as the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, the bomb explosion at the Marriot Hotel in 2003, and the Australian Embassy in 2004 (Hilmy, 2007). As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and the third-largest democracy after the United States and India, Indonesia strives to uphold democratic values. The post-Islamism movement wants to remove the negative stigma against Islam which was previously considered part of a radical group. The post-Islamism

movement wants to show Islam as a religion of peace, not a religion that teaches terrorism as is often addressed to Islamic groups, especially the Islamism movement.

Through Indonesian cinema, the post-Islamism movement presents a peaceful Islam. They put forward democratic values. On the other hand, they remain in the faith by prioritizing Islamic Sharia (law). Despite placing Islam as a social order, this group accommodates democracy due to living in Indonesia. They do not impose Islam as the state's political ideology as conservative Islamic groups do. For Bayat (Bayat, 2011), Islamism defines Islam as responding to political, economic, and cultural deficits. It imagines Islam as a perfect divine system, not just a means of worship but a political model, cultural code, law, and economic order. Islam is a system that responds to all problems in all human life. However, Bayat said that this interpretation tends to marginalize and oppress others who have

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different understandings in many ways. In practice, the Islamism movement is also against local tradition, secularism, non-Islamism, religious minorities, women, etc. Islamism or post-Islamism is an idea that understands Islam in its socio-political context. Islam is an ideology and a tool of power, and a tool for social domination. The difference between Islamism and post-Islamism lies in the realm of the practice of Islamic doctrine itself. Islamism works on the state system while post-Islamism works on socio-cultural life (Bayat, 2007). Making Islam Democratic: Social movements and the post-Islamist turn. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.). Islamism has a relationship with the interests of the transnational movement. Meanwhile, post-Islamism uses arguments with local repertoires (repertoires of reasoning) such as local history, customs, rituals, and local memory, rather than scripturalist theological views (Alimi, 2014). 'Local repertoires of reasoning and the Islamist movement in post-authoritarian Indonesia,' *Indonesia and the Malay World* 42–122: 24–42). Post-Islamists do not take a position against secularism but instead apply Islam despite the secular social environment (Sakai & Fauzia, 2014).

In the post-reform era in Indonesia, these ultra-conservative Islamic groups were considered agents of the 'Arabization' of Indonesian Islam after experiencing a period of marginalization in the 1980-1990s. This group received assistance from Saudi Arabia (such as funds), although not all groups promoted radical Islamic ideas (Bubalo and Fealy, 2005; Izharuddin, 2015). The use of the veil (for Muslimah) and pornography provisions law is also related to the mission of 'Arabization' and the spread of Islamism in Indonesia (Wieringa, 2009; Izharuddin, 2015). In the context of Indonesia, which adheres to the Pancasila ideology, which is secular, it prioritizes harmonious relations (and equal rights) with non-Muslim minorities so that the idea of becoming an Islamic state is not appropriate (Van Bruinessen, 2013).

The ideas of Islamism became a topic of discussion among the nation's founders at the beginning of Indonesia's independence. They discussed the relationship between Islam and the state at The Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence and The Constitutional Assembly sessions. The agreement among them is Pancasila which they believe can accommodate plurality. Pancasila means The Five Principles. They include Belief in the one and only God, Just and civilized humanity, the Unity of Indonesia, Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising of deliberations among representatives, and social

justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. It shows that Indonesia has ideas about Islamic identity and ideology that have various interpretations. Indonesia also enjoys popular culture with the global community, especially among the youth. It then mediates the growth of post-Islamism. The presence of new (media based on internet technology) accelerates the dissemination of messages contained in popular culture (Rosa, 2019).

Ariel Heryanto (Heryanto, 2015) sees the process of this generation of Muslims as connoisseurs of cultural taste and independence. However, they also do not want to sacrifice their faith. Ariel argues that the emergence of post-Islamism is part of the New Order's history which is not friendly with Muslim communities, both moderate Muslims and conservative Muslims. With the New Order's treatment, which always cornered Islam and used it as a political vehicle at the end of Suharto's tenure, Islamic groups reformulated Islam after the collapse of the New Order regime. One of them is post-Islamism, born in the economically middle class, in urban areas. They reproduce their identity as followers of Islam by considering the values of globalization, modernity, democracy, and freedom. In the past, these values were enjoyed in camouflage.

