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GENDER AND ISLAM IN INDONESIAN CINEMA

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2014

Centre for Gender Studies
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Declaration for SOAS MPhil thesis

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Abstract

My PhD thesis draws from feminist and post-structuralist approaches to examine the construction of gender and Islam in Indonesian Islamic cinema between 1977 to 2011. This thesis asks: how, when, and where do Indonesian femininity and masculinity in film become 'Muslim? Previous studies on representations of gender in Islam have shown that clothes are immediate markers of Islamic identity. This thesis, however, seeks to transcend clothing as an obvious visual marker of Islamic identity and the fixation on the Islamic veil and turban and focus instead on the dynamic relationship between modernity and (trans)-nationalism in the construction of Muslim femininity and masculinity in Indonesian cinema. The Islamic film genre produces various mechanisms to isolate Muslim characters from their non-Muslim counterparts while at the same time marking distinctions between the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim. This thesis demonstrates that such mechanisms behind the binaries of the Muslim/non-Muslim and 'good' Muslim/'bad' Muslim are shifting concepts rather than fixed and self-evident. Furthermore, these shifting distinctions are achieved through narrative device, audio-visual tropes, and political discourse and governed by economic and cultural imperatives in the Islamic film genre. Ultimately, this thesis aims to make a contribution to the study of gender in Indonesian cinema more generally and to the definition of Islamic cinema as a film genre.

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Azas kekeluargaan - 'foundations of the family'

Bapak - 'father' or address for a man

Cadar - the face veil, sometimes known as the *niqab*

Dakwah - Islamic preaching or teaching

Dangdut - a popular musical genre with Malay, Arab, and Indian musical styles

Ibu - 'mother' or address for a woman

Imam - male Islamic leader

Jilbab - sometimes known as the *hijab*. *Jilbab* is a headscarf worn around the head, covering the hair, neck, ears, and chest area

Kadi - Islamic judge

Kerudung - loose headscarf for women, sometimes worn like a shawl over the head

Kodrat pria - men's essence

Kodrat wanita - women's essence

Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) - National Council of Ulamas

Pesantren - Islamic boarding school

Sinetron - film made for television

Ulama - an Islamic cleric

Ustazah - female Islamic teacher and preacher

Wali songo - Nine Javanese mystics of myth and legend

Chapter 1

Introduction

When I began researching for this thesis, the Indonesian film industry was experiencing the boom years of Islamic cinema or *film Islami*, between 2008 to 2011. The scholarly literature on the cinematic phenomenon quickly followed suit. What I found was a lack of attention in the literature to images of gender in Islamic cinema from a feminist perspective. Thus a thesis was born. I soon realised that not only would my task involve developing a feminist approach to studying images of gender in the Islamic film genre but also refining the definition of the genre itself. Drawing from feminist post-structuralist, ethnographic, and cultural analysis, I argue that there is an Islamic film genre unique to Indonesian cinema and that images of gender are central to the constitution of the genre. The films studied in this thesis were released between 1977 and 2011, spanning across the New Order period (1966 -1998) to the post-New Order period (1998 - present).

The Islamic film or *film Islami* in Indonesia goes by several other names and descriptions: *film religi* or religious films, *film bernafaskan Islam* (films that breathe Islam), *film bernuansa Islam* (Islamically nuanced film) and *film dakwah*. Despite its contested allusions to being 'Islamic', *film Islami* is a helpful generic term to categorise a host of films about Muslims who try to be better Muslims. Films of this genre incorporate Qur'anic verses in the dialogue and a host of Islamic symbols, such as the mosque, the veil, and the Islamic boarding school as significant features of the narrative. Its Muslim male and female characters overcome a spiritual crisis and convey an 'Islamic message' about the Muslim public and private sphere within their respective rigid gender roles. Their narratives are sometimes told

following a carefully considered ethic of production where the Islamic integrity of its filmmaker, actors, funders, exhibition, and filming practices are thought to legitimise the genre's purpose as a medium for *dakwah*.

It is an important form of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia for several reasons. The Islamic film genre has a tendency to be big-budgeted and targeted at a mainstream, mostly Muslim audience. Once a staple during the Ramadan month throughout the New Order, films with Islamic themes in Indonesia have become an all-year-round affair due to their commercial viability and the Islamic revivalism of the public sphere. Box-office success of a few Islamic films during the New Order era and the period after can be attributed to Muslim audiences attracted to the Islamic message of the films, audiences who are new to the cinema-going experience and previously wary of the immoral connotations of such an experience (Sasono, 2013a: 49). Thus Islamic films transformed the practice of cinema-watching and continue to do so. Success with a broad audience demonstrates in no uncertain terms that the Islamic film genre, as a medium for both Islamic teaching and entertainment, is compatible with Islamic consumption and consumer trends.

The growth of Islamic media has been welcomed by the pious Muslim middle classes in Indonesia who have developed a more spiritually conscientious approach to consumerism. The increased variety of Islamic media and popular culture from the 1990s to the present day reflects the changing tastes and needs of this increasingly discerning market (Noorhaidi, 2009: 242-243; Heryanto, 2011: 62). The hallmarks of Islamic popular culture include Islamic pop and rock music, Muslim women's magazines, Islamic comic books, religious television dramas, and the Islamic film genre. Made to appeal to a pious Muslim audience and youth who would otherwise be enticed by Western popular media, these different forms of Islamic media are also replete with images of idealised Muslim women and men (Brenner, 1999; Ida, 2008, 2009; Barendregt, 2011).

Discussions of gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema have tended to emphasise the appearance of veiled female characters as an index of a

film's religious qualities. Onscreen veiling can be connected to the increased visibility of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere, an effect of Islamic revivalism since the 1990s (Heryanto, 2011: 70-71). The 'new visibilities' (Göle, 2000: 173) of Islam in the public sphere refer to the way 'citizens increasingly appeal to Islamic virtues, Muslim symbols, and Muslim (life)styles' (van Wichelen 2010:1) which indicate the heightened piety of nominal Muslims (Mahmudi, 2005: 76). It is during the period since the 1990s when the process of Islamisation became more 'gendered' in its focus on the profound impact of Islam on women. The gendered character of the Islamic public sphere is shaped through debates by Islamic and secular actors alike on the practice of veiling, female circumcision, polygamy, and female leadership (van Wichelen 2010: 93).

This thesis considers the portrayal of gender in *film Islami* to be key elements in the system of cultural representation circulating in the Indonesian public sphere. It proposes that diverse images of masculinities and femininities emerge at the meeting point between contrasting interpretations of Islam and other public discourses of (trans)-nationalism and modernity. Such images are shot through national questions of development and modernisation during the New Order and transnational geopolitical conflict in the aftermath of 9/11. The thesis brings together new questions about representations of gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema, and with them, new methodologies. The new methodologies emerge from nascent scholarship that focus separately on cinema, Islam, and gender but seldom intersect with each other. These methodologies, which involve feminist approaches to textual analysis, field research, and the explicating of context, will bring to light power and ideology in the construction of cinematic Muslim femininity and masculinity. As this thesis will later show, the shifts in the image of Muslim femininity and masculinity in *film Islami* underline the political and social changes which align the transition from Sukarno's 'Old Order' (1945 -1965) to Suharto's New Order and the end of the latter. It will also demonstrate the (mediated) diversity of Islamic practices and beliefs that make the Islamic film genre a popular forum for Muslims to contemplate the reality of Islam in Indonesia.

Gender is a powerful symbol in nationalist rhetoric, Islamic revivalism in Indonesia and is the fault line of debates about Islam in the post-9/11 age. This thesis understands gender as representations inscribed in the cultural practice of cinema, a medium that is essentially 'allegorical' in that women and men on screen do not represent real individuals but typologies and ideas about gender. Gender also has a socio-cultural origin with an ideological purpose to 'dissimulate the difference between gender and biological sex' (Hayward, 2006: 179). To illustrate an example: in the gender ideology of the New Order, socio-cultural femininity is conflated with a woman's 'natural' destiny (*kodrat*) as wife and mother.

In her work on the conceptual variations of the feminine in Indonesian discourse, *Fantasizing the Feminine* (1996), Laurie Sears offers important clues for locating constructions of femininity and masculinity in the continual 'play' of history, culture, and power. Rather than attempt to discover an authentic notion of gender, one must accept the fragility and multiplicity of gender constructions that are contingent on where, when, and how they are enunciated (Sears, 1996: 24). Sears' assertion of the instability of gender at the moment of enunciation is relevant in the description of representations of shifting notions of Muslim femininity and masculinity in Islamic cinema.

Building on Sears' post-structuralist concept of gender, a further discussion on the characteristics of gender as a series of iterations and as 'performance' deserves mention here. Using the concept of performativity, Judith Butler challenges the basis for identity as a pre-social centre around which gender is attached. Rather than a stable, inert concept, gender is a performance, an 'identity tenuously constituted in time, [...] instituted in a stylised repetition of acts' (Butler, 1988: 519). Therefore, through this framework of analysis, gender is not what one is, but rather what one does.

If Butler is right about the idea of gender as performance, there is therefore room and possibilities for change and subversion in the 'arbitrary relation between such acts' producing 'the possibility of a different sort of

repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style' (Butler, 1988: 520). Butler draws from Michel Foucault's 'model of inscription' around which 'the law' of gender discipline, as it were, is incorporated on bodies, and where gendered acts are *effects* of discourse rather than the cause (1990:135-136). Gender is therefore a 'corporeal style', an act, or sequence of acts, a 'strategy' with survival as its motivation, as those who do not 'do' gender correctly will be punished by the norms of society (Butler, 1990: 139-140). Butler's suspicion about the consistent core of gender identity applies in the cinematic representations of Muslim femininity and masculinity which are stylised acts that are subject to change and subversion.

Gender performativity, according to Butler, is also a 'citational practice' in which gender is not only reiterated but *cites* the norms of womanhood and manhood that give the presentation of gender its authority and meaning (Butler, 1993: 13, 225). Rather than being the originator of ideas about gender, a woman or man that performs gender engages in a citational practice and invokes a convention that refers to a 'law' or regime of heterosexuality (Butler, 1993: 225). The concept of citational practice is useful for this thesis's analysis of construction of gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema. Gender in Islamic films cites from a normative religious project that contests the compatibility of national ideals and modernity with Islam in Indonesia. The religious project that organises the construction of Muslim femininity and masculinity is manifested most profoundly, in recent decades, in the 'upgrading' of piety (Heryanto, 2011) and Islamic revivalism in everyday life and popular culture. Such a project is a feature of Islamic modernity in Indonesia which I will return to in more detail below.

It is worth noting that gender is also inscribed within unequal power relations between women and men whereby men and masculinity have the power to be the unmarked gender (Flood, 2002: 203). As an unmarked gender, masculinity has the power to be regarded as a universal identity while femininity is its Other, a 'problem' that requires solving. Yet, at the same time, sexual differentiation between femininity and masculinity needs to be established as visibly as possible in society (Cohan, 1997:

xvi). Therefore, when rendered visible as gender, masculinity is 'unmasked' through scrutiny (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988).

To return to Sears, the act of examining the inscription of gender into cultural practice entails the unpacking of gender ideology, revealing the fact that gender does not always arrive fully formed or coherent. Instead, gender relations run up against local and globalised notions of womanhood and manhood, biological sex, and sexuality, each of which are refracted through class, ethnic, and religious lens. Recalling Butler, there is no one true Muslim man or woman in a particular cinematic frame, but rather a series of representations or representation-as (Goodman, 1976: 27-28) embedded in discourses concerning gender, Islamic practice and class status.

A clearer definition of what is 'Muslim' is necessary here. 'Muslim' in the normative sense refers to an adherent of Islam born to Muslim parents or a person who has publicly pronounced the *shahada* or the declaration of faith with the intention of embracing Islam. However, in this thesis, 'Muslim' will be referred to as a set of culturally and historically-specific symbols that are widely recognised as being associated with Islamic behaviour and Islam itself. The qualifier 'widely recognised as being associated with Islam' is important. Certain features of Muslim cultures are argued to have nothing to do with Islam or with orthodox Islamic practices. For instance, the practice of wearing the burqa and dyeing one's beard orange are culturally-specific practices conflated with Islamic tradition in certain Muslim societies but not universally accepted as Islamic.

It would also be important to point out that Muslim identities do not emerge as a product of religious motivations alone but out of class interests, national loyalties, and other diverse motivations reflective of human complexity. However, like representations of gender, Muslim identities in film are narrower. This is due to the commercial imperatives of cinema and the creative and socio-political projections of filmmakers who belong to a narrow slice of Indonesian society.

Following an elaboration of this thesis's objectives and research questions below, the subsequent sections of this chapter will map out the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis. Starting with the critical appraisal of the relevant theoretical literature on analysing gender in cinema, I will tease out some important arguments germane to an inquiry into representations of gender and Islam in the context of Indonesian cinema. A much-needed explication of the processes of commodification of Islamic symbols follows, especially those related to popular cinematic representations of Muslim identities. This is followed by a discussion about how the field research necessary for the illumination of the object of study and writing of this thesis was conducted. Finally, this introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters contained in this thesis.

Objectives and research questions

This thesis was conceived from two broad objectives. First, to refine the definition of Islamic film (*film Islami*) as a genre while building on existing scholarship on the genre (Sasono, 2010; Imanda, 2012; van Heeren, 2012; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012). Current scholars have explored the history of the Islamic film in Indonesia and have proposed the formation of the genre that precedes the efflorescence of Islamic films that began in 2008 (Imanda, 2012; van Heeren (2012); Hoesterey and Clark (2012). Based on this body of scholarship, this thesis develops a more systematic analysis of the Islamic film genre in accordance with theories relating to film genre. Second, to address some of the gaps in the present literature on representations of gender in the genre. To fulfill this second objective, this thesis has set out to bring together previously separate approaches to gender and religion in film. When these approaches are brought together, they contribute to the emerging literature on methods and methodologies for the study of gender and religion in media texts (Lövheim, 2013).

Women in films made in predominantly Muslim countries are regarded as 'absent' subjects; vehicles simply for Muslim men's concerns and anxieties

about female sexuality and modernity. In her survey of Muslim women in films, Gönül Dönmez-Colin finds that women's place (and lack of it) in cinemas of countries as wide-ranging as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, and Egypt are directly connected to the political and cultural vicissitudes in which religion plays an important role (2004: 7). Previous studies on representations of gender in Islamic contexts have shown that clothes are immediate markers of Islamic identity (Barlas, 2009; Tarlo, 2010). This thesis, however, seeks to transcend clothing as an obvious visual marker of Islamic identity and the fixation on the Islamic veil, and focus also on visual markers of class, modernity and (trans)-nationalism in the construction of Muslim femininity and masculinity in Indonesian cinema. This thesis joins studies that are '[concerned] with confronting stereotypes and highlighting variety and complexity' in representations of religion and gender in media texts (Lövheim, 2013: 20).

The Islamic film genre produces various mechanisms to isolate Muslim characters from their non-Muslim counterparts while at the same time marking distinctions between the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim. This thesis aims to demonstrate that such mechanisms behind the binaries of the Muslim/non-Muslim and 'good' Muslim/'bad' Muslim are shifting concepts rather than fixed and self-evident. As will be discussed in further detail, these shifting distinctions are achieved through narrative device, audio-visual tropes, and political discourse and governed by economic and cultural imperatives. In summary, this thesis focuses on film representations of femininity and masculinity in Indonesian cinema putatively assigned as 'Muslim', and asks:

1. How, when, and where do Indonesian femininity and masculinity in Indonesian film become 'Muslim'?
2. Why, and to what effect, are distinctions between representations of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims made?

3. How can representations of gender and Islam be better understood through feminist approaches to textual and contextual analysis?

Finally, the two main objectives outlined above, along with the three research questions, contribute to the study of gender in Indonesian cinema by highlighting the religious dimension in cinematic representations of women and men. The objectives aim to situate this thesis within the wider dialogue about gender and religion in film, media and visual culture. They also avoid an additive approach to cinematic representations of gender by proposing substantive explanations for the importance of studying gender in film.

Why representations of gender in film?

The under-representation of female filmmakers and the preponderant sexual use of women's bodies to sensationalise and 'sell' films are key signs of inequalities in cinema as a culture industry. Such inequalities habitually trickle down to the kinds of representations found in films. But this does not mean that cinema holds up a mirror image of society. In the context of filmmaking in Indonesia, Ariel Heryanto offers a cogent argument describing the intimate yet ambiguous link between cinema and socio-political contexts, in which he states:

Commercially produced films for entertainment are of course never meant to be a true representation of any social reality. Yet, no films can be entirely disassociated from the social dynamics that bring them into existence in the first place, and within which the films are circulated and consumed. Precisely because of their nature as statements about particular aspects of social life, films (like other narratives) can be instructive for political and cultural analysis. In particular, they raise questions about which aspects of a given society are foregrounded, which are exaggerated, distorted, overlooked or

excluded, or presented under erasure (and also how and why) (Heryanto, 2011: 64).

In a similar spirit, Suzanne Brenner's study of representations of women in New Order print media suggests that visual and textual evocations of femininity inadvertently function as indexes of the times for print media producers and their audiences:

Photographic and textual images of women, more than those of men, serve as symbolic representations of a burgeoning consumer culture; of the growing Islamic movement; of the moral deficits of modern society. Women not only participate fully in the processes of social change that Indonesia is undergoing, they also signify those processes (Brenner, 1999: 17).

Women-as-symbol whether of the nation, culture, or collective morality of a community, is a common trope in nationalist discourse (for a further explication on this subject, please refer to Chapter 4). However, I will disagree with Brenner here about the primacy of women as image, symbol and cog in the machine of social processes, for images of men must also be examined to understand how they too 'transcode' dominant socio-political discourses. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner describe the transcoding process in cinema as follows:

Films transcode the discourses of social life into cinematic narratives. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film medium, films execute a transfer from one discursive field to another. As a result, films themselves become part of that broader cultural system of representations that construct social reality (Ryan and Kellner, 1990: 12).

As a product of multiple compromises, especially creative and financial ones, fiction film is a relatively conservative medium. Due to the economic and socio-political constraints within society and the film industry, it may come as little surprise that compared to their male counterparts, female

characters in Indonesian film are often restricted to the easy categories that popular narratives and familiar genres demand of them. The representation of gender in Indonesian film hinges as much on issues of production, institutions, and genre as on social, political, and historical contexts. Thus the restricted typologies of female characters and their narratives express, at a broader level, the complex set of limitations and opportunities available to them.

The contemporary study of gender in film is a descendent of feminist critiques of entrenched objectification and silencing of women in Euro-American film and visual culture. It is therefore necessary to reflect on the purpose of studying representations of gender through the lens of feminist film theory. Feminist theory of film began as a project to expose the phallo(go)centrism of Western culture and the recuperation of women's voices through the deployment of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches. Reflecting the diverse feminist approaches to film, media, and culture, feminist theory of film later developed an interest in Third World and postcolonial cinema, the critique of heteronormativity and white privilege, and audience responses. The emergence of many theoretical advances in feminisms and feminist media studies have destabilised the monolithic edifice of feminist film theory and problematised its reliance on psychoanalysis (Kaplan, 2004: 1238).

Due to their specific cultural trajectories and concerns that emerge out of a masculinist postcolonial and nation-centric cast, feminist approaches to Third World and postcolonial cinema continue to be sidelined by feminist film theory (Shohat, 1991: 45). As a result, Third World and postcolonial feminist film theories often operate in isolation from 'general' discussions of feminist film theory. The question of the nation is almost always indispensable to Third World and postcolonial cinema as most films are produced within the legal codes of the nation-state, usually in hegemonic national languages through which national imaginaries are projected (Shohat, 1991: 45). In contrast, the nation is less of a concern in feminist film theory. That feminist film theory rarely takes into account the nation in theoretical considerations is a reflection of Euro-American power to make

and disseminate films the world over, masking feminist film theory's geopolitical specificities.

A critique of feminist film theory's limitations addresses how feminist film theory often neglects the changing modes of cinematic production, distribution, and exhibition and the way these changes may be gendered. The rise of Third World cinemas and new technological means for filmmaking renders the unified Eurocentric and deterministic theory of film untenable in a globalised world of cultural production. But this is not to suggest that feminist film theory is to be wholly rejected because there are numerous continuities between feminist film theory and social theories that are important to preserve. For instance, social theories share critical lineages with the foundational frameworks of feminist film theory such as the critique of ideology and the acceptance of cultural constructivism of social categories.

Studies of men in film emphasise the diversity of masculinities but also more significantly, the antidotes to traditional models of masculinity, especially those that signify masculine passivity and fragility (Cook, 1982; Neale, 1983). Narratives of men defeated and seemingly emasculated by war, violence, economic and social deprivation signalled a recognition of representations of masculinity in crisis. Men can also be the object of the gaze but unlike women, men deflect the gaze through aggressive facial expressions and in tense acts of physical violence. The deflection of the feminising gaze suggests the erotic repression and disavowal by the (straight) male spectator of associations with male homosexuality (Neale, 1983). Other studies on masculinity as spectacle suggest that men can be looked at in a fetishistic way, especially when dressed in highly stylised clothing (Bruzzi, 1997: 67-68).

Demetrakis Demetriou (2001: 346) argues that within the framework of multiple masculinities developed by Raewyn Connell (1995), discrete configurations of masculinity are still too homogeneous and inert in their relation to other masculinities. Connell's notion of multiple masculinities is nonetheless useful so long as fluidity of identities and relationality are

taken into account. But perhaps importantly of all, Connell's masculinities are most helpful in mapping out the 'big picture' of gender relations compared to the often contradictory individual masculine subjectivities (Pringle, 2005: 267). The big picture of gender relations situates images of men in relation to other men and women as a broad canvas from which to draw other relational categories such as religion, nationality, class, and sexuality.

Commodification of Islam and gender in Islamic modernity

This section's theoretical considerations will add to the current literature on Islamic films seen as part of the rise of 'pop Islam' and religious commodification in Indonesia (Widodo, 2008; Imanjaya, 2009a; Sasono, 2010; Heryanto, 2011; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012). It will also consider concepts of Muslim publics and Islamic modernity as the social, political and cultural condition conducive to religious commodification and the rise of Islamic popular culture. And finally, this section will discuss the significance of gender in relation to these concepts. This section suggests that the production of gender in Islamic cinema should be understood within the context of Islamic modernity, the rise of Muslim publics, and religious commodification in Indonesia. No one strand alone can meaningfully portray the context of gender in Islamic cinema - it is the linkages between them which provide the theoretical basis.

This section also illuminates, in conceptual terms, trends that became more entrenched since the late Suharto years of the 1990s. This might suggest that Islamic films made in the 1970s and 1980s are outside the remit of the concepts considered in this section. I would hasten to say that this is not entirely untrue. Religious commodification was already evident during the New Order and as discussed below, became a point of contention during this period. However, the development of Muslim publics and Islamic modernity in recent decades mark a new phase in religious commodification in terms of scale and importance to the public sphere. A similar point can be made about gender. Scholarship on the development

of Muslim publics and Islamic modernity cite the significance of gender in more recent decades of religious commodification than in the 1970s and 1980s (Göle, 2000; 2002). The construction of gender is an *effect* of Islamic modernity conceived through political ideologies and cultural debates about the 'woman question' in Muslim societies. Debates about women's rights and education, veiling, and polygamy coincided with contestations between 'progress' through modernity and preservation of tradition and religious orthodoxy (Kandiyoti, 2009: 91). These concerns are transcoded in cinema and in other commodified ways, through a range of popular visual and audio media for the contemplation of a nation.

Commodification refers to 'the action of turning something into, or treating something as, a (mere) commodity; and the commercialisation of an activity, and so on, that is not by nature commercial' (OED, 1989: 563). In the case of religious commodification, aspects of religious practices and symbols are rendered exchangeable in commercial terms. Historically, the commodification of Islam and its role in the production of Islamic cinema can be traced to transformations in Islamic behaviour in Indonesia over the last 40 years that have culminated in a public sphere in which Islam 'is everywhere' (Fealy, 2008: 15). A public sphere in which 'Islam is everywhere' describes a phenomenon whereby Islam can be seen to have entered more deeply into the lives of Indonesian Muslims in more commodified ways than ever before.

Investigations into religious commodification have challenged theories of secularisation in modern society demonstrating that far from a wholesale decline in public belief in God and religious membership, certain modern and rational societies, in particular those in Asia and the United States, continue to embrace religion and imbue public life with notions of religious symbolism. However, as Ariel Heryanto rightly notes, religion's relevance in an increasingly secularised world is maintained through its willingness to enter into 'dangerous liaisons with the logic of the capitalist market' (2011: 77).

Following Heryanto's cautionary view, questions about religious commodification and its relation to Islamic cinema need to be raised. What happens to religious symbols when they enter the discursive circuit of cinema? Do they cease to be sacred and become objects of entertainment? Or are they simply a commodity bereft of any spiritual meaning? Can they be both sacred and a source of entertainment? There is considerable debate among practitioners and scholars about the effects of commodified forms of Islam. Some have praised the increased presence of Islam in the spiritual marketplace as it encourages the incorporation of Islamic values into the everyday practices of Muslims. Others have been less celebratory of Islamic commodification, arguing that the commercialisation of Islam appeals to superficial expressions of piety (Fealy, 2008: 16).

The circulation of Islamic symbols outside the formalist domains and authority of the state and religious institutions and into the market and the media coheres with Eickelman and Anderson's (1999) concept of the rise of Muslim publics. Facilitated by increasing access to new modes of communication and popular media, the creation of the Muslim public sphere challenges the authority of conventional religious institutions and fosters the building of a civil society and the 'global *ummah* (community)' (Eickelman and Anderson, 1999: 2). The Muslim public sphere is cultivated by Muslim actors who utilise secular and religious idiom in public debates transformed by an eruption of religious issues where, among other things, Islamic films have become a popular subject of cultural criticism (Göle, 2002: 173).

The development of Muslim publics conducive to the rise of Islamic commodification is a feature of 'Islamic modernity'. Islamic modernity is a political and cultural sensibility whereby modernity is embraced alongside a commitment to Islam as a project of modernity in itself. The concept of Islamic modernity departs from the view that positions modernity and Islam as mutually exclusive and in opposition to each other. Rather, Islamic modernity develops its own approximations to Western notions of modernity (Göle, 2000: 92). In short, not only are Muslim publics a

product of Islamic modernity, but the former rely on the sensibility of Islamic modernity to develop as a site for continuing contestations, not least the contest of Islamic gender relations in the public and private spheres.

Nilüfer Göle's notion of Islamic modernities adopts a postmodern suspicion against the grand narrative of Western modernity in favour of a more hybrid and reflexive modernity. An Islamic modernity engages critically and creatively with Western ideas of modernity, destabilising fixed ideas about Islam versus the modern 'West', the secular and religious spheres, and the (gendered) private and public domains. Islamic modernity has elements of Islamist utopia where Islamic values inform aspects of public culture and everyday life. But as an Islamist utopia, it departs from the key premises of Western modernity in distinct ways: rather than forward-looking it is past-oriented - towards a lost golden Islamic age, and it is committed to collectivism rather than autonomous individuation (Göle, 2002: 175).

Indonesia, however, is not an Islamist utopia. Instead, it has features that Göle anticipates in Islamic modernity; of being in a situation where Islamism is losing its revolutionary edge, otherwise known as post-Islamism. Göle also speaks of post-Islamism whereby the actors of Islamism have diversified beyond political and religious ranks and are represented in intellectual and artistic arenas who contribute to the production and dissemination of Islamic visions and ideals. The production and dissemination of such visions and ideals relate to the consumption of Islamic media and Islamic forms of consumerism that exist, not without friction, alongside purist Islamic beliefs and practices.

Göle's argument that in 'Muslim contexts, women's participation in public life, corporeal visibility, and social mixing all count as modern' (2000: 177) is echoed in observations on the convergence (or clashes) between modernity, Islam, and gender relations in Indonesia (Brenner, 1996; Bennett, 2005; Rinaldo, 2008; Robinson, 2010). Gender, which underpins Islamic modernity (Göle, 2000; 2002), is made more visible by Muslim

women's participation of the public sphere. I would argue further that the gendered characteristic of Islamic modernity is fostered by the embrace of consumerism by the pious Muslim middle classes and gendered Islamic consumption.

If one should consider the relationship between the commodification of Islam and gender in film, the question is less about how gender became a commodity in the marketisation of Islam than what kind of gendered representations are used as commodities in the Islamic marketplace. The question of why only certain kinds of representations of Muslim women in Indonesian film and other forms of mass media are emphasised begs the suggestion that such representations sell. Studies on the rise of 'popular' Islam in Indonesia frequently cite the capitalisation of the headscarf, whether through advertising, fashion, music, or indeed film (Heryanto, 2008; 2011; Noorhaidi, 2009; Sasono, 2010). The preponderance of the headscarf's associations with consumerism signals the recognition of pious Muslim women as an attractive consumer group and the headscarf's powerful visual quality. As the most visible of Islamic symbols, the headscarf or Islamic veil is a marker of Islamic difference and a symbol with multiple meanings that cut across religious, political and class lines. Here, the headscarf is understood as a commodified symbol that is very closely associated with Islamic femininity.

Commodified aspects of Islamic masculinity are less obvious and deserve more attention. This thesis will demonstrate aspects of commodified Islamic masculinity as featured in Islamic cinema and contribute to the nascent discussion on gender at the intersection of Islam, popular culture, commodification, modernity, and the public sphere. The identification of commodified Islamic femininity and masculinity may point to narrow representations of gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema, underlining the regular use of stereotypes in the genre. However, post-structuralist strategies in 'reading' audio-visual texts can illuminate the multiple layers of representation of gender. Approaches to studying representations of gender in Islamic cinema require an anti-essentialist view of gendered

Islamic identity and gender in cinematic texts more generally if a historical and cultural understanding of such representations is to be gained.

Ways of making meaning: approaches to film analysis

The purpose of this thesis is to consider representations, understood as both still images and moving audio-visual text, of gender. Thus, it behooves the author to introduce the methodologies/theories used to study such representations. The approaches of the methodologies/theories mentioned here are built on particular epistemological foundations such as the interrogation between 'representations' and 'reality' and how meaning is generated. This section begins with an introduction to ideological critique as a way of examining the link between cultural representations and society in the maintenance of unequal social relations. A salient example is the use of ideological critique to illuminate the link between cultural representations of gender and socio-political ideals of gendered behaviour in order to ascertain the mechanisms of ideology (Gill, 2007: 54). Ideals and expectations relating to gender are reproduced through ideologies of nationalism, developmentalism, and political Islam that dissimulate heteronormativity as something natural and to be desired.

However, ideological critique, based on Gramscian analysis of domination, emphasises a one-way 'hypodermic needle' model of meaning production and reception. Such a model for understanding how meaning-making works neglects creative and dissenting readings by the 'ordinary' recipient of representations. As discussed below, semiotic and post-structuralist feminist analysis approaches address this reductive understanding of how representations work through a focus on film as text and the unlocking of multiple meanings embedded in the text. Furthermore, post-structuralist feminist approaches depart from the notion of ideology that appeals to the unified subject and engage instead with differences within and between subjects that become the target of ideology in film texts. That said,

however, ideology is still a key concept when examining the function of representations and its relation to power and discourse.

This thesis considers gender as an ideological function that is replicated through cultural practices, institutions, and texts. Ideology is understood as the dominant set of ideas and values which imbues a society with 'social behaviour and representative texts at a level that is not necessarily obvious or conscious' (Nelmes, 2007: 233). Ideology, however, requires constant re-establishing through hegemony, the means through which dominant groups maintain control over subordinate groups by making ideas and practices culturally entrenched and 'common sense'. However, rather than being fixed and unchanging, hegemony has the propensity to transform and be open to negotiation and challenge (Gill, 2007: 55). With the notion of gender as ideological function reproduced in cinematic practice, one needs a framework to peel away the layers of signification contained in the images and sometimes, film sound, to unpack the representations of women and men. The framework in question is a semiotic-based approach that treats films as text and as having language-like qualities, allowing the scholar to identify structural principles of the cinematic experience.

The semiotic-based approaches to film texts in this thesis is also influenced by post-structuralist approaches to representation. Post-structuralist approaches to representations of gender are concerned with the way gender is constituted through media representations - as images and other texts - rather than mirroring pre-existing categories of femininity and masculinity (Gill, 2007: 12). Such an approach is based on the post-structuralist suspicion of universalisms and emphasis on cultural and discursive constructions of gender. The adoption of post-structuralist feminist approaches also means a shift away from focusing on gender stereotypes towards diversity in representations of gender (Gill, 2007: 12). A combination of semiotic text analysis with an emphasis on feminist post-structuralism results in the acceptance of the 'polysemic' quality of gendered subjectivities (Lövheim, 2013: 17) and the possibility of identifying beyond oppressive and empowering cinematic representations.

The adoption of a combination of approaches above may augur well as a method for studying Indonesian cinema and a critique of feminist film theory. Such a combination coheres with the idea of 'middle level research' (Bordwell, 1996: 26-30) and a piecemeal approach (Carroll, 1996: 38-39) to studying cinema. The two strategies privilege a more historical and culturally contextualised look at cinema while developing micro theories in the process. But more importantly, middle level research and the piecemeal approach demonstrate that film research can proceed without employing the psychoanalytic framework routinely mandated by the film studies establishment (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996: xiii).

Middle level research and the piecemeal approach promoted by Bordwell and Carroll address the value of empirical research of cinematic text found in trade journals, newspapers, court cases, and other print materials generated around the film trade (discussed in the next section). Other aspects of empirical research of film fall under the rubric of middle level research and piecemeal approach, such as the political economy of film. The political economy of film is less about individual films than about the commercial imperatives and principles of management behind film production, distribution, and exhibition. And finally, Bordwell argues for due attention by middle level researchers to 'film syntax' (1996: 28) which refer to filmmaking techniques - the use of sound, camera movement, editing styles - as devices unique in cinematic storytelling. The strength of middle level research and piecemeal approaches is found in its ability to combine traditionally distinct spheres of inquiry and to cut across traditional boundaries between film aesthetics, institutions, and audience response while maintaining coherence and rigour in analysis (Bordwell, 1996: 28).

Data and materials

Audio-visual material discussed in this thesis include films in DVD, VCD, and VHS format obtained and viewed at SOAS University of London and at the Indonesian film archive, Sinematek, in Jakarta. 15 films released

between 1977 and 2011 were chosen for analysis based on their financial success, critical acclaim, and significant media attention (for a list of the 15 films, please refer to page 244). The films were also selected in order to display the diversity of Islamic themes found in the genre, ranging from the myth and legends of the arrival of Islam in Java, the merging of pop music and Islam, biopics of Islamic revolutionaries, polygamy, women's rights, poverty, and religious minorities in Indonesia.

Printed sources consisting of newspaper and magazine film reviews and features on many of the selected films from the New Order period and thereafter (between 1977 to 2011) were drawn from the archives of Sinematek. Derived from a variety of national and regional newspapers and magazines, these sources offer some information on the critical press reception contemporary to the films' release mainly from film critics and in the case of a few films, from the National Council of Ulama, MUI. However, not all of the newspaper and magazine reviews and features collected from Sinematek were concerned with all 15 films analysed in this thesis.

The magazine and newspaper clippings obtained from Sinematek also include promotional reports about films in the production stage and interviews with filmmakers and well-known actors who star in them. These reports illuminate the apparent motivation of the filmmaker behind the making of their films as a means of promoting them to discerning Muslim audiences.

Interviewees or informants in the Indonesian film industry are regarded as primary sources. A light-weight sound recording device was used to interview film critics, scholars, and filmmakers in Jakarta and Yogyakarta with their explicit permission (for samples of the interviews, see Appendix on page 273). All recordings of the interviews were taken and saved in a Sony IC voice recorder and a notebook for personal note-taking. While the photocopied, printed, and recorded data were used throughout the writing-up of this thesis, they were also useful during the period of the field research in Indonesia discussed below as a means for cross-referencing.