The post-Islamists took advantage of the collapse of the New Order regime through Indonesian cinema. This reality is in the film adaptation entitled *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008) by Hanung Bramantyo. The film, adapted from a novel by Habiburrahman El Shirazi, marked the rise of Indonesian cinema and the first time the birth of a post-reform Islamic-themed film. This film has the support of 3.7 million viewers in Indonesia. The emergence of post-Islamism erased the face of Islam, which was considered radical in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. This film depicts handsome, friendly, educated, successful, and modern Muslims. The film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* also puts women equal to men in career and education. This impression is far from the shadow of the violence and radicalism inherent in conservative Islamic groups such as Islamists. The success of post-Islamism identity politics through the big screen was followed by other films such as *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2009), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (2010), and *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (2012) and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2* (2017). All three are adaptations of the novel by Habiburrahman El-Shirazi. Meanwhile, other films that grew up with post-Islamism packaging were adaptations of novels by Asma Nadia, such as the film *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (2013), *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Jilbab Traveler: Love Spark in Korea* (2016), *Cinta*

Laki-Laki Biasa (2016) and *Bunda: Kisah Cinta 2 Kodi* (2018).

The emergence of the post-Islamism movement in Indonesia is related to the consolidation of democracy which facilitated the opening of political opportunities after the fall of Suharto and the development of modern idioms from the moderate Muslim campaign against Islamic radicalism (Hasan, 2013). In popular culture, the manifestation of Islam in films has been a long time in Indonesia. Islam and pop culture get combined in various forms and purposes (Barker, 2011). As a mass media, films convey the ideology of filmmakers such as directors, writers, or producers. These three elements have an essential role in constructing messages through stories, scenes, plots, settings, wardrobes, and other elements (Bahruddin et al., 2021).

2 METHOD

This study uses in-depth interviews with informants involved in Islamic-themed films, especially in the post-Islamism movement. Habiburrahman El Shirazi and Asma Nadia are novel writers whose works have been adapted into films. Another informant was Guntur Soehardjanto who directed *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2*, *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, and *Jilbab Traveler: Love Sparks in Korea*. The issue of democratic values in this paper is limited to issues of tolerance and women's freedom packaged in the post-Islamism movement. The author explores information from filmmakers to find out what kind of interpretation of Islam they want to offer to the public in Indonesian cinema. The filmmakers will confirm the film's reading of issues about democratic values to find out more about the post-Islamism movement, especially in Indonesian cinema.

3 RESULTS

Western mass media view Islam as the root of authoritarian rule for the Muslim community in the Middle East. Islam is a patriarchal religion, bad at regulating citizenship, and minus in freedom (Bayat, 2007). To remove this stigma, the post-Islamism movement uses issues of democracy to emphasize that Islam is a religion that is far from violence and radicalism and is in line with democracy. The issues of democracy focusing on Indonesian cinema are inter-religious tolerance and women's freedom. However, the post-Islamism movement still upholds

the principles of Islam as an unnegotiable legal system. Post-Islamists view Islam as a religion that regulates all aspects of people's lives. However, they view Islam can't be forced into state law as the Islamism movement views.

3.1 Tolerance Issue

The issue of tolerance in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008) is about the association of a Muslim with a Coptic Christian. Several scenes show the harmony of Islam with other religions. For example, the scene where Fahri (Fedi Nuril) helps Americans when they are accused of being a terrorist by native Egyptians while on the Metro. In this film, Fahri is also willing to marry a Coptic Christian girl named Maria Girgis (played by Carissa Putri). Even though at first, Aisha (played by Rianti Cartwright) was not willing to be married but saw Maria was seriously ill due to thinking about Fahri as well as being the key witness to Fahri's accusation of committing adultery against Noura (Zaskia Adya Mecca), Aisha finally asked Fahri to marry her. A few days after marriage, Maria died after converting to Islam.