Notes on the field sites

Working in the field sites of Jakarta and Yogyakarta for seven months between December 2011 to June 2012 enabled an immersion into the debates about *film Islami* with Indonesian film critics, film scholars, filmmakers, and film producers. Contact with informants was established through a snowballing technique initiated by friends in the Indonesian and Malaysian film industry. Meetings with informants for recorded interviews were negotiated mainly on the phone, by text messaging, and face-to-face meetings.

The timing of the field research influenced the emphasis of discussion surrounding the state of Islamic cinema in Indonesia. When the interviews with critics, scholars, and filmmakers were conducted, the Indonesian film industry was experiencing significant fluctuations in the number of cinema-goers. From a respectful one million viewers enjoyed by successful films in 2010, filmmakers in late 2011 could only expect a modest half a million viewers. Production values of current and future films, and the subsequent distribution and quality of DVDs reflect the slump as well. For instance, DVD buyers can purchase more cheaply made original DVDs with thinner plastic cases or without the casing at all at a lower 'economic' price.

Jakarta is the capital of the Indonesian film and media industry and functions as the main site from which the discourse on gender and Islam in audio-visual media flows. During the field research in Jakarta, I had the opportunity to speak with film critics and scholars Eric Sasono, Ekky Imanjaya, Katinka van Heeren, Budi Irawanto, and Tito Imanda about the rise of *film Islami*, the reasons behind its rise and the key actors responsible for it. The decision to interview these individuals was taken not just because they were influential film critics and scholars of Indonesian cinema, but also because of their direct involvement in the film industry as consultants in the writing of a few *film Islami*. Their views about *film Islami* reveal competing definitions and functions of the genre upon which the objectives of this thesis builds.

Film critics have important roles in the success, and often prior to that, the production of a film. As influential actors in the film industry, critics actively affect the viewing decisions of film audiences in the early run of a film and as predictors, they can predict the box office success of a film (Basuroy et al, 2003: 103). However, the usually sophisticated views of critics do not always translate to widespread popularity and box office success. The class and institutional privilege of the critic is symptomatic of this disconnect between film criticism and mass audiences. But it is the same privilege that has traction in the discursive arena of scholarship in film and popular representations of Islam. In Indonesia, film critics lament the circular logic of insubstantial horror and sex in films that is continually reproduced because of the favourable market for such themes. However, their often disdainful views of such films have comparatively little impact on the high audience numbers these films receive.

Indonesian filmmakers and producers of films with Islamic themes do not always make them with the intention of conveying explicit statements on gender relations. However, as will be discussed in further detail below, interviews with the filmmaker Aditya Gumay and film producer Putut Widjanarko can prompt conversations that can lead to the production of new knowledge about gender in Islamic films. Other informants who were interviewed, however, such as the filmmaker Nia Dinata and feminist activists Debra Yatim and BJD Gayatri were more explicit about their views on gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema and the role of women in the industry. The value of obtaining a diversity of views about gender in Indonesian cinema cannot be overstated, as it provides a snapshot of how ideas about not only gender, but also modernity and Islam are contested amongst Indonesia's tastemakers and intelligentsia.

This thesis aims to examine the competing scholarly discourses on gender and Islamic popular media particularly those produced by Indonesian scholars in the Indonesian language. An interview with the Islamic scholar Noorhaidi Hasan in Yogyakarta on the rise of Islamic popular culture offered further insights into the emergence of Islamic cinema and its representations of gender. Influenced by the work of Nilüfer Göle,

Noorhaidi argued that Islamic popular culture is less a product of the Islamisation of culture than of the prevailing reality of Islamic modernity. Views on power and representations of gender in film were shared in an interview with Wiyanti, a media studies scholar at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Their views on Islam and gender in Indonesian media are informed by their scholarship and are a reflection of local academic discourse on Islam, gender, and the media.

During the field research, I found that most of the informants I interviewed were not just significant actors in the development of discourse on film, Islam, and gender in Indonesia. They were also members of the cultural elite who were committed in campaigns that champion civil liberties and anti-extremism. Each informant may have specific demands towards these ends, but they coalesce to form members of Indonesian civil society. A term utilised by Alexis de Tocqueville in his writings about the process of democracy in nineteenth-century United States, civil society refers to intermediary groups outside the government comprising of non-profit, human rights or religious organisations, women's groups, cultural initiatives, and other associations that manifest the interests and will of citizens (Hefner, 2011: 23).

I argue that my informants are part of 'networks of civic engagement' (Putnam et al, 1994) in post-Suharto Indonesia. Since Suharto's resignation in 1998 and the rise of the *Reformasi* movement that endeavoured to reinstate democracy in the nation, a surge of new political parties, women's non-governmental organisations, religious groups (political or otherwise), and media and cultural industries began to participate in the newly unfettered public sphere. The decentralisation of political authority following the end of Suharto's regime witnessed aggregates of groups and individuals who form networks of civic engagement independent of the state taking on greatly contested public matters (Hefner, 2011). Networks of civic engagement are produced in the seemingly self-governing horizontal collaboration between the aforementioned groups who aim to make 'democracy work.' However, not all horizontal collaborations are meant to instill democracy in society as

right-wing and extremist groups also employ similar modes of engagement to rally for their cause in society (Hefner, 2011: 24).

Interviewing Indonesia's cultural elite

A series of in-depth interviews were conducted to lend competing voices to a study that could easily be lost in the thick mist of unanchored representations. The interview is different from ethnography in that it does not include long periods of researcher participation in the life of the interviewee and differs from survey research by offering opportunities for the interviewer to gain clarification and discussion (Reinharz, 1992: 18). Open-ended interview research which allows respondents to answer questions in their own words sheds light on people's views of reality and enables the researcher to generate theory. Interviewing has also been commented on as drawing on skills that are socially defined as 'feminine' such as being 'receptive and open to understanding' and the development of emotional and social connection with people (Charmaz, 2006: 28).

At its most fundamental, the interview shares many features with ordinary conversations. But the interview is a carefully constructed and manipulated process, which involves the interviewer coordinating the conversation to elicit the desired responses. The interviewer initiates the contact with the respondent, making arrangements for the time and place of the interview, sets the ground rules and necessary disclosures, interacts with the respondent in a series of questions, and then processes a representation of the interview. Treating interviews as a site of socially-constructed meaning, the interview is more than just an information-gathering operation but a process of knowledge production (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003: 4). Furthermore, the content and form of what is said are shaped by the event of the interview, with the interviewer implicated in the creation of the meaning that is thought to reside in the respondent (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003: 8).

The interview is a form of representation, rather than a mirror of a so-called external world or a window into the inner life of the interviewee. The timing and place of the interview, the angle of interest, the interpretation, transcription, the editing, and the eventual presentation attest to the representational properties of the interview. The choice to conduct in-depth interviews in lieu of an ethnography of the film communities involved in the making of religious films was also a matter of temporal constraints despite the relatively easy access to a variety of key individuals in the production of Islamic film discourse in Indonesia.

For the specific concerns of this thesis, in-depth interviews help forge scholarly and industrial narratives about gender, Islam, and cinema into a dialogical knowledge production process between the researching interviewer and interviewee. The interviews with those who are active in the filmmaking industry and scholarship on Islam, gender, and cinema add to the building and clarification of the categories of 'gender' and 'Islam' in the discourse of Indonesian cinema. Interviews with film critics, producers, directors, and scholars also facilitate discussions on the definition of a film genre, and in the case of this thesis, the *film Islami* genre.

Individuals interviewed for this research depart from the more common forms of ethnographic-oriented interview in that they represent the small group of high-status, influential elites who are the decision-makers of Indonesia's cultural industry. They also control various aspects of the Indonesian film industry and are experts in the field of Islam, media, and gender in Indonesia. Elites are commonly invoked in qualitative research, but are less frequently interviewed compared to 'ordinary' members of society over whom power is exercised. The reasons for the comparative lack of in-depth interviews with elites are the practical constraints involved. They are often protective of themselves and their interests making them more difficult to access and as a result researchers would usually need to get pass gatekeepers such as personal assistants, advisers, and security guards (Odendahl and Shaw, 2001: 299). These constraints underscore the unequal power relations in favour of the respondent that lie in wait for the researcher (Burnham, 2004: 205).

Due to the various barriers to interviewing elites, studies have recommended that researchers draw on their institutional affiliations, use personal connections where possible, and obtain the endorsement of a project's sponsor that can ensure cooperation from the interviewee (Ostrander, 1993: 9). In any study with elites there is a kind of understanding of wealth and power in society and in the case of this thesis, the Indonesian cultural elite have substantial power in the development of public opinion and intellectual discourse. The cultural elite are commonly identified by abstract notions of power and privilege, but their identification is less straightforward and criticised as reinforcing dualism of the 'powerful' and the 'less powerful others' (Ostrander, 1993: 10).

Studies on members of the elite have defined this group primarily by their occupations (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman, 1996: 10), educational pedigree, and lineage (Schijf, 2012: 37). Earlier studies of Indonesian elites (Mysbergh, 1957; van Niel, 1970) defined the group as Jakarta-based, Dutch-educated, urban, articulate and descendants of the aristocracy who 'claim to know and speak for the people; yet often present a misleading impression of national homogeneity' (Mysbergh, 1957: 38). There are few contemporary accounts of Indonesian elites other than about those who belong to the inner sanctum of politics and high-ranking military officers. But in everyday parlance, there is an easy recognition and self-acknowledgement amongst my informants of being part of the cultural elite in Indonesia. The use of the term 'cultural elite' is used here in this thesis as a mutually-reinforcing shorthand between my informants and others like themselves as representing a small group of individuals with decision-making roles in the film industry and intellectual expertise.

Positionality

My position as researcher and the interactions developed with respondents did not occur in a vacuum. Rather they were constituted in

specific social relations and historical conditions. The relative ease with which I was given the access to and time with my interlocutors may be attributed to a host of possible factors; my Malay identity, gender, age, academic affiliations, social connections, the ability to communicate in the local language, and a flexible attitude. The relative openness of members of the film industry to outsiders is also an important determining factor in my success to gaining access to them.

As this thesis addresses gender and sexuality as conceived through power relations, it is important that it is couched in feminist approaches to the research process, analysis, and the writing up. Feminist approaches to research mobilises a critique of the positivist researcher and requires an acknowledgement of the researcher's partiality. The researcher's partiality impacts on the research process and knowledge produced in numerous ways. For instance, a researcher's identity, assumptions, and interests will be reflected in the selection and conceptualisation of topics for an enquiry, formulation of research questions, the interactions between researcher and participant, and the presentation of the research (Archer, 2002: 109). Feminist researchers must also address the potential problems of exploitation, privilege, and subordination within the research process particularly when participants from less powerful or marginalised social groups are studied and whose lives are interpreted by researchers from socially dominant groups (Haw, 1996: 320).

In response to the power imbalances between researcher and participant, arguments have been made about the many advantages of 'matching' researchers and participants in terms of social backgrounds and life circumstances. However, the 'matching' strategy for research perpetuates notions of essentialism that individuals from similar social groups share the same world views and life experiences. The strategy has also been criticised for being rigid when identities are argued to have the potential to be shifting and multiple, often crossing the boundaries of social categories (Yuval-Davies, 1994; Bhavani and Phoenix, 1994).

The way forward to developing anti-oppressive feminist research is through the recognition that the subjectivities of the researcher and participant are interdependent (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995: 115) and by employing feminist reflexive practice. Reflexivity here refers to 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher' (England, 1994: 82) as a method towards situating knowledge production. The recognition of dynamic subjectivities and reflexive practice allow for the delineation of differences and similarities between researcher and participants that contribute to particular types of knowledge and the consequences for both parties (Maynard and Purviss, 1994). It is at this juncture where the researcher must locate herself in relation to her participants and clearly spell out her values/politics and the procedures used to carry out the research (Edwards, 1990; Gill, 1995).

As a Malay female scholar of Indonesian cinema, my presence at several field sites was welcomed for the very fact that a Malaysian was taking a keen interest in Indonesian popular culture. Malaysia and Indonesia share a number of historical, cultural, and linguistic links that facilitate transcultural exchange. The bilateral relationship and notion of kinship shared between Indonesia and Malaysia are encapsulated in the idea of *serumpun* (common stock or 'race') (Liow, 2004: 2). However, since their national inception in the middle of the twentieth-century up to the present day, the two countries have had a volatile political relationship on a number of occasions.

Cases of abuse against Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and the cultural 'theft' committed by the Malaysian Tourism Board of regional traditions from Indonesia and relabeling them as uniquely Malaysian count as one of the many un-neighbourly crimes perpetrated by Malaysia. The assumption that perpetuates this divide is that Malaysia may be economically affluent but it is culturally poor and xenophobic towards its Indonesian neighbour. The subject of the various abuses and controversial cultural claims committed by my compatriots would crop up with some regularity in conversations with my research participants, which demonstrates that I cannot escape my national positionality in discussions

about my scholarly interest in their cultural affairs. With all things considered, the writing of this thesis owes a great deal, at the macro level, to the specific historical moment in Indonesian history and the manner in which it impacts on its national cinema, public religious practices and markets, and gender relations and at the micro level, to my positionality and timing as researcher and the interactions with my participants.

Outline of chapters

This introductory chapter began with a discussion about the need to study representations of gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema in its social and historical contexts. There has been, to this date, minimal but increasing research on this subject. And while there have been a few studies reviewing the history of religious representations in Indonesian cinema (Sasono, 2013), very few focus on the gendered dimension of such representations (Paramaditha, 2010; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012). By heeding the call for such a study, several issues about how the categories of 'gender' and 'religion' in cinematic representations should be addressed are also called into question. This chapter introduced theoretical approaches underpinning commodification of gender and Islam before discussing the methodological frameworks for the analysis of film text and field research.

Chapter 2 begins by considering the thesis's position within the scholarship on gender in Indonesian cinema, in particular its theoretical direction and scope. It will present an overview of the historical context of the Indonesian film industry, namely from an angle that focuses on its inception, the relationship between censorship and representation, and the rise of women filmmakers in the post-Suharto period. It then reviews the scholarship which highlights gender as a key organising principle in studies on Indonesian cinema of the New Order and post-New Order period. The literature review will also address the gap in the scholarship on the intersection between gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema.

The definition of the Indonesian Islamic film genre is considered in detail in Chapter 3 based on an analysis of recurring themes and narrative structures, audio-visual conventions, production ethics, and modes of distribution and exhibition. There is as yet no official guideline to making an Islamic film. But many filmmakers have nonetheless found ways to sanctify the film production, whether through consultation with the highest religious authorities or adhering to strict Islamic laws in visualising characters in film. The poetics of Islamic film production is considered from an industrial perspective: how the need to visualise Islam has ebbed and flowed throughout the history of Indonesian cinema following the tide of geopolitical vicissitude and burgeoning Islamic consumerism. Censorship is revisited again but this time is concerned with the government's uneasiness regarding representations of Islam, politics, and history.

Chapter 4 discusses the preoccupation with the proto-nation in Islamic films during the New Order, not least nationalist struggles and release from colonial powers and the Indonesian nation's development into a modern state. This chapter will explicate how the rise of Islam as an anti-oppressive force is embodied in the masculine figures of the Javanese mystics in *Sembilan Wali* (The Nine Holy Men, 1985, dir. Djun Saptohadi) and Pangeran Dipogenoro in *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* (Warrior of Selarong Cave, 1972, dir. Lilik Sudjio). The men are also shown as founding fathers of a proto-nation that predates the establishment of the Indonesian nation state. Chapter 4 will also explore two other films about men as bearers of modern Islam, *Al-Kautsar* (Abundance, 1977, dir. Chaerul Umam) and *Perjuangan dan Doa* (Struggle and Prayer, 1977, dir. Maman Firmansyah), as an illustration of Muslim men's primary role in national development and progress.

In contrast to the portrayal of men as founders of the proto-nation and bearers of modernity is the depiction of women in the latter half of Chapter 4. The first of the two films on femininity and its relationship to the proto nation, *Tjoet Nha Dhien* (1988, dir. Eros Djarot), concerns the eponymous revolutionary campaigner for the freedom of Aceh in Northern Sumatra

from Dutch forces at the turn of the twentieth-century. The second, *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (The Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani), aligns colonial subjugation with the oppression of women under literalist Islamic marital law in early twentieth-century Dutch-occupied Sumatra. This section of Chapter 4 examines more closely the theoretical assumptions surrounding the representation of women in nationalist discourse.

Chapter 5 will discuss how post-New Order Indonesian filmmakers use films as a representational arena to challenge negative stereotypes of Muslims in the world after 9/11. Produced mainly by young male filmmakers, the films portray highly educated and working Muslim women and female converts to Islam who have agency to lead a life of piety on their own terms. Their faith and resoluteness however are tested through a series of domestic struggles and family relations on the verge of collapse. These may be melodramatic conventions typical to films about women (Kuhn, 1984; Gledhill, 1987), but as films that deliberately portray women who take control over their personal lives and religious choices, they can be described as part of 'oppositional cinema'. Chapter 5 closes with a study on the rise of Islamic female stars in Indonesian cinema.

In Chapter 6, the sexual excesses of the male polygamist in *Mengaku Rasul* (Self-Proclaiming Prophet, 2008, dir. Helfi Kardit) is examined to identify the contours of failed Muslim masculinity. This is followed by a look at the notion of masculinity in crisis through an Islamic lens. A nation still recovering from the Asian economic crisis of 1997, a high unemployment rate and the obscenely vast gap between rich and poor in Indonesia represent the backdrop of two films, *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*, (Mother Wants To Go On the Hajj, 2010, dir. Aditya Gumay) and *Kun Fayakun*, (God Will It, And So It Is 2010, dir. H. Guntur Novaris). The two films demonstrate the way masculinity in crisis is recuperated through charity and the power of prayer. The theme of failed Muslim masculinity continues in the gentle rural-based drama *3 Doa 3 Cinta* (3 Wishes 3 Loves, 2010, dir. Nurman Hakim) which injects nuance into the 'explanation' of why young Muslim men may be drawn into radical and militant versions of Islam.

The concluding chapter revisits the notion of Muslim femininities and masculinities in the context of cinematic production and considers how the theoretical paradigms employed in this thesis may impinge on current understandings of gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema. It will propose directions for future studies in Islamic popular culture in Indonesia with considerable attention paid to feminine and masculine consumer/audience subjectivities that cut across class, sexuality, ethnicity, and region. It will also suggest possible directions in methods for the study of popular culture where gender, religion, and cinema intersect. This includes audience and ethnographic accounts of the use of Islamic cinema and mass media, in particular the means through which the gendered dimensions of Islamic media usage can further enrich the representations of the 'religious' and the 'Islamic' in the everyday lives of Muslims in Indonesia.

Chapter 2

Gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema as an object of study

What does it mean to study the representations of gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema? How have the scholarly debates been animated by issues relating to such representations? In what ways have the debates been informed? Finally, how have the debates changed over time? This chapter engages with these questions and ends with a reflection on how the debates can create new insights and questions for looking at gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema.

Marginalised within the study of gender in Indonesian cinema is the Islamic dimension of such representations. Its marginalisation may be attributed to the relatively recent entry of pious and bourgeois Muslim women and men into the 'new modernity' sweeping Indonesian society (Brenner, 1996: 673) coupled with the dearth of studies dedicated to gender and Islam in Indonesia (Blackburn, Smith, and Syamsiyatun, 2008: 8-9). Meanwhile, the study of gender in Indonesian cinema, particularly that of women, has long been part of the scholarly repertoire on Indonesian cinema. A preoccupation with representations of women in Indonesian cinema may be reflective of Western feminist film theory's influence on scholars studying Indonesian cinema in the 1980s. But much has changed since then. There has been a broadening view of gender in Indonesian films in the last ten years with interest in cis-gendered¹

¹ As the converse to transgender, cis-gender refers to the match between an individual's biological sex and psychological and social gender identity.

masculinity and transgender subjectivities². However, the focus on femininity in Indonesian cinema continues to predominate.

Previous studies on the representations of gender in Indonesian cinema have been based on comparisons between the regimes of representation³ and ethnographic findings or 'social reality' (Heider, 1991; Aripurnami, 2000; Nilan, 2009). The crux of such comparative studies is based on the assumption that film representations of gender are a distortion of 'real' women's lived experiences. Following this logic, films should be reflective of the gamut of femininity. Other studies have taken film texts to task as an ideological site of gender reproduction by subjecting such images to close readings. These textual analyses tend to be combined with a focus on the cultural context of the film studied and deploy a feminist or other critical theoretical framework (Sen, 1994; Clark, 2004; Sulistyani, 2010). Other studies offer a melange of approaches to analysing representations of gender in Indonesian cinema combining textual and cultural analysis but with few references to Western film or cultural theory (Hoesterey and Clark, 2012).

As with any methodological approaches to studying representations of gender in Indonesian film, there are strengths and limitations with regard to each approach. By making a comparative analysis of cinema and the 'real world' necessary, there is an assumption that cinema should reflect the real world, and perhaps vice versa. If cinema mirrored ethnographic data and social reality, one would find a diverse representation of Indonesian women in cinema. But such an expectation elides the fact that cinema is produced for commercial purposes and reflects the economic interests of a small handful of people who are mainly men. Furthermore, a commercial product aimed at a mass audience needs to present images of

² For an example of a more extensive study of transgender characters in Indonesian cinema see Murtagh (2013).

³ Adopted from Stuart Hall (2003), 'regimes of representations' refer to the broader cultural frameworks of power that determine the representation of individuals, groups, and things. Regimes of representation exert symbolic power through representational practices.

women that audiences are assumed to understand, empathise with, and enjoy to watch. Thus the resulting product of audience expectations and commercial compromise is often a limited and distorted image of women in general. A study that criticises the chasm between cinematic representation and social reality may well highlight the gender disparity in the film industry and sexism in society.

Scholars who adopt Western theoretical approaches to gender in Indonesian cinema do so to question the regimes of representation behind the constructions of gender. This line of questioning leads to the examination of the nature of picturing gender in Indonesian visual culture itself. In this respect, Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2008: 160-161) argues that representations should be theorised 'as situated in relation to a political process of contestation and assertion'. This means asking 'whose representations are being deployed, and for what purposes, and how representations determine and reproduce experience' (Hughes-Freeland, 2011: 422). A searching theoretical evaluation of Indonesian cinema and representations of gender can be a resource for the undoing of much relied-on hegemonic Eurocentric theoretical frameworks of gender relations and sexuality. If Hughes-Freeland is right, then we can take into account the layers of context, produced by historical, cultural, economic, and political specificities, behind the image.

Until recently, the scholarly focus on gender in Indonesian cinema has been mostly with 'secular' or non-religious films. However, the popularity of the Islamic film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) elicited discussions about the emergence of a 'new' kind of Muslim man (Paramaditha, 2011; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012) and a man symbolising the nation in democratic transition (Heryanto, 2011: 75). The new kind of Muslim man in post-New Order Indonesian cinema is also said to be peaceful and pro-women (Nilan, 2009; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012). *Ayat-ayat Cinta* became equally significant for the first depiction of a romantic heroine who wears the face veil. Representations of veiled Muslim femininity in Indonesian cinema are said to hinge on the symbolic potency of the headscarf during a period of heightened tensions

between the US and the Muslim world (Heryanto, 2011: 63). These images, both new femininities and masculinities, have risen from the aftermath of 9/11 to counter the often essentialist Western hegemonic portrayal of Islam and Muslims as backward and oppressive towards women.

This chapter will outline and engage with the breadth of literature on gender in Indonesian cinema. It will first describe the historical, political and economic context in which the Indonesian film industry developed since its inception in 1919. This context will shed light on how representations of femininities and masculinities may have been produced within and influenced by the interlacing contexts. This is followed by a discussion of the literature on representations of women in Indonesian cinema that will bring together findings that propose a prevailing trend of negative stereotypes in New Order cinema and the inhibiting circumstances within the film industry for images of women and female filmmakers. A review of the emerging studies on masculinity in Indonesia cinema will follow and assesses the shifting images of men and how they relate to those of women. The literature on gender in Indonesian cinema will then segue into looking at a new mode of expressing gender through an Islamic lens. Ultimately, this literature review addresses a largely unexplored area pertaining to conditions for the production of gender in 'Islamic' Indonesian cinema.

Gender as a product of state ideology and censorship

To better understand the political and economic history of Indonesian cinema that gave rise to the representations of gender on its screens, a relevant overview of the Indonesian film industry is in order. Such an overview will shed light on the regimes of representations whose role is to control the kinds of images produced in Indonesian cinema. Because the Indonesian film industry is founded as a male-dominated cultural practice, women's roles in films have been mainly confined to the front of the camera. New Order regulations on film products and the class-defined

culture of filmmaking contributed to maintaining gender ideology in almost equal measure. The laws and bodies relating to censorship inherited from colonialism but reworked during the New Order have shaped the kinds of representations of gender that were tacitly promoted and suppressed during the period. Film production was regulated under various state apparatuses and viewed as a form of mass media equal to radio and television in its function and influence (Sen and Hill, 2006: 139).

The story of cinema in Indonesia began in 1900 with the arrival of moving pictures from abroad. Control of gender and sexuality was at the heart of the kinds of films imported into the colonial Dutch East Indies in that films needed to portray White European women who were morally upstanding rather than images of femme fatales or prostitutes who might threaten the moral superiority of Dutch people (Sen, 1994: 14). Locally-made films in the first decades of the twentieth-century under Dutch colonialism were made by Europeans and ethnic Chinese filmmakers. It was during the Japanese occupation of the Malay archipelago in 1942 and the Japanese take-over of the Dutch government film production company, *Algemeen Nederlansch-Indisch Films* (ANIF), that indigenous Indonesian filmmakers began making films to the exclusion of the Chinese and Dutch. Indonesian filmmakers were taught filmmaking techniques and production organisation by the more skilled and knowledgeable Japanese and under their tutelage, Indonesians learned to make politically-motivated propaganda and documentary films (Sen, 1994: 17).

After achieving political independence from the colonial Dutch government in 1949, the 1950s became a high point for Indonesian cinema with the establishment of its indigenous film industry before its collapse during political conflicts between the first president Sukarno and the army in early 1965. After the military coup and instalment of Suharto as the new president in 1966, the Indonesian film industry was revived between the 1970s to 1980s with the release of between sixty to seventy highly commercial films a year (Hanan, 2008: 107). Suharto's regime lifted the ban on imported American films and initiated the oftentimes half-hearted rebuilding of the local film industry. The flood of Hollywood and Hong Kong

film imports during the 1970s and 1980s threatened the production and marketability of local films. Although embroiled in an unfair competition with the behemoths of Hollywood and Hong Kong, local filmmakers were nonetheless greatly influenced by them. Aspirational Western-style lifestyles and dress and kung-fu inspired fighting scenes are hallmarks of transnational influence in New Order Indonesian cinema.

Censorship regulations enacted to preserve the national culture and control the circulation of explicit violent and sexual images dominated the narrative form of Indonesian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. The archetypal narrative form promoted by the New Order regime comprised of the 'order-disorder-resolution of disorder' cycle as a means of demonstrating the redemptive power of the state (Heider, 1991: 38). Government directives ensured that outlaws in film narratives must be punished and the police or army not represented in a bad light (Sen and Hill, 2006: 142). As common as these narrative forms were during this period, there were films that elided the archetype thanks to the emergence of new and competing communication technologies, political dissent, and influx of global imagery (Sen and Hill, 2006: 160).

In the early 1990s, the Indonesian film industry experienced a nadir. The number of companies making celluloid films for cinema fell from ninety-five in 1991 to only thirteen in 1994 (Sen and Hill, 2006: 137). This steep decline can be attributed to three main factors. First, privatised television stations and the boom of home viewing media such as video and laser discs forced the film industry into even stiffer competition. Greater financial investment in television production marginalised the production of cinema due to falling sources of funding. Second, the monopoly of cinemas by the Suharto family ensured that profitable American films were screened to the detriment of local cinema. Third, repressive censorship laws curbed the creative liberties of filmmakers from producing innovative films. Seemingly defiant of censorship, exploitation films that depended on the sensationalist mix of sex and violence filled the creative dearth of the industry during this period of decline. These trends appear to be at odds with the 1992 New Order regulation on film production, which decrees that

'cinema is defined as a form of mass communication to develop national culture and to improve national security' (Paramaditha, 2007: 43).

Although state censorship regulations and other directives on film narratives have been consistent throughout the New Order in restricting a host of 'dangerous' subjects, it would not be helpful to assume that censorship was the main driving force behind the limited representations of gender for three reasons. First, the New Order regime had been primarily prohibitive towards films that might stoke ethnic, class, and religious tensions and political dissent (Sen and Hill, 2006: 141). Second, the New Order regime did not wield its power to curb images of women that deviated from the state ideal of womanhood. Third, self-censorship appeared to be a powerful deterrent to producing complex representations of gender for Indonesian film audiences (Soh, 2007: 85). Self-censorship became the path of least resistance for filmmakers who were required to face stringent pre-shooting consultation with the Directorate of Film in the Department of Information (Sen, 1991: 66). The occasionally weak enforcement of the New Order's guidelines on the depiction of violence and sexual acts can be attributed to economic imperatives found in profitable sensationalist material, further underlining the censorship board's 'hands-off' approach to gender.

Byungkuk Soh (2007) makes an interesting observation on the connection, or rather the disconnect, between the New Order's ideology on modernising women and its codes of censorship and film regulation. Both, the New Order ideology and codes of film censorship and regulation, are state tools that control the reproduction of social identities. However, Soh finds that the government's view of cinema as 'a medium [that] exerts great influence on the development of the nation's attitude, character, and civic virtues' is discordant with the promotion of the image of the modern Indonesian woman it promotes in its marriage laws, government-sponsored women's organisations, and publications about women's roles by the government (2007: 84-85). In other words, state bodies that regulate film production do not have a duty to assert diverse and 'positive' images of women to fulfill cinema's social function. In fact, as I will discuss

in the next section, images of women in New Order cinema were often confined to limited roles not because of overt censorship and regulation, but because they were promoted by film festival juries and aligned with expectations of 'realism' (Sen, 1994: 137).

After 1998 and no longer within the grip of Suharto's authoritarian policies, the mass media experienced both expansion and an increase in sexualised and 'Western' content. They ranged from highly erotic stage performances and television programmes to soft-core pornographic content in men's magazines and often subversive exploration into female sexuality in novels by a new generation of young women authors (Heryanto, 2011: 67). Islamic groups and socially conservative commentators expressed concerns and alarm at the media phenomenon that posed a serious moral threat to Indonesian society (Hatley, 2009: 46). The mass media expansion also provoked a dramatic reconsideration of national identity, gender, sexuality, religion, and class (Paramaditha, 2007: 42). These renegotiations of previously circumscribed social identities rejuvenated the film industry in the *Reformasi* period and propelled the production of more daring and provocative films throughout the ensuing decade.

The new kind of censorship represented by the broadly defined anti-pornography bill tabled in 2006 to tighten the control of gender and sexuality evinces a reaction to a public sphere that was seen to have overstepped multiple moral and sexual boundaries. Contained in the bill are laws that forbid public acts or images of kissing, dressing in 'immodest' clothing, lewd language and bodily conduct. The anti-pornography bill was ratified in October 2008 to much protest by non-Muslim and liberal Muslim Indonesians who saw the bill as not only a sign of repressive Islamisation but also a creeping breach of freedom of expression (Heryanto, 2008; Hatley, 2009; van Wichelen, 2010). Rising anti-American sentiment in Indonesia brought about by the US-led war in Iraq galvanised support for the bill and protest against another moral lightning rod, the launch of the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine in 2008.

Women's bodies became a site of contestation for clerics, feminist activists, and media producers each with diverging agendas. Debates that verged on moral panic were provoked by the furore over Inul Darasista's musical career and signature *derriere*-'drilling' dance, disputes over Megawati's ascendancy to national leadership, and the aforementioned anti-pornography bill. The anti-pornography bill was also criticised for its potential to effectively curb the movement of women and girls (van Wichelen, 2009). These issues have contributed to the formation of what Rachel Rinaldo describes as the 'feminisation' of the Indonesian public sphere, whereby 'more women were becoming more numerous and outspoken in NGOs, religious organisations and the media' (2008: 1798). However, the feminised public sphere is not necessarily a progressive climate that pushes for greater equality seeing as equality is not the goal for all Muslim women activists who range from liberals to conservatives (Rinaldo, 2008: 1798).

The end of Suharto's dictatorial regime in 1998 saw the advent of new film genres and innovative works by independent filmmakers and the increased participation of women as directors and producers in Indonesia's film industry. The slowly rising participation of women filmmakers in contemporary Indonesian cinema is part and parcel of the greater involvement and influence of Indonesian women in the arts, literature, politics, and Islamic institutions. Upper middle class women, who possessed skill, vision, connections, and capital, in particular benefited greatly from these shifts of power from the government centre to the periphery. The first independent film to be released from the ashes of the New Order's collapse, a portmanteau film, *Kuldesak* (Cul-de-sac, 1998), was directed by two women, Mira Lesmana and Nan T. Achnas, and two men, Riri Riza and Rizal Mantovani.

Of the 184 film directors who have directed films during the post-New Order period between 1998 to 2009, only 19 are women (10%) (Sasono 2011b: 118). This is a modest increase from the four female directors during the New Order; Ratna Asmara, Citra Dewi, Ida Farida, and Sofia

W.D. (for a fuller discussion on female filmmakers and their films in the New Order period, see Michalik (2013)). However, as Sen (1994) has noted, the female producers and directors during the New Order were either the wives or daughters of male filmmakers. In other words, Sen suggests that access to the New Order filmmaking industry was granted on male-centric terms. In contrast to women's subsumption in the New Order, Sen (2009), Sulistyani (2010) and Hughes-Freeland (2011) found that the higher number of women filmmakers from 1998 onward has substantially redefined post-New Order Indonesia cinema in terms of films produced and the political economy of the industry.

Outside of the domain of Indonesian fiction film are young female filmmakers who are making inroads into documentary filmmaking (Hughes-Freeland, 2011). They bring to light the plight of women who are unfairly impacted of Sharia laws in Aceh and Sulawesi (Kusumaryati, 2010) and of those who work in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the in Gulf states as domestic workers. The first V Film Festival in Jakarta in 2009 was established as a collaboration between liberal and female-dominated institutions: Kalyanashira Films; Komunitas Salihara (Salihara Community); *Jurnal Perempuan* (Women's Journal); Kartini Asia Network, and Kineforum. The festival, which used to take place annually on Kartini Day,⁴ on 21 April, showcased local and international films about, directed by and for women as a way of celebrating women's contribution to cinema and raising awareness on 'women's issues' in Indonesia through the medium of film (Yazid, 2010). Although now defunct for lack of funds after running for two years, the V Film Festival was groundbreaking in its response to male dominance in the film world both in Indonesia and beyond its borders. The V Film Festival served as an important reminder of the marginalisation of women behind and in front of the camera in Indonesia and the difficulty women often faced to secure a comfortable role in the industry.

⁴ 21 April is the birthday of the famed Javanese princess and pioneer of women's rights to education, Raden Ajeng Kartini, who lived between 1890 to 1901.

Does the emergence of female-directed and produced films spell a more diverse and nuanced representation of women in cinema? How much has changed for women onscreen since the end of the New Order? How are the issues about gender and sexuality ignited in the post-New Order public sphere imagined in cinema? These are the questions that have animated and helped frame the literature on images of femininity in Indonesian cinema, to which I now turn to in the next section.

Stirring slowly from passivity: femininity in Indonesian cinema

Commentary on gender in Indonesian cinema has lamented the limited range of female characters in film. During the New Order, women were assigned as not only procreators of the state but also as an index of what defines the state, as demonstrated in the many minor and non-speaking/symbolic roles for women (Sen 1995: 94). Furthermore, women's images in film were often used for either sensationalistic purposes or as personifying the nation's moral order. If the moral order is challenged by liberated female sexuality or non-heteronormative behaviour, it would typically be restored by the end of the film through the punishment of female characters who strayed from their traditional gender roles (Sen, 1994: 138). If female characters were not idealised as dutiful and self-abnegating mothers and wives, they were idealised as beautiful mute women, a blank slate onto which men inscribe their ideas, desires, and aspirations (Sen, 1994: 141-144). There are, however, exceptional examples of alternative femininity whose lack of convention goes unpunished, but they apply to non-Indonesian women or women who are sexually objectified (Hughes-Freeland, 2011: 421).