Meanwhile, in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2*, tolerance issues get raised by Fahri's story, who has become a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and a retail entrepreneur there. In this country, Fahri neighbors Jewish and Christian families. They described Fahri as a 'perfect' Muslim figure, and he is handsome, friendly, successful, intelligent, and generous. It makes their Jewish neighbors, Mrs. Caterina (played by Dewi Irawan) and Keira (played by Chelsea Islan), who are Christians, admire Fahri's figure as a good Muslim. Even Keira, who initially hated Fahri because his father was a victim of terrorism, finally realized that Fahri was a kind-hearted Muslim, far from the negative stigma that he had always believed in.

The issue of tolerance is also in the film *Assalamualaikum Beijing* which features a Muslim female character named Asma (played by Revalina S. Temat). He befriends an agnostic character (no religion but believes in God), Zhong Wen (played by Morgan Oey). Narratively, the film *Assalamualaikum Beijing* also explores Islamic buildings as a cultural heritage in China. Even though Islam is a minority religion in China, it can coexist with non-Muslim communities. Even Zhong Wen, who works as a tour guide, swiftly took Asma on Islamic religious tours, and told the early history of Islam in China.

3.2 Women's Freedom Issue

The issue of women's freedom in the Islamic legal system, mainly widely applied in the Middle East, is often in the world's spotlight. Post-Islamism groups want to remove this stigma through the films they produce. Aisyah's character in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is a free woman who can make her life choices. Besides being successful in higher education, Aisyah and her best friend decided to become humanitarian volunteers in Palestine, even though she already has a husband (Fahri). Likewise, Hulya (played by Tatjana Saphira) has the freedom to pursue a master's degree in Edinburgh. This film also shows the character of Aisyah, who refuses to be married when Fahri wants to marry Maria. However, Aisyah accepted Maria for humanitarian reasons.

The same thing is in the film *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan*. This film depicts a wife named Arini (played by Laudya Cinthia Bella) who is not willing to be polygamous with her husband, Pras (played by Fedi Nuril), who wants to marry Meirose (played by Raline Shah). Even though, in the end, Arini accepted for humanitarian reasons that Meirose's mental health would get worse due to her husband leaving her at the wedding reception.

The film *Jilbab Traveler: Love Sparks in Korea* provides an overview of the freedom of Muslim women to explore the world without being accompanied by their mahram or family. This film also illustrates that women have the freedom to choose their life partners. This freedom to explore the world is in the film *Assalamualaikum Beijing*. Asma (played by Revalina S. Temat) is a character who can travel to China for her dreams and career. The story of this film seems to emphasize that Islam does not limit women who have been considered only behind the success of men. He can travel wherever he likes to achieve his dreams.

Meanwhile, the film *Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa* depicts an independent woman in the character of Nania (played by Velove Vexia). He was successful in his education and career as an architect, and Nania also has the freedom to choose the life partner she loves. He refused the arranged marriage by his parents.

Freedom in pursuing higher education is also seen in the film *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*. The character Ana (played by Oki Setiana Dewi) is a woman who has completed education at Al Azhar, Cairo, Egypt. This film also depicts the figure of women's freedom in making their life choices. Ana filed for divorce after finding out that her husband was HIV. Meanwhile, freedom in the film *Bunda: Cinta 2 Kodi*

is about women's freedom to improve careers. Kartika (played by Acha Septriasa) is a thriving Muslim woman who becomes an entrepreneur. Even in her household journey, Kartika often fights with her husband because it is difficult to divide time between business and household. Likewise, the film *Cinta Suci Zahrana* depicts a successful woman in her education and career. The character Zahrana (played by Meyda Sefira) also has a choice in determining her soul mate, who, in the end, marries the student she loves.

The film *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* also describes the freedom in choosing a mate. Zizi character (played by Meyda Sefira), the daughter of a Kiai (Muslim cleric) from a boarding school, has the freedom to express her opinion and determine her life partner. He rejected the application of one of the students, whom he considered a bad character.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The issues of tolerance and women's freedom in a democratic system depicted in the film's adaptation of the novels by Habiburrahman El Shirazi, and Asma Nadia show that Islam is quite flexible and can adapt to the modern world – adhering to the Western system – while still upholding Islamic principles. For example, consuming halal food and beverages, not touching people who are not mahram, and praying even abroad. For sharia, it must be firm (Asma Nadia, Personal Communication, August 27, 2017). The images of films adapted by Habiburrahman El Shirazi and Asma Nadia always represent friendly Islam, wherever a Muslim lives. Islam can coexist with adherents of other religions, both neighbors and friends, including through marriage. Others should feel the goodness of Islam. A Muslim must be an ambassador for Islam everywhere (Asma Nadia, Personal Communication, August 27, 2017). Islam must be good religion for everyone (Habiburrahman El Shirazi, Personal Communication, July 8, 2017). However, this contradicts the Islamic-themed films by director Nurman Hakim (Nurman Hakim, Personal Communication, December 13, 2017). In his films, Islam appears in conditions that are not always good. He describes the life of a boarding school which is not always good. For example, there was an ustadz sexually harassing a student, as depicted in the film *3 Doa 3 Cinta*.