The limitations placed on representations of women have been attributed to the aesthetic judgement of film critics and judges of film festivals. Images of passive and merely symbolic femininity in New Order cinema were reinforced through local film institutions, festivals, and awards. Krishna Sen found that New Order films that preserved the status quo involving the restoration to normative or 'correct' femininity and gendered

division of labour were usually awarded the Citra, the most important filmmaking award in Indonesia (Sen, 1994: 148-149). In contrast, films that depicted women who were in full control of their destiny and exerted their independence outside a heterosexual relationship were not critically acclaimed. Instead, they were criticised for being unrealistic in their portrayal of women's superiority over men (Sen, 1994: 140).

Hughes-Freeland argues that femininity in New Order cinema was usually reduced into a dichotomy, where on the one hand a woman is a victim, and on the other hand she is the uncontrollable virago (2011: 420). Sita Aripurnami (2000) identifies a range of negative representations of women in key films during the New Order that are succinctly captured in the title of her essay, 'Whiny, finicky, bitchy, stupid, and revealing'. In essence, women have been portrayed in Indonesian cinema as domineering, unreasonable, and prone to wild emotional outbursts in stark contrast to their often stoic male counterparts (Aripurnami, 2000: 55-57). Although filmmakers have access to a wealth of data on the diversity of women's lives, Aripurnami argues that women were nonetheless reduced to one-dimensional images in film. The richness of Indonesian women's lives is said to be 'buried under the "impressions" created and captured by filmmakers, scenario writers, directors, directors, actors, and by the audience' (Aripurnami, 2000: 60).

The 'real' Indonesian woman is said to exist in national discourse, and at times shuttles, precariously between the Kartini model and the maniacal throng of women in New Order mythology (Tiwon, 1996: 65). Sylvia Tiwon argues that the cultural and social barriers to self-actualisation and articulation that women face result from the organisation of their womanhood around the model/maniac binary. On the one hand, a woman must fulfill an idealised image of the perfect *ibu* (mother and/or married woman) modelled after the Javanese princess and first Indonesian campaigner for women's rights Raden Ajeng Kartini. But on the other hand, when she gains more agency to express herself more freely, she

risks falling into the condemned category of the wild and immoral maniacal caricature of Gerwani activists⁵ (Tiwon, 1996: 66).

The ideal woman according to the gender ideology of the New Order is one whose role is primarily confined to the domestic sphere to produce healthy and productive Indonesian men.⁶ This role is reiterated in other government directives, such as the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (The Five Obligations of Women) and the *Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara* (GBHN, Broad Guidelines for State Policy). *The Panca Dharma Wanita* is the foundational guideline for the *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (PKK, Family Welfare Movement), while the GBHN is for the government. To foster a 'happy family' (*keluarga sejahtera*) according to the PKK, a woman must fulfill five roles, in order of importance: as wife who stands by her husband, manager of the household, mother, educator of her children, and finally as citizen of Indonesia (Oey-Gardiner and Bianpoen, 2000: 58). Scholars of representations of gender in Indonesian cinema usually note the various state programmes and government-sponsored organisations dedicated to the development of women as exemplifying the official line for the correct behaviour of all women and its power to somehow influence film narratives (Aripurnami, 2000; Imanjaya, 2009b; Hughes-Freeland, 2011: 418-419). But they do not usually establish their rationale for doing so, as if such state directives on women's roles have influence on cinema in a straightforward way.

Little is said about how the control of gender roles and sexuality during the New Order were steeped in notions of class. Although not stressed enough in her groundbreaking thesis on State Ibuism (State Motherism), Julia Suryakusuma's discussion on the role of the government and state constitution in maintaining unequal gender relations among civil servants is ultimately a question of class as a function of gender and sexual monitoring (Suryakusuma, 1996). Civil servants were expected to be role models for the rest of Indonesian society by swearing allegiance to

⁵ Gerwani was a much demonised women's communist organisation during the New Order for their purported association with sexual perversion (Wieringa, 2000).

⁶ *The Women of Indonesia*, 1985: 57-58

the *Pancasila* (the state philosophy) and having their private lives regulated by the state (Suryakusuma, 1996). By implication, the greater one's status, the greater the moral burden one must carry. Women of the bureaucratic class were especially burdened by double oppression; oppressed by their inferior status in the bureaucratic hierarchy and their inferior position to their husbands (Suryakusuma, 1996).

Thus in a discussion about the invasive ways the state entered the private sphere of its people, Suryakusuma was interested in how state gender ideology was imposed on the bureaucratic class and not how it affected those lower in the social hierarchy or at the margins of Indonesian society. Despite the regime's best efforts to homogenise a diverse and populous nation into the binary model of *kodrat pria* (men's moral code or essence) and *kodrat wanita* (women's moral code or essence), ethnographic studies on gender relations during the New Order demonstrated a variety of gender regimes. Individuals across Indonesia assert a reasonable level of autonomy over their gender identities which often fly in the face of the official line on correct gendered behaviour (Robinson, 2010: 11). Nevertheless, the gendered nature of social organisation, the *azas kekeluargaan* (foundation of the family), however symbolic, is often manifested most acutely during political crises.

Not all authors are of the view that the New Order's repressive policy on gender produces restricted images of women in cinema. Soh's (2007) analysis of the images of women in New Order cinema departs from Hughes-Freeland's opinion that a feminine binary prevailed during the period. Although there are certainly many films that circumscribe female characters to traditional gender roles, Soh argues that not all female protagonists were punished for deviating from the role of subordinate mother and wife. Instead, Soh's suggests that the variety of women's images in Indonesian cinema is legitimised by a blind-spot of the New Order regime to account for the 'unity in diversity' philosophy in cinema (2007: 81-83).

Reflecting the leap into modernity in the 1980s, there have been films of career women who are independent and divorce their husbands without social repercussions. Women in horror films may often be victims of sexual violence and murder, but they return with a vengeance to terrorise both men and women (Soh, 2007: 74). Soh goes on to argue that the national ideology, *Pancasila*, and guiding tenets of organisations and national programmes dedicated to developing the ideal Indonesian woman have little bearing on the film industry which produces a more diverse range of feminine representations. Although strongly directive, Soh argues that the New Order regime's preoccupation had been less on women in film than a vision of national unity.

Although criticisms of the recurring dichotomy of feminine representation in Indonesia are an important commentary on the lack of diversity of women's images, they also suggest that there is a positive feminine 'essence' that female characters fail to achieve in cinema. Images of women identified as mute, passive, submissive, and desired as an object of the gaze follows the patriarchal discourse of sexual difference that constructs Woman from a distillation of feminine tropes: enigma, nature or evil (De Lauretis, 1987: 19-20). But such a preoccupation with this restrictive feminine binary limits our view of other kinds of images of women.

To examine the variety of gender representations, if one is to follow Teresa De Lauretis's critique, one must move away from sexual difference, the notion of women as different from men, female from male. Less a biological or social difference than difference defined in signification and discursive effects, sexual difference positions women in negative relation to men. In psychoanalytic terms, sexual difference characterises women as lack in relation to the phallus. De Lauretis argues for the theorisation of gender in cinema that departs from reproducing patriarchal formulation of Woman; the distillation of patriarchal definitions of femininity as mother, virgin or whore, and towards embracing differences *between* women.

I would argue that the rigid binary schemas of 'bad' and 'good' femininity are often at work in Indonesian cinema. But rather than arguing that they occur as a rule in Indonesian cinema more generally, I contend that they are depicted as such in individual films and should be analysed on a film by film basis. Furthermore, such oppositional binaries are contextual to the historical moorings during which the films were made. This view follows De Lauretis's rejection of feminist film theory's deployment of sexual difference and of the universality of women's experiences. Instead, she argues that representations of gender are not found in a finished or coherent way but rather produced through discursive practices and social relations.

Refashioning Foucault's technologies of sex to account for gender, De Lauretis proposes that the technologies of gender, at times regarded as discursive practices, produce gendered subjectivities. To further elaborate this view, representations of gender emerge from the social, political and economic conditions that allow, restrict, and promote certain, often narrow, images of women. De Lauretis's view marks a shift away from classical feminist theoretical conception of film as a closed system of meaning that consisted of fundamental modes of address - camera technique, narrative arc, editing, lighting - that oppress women. A corollary argument would be that classical feminist film theory provides a limited and often deterministic interpretation of film that commercial films are irredeemably sexist. Following De Lauretis, I propose in this thesis that there is more to a film than text.

Hughes-Freeland (2011: 421) notes that the highly sexualised depiction of women became common and more explicit in the 1990s than in previous decades when government media regulation was in decline. The sexual and violent content that pervaded Indonesian cinema was a reflection of a declining film industry that was desperate to attract audiences on the basis of sensationalism. But it also demonstrated that the ways female sexuality were depicted were economically determined by market imperatives. In other words, sexual objectification of women to appeal to the male gaze is not an ahistorical and essentialising evidence of women's inferiority in

society or that Woman stood as both image to be looked at and symbolic repository for sexuality (Mulvey, 1975 ; Doane, 1991). Images of women who were either victims of sexual violence or engaged in consensual sexual acts - the 'virago' (Hughes-Freeland, 2011: 421) - triumphed in the 1990s, a significant shift from older images of women who were punished for their sexuality.

The focus on the production of 'women's films', films about and by women, has arisen from feminist criticisms of the history of cinema and androcentric definitions of the auteur. Women have been active and prolific producers of cinematic material since the beginnings of the medium but their contributions have been devalued by many male film scholars and critics. Feminist film critics have rediscovered and re-evaluated the works of female directors and 'women's films' - mainly the melodrama to recuperate the value of women's contributions in cinema and pleasure as spectators (Kuhn, 1984; Gledhill, 1987). However, 'corrective' representations of women are not necessarily to be found in 'women's films' either. Krishna Sen found that New Order *film wanita* (women's films) that were sold as films made for and by women about women's issues were actually mainly filmed through the male gaze, spoken by male 'voices', and ultimately about men's concerns and insecurities about female sexuality (Sen, 1994: 43). In order to succeed in the film industry, female filmmakers during the New Order needed to adopt elements of mainstream sexist culture in the making and marketing of their films.

Several authors have commented on the shifts in representations of women in the post-New Order period towards increasing diversity and social awareness of women's status in Indonesian society (Sen, 2008; Hughes-Freeland, 2011; Sulistyani, 2010). As mentioned previously, the higher number of women in the film industry as directors, producers, and writers during the period post-1998 has made headway into representing women engaging in issues that would have been unheard of in New Order cinema. Media liberalisation made it possible for the making of female-centred films on polygamy, female homosexuality, and abortion in more

enlightening ways than what would have been permissible previously. One must be careful however not make a causal connection between media liberalisation and a more women-friendly film industry with a complete break from older regimes of representation. As Soh observes, 'change of any kind is difficult to locate or mark off as if it has precise boundaries [...] for it is usually uneven, hidden, or presents itself in such a wide variety of manifestations so as to defy control' (2007: 69).

With regards to the women's films produced during the post-New Order period, Hughes-Freeland states that they demonstrate 'where a creative exploration of gender relations will be found' (2011: 420). Adopting Raymond Williams's approach to understanding cultural flows, Hapsari Sulistyani argues that post-New Order women's cinema is an expression of a struggle between 'residual' gender ideology of the New Order and 'emergent' ones of the Reform period (Sulistyani, 2010: 161). According to Sulistyani, the depiction of female characters in women's cinema or female-directed films such as *Pasir Berbisik* (*Whispering Sands*, 2001, dir. Nan Triveni Achnas) and *Berbagi Suami* (*Love For Share*, 2006, dir. Nia Dinata) implies that women cannot completely escape the influence of patriarchal ideology when 'they return to the expected subject position for women' (Sulistyani, 2010: 162). However, both films refuse to naturalise patriarchal values. Rather, they depict those values for what they are - 'a set of rules that serve the interest of men and entrap women in a state of hopelessness' (Sulistyani, 2010: 164).

Both *Pasir Berbisik* and *Berbagi Suami* critique many dominant ideas about the construction of female subjectivity in Indonesia, such as women's position in the 'normal family' that reinforces the dominant presence of the father as essential while mothers are asexual beings (Sulistyani, 2010: 164). Sulistyani argues further that both films posit a contrasting distinction between motherhood and wifehood in contrast to New Order films that routinely conflated the two (2010: 165). Although the films challenge many elements of New Order filmmaking, the female protagonist in *Pasir Berbisik* falls back into a more stereotypically feminised female subject position by the end of the film. Sulistyani asserts

that the films manage to subvert the male gaze by denying sexualised representations of passive female characters,⁷ demonstrating that Indonesian female filmmakers have a cinematic medium to express their political opinions to a high artistic standard (2010: 165).

Relational to representations of women are those of men. Existing discussions on women and men in Indonesian cinema tend to position the two genders as antagonistic: in relations where men are powerful and domineering, while women are submissive and oppressed under male domination. Conversely, 'strong' women are paired with 'weak' men (Heider, 1991; Clark, 2004). But I argue that an oppositional framing of the sexes turns women and men into one-dimensional and static components of what are dynamic and ever shifting characters within an individual film, a corpus of films, genre, and in the film industry as a whole. A more sensitive examination of masculinities in Indonesian cinema sheds light on the differences along class, religious, ethnic, and sexual lines between men in film, providing a context-rich tableau of representations of gender.

'The film industry is masculine': masculinities in Indonesian cinema

Addressing masculinity in Indonesian cinema requires some reading against the grain. Like heterosexuality, lack of disabilities, and whiteness, masculinity is often referred to as an unmarked social category in which male dominance has been historically treated as the 'norm'. Gender meanwhile is often taken to be a shorthand for women's issues (Clark, 2008), with women as the 'problematic' gender. In the spirit of Richard Dyer's description of male sexuality, it is often difficult to see masculinity and talk about it, as it is 'like air – you breathe it in all the time, but you are not aware of it much' (Dyer, 1985: 28).

⁷ I am less certain about *Pasir Berbisik's* alleged success at subverting the male gaze. The film is centred around a troubled mother-daughter relationship that is thrown into crisis when the daughter, Daya, played by the popular actor, Dian Sastrowardoyo, becomes a victim of sexual abuse. The abuse is played out in a prolonged scene with Daya forced to masturbate in front of her male abuser, whose view of the event is aligned with the audience/camera.

Masculinity's invisibility may have to do with the fact that most Indonesian films throughout the New Order and thereafter have been about men and when they do feature prominent female roles, the women merely become vehicles for men's concerns or 'spheres of action' (Sen, 1994: 116-133). At other times, women in Indonesian film fulfill merely a subsidiary role. Hence, men's narratives are often the standard for cinematic storytelling. Films that focus on women are 'women's films', while those about men are simply films. The inability to notice masculinity demonstrates how deeply influenced we are as film viewers by the dominant discourses regarding gender relations in society.

We can argue that an examination of masculinity is more than just studying the men in films, but recognising the tropes or conventions male characters habitually exhibit and how the particular concerns expressed by the male characters drive the narrative of the film. Remarking on the relative invisibility of Indonesian masculinity as a construct and analytical category, Dédé Oetomo contends that masculinity arises as an issue during discussions regarding gender inequality, men's roles as the head of the family and chief breadwinner, men's rightful participation in the public domain, and their dominant role in heterosexual relations (Oetomo, 1996: 260).

Existing theories of hegemonic Indonesian masculinity point to the construction of upper-class Javanese *priyayi* (aristocrat or nobleman) manhood as the aspirational model for men during the New Order period (Aveling, 2001: 162). The hegemony of aristocratic Javanese masculinity is a reflection of Javanese cultural dominance in Indonesian public policy since the inception of Indonesia as a postcolonial nation under Javanese-dominated rule. The emotional restraint of the *priyayi* man is often held up as an ideal disposition for a man and is distinguished from the uncouth loose cannon of a man who is liable to go *amok* (Clark, 2004: 118). But given the vast diversity of cultures, languages, and socio-economic differences between Indonesian men across the archipelago, the

Javanese *priyayi* masculinity remains simply a model achievable by the very few.

The New Order period was characterised by a repressive form of development which went to great lengths to circumscribe the dominant ideological gender regime, one represented by the monogamously married heterosexual man who is a responsible breadwinning father (*bapak*) and the obedient and supportive wife and mother (*ibu*). The origins of the *azas kekeluargaan*, a concept upon which the New Order gender regime rested, was the brainchild of the Javanese nationalist-intellectual Soetatamo Soriokoesomo as a basis for the revitalisation of Javanese culture at the turn of the twentieth-century. According to Kathryn Robinson, the *azas kekeluargaan* 'symbolically anchored the militarised hegemonic masculinity and disguised its violent character through the image of the benevolent *bapak*' (2010: 68). The nuclear family was seen as a replica of the state. As a hierarchical parent-child/master-slave (*kawala-gusti*) model of relations, the state is in turn symbolically a family consisting of the 'wise father, the caring mother, and their children who know their place' (Shiraishi, 1997: 84).

Derived from elite Javanese discourse on hegemonic masculinity and the masculine counterpart of Ibuism, 'Bapakism' (Father-ism) became the guiding principle for secular male leadership. At the pinnacle of masculinities is the ultimate *bapak* (father), the archetypal male leader of the nation personified by Suharto during his presidency (Suryakusuma, 1996). Suharto's bapakism became the gendered ideological centre around which the bureaucracy of the New Order organised. Suharto even declared himself *Bapak Pembangunan*, the father of development (Rahim, 2001; Scherer, 2006), which underlines the nature of his paternally and paternalistically driven authority. The authority of the *bapak* is perceived as natural and God-given as he is the head of his family, community, businesses, and nation-state. Suharto's bapakism appears to be a deliberate and oppositional construction to the image of hegemonic masculinity embodied by his predecessor Sukarno. Sukarno projected himself as '*Bung*' (Brother) or 'Comrade', an appellation of equality and

brotherhood in contrast to Suharto's hierarchical terms of address. Communist masculinity, which Sukarno was associated with, was viewed as 'chaotic and orgiastic' while bapakism, in contrast, was viewed as symbolic of restraint and composure (Paramaditha, 2007: 45).