On the other hand, the tolerance issue packaged in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is considered by non-Muslims as justification that Islam is the most authentic religion. For example, the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is considered part of the hegemony of the

Islamic group as the true religion, and they protest discrimination and religious tolerance in this film (Detik.com, 2008). Meanwhile, the scene of Fahri's defense of foreign tourists on the metro because Egyptians accused them of being part of the American people (a country that has massacred Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine) was considered by the editors of Mujahidin magazine as a campaign mission for Islamic pluralism (Arrahmah, 2008). To avoid Muslims and other religions being offended by the films written, Asma Nadia (Asma Nadia, Personal Communication, August 27, 2017) continuously monitors the storyline during film production. The films adapted from the novels must not conflict with Islam and not offend ethnicity, religion, race, and groups. Islam must be presented as a religion of *rahmatan lil alamin* (Islam is a religion that gives love to the entire universe). Meanwhile, director Guntur Soeharjanto (Guntur Soeharjanto, Personal Communication, August 22, 2017) admits that he only makes films that have good values and are not controversial.

Asma Nadia's commitment is also seen in films that raise the issue of women's freedom. Asma Nadia (Personal Communication, August 27, 2017) emphasizes that women must be logical and must be able to solve problems. A woman must be economically empowered. They must have strong support for their children so that when their husband dies or is polygamous but irresponsible, their children do not become victims of adults' decisions. The children can continue their dreams and aspirations because their mothers are economically empowered.

This women's empowerment seems to refute the view that Islam positions women as subordinates, namely only being part of men, as described in Islamism. In countries that use the Islamic system, the position of women is a part of men. They do not have the right to choose a partner, cannot be highly educated, and cannot have a career like men. The film's adaptation of Habiburrahman El Shirazi and especially Asma Nadia seem to want to emphasize that women have their abilities so that equality with men will come naturally. This thinking aligns with post-feminism, which is fed up with feminist thinking, which holds that women need to be empowered to be equal to men. This kind of thinking ignites the view of women's own inability to build themselves (Rosa, 2019). The films of Habiburrahman El-Shirazi and Asma Nadia depict women's freedom in careers, education, and freedom in determining their life partner. However, these films want to emphasize the necessity of obeying Islamic law. For example, a wife (woman) must obey her

husband. Men still have power over women, especially in the household, as in the film *Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa*. When Rafli (Deva Mahendra) does not have the cost of giving birth to his wife, Nania, he has to say that he will replace all Nania's deliveries if he has enough money. The concept of the husband as the leader of the household is considered an act following Islamic principles. These films argue that not all wives can be treated according to their husbands' will regarding polygamy. There are many things that a husband must prepare if he wants to be polygamous, both materially and psychologically, for his wife. Nevertheless, these two films still want to emphasize that polygamy is legal and is part of Islamic law. Hence, both films end with polygamous scenes based on the wife's request for humanitarian reasons. Women are free to make their life choices, but they must also know that there are limits to Islamic law that they must obey.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The synthesis of democratization and Islam in the post-Islamism movement was mainly carried out through popular culture media such as films, especially during the reformation period. Through Indonesian cinema, post-Islamism brings issues of democracy such as tolerance and women's freedom to emphasize that Islam is not a radical religion and imposes an Islamic legal system (sharia) as the ideology of the Indonesian state. The negative stigma against Islamism as political Islam is trying to be removed through Islamic-themed films that promote democratic values while still upholding Islamic principles. In popular culture media, post-Islamism tries to juxtapose democracy and Islam friendly, far from violence and violent radicalism.

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