The flip-side of the prevailing discourse on the restrained New Order masculinity was men's power to commit grievous violence in the name of the nation. Primary examples of men's dominance were manifested in the bloody purge of Communists committed during the 1965-1966 military coup, and the state-sponsored gendered violence such as the rape and murder of women during the military unrest in Aceh between 1990 to 1998 (Wandita, 2000). Since the end of the New Order, control over the prevailing gender regimes became more fragmented thanks to three major shifts in the political and socio-economic landscape. First, a combination of the Asian economic downturn of 1997 and the upward credentialising for access to jobs (Elmhirst, 2007: 232). Second, the growth of knowledge-based sectors in the national economy (Bayhaqi, 2000), and third, the tremendous expansion of access to global media and information technologies (Nilan and Utari, 2007) affected ideas about gender that without doubt impacted men and their relation to women.

The literature on masculinity in Indonesian cinema has to some extent captured the prevailing themes of men, power and the lack thereof found in ideology and socio-economic context. Films about national heroes, irrespective of who is narrating Indonesian history, are replete with images of competing masculinities. In the government-sponsored propaganda film, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Treachery G30S/The Indonesian Communist Party, 1984, dir. Ariffin C. Noer), an image of nationalistic masculinity is carved out of the contest between the military under Suharto and the 'others': Communist men and female Communist activists of Gerwani, who represent dangerous female sexuality. Rising above them all, both morally and ideologically, is the figure of the military general in *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* whose masculine power and authority transcend the man himself. Without the presence of the hero-general, his military paraphernalia in his home is enough to exude his authority and act

as his stand-in as leader, husband, and father to his family (Paramaditha, 2007: 26).

Intan Paramaditha's analysis demonstrates that clothing is an important feature in signalling aspects of masculinity even without the appearance of the man. She goes further to suggest that scenes depicting the torture of military generals by members of the PKI indicated their 'feminised' victimisation which required the eventual recuperation of their masculinity through the PKI's defeat. Produced by a member of the presidential office and features President Suharto himself in a heroic role, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* is a propaganda film *par excellence* which functioned to construct members of the PKI as a bloodthirsty and unscrupulous lot. The figures who uphold national order, in this case the generals under the leadership of Suharto, are foregrounded as the upstanding men who lead, suffer, die as martyrs, and triumph in their battle with Communists.

The end of Suharto's New Order heralded the recuperation of long-repressed and vilified images of Chinese Indonesians in cinema, most notably in Riri Riza's *Gie* (2005), about the anti-Sukarno student activist Soe Hok Gie. Ideas about hegemonic masculinity are completely dismantled in the figure of Gie; notably when contrasted with the sexual excesses of the womanising President Sukarno. Played by the young Eurasian actor and matinee idol Nicholas Saputra, Gie is emotionally and sexually repressed in the company of women who desire him. Instead, his most intimate relationship is with his male best friend. Needless to say, the homoerotic undertones of their relationship did not go unnoticed by Indonesian film critics who expressed mixed views on the matter (Paramaditha, 2007: 5).

Because Gie is unable to perform the valorised heterosexual virility and dominance in the manner of Sukarno, the figure of Gie subverts any notion of 'nationalised masculinity' (Paramaditha, 2007: 54). Gie's anti-heroism has been criticised for its 'weakness' and sexual impotence and not playing up to the audience's expectations of a leading man (Paramaditha, 2007: 52). This may be due to the origins of Gie's depiction by the director,

Riri Riza. Riza was influenced by representations of men in American films who were flawed and sensitive and his favour for such representations is later imbued in Gie's character. In fact, Riza became inspired by the conflicted and emotionally complex role played by the British actor Jude Law in the 2004 Hollywood film, *Closer* (Paramaditha, 2007: 52).

Gie is a critique of Sukarno's repressive rule and corrupted hegemonic masculinity featuring an male anti-hero who is in many ways flawed and 'unproductive' according to the New Order's definition of the ideal man whose responsibility is to marry a woman and provide for his family. Furthermore, Riza describes Gie as 'less an action hero' and more of an intellectual who is able to exert his powers through writing rather than the traditional masculinised tropes of compulsory heterosexuality and asserting dominance over other men through fighting. The sexual ambiguity and reluctant heroism of Gie are akin to the images of masculinities in the 1998 film *Kuldesak* (also directed by Riri Riza, alongside three other filmmakers).

Both films portray men who are reluctant heroes in the traditional sense. Instead, the films demonstrate the fluidity and instability of men's subjectivities during the post-New Order, a deliberate departure from previous celebrated images of masculinity of the New Order. The shift towards ambiguous masculinity and male sexuality is not a willful one expressed in the 'democratic euphoria' of post-1998 *Reformasi*. Rather, masculinities that were granted authority and prestige by the ideology of the New Order regime were becoming 'undone' or dismantled, revealing the masculinised violence done in the name of the nation.

In his assessment of *Kuldesak*, a portmanteau of four parallel narratives set in contemporary Jakarta, Marshall Clark (2004: 122) finds that the men in the film are hardly realistic nor remotely admirable. Nonetheless, the film provides a wide range of masculine tropes that weave in and out of global popular culture references, New Order ideology, and Javanese mythology. As a film, *Kuldesak* was in many ways groundbreaking. It was the first independent film whose time of release and tone strongly

resonated with the euphoria of the New Order's sudden end. The main male characters of the film: a grunge slacker who drifts aimlessly in his highly privileged but degraded lifestyle, a film buff and director wannabe, the depressed and alienated gay man, and the businessman who rapes his female employees, are 'wooden caricatures who represent various models of masculinity' (Clark, 2004: 122). The other supporting male characters act as either foils or the 'alternative masculinity' to the primary anti-heroes. Minor male characters such as the madman who the grunge slacker Andre consults is an allegorical figure who, like the buffoons of the iconic Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow play), Semar and his sons, act as guardians of truth and justice (Clark, 2004: 127).

The focus on many competing masculinities continues in post-New Order cinema and is informed by ethnography and other mass media. Pam Nilan (2009) has identified three distinct 'styles' of youthful masculinities in contemporary Indonesia: the bearded male evangelists and all-male *nasyid* (Islamic a cappella) music groups, the hip but sensitive young man, and the belligerent *preman* (thug). They arise from the tensions created by 'familial and pedagogic discourses that call them towards the role of the steady worker and reliable provider' (Nilan, 2009: 328). But at the same time, the young men are drawn towards 'compelling discourses of macho bravado deriving from both local and global sources that create pressure to construct their identity in terms of quite different kinds of masculine cultural practice' (Nilan, 2009: 328).

The three images of masculinities delineated by Nilan all make prominent appearances in current Indonesian film and other mass media. The three styles of masculinity are coded hypermasculine as they exhibit the prevailing and persuasive re-iterative performances that connote social influence, aspiration, power, dominance, and the ultimate antithesis to femininity (Nilan, 2009: 329). As young hypermasculine men, they challenge the authority of older men whose masculinity is defined and legitimised by New Order bapakism. The hypermasculinities that Nilan identifies are not static as the young men gradually shift towards a hegemonic centre around which further status is granted through ageing

and acquisition of a family and full-time employment. Inevitably, the hypermasculine young men eventually become reconfigured versions of the *bapak*.

The emergence of sensitive men in Indonesian cinema did not, however, signal the end of the triangulated link between power, violence, and masculinity. Marshall Clark (2008) has explored the ways in which men and masculinities in post-New Order films reflect socio-economic trends and anti-authoritarian sensibilities in two popular films directed by Rudy Soedjarwo; *Mengejar Matahari* (Chasing the Sun, 2004,) and *9 Naga* (9 Dragons, 2006). In these two films, the grittier, more violent representations of men accentuated by their grimy, poverty-stricken surroundings take centre stage. These representations are taken by Clark as masculine expressions of rage and powerlessness with regard to their poverty and disenfranchisement in society. According to Clark, the scenes of violence in the two films are far more graphic than previous Indonesian films signalling a new aesthetic towards hyperrealism and reassertion of 'what it means to be a man' when traditional elements of manhood - power, money, admiration - are beyond the reach of struggling young Indonesian men.

For Clark, the rise of hyperreal violence of the two films expresses an anxiety set in a 'masculinist cast' towards the double threat of male homosexuality and the feminisation of the public sphere in the post-New Order period (Clark, 2011). *9 Naga* also raised a different kind of anxiety in censors when its promotional poster prominently featured the buffed-up body of one of its heroes (played by Fauzi Baadila) along with a subversive tag line, 'The best people in Indonesia are criminals' (Clark, 2008: 50. See FIGURE 1). The censorship board demanded the offending half-naked body be covered up and the tag line amended into something less incendiary. Objections against Fauzi Baadila's naked torso may be related to concerns that the emerging queer culture in Indonesia may 'spill' into mainstream media and heterosexual men's spheres of action.

Through these different instances of masculinity, Nilan and Clark's studies suggest that the construction of competing hegemonic masculinities has become an important feature in post-authoritarian Indonesian film and public discourse. It is pertinent to remember, however, that representations of hegemonic masculinities are not fixed states but a 'configuration of gender practices' implicated in a struggle for dominance and contingent on context (Connell, 1995: 84). The contingent aspect of masculinities will play a significant part in the analysis of 'new' Muslim masculinities in this thesis, particularly those relating to socioeconomic class and Islamic contestations.

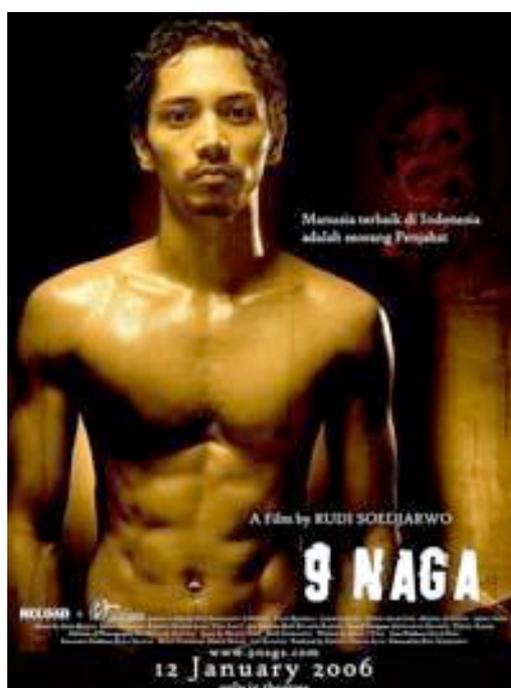


FIGURE 1 Fauzi Baadila on the *9 Naga* (9 Dragons, 2006, dir. Rudy Soedjarwo) promotional film poster.

Clark notes quite rightly that the notion of masculinity and violence cannot be considered unproblematically because more 'positive' representations of masculinity - the military figure and action hero in particular - are also prone to resorting to violence when provoked to fight (Clark, 2011: 49). Perhaps what sets the 'negative' images of men in post-New Order films featuring violent thugs and impoverished leading men apart from 'positive' male heroes of yore are the former's outburst of *amok*, the frenzied and often violent reaction to *malu* or shame. Furthermore, the men in *9 Naga* and *Mengejar Matahari* inhabit an environment that is

perpetually on the brink of violence and chaos, with danger looming over them at every turn accentuating the definition of their masculinity around violence.

When 'new' femininities – educated, independent, and assertive - are introduced in the new wave of religiously-inflected filmmaking in post-1998 Indonesia, different strands of 'new' masculinities also emerge in relation to them, albeit in more implicit ways. Changing gender dynamics resulting from women's increasing, and at times empowering, presence in the public sphere inadvertently transform men's relationships with women. In Indonesia, little is noted of the relationship between women's gradual emancipation during a period of socio-political upheaval of *Reformasi* and the feelings of male disempowerment that have driven some men to seek solace in Islam and its radical, sometimes violent, versions (Clark, 2008; Heryanto, 2011).

The concept of masculinities is employed in this thesis as it takes into account the multiplicity and fluidity of masculine gender performance and different ideas of what it means to be a man. The representation of masculinities in post-New Order Indonesian cinema is less about 'newness' whereby 'older' images of masculinities have been replaced than it is about recurring tropes that are enmeshed with masculinised anxieties and uncertainties of the post-New Order period. There are indeed enduring themes pertaining to New Order masculinity, such as its dominance in relation to femininity, and the subordination of homosexual masculinity that are not new but persist in films of recent years. But there are a few new and emerging themes unique to post-New Order masculinity that blend nonetheless with older masculine tropes. With that in mind, I would like to propose herein and in the chapters that follow the construction of new configurations of older representations of masculinity in Indonesian Islamic cinema.

Gender through an Islamic cinematic lens

How are Islamic femininity and masculinity represented in Indonesian cinema? What have been the economic and political imperatives that brought about their emergence? The scholarly focus on Islamic identities in Indonesian cinema is relatively new and was spurred by the release of films about polygamy, namely *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share, 2006, dir. Nia Dinata) and the highly successful *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo). Although there have been film portrayals of Muslims throughout the history of Indonesian cinema, few have been studied as Muslim characters, much less as Muslim women and men. Thus with respect to the discourse on gender in Indonesian cinema, the image of the 'Muslim woman' and 'Muslim man' did not emerge until the post-New Order period marking a new phase in representations of gender in Indonesia. As will be discussed in further detail, their emergence coincides with the moral panic brought about by media liberalisation following the end of the New Order and the rise of Islamic media consumption by the pious Muslim middle classes (Heryanto, 2011: 67).

Much of the early attention on Muslim identities in post-New Order Indonesian cinema has focused on how women are visually constructed and how the visualisation of women's bodies are contested in the public sphere. The construction of the Muslim woman, referred here as an image rather than a referent signifying a living flesh and blood Muslim woman, is a historical product. Like representations of the Muslim woman in Western discourse, she is a 'product of specific moments and developments in culture' (Kahf, 1999: 2). The image of the Muslim woman has taken on different meanings in the history of Indonesian visual culture and although there have been more images of women signified explicitly as 'Muslim' (in a headscarf, face veil, praying) in the mass media since the 1990s, such images do necessarily not signal the Islamisation of Indonesian women.

This review of Muslim women in Indonesian cinema is therefore about a category produced through visual and narrative conventions, with narrative convention defined here as a storytelling arc in film (consisting of the onset

of a spiritual crisis followed by the resolution of the crisis through Islamic teachings or experiences) that recurs throughout the genre. Such a review demands a more specialised attention to representations of women in the medium. Hence, a further delineation of what the 'Muslim woman' as a category means is required. To begin with, the 'Muslim woman' in Indonesian visual discourse is marked by a familiar article of clothing and metaphor: the veil. Beyond the veil, the Indonesian 'Muslim woman' is conceived through the contestations concerning women's roles in the public sphere. This is a refinement of the category 'Muslim woman' employed by the pioneering review by Gönül Dönmez-Colin (2004) of women in films produced in predominantly Muslim countries such as Turkey, countries in Central Asia, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Dönmez-Colin sought to identify the representational patterns of Muslim women in films between 1917 to 2003 to locate the ways in which women's roles in cinema are 'directly linked to social and political evolutions in which religion and religious customs play an important role' (2004: 7). In nearly all the films, Dönmez-Colin identifies the negative portrayal of women characterised by the recurring exploitation of women's bodies and marginalisation of their voices and vision. Far from being absent from the cinematic screen, women in these films are presented mainly to be 'seen'. Obversely, the dearth of female directors across the board means that women do far less of the 'seeing' than men (Dönmez-Colin, 2004: 187).

While there are vast differences between predominantly Muslim societies to be considered, Dönmez-Colin argues that these societies share continuities in image production through what is a thoroughly male-dominated activity, in that films were made by and for men (2004: 9). In early twentieth-century Turkey and Iran for instance, cinemas were places of entertainment and leisure for men from which women were forbidden. The appearance of female actors in silent films became an issue of moral contention in Turkey, India, and Iran when the medium of cinema first arrived in the respective countries. A female actor's moral virtue and

reputation were often questioned, particularly when they played the role of 'fallen women' on screen. Issues relating to women, Islam, and cinema are therefore evoked not only within cinematic representations, but behind the camera and in relation to the private lives of female actors.

Popular images of Muslim Indonesian women have a history that preceded cinema. The rise of popular representations of the Muslim Indonesian woman coincided with a new 'historical consciousness' during the 1990s that embraced both modernity and Islam (Brenner, 1996: 673). This new phase of Islamic modernity welcomed veiled women into the public sphere as, among other things, workers, leaders, and consumers. The production of 'veiled bodies' in the Indonesian media (van Wichelen, 2007: 93) is legitimised by two contrasting discourses. On the one hand, the consumerist veiled body is embraced by the Muslim middle and upper classes and on the other hand, the politicised veiled body prevails amongst the working class through images of Islamic street protests (van Wichelen, 2007: 94).

The politicised veiled body preceded the consumerist counterpart when the veil was stigmatised as a symbol of extremism. Images of 'the sea of veils' of the 1990s and other homogenising descriptions of Muslim women became iconic signs of the Islamisation of Indonesia (van Wichelen, 2007: 99). But the veil began to lose its dangerous associations when more young Muslim women and high profile personalities adopted it to symbolise their new pious identities. (A longer discussion of the veil and its meanings is to be found in Chapter 5)

Before the advent of the veil in film, the image of the pious Muslim woman was already *de rigueur* in Islamic women's magazines, Islamic fashion, *sinetron religi* (religious soap operas), and popular Islamic novels. The link between literary representations of the Muslim woman and her cinematic counterpart is in fact a strong one; films that heralded the popularity of Islamic cinema are adaptations of best-selling novels⁸. But due to the

⁸ *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) was adapted from the novel of the same name by Habiburrahman el-Shirazy.

differences between the media forms, representations of Muslim femininity in the popular novels (Arnez, 2009: 51) are conveyed rather differently from the films discussed in this thesis.

Muslim female characters in Ramadan soap operas or *sinetron religi* exhibit very similar visual codes to denote idealised Muslim femininity. The Ramadan soap opera is part and parcel of the proliferation of Islamic media that Islamic cinema falls within (Noorhaidi, 2009; Heryanto, 2011). Rachmah Ida (2009) argues that Ramadan soap operas reproduce a similar kind of oppositional dichotomy of femininity found in Indonesian cinema: the protagonist versus the antagonist represented by the ill-mannered, malicious 'bitch' pitted against the demure 'perfect' woman; and the 'liberal', self-determined Muslim woman versus the pious 'conventional' woman (Ida, 2009: 11).

The oppositional quality of the female characters in these seasonal soap operas may arise from the tensions of tradition and modernity following the transition from authoritarianism to democracy that women in Indonesia and their cinematic counterparts face (Ida, 2009: 24). Like Islamic cinema, the theme of intense hardship suffered by the Muslim female protagonist and a denouement through prayer and forgiveness dominate Ramadan soap operas. The female protagonist, who wears the veil in these soap operas, is often caught between the symbols of modernity – a university degree from abroad and freedom in the public sphere - and tradition, represented by the domestic role of wife and mother (Ida, 2009: 21). Given the predictable formula there are minor differences between the female protagonists across different Ramadan soap operas for the sake of ratings.

In Ida's analysis of the soap operas, the conservative Islamic interpretation of women's roles as subservient to their husbands become the source of the protagonist's suffering. Although the Muslim female characters start out as liberated women with a future full of potential, crisis occurs in the marital context when their traditional role as wives clashes with their career and other life aspirations (Ida, 2009: 32). Ida's reading of the ill-

treatment of the female protagonists is drawn from a comparison between the film's narrative and excerpted verses from the Qur'an. For Ida, the representations of Muslim women in Ramadan soap operas are unjust and un-Islamic by Qur'anic standards because the television characters do not redeem themselves in the Islamic way. From her theological perspective, Ramadan television dramas should function as guidebooks for proper Islamic behaviour and concur with Islamic scripture (Ida: 2009: 69).

The relatively late cinematic appearance of the veiled woman - the archetypal Muslim woman - strikes Ariel Heryanto (2011: 63) as perplexing given the plethora of veiled bodies in the Indonesian mass media since the 1990s. Heryanto attributes the late emergence of the veil to the reaction in Indonesia towards the globalisation of Muslim cultures and the demonisation of Islamic identity brought about by the 'war on terror' (2011: 63). Under these circumstances, the veil was reasserted yet again as a symbol of protest and agency but importantly, not as oppression against women. He adds that there was another more apolitical cultural trend that provided a context for the representation of the veil in Indonesian cinema. In the years preceding the release of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, Islamic symbols and piety became more intensely associated with wealth and higher social status, resulting in more women adopting the veil for socio-cultural rather than purely religious purpose. It would not be far-fetched to assume that cinema absorbs such associations to project visions of glamour and aspiration personified by Muslim characters. As a powerful symbol of Islam and aspirational Muslim femininity, the headscarf is easily absorbed into the circuit of cinematic representation.

Like the veil, representations of Muslim women in Indonesian cinema are enmeshed in the wider discourse on Islam and gender. Films of the *film Islami* genre are often called 'statement films' by filmmakers within and outside the genre alike⁹, films which are made to project certain political positions on a hotly debated issue. As statement films, post-New Order

⁹ Nia Dinata cites controversial and hotly debated Islamic films of the post-New Order period such as *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Tanda Tanya*, both directed by Hanung Bramantyo, as 'statement films' (interview with Nia Dinata, 12 January 2012)

Islamic films often take on the 'gendered' dimension of Islamic issues (van Wichelen, 2010) that require the personification of such issues through Muslim female and male characters. In the early half of the 2000s, polygamy became a contested Islamic issue that captured filmmakers, not least Nia Dinata in *Berbagi Suami* and Hanung Bramantyo in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Nia Dinata's *Berbagi Suami* follows the inner and public lives of three women who, both unwillingly and willingly, enter polygamous relationships. Not all of the female characters in such arrangements are Muslims, but those who are embody the public critique of polygamy: they are women abused by religiously-sanctioned male privilege but utilise bodily and spiritual resistance against the practice (Imanjaya, 2009b).

Ekky Imanjaya's reading of the Muslim women in *Berbagi Suami* implies a quiet rebellion against prevailing expectations of Muslim female behaviour of compliance and submission. The two main Muslim female characters in the film, Salma and Siti, are betrayed and tricked by their husbands into a polygamous relationship. Salma and Siti are restrained by public stigma and financial means from leaving their husband respectively. But Salma's husband passes away from a heart attack while Siti, who utilises her agency, runs away with her co-wife/female lover. For Imanjaya, Dinata's representation of the two women is an exercise in 'realism' and a product of two years of social research on Indonesian women in polygamous relationships (2009b). Rather than an Islamic film, *Berbagi Suami* qualifies as a 'women's film' as it places differences between women, across religious/class/ethnic lines, at the centre of a gender issue (i.e. polygamy) that gripped Indonesia during the period. In the *Reformasi* years, polygamy also became a theme in major Islamic films and a cause célèbre among Islamic clerics, preachers, Islamic scholars, and feminist activists. The sexual politics of polygamy in the Islamic film genre will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The women of *Berbagi Suami* have been hailed as strong but at the expense of the men. A focus on their inner lives adds a nuanced perspective on how their new marital role impacts on their personhood,

marking a significant shift from previous representations of women in Indonesian cinema whose inner lives were rarely if ever scripted (Imanjaya, 2009b). More significantly, the women break away from the 'New Order patriarchal ideology' by no longer acting as the 'medium or conduit for their husband/father's power' (Imanjaya, 2009b). *Berbagi Suami's* multiple narratives on the issue of polygamy have been commented on as being diametrically opposed to the other major film on polygamy, *Ayat-ayat Cinta*¹⁰ (Hatley, 2009). The women who vie for the male polygamist's love in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* depend on him to fulfill their lives. One of them in particular, the Coptic Christian Maria, relies on his love and a marriage proposal to rouse her from a life-threatening coma. In contrast, the women in *Berbagi Suami*, whose narratives are more fleshed out, are less dependent on their husbands.

Current scholarship on the relationship between new constructions of masculinities and Islam in Indonesia points towards debates surrounding polygamous marriage and the 'born-again' Muslim. Female and male media personalities who underwent very public spiritual transformations have capitalised on their religious 'rebirth' in various media and business ventures. For Sonja van Wichelen (2010), discussions on new masculinities cannot be separated from the economic crisis of 1997, the threat of fragmented hegemonic manhood posed by the decline of the New Order, and the possible recourse Islam offers to Indonesian men during 'crises of masculinity' (2010: 91). The strong pro-polygamy stand adopted by men such as the popular Islamic preacher Abdullah Gymastiar, singer-actor Rhoma Irama, and the 'trendy' preacher Ustad Jeffry Al-Buchori (also known as Uje) demonstrates a new form of conservatism that cuts across generations and the boundaries between pop culture and religious education.

A possible precursor to the youthful Islamic masculinities of the post-New Order may be found in highly popular Western-influenced teenage films. The latter years of Suharto's New Order saw a new kind of masculinity

¹⁰ For a further discussion on *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, see Chapters 5 and 6

that emerged from decades of the New Order's often uneven economic development. The new kind of masculinity in question is the ultra-rich teenage boy who is at ease with his Indonesian-ness and Western cultural tastes. The series of films that bears this image of masculinity is *Catatan Si Boy* (Boy's Diary, 1988; 1989, dir. Nasri Cheppy). This youthful pro-consumerist masculinity coheres with the values of the New Order: respect towards elders and tradition, heterosexuality, and male-centric work ethic of productivity (Sen, 1991: 140; Hanan, 2008: 55-56). Boy strikes a balance between the worldly pleasures of sports cars along with the devotion of young women and his Islamic obligations, which makes him a possible precursor to the youthful masculine heroes in Islamic post-New Order cinema.

There are competing views on the emergence of 'new' Muslim masculinities in Indonesian cinema. On the one hand, there is a flawed Muslim masculinity that deliberately departs from previous notions of domineering *Bapak* and freewheeling materialism of teenaged masculinity of the New Order. But on the other hand, scholars have argued that images of Muslim men emerging in Indonesian cinema are gaining in importance in Islamic public life and connote some aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Hoesterey and Clark, 2012: 222). In her study on Muslim performativity in *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, Paramaditha (2010) found that the director's re-writing, or as he describes it 'deconstruction', of the male protagonist Fahri in the film was meant to construct an imperfect Muslim man through his insecurity, innocence, and sense of doubt (Paramaditha, 2010: 82). The masculinity of Fahri joins other secular representations of masculinity in post-New Order cinema who are similarly defined by their lack of assertiveness in handling romantic relationships and conflict.

Fahri's masculinity has parallels with young and reticent heroes in popular non-religious post-New Order films such as *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (What's Up With Love? 2002, dir. Rudy Soedjarwo). As one of the most successful films to emerge since the fall of Suharto, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* features a male romantic lead who is introverted, sensitive, and interested in the deeply introspective art of poetry (2010: 82). In his

rejection of perfect masculinity in his leading man, the director of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* follows the lead of his fellow new generation of young Indonesian filmmakers of the post-New Order who are disillusioned with the carefree masculinity of the commercially successful *Catatan Si Boy* series of films of the late 1980s.

One strand of hegemonic Muslim masculinity in post-New Order Indonesian film has been described as 'pro-women' and gentler than the hypermasculine characterisation of the tough men typical of mainstream Indonesian cinema (Hoesterey and Clark, 2012: 211-212). In their study of prototypical Muslim masculinity in Islamic films, Hoesterey and Clark found that male protagonists are usually pitted against Muslim male antagonists who oppress women. These 'softer' pro-women men in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman in a Turban, 2009, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) protect women from male aggressors not with their fists but with words. As the gentle hero, the male protagonist is the 'renovated' strain of the Islamic male binary and opposite to the 'hard line' Muslim male antagonist (Robinson, 2007 quoted in Hoesterey and Clark, 2012: 214). These Muslim masculinities are described as 'new', but as we will see in my own findings in Chapter 4, there are also instances of hegemonic Islamic masculinities in the New Order period.

Because these gentler Muslim heroes refrain from responding towards violence with aggression, they become the object of harassment and abuse at the hands of other men (Hoestery and Clark, 2012: 215). In *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, the main male protagonist and student in Cairo, Fahri, represents the peace-loving Muslim Indonesian man who stands up against the aggression of abusive and xenophobic Egyptian men who terrorise foreign non-Muslim women. By defending the women from violence, Fahri personifies the moderate Muslim whose cordiality towards white non-Muslim foreigners sets him apart from the notionally despotic Muslim masculinity of the Arab world. Fahri defuses the Egyptian man's aggression with his own unassailable defence: quotations of the Prophet Muhammad who forbade the mistreatment of foreigners in Muslim lands.

Hoesterey and Clark (2012) identify another antithesis to the peace-loving pro-women Muslim masculinity: the misogynist religious male leaders of Islamic schools in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. The titular character of the film, Annisa, suffers at the hands of nearly every man and boy she encounters in her childhood and adulthood. She is denied the position of class president because of her sex, a university education, and dignity by the men of her life. A redeeming masculine figure of her childhood sweetheart and husband is the opposite of the other men. He is patient, pious, and intelligent, the right kind of man for a similarly intelligent and pious woman such as Annisa.

With a few exceptions,¹¹ analyses of representations of Muslim women and men in post-New Order Indonesian cinema neglect to contextualise the place of such representations within the global circuit of images of Muslim societies. This thesis will address this lacuna by demonstrating that images of Muslim women and men in Indonesian cinema are juxtaposed with characters and elements both local and global in order to reinforce the ideal Muslim subjectivity of its Indonesian female and male heroes.

Summary

This chapter has brought together the literature on gender and Islam in Indonesia cinema spanning from the New Order period to the period thereafter. The study of women has long animated the earliest scholarship on Indonesian cinema, in both the Indonesian and English language, often to the exclusion of the study of men in film. Discussions on masculinities, much less representations of transgender subjectivities, in cinema remain minimal. However, current trends of examining gender diversity in film may signal continued interest in the scholarship on masculinities and trans subjectivities in Indonesian cinema. One may even take issue with whether or not a preoccupation with masculinity and femininity with the

¹¹ Ariel Heryanto's 2011 analysis of Fahri in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* situates his identity within the global discourse of Islam and Indonesian Islam's relation to it.

omission of transgender subjectivities demonstrates the reinforcement of the gender binary that marginalises the discourse on transgender and other queer identities.

Representations of women in Indonesian cinema, particularly those in the New Order period, have often been described as centred around the Freudian model of virgin-mother/ virago-whore. That the limited range of feminine representations in Indonesian cinema is a symptom of a lack of women behind the scenes can be attributed to the gender inequality in the political economy of the industry itself. In some cases, the binary model of femininity is a product of changing economic imperatives. Market demands and 'disorderly' women of the 1990s triumphed over New Order regulations on sex and violence contributing to the disintegration of the order-disorder-order narrative cycle upon which the New Order government depended to symbolise its legitimacy.

The film industry is a risk averse industry in which large financial investments are marshalled into making a commercial film. Being risk averse, filmmakers are more inclined to produce narratives that may appeal to the majority of audiences. This may include narratives whose storytelling devices reproduce sexist and titillating material to conform with the assumption that sexual objectification of women sells and that safe images of domestic and demure women do not challenge the viewer's sensibilities. The film industry is also the preserve of the elite that privileges those with greater financial resources. The industry may indeed be a microcosmos of a society where men in general are politically and financially more powerful than women.

Although there exists an intense scholarly and media interest in the veil and the Muslim women who wear them, less attention has been paid to the role of Muslim women in terms of their creative contributions to the cinematic medium in Indonesia. Thus far, the roles of Muslim women have been restricted to onscreen roles in Islamic film and soap opera where their characters must grapple with the conflicting demands of domesticity and the public realm or reduced to emblems and boundary markers of

religious difference. The veil is the most visible visual marker of Muslim femininity and is used obsessively to portray the notional Muslim woman. Although women are not pressured by law to wear the veil in much of Indonesia, the sartorial item has come to be a synecdoche of Islam itself. Unlike Muslim men who are not associated with a visual marker as powerful as the veil, Muslim women become symbolic bearers of Islam and culture.

In contrast, men in Indonesian cinema are bearers of other less visually striking and universal elements. In New Order cinema, they are stoic defenders of the nation or carefree yuppies. Acts of violence belie the hopelessness and anxiety in representations of masculinity in *Reformasi* cinema. More youthful masculinities marked as 'Muslim' are meanwhile argued to be the opposite of the violent *Reformasi* masculinity - supportive of women and gentle in disposition - for purposes necessary in the post-9/11 world. Their masculinity is sometimes mobilised to contrast with the oppressive Muslim man and homosexual Muslim man. As we will see in the next chapter, Islamic films featuring Muslim female and male characters seeking a fulfilling Islamic life are more than just a statement on public debates or used as Islamic teachings. Through various visual codes, narrative conventions, and commercial strategies, these films reveal much about a genre that attempts to present the Islamic faith in a benevolent light and transform its audiences.

Chapter 3

***Dakwah* at the cinema: identifying the generic parameters of Islamic films**

During the fasting month of Ramadan, all Muslims are expected to engage in spiritual reflection and the enhancement of their piety through various rituals. Ramadan is also a period inundated with Islamic consumer and media products to appeal to a presumably more pious market than other times of the year. Films with Islamic content featuring characters on a quest of spiritual fulfillment would have been broadcast on television and played at cinemas throughout Ramadan since the New Order period. But after the success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) in 2008, films about spiritual struggle and other Islamic themes began to step outside the once-a-year 'niche' market and become part of an all-year round, mainstream cinematic experience. *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and the films that followed in the footsteps of its success are also different from their New Order predecessors in their themes, style, and mode of marketing and exhibition.

The spillover of popular representations of Islam in film beyond the month of Ramadan is an effect of the rise of Islamic symbols in the public sphere and popular culture since the late 1990s. Films with Islamic content were made during the New Order period and were consolidating into a recognisable genre with themes of *dakwah* and redemption, and concerned about legendary Islamic figures in history. However, prior to the success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008, these films with Islamic themes were considered risky ventures. Besides lacking the promise of commercial viability, the potential treatment of Islamic matters as entertainment would

prove controversial for filmmakers and audiences alike. Somehow, such views have shifted towards a commercial embrace of Islamic popular culture particularly in the years after 1998.

The meteoric rebirth of *film Islami* during the post-New Order period precipitated by *Ayat-ayat Cinta* signalled the culmination of Islamisation of Indonesian popular culture. *Ayat-ayat Cinta* became one of the most successful film in Indonesia's history, with 3 million viewers within three weeks of release and spurred a stream of other Islamic films. In the following year, two Islamic films, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1* (When Love Glorifies God 1, 2009, dir. Chaerul Umam) and its sequel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 2* (When Love Glorifies God 2, 2009, dir. Chaerul Umam), attracted 3.1 million and 2.0 million viewers respectively, making them the two most successful films of 2009 (Imanjaya, 2009a). Costing 40 billion rupiah (£2.6 million) to make, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1* was also the most expensive film in Indonesian history.

A number of authors agree that the rise in Islamic media and youth consumer trends are also in dialogical relationship with the emergence of a more pious Muslim middle class since 1998 (Fealy, 2008; van Wichelen, 2010; Heryanto, 2011). Since the late 1990s, Islamic piety in Indonesia has become emblematic of elite social status and political affiliation invigorated by a global phenomenon characterised by the revival of both cultural and political Islam (Noorhaidi, 2009: 231). It can be argued here that the *film Islami* genre emerges from the plethora of Islamic cultural products made for a pious but nonetheless acquisitive Muslim middle classes.

In this chapter the questions of when, what, why, and how of *film Islami* will contribute to a better understanding of popular representations of Islam in Indonesia. This chapter will begin with an historical overview of the commercialisation of Islamic teachings or *dakwah* in Indonesian cinema before going into an in-depth analysis of defining the Islamic film genre. An important practice closely associated with *film Islami* is *dakwah* or Islamic preaching. *Dakwah* is widely regarded to be central to the

function of Islamic cinema and media. Derived from the Arabic term *da'wa* to mean call or invitation, *dakwah* in the Indonesian context is a general term to denote efforts to propagate Islam in society. Although *dakwah* is used to convert non-Muslims to Islam, the term is more commonly invoked for the strengthening of the Islamic faith and guiding Muslims to live by Islamic principles (Meuleman, 2011: 236). For the concerns of this thesis, *dakwah* is theorised as a gender-neutral concept, although its effects on Indonesian Muslims in general may be gender specific, such as the strict adherence to Islamic clothing and the ascription to certain codes of morality and behaviours such as gender segregation and acceptance of polygamy.

In defining the Islamic genre, we can better understand the character of Islamic symbols onscreen. On the one hand, Islamic principles and Qur'anic verses used by all Muslims to lead a spiritual and Islamic life are believed to be divine and unchanging. But on the other hand, the need and opportunity to turn these features of Islam and Muslim life into cinematic representations are contingent to specific historical, social, and economic contexts. As much as cinema is a cultural product it is also an economic product whose *raison d'être* and success are subject to lucrative trends for maximised profit. And as I will discuss below, not only is the economic reality a key determinant in the making of *film Islami* but so too is the need for 'authentic' representations of Muslims and their spiritual lives.

While a number of scholars and critics have written on aspects of *film Islami* in Indonesia (Imanjaya, 2009; Sasono, 2011; Heryanto, 2011; Hoesterey and Clark, 2012), there has not yet been a systematic attempt to define *film Islami* as a genre. To address the lack of a detailed exploration into the genre, this chapter sets out to identify the shared features of certain films that contribute to its generic category. A modest attempt at formulating the characteristics of the genre, although not an exhaustive one, is imperative here despite two negating factors. First, the elusive categorical boundaries of the genre and second, the reluctance on the part of filmmakers to categorise their films as Islamic for fear of

pigeonholing their work and alienating certain audiences, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Below, *film Islami* from the New Order period and thereafter will not only be defined within its diegetic boundaries such as its narrative structures, themes, visual and audio aesthetics. Other elements beyond the film text are also considered, namely the publicity strategies and its production ethics. Islamic films of the New Order and post-New Order period share many similarities in purpose, narrative form, visual and audio aesthetics. However, the use of music soundtracks, *YouTube* video clips, and DVD packaging as promotional strategies were common only in Islamic cinema from the 1990s onwards.

This chapter will also build on Katinka van Heeren's view that nascent efforts in the development of Muslim visual ethics in the Reform years mirror the agenda of oppositional Third Cinema (van Heeren, 2012: 121-122). As an oppositional cinema, the Islamic film is a reaction to the perceived assault on the Islamic promotion of peace by immoral elements in mainstream film and the misrepresentation of Muslims in Western media as oppressive and despotic (van Heeren, 2012: 122). Finally, this chapter will outline the challenges filmmakers of Islamic films face through institutional barriers and censorship. Islamic groups as well as the state often exert pressure and threaten to put a stop to film representations of 'hot button' issues that are intertwined with ideas of the nation, Islam, and security. Indonesia may be home to the largest Muslim population in the world but that does not necessarily facilitate the production of Islamic cinema. This chapter will show that the opportunity to present Islamic themes in film is made more complicated when placed in an obstacle course of political and ideological barriers, market forces, and censorship.

Between the purity of *dakwah* and market forces

What is the purpose of Islamic films? How did they come into being? How do Islamic films reconcile their spiritual purpose with commercial ones?

The answers to these questions are organised around the concept and practice of *dakwah* or Islamic preaching. This section is part historical overview of the history of Islamic cinema in Indonesia and part analysis of debates surrounding the meaning of films made for *dakwah*.

Indonesia is not unique in its filmmakers' quest for turning cinema into a mass medium for religious preaching. The rise of Pentecostal 'video-films' in Ghana, the success of Hollywood films such as *Ben Hur* (1959, dir. William Wyler) and *The Passion of Christ* (2004, dir. Mel Gibson), and the popular reception of *Karunamayudu* (*Ocean of Mercy*, 1978, dir. A. Bhimsingh), a Telugu retelling of the story of Jesus, watched by over 10 million in South India are but a few examples testament to the bankable marriage of popular representations of religion and economic know-how (Nayar, 2012).

The Islamic film is an international phenomenon and produced in predominantly Muslim countries other than Indonesia. Turkey, Iran, and Egypt have been producing their own brand of cinema with Islamic aesthetics in recent decades (Abu-Lughod, 1995; Dönmez-Colin, 2004: 3). Films with overt Islamic themes earned attention in Turkey as 'white cinema' in the 1990s when Islamist parties gained political dominance (Dönmez-Colin, 2004: 14). A distinctively Islamist cinema that adhered to *fiqh*-based ideology (Islamic jurisprudence) was promoted in Iran after the 1979 revolution but lasted only until the mid 1980s¹² (Dönmez-Colin, 2004: 40). An international and historical survey of the type of Islamic films and filmmaking practices in these countries and whether they share similar generic parameters with the Indonesian Islamic film genre is a major undertaking and therefore outside the scope of this thesis.

The role of Islam in Indonesian cinema can be traced back to the period of Sukarno's 'Old Order' (1949-1965) when Islamic art and cultural organisations were influential in the development of a Muslim aesthetic in filmmaking. These organisations, such as the Association for Islamic Arts

¹² For a discussion on Islamic cinema in post-revolution Iran, see Naficy (1995).

and Culture (HSBI)¹³ and the Cultural Association of Indonesia, (LESBUMI),¹⁴ emerged in the spirit of pan-Islamism and anti-imperialism spreading across Indonesia and other newly independent Muslim postcolonial nations (Chisaan, 2012: 282). The need for an Islamic cultural expression also arose from the heightened political tensions between the competing ideological strands of Sukarno's political policy – nationalism, religion and Communism or *Nasakom* (Chisaan, 2012: 283).

It was during this period of Muslim consciousness in Indonesian culture when the first Islamic film, *Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh* (The Narrow Bridge, 1959, dir. Asrul Sani) was made, marking the birth of the genre and the phase of the genre's consolidation on which I elaborate in the next section. A few years later, a film about the revolutionary potential of Islam, *Tauhid* (The Oneness of God, 1964, dir. Asrul Sani), was produced by Djamaluddin Malik with the backing of the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Religion and President Sukarno (Chisaan, 2012: 99; Imanda, 2012: 92). *Tauhid* is not only an Islamic film with political undertones made during Sukarno's presidency, but, like the documentary film *Panggilan Nabi Ibrahim* (Ibrahim's Calling, 1964, dir. Misbach Yusa Biran) is also an educational film about the hajj.

The use of cinema for *dakwah*, however, is more vague in its execution. Nevertheless, it was embraced by Indonesia's pioneering filmmakers Asrul Sani and Misbach Yusa Biran who made films for the purpose of conveying the Islamic message in their films, *Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh*, 1959 and *Panggilan Nabi Ibrahim*, respectively. Clerics and religious commentators have often tended to define the *dakwah* film in terms of what it is not, in that it does not have the 'immoral' elements of

¹³ Founded in 1956 and affiliated with the modernist Islamic party, MASJUMI (*Madjelis Sjura Muslimin Indonesia*, Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims), HSBI, (*Himpunan Seni Budaja Islam*, the Association for Islamic Arts and Culture,) was a pioneer in promoting the development of Islamic culture in Indonesia.

¹⁴ *Lembaga Seniman Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia* (LESBUMI, Cultural Association of Indonesia) was founded in 1962 and was the cultural arm of the main traditionalist Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama.

Hollywood cinema and the preoccupation of Indonesian cinema with horror, the supernatural, and erotic scenes (van Heeren, 2012: 117).

In his 1965 essay entitled '*Film sebagai dakwah*' (Film as *dakwah*), the distinguished filmmaker Usmar Ismail urged other filmmakers to 'make films a media of [national] struggle and a media for Islamic proselytising' (Ismail, 1983: 100). *Dakwah* films, he asserts, need not be religious or commercial akin to the 1956 Hollywood blockbuster *The Ten Commandments* but should affirm Muslims as subjects of God. A fellow contemporary of Usmar Ismail, Asrul Sani, however, held a more critical view. Sani argued that all *dakwah* films made during the New Order and the period after were misguided in their approach. For Sani, Indonesian *dakwah* films are preoccupied with ritualistic and dogmatic Islam with the intention of substituting the role of the *kyai* or religious leader. He even rejects the term 'Islamic film', arguing instead that 'all films that go beyond the surface of life are [actually] religious films' (Sani, 2000). The occasionally contradictory explanations regarding the use and constitution of Islamic films as a medium for *dakwah* underline the tensions between the filmmaker's commercial, spiritual, and artistic aims that undergird the production and marketing of films with Islamic themes. The tensions are not easily reconciled, as opinions on what makes a film fit for *dakwah* are as diverse as the interpretations of Islam in Indonesia.

Cinema as a tool for *dakwah* has also been praised by intellectuals outside the film community. In an article written in 1983, the Muslim intellectual Abdurrahman Wahid¹⁵ or as he is more popularly known, Gus Dur, argued that film should be a medium to spread the Islamic faith. He compared the films he had watched while in Egypt in the 1960s with those that were made in Indonesia and found that Indonesian filmmakers presented Islamic matters in a formalistic way that emphasises the facile deployment of Qur'anic verses (Wahid, 1983: 53). For Gus Dur, the audience of the *dakwah* film in Indonesia 'is a congregation attending a

¹⁵ Abdurrahman Wahid was also the president of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001.

sermon about the subordination of science to religious truth' (Wahid, 1983: 53).

The role and moral influence of film in Indonesian society were first officially discussed by Indonesia's National Council of Ulama (MUI) in 1983. The *ulama* condemned the preponderance of violent and sexual content in films produced in and imported into Indonesia during the New Order. Even the very act of cinema-going was regarded to be morally suspect. Most clerics maintained that the darkened ambience of the cinema would encourage illicit sexual behaviour (Bintang, 1983; Jasin, 1985). But as a sign of compromise with the film industry, they suggested instead that films should be used for *dakwah*. As a cinematic model for Islamic preaching, the *ulama* were shown Chaerul Umam's 1982 remake of Asrul Sani's *Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh* (The Narrow Bridge). The MUI's consensus on films shifted by the mid 1980s when the first of a string of Islamic 'mission' films on the early Islamic preachers in Java was released (van Heeren, 2012: 116).

Questions about the winning formula of producing Islamic films and the role of religious authorities began to animate the print media and conferences from 1989 onwards (van Heeren, 2012: 117). While there was an agreement that as experts on Islam, clerics have an important role in Islamic filmmaking to ensure the 'correct' portrayal of Islam, there was uncertainty about the extent of their involvement in the production of a film. Do the *ulamas* only perform as consultants to filmmakers, or do they have a greater leverage in the filmmaking process by deciding what films to make and even becoming actors themselves? (Cahyono, 1989: 20). As a sign of their approval, a number of clerics have acted in 'mission' films to attract spiritually discerning audiences. An example of a *dakwah* film receiving the approval and praise of clerics is *Sembilan Wali* (The Nine Holy Men, 1985, dir. Djun Saptohadi).

The course of *dakwah* in Indonesian cinema did not always run smoothly as Islamic preaching was a sensitive subject during the New Order. The massacre of Communist *abangan* Muslims during the 1965 coup and

subsequent transition into the New Order resulted in the suspicion and rejection of Islam in parts of Java (Hefner, 1987: 540). A description first formulated by Clifford Geertz, *abangan* Muslims are distinguished from the orthodox *santri* class of Muslims by their adherence to a syncretic version of Islam (1976: 126-128). In their response to heightened tensions towards Islam, promoters of *dakwah* employed subtle, non-violent strategies for proselytising. This 'soft' approach to *dakwah* in the 1970s and 1980s was directed towards Muslims who identified as 'Islam KTP' (*Islam Kartu Tanda Penduduk* or Muslim identity card holders), a post-1966 description for non-practising Muslims (Cederroth, 1991: 7).

Thus *dakwah* in Indonesian films is targeted mainly at Muslim audiences who are by default in need of spiritual improvement. The care taken to present a friendly and peaceful image of Muslims in Indonesian popular culture for the purpose of *dakwah* also resulted in the refashioning of the notion of *perjuangan* (struggle) from its connotations of fighting and warfare to the emancipation of the masses in popular representations of Islamic history and figures (Soenarto, 2005: 54). With the suppression of political Islam during the New Order, the use of Islamic symbols in public discourse was exercised with sensitivity. Carefully selected cultural signs of Islamic piety such as well-rehearsed Qur'anic phrases and non-provocative images of mosques were used in popular representations of Islam.

Besides the 'mission' films, the television broadcast of Islamic music programmes was another sign of the successful incorporation of *dakwah* into popular culture in the 1980s. Among the biggest stars of the Islamic pop music scene is the flamboyant Rhoma Irama and his band Soneta Group who inflected Islamic teachings into their brand of *dangdut* music. Popular amongst working class Indonesians, *dangdut* is a hybrid of Malay, Arab, and Indian musical styles (Ishadi, 2011: 25). *Dakwah* is central to Rhoma Irama's music and later, films (see Chapter 4 for a further discussion). He acknowledges the 'unconventional and controversial' combination of music and proselytising which is why he feels duty-bound to clearly explicate how *dakwah* in music and cinema is accomplished

(Irama, 2011: 185). Despite his best efforts, however, Rhoma Irama's oeuvre has been dismissed as low class, trashy, and bizarre by Indonesian cultural and political elites (Frederick, 1982: 124). Rhoma's flamboyant image as a righteous man of Islamic *dangdut* has mellowed in recent decades during which time he reinvented himself as a firebrand conservative political figure of the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*).

The period between the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the contest over the propagation of Islamic teachings between government-supported Islamic groups such as the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*, ICMI) and their theologically conservative rival, the Indonesian Counsel for Islamic Predication (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*, or DDII), one of Indonesia's largest organisations for reformist Islam. The politicisation of *dakwah* during the period was inextricably linked with the use of print media for Islamic propaganda and the consolidation of political power (Hefner, 1997: 87-88). Returning Islamic scholars from Western Europe and the United States who were aligned with ICMI and who promoted a tolerant and pluralist interpretation of Islam were appointed to key government positions in the Department of Religion, much to the objection of DDII (Hefner, 1997: 86). The influence of these tensions on the production of Islamic popular culture and film is less clear. However, competing Islamic messages and images of Muslim figures as conveyed in Indonesian films are nonetheless informed by the political Islamic rivalry in Indonesian mass media of the period.¹⁶ After the resignation of Suharto and the end of the New Order in 1998, Indonesia underwent a period of decentralisation which saw the growing influence of sharia laws, Wahhabism and radicalisation. The post-New Order years saw the resurgence of political Islam composed of multiple Islamic ideologies, ranging from democratic and traditional to conservative and violent extremists competing for political legitimacy in relation to the state.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Ekky Imanjaya, 10 October 2014.

Towards the late 1990s and early 2000s, the formula of *film Islami* as a serious medium for preaching would regularly absorb elements of horror and the supernatural. An Islamic teacher or *kyai*-cum-exorcist would often make an appearance in *dakwah* films of the period defeating evil spirits and restoring the moral order (van Heeren, 2007: 213). Similar to the role of the Catholic priest in Hollywood religious horror, the image the *kyai* became commonly associated with the guardian of the spiritual world, protecting the masses from supernatural evil. He personifies the *deus ex machina*, armed with Qur'anic verses and steely determination to defeat ghosts and demons that threaten the masses. The inclusion of the *kyai* in horror films in the 1990s and 2000s stems from a regulation by the National Film Council to ensure that the 'devoutness and glorification of the One and Only God' prevails in a conflict between good and evil (Van Heeren, 2007: 214).

Films such as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008 and the others that shortly followed were seen as filling the moral vacuum created by a mass media dominated by elements of sex, horror, and superstition. The popularity of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008 is therefore argued to be a testimony to the public's anxieties about widespread moral corruption in the media (Widodo, 2008). Ariel Heryanto (2011: 75), however, holds another view. He suggests that the youthful and middle-class characters in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* struck a chord with its biggest audience who were similarly young, middle-class, and religious. By this point in Indonesia's film history, there have been many films tackling a diversity of Islamic themes prompting scholars to argue that as a genre, Islamic cinema had come of age.

In what ways is *film Islami* a genre? What makes a *film Islami* Islamic? Cynical film critics in Indonesia argue that a film becomes Islamic when veiled characters are featured prominently. The next section, however, makes a case for an Islamic film genre beyond the depiction of veils and even turbans. The aesthetic and narrative patterns associated with films of an Islamic nature, along with their promotional strategies, are examined to further refine the definition of the genre.

Film Islami as a genre

At present, *film Islami* goes by several other names and descriptions: *film religi* or religious films, *film bernafaskan Islam* (films that breathe Islam), *film bernuansa Islam* (Islamically nuanced film) and lastly, *film dakwah*. Despite its contested allusions to being 'Islamic', *film Islami* is a helpful generic term to categorise a host of films about Muslims who try to be better Muslims. There is as yet no consensus on what constitutes *film Islami* as a genre and this is partly because scholars, film critics, and filmmakers have contrasting definitions and views on what makes a film Islamic or whether such films may be part of a genre. For this reason, it is necessary to clarify here that 'genre' in this usage refers not to shared characteristics of films that are obvious or discernable 'out there' through a lay perspective (Stam, 2000: 14). Nor does it rely solely on the naming practices used by filmmakers. Rather, genre is understood as a 'construction of analysts' (Stam, 2000: 14) and 'an *essential critical tool* for understanding the ways films are produced and consumed' (Langford, 2005: vii, my emphasis). Thus, as a construction of analysts and a critical tool, genre is therefore identified through particular genre-forming factors, such as specific usage of symbols and music and modes of advertising for instance, in order to justify the usage of 'genre' and to demonstrate that the Islamic films can indeed be examined and constructed as a genre.

Drawing from cinematic conventions of films from the 1970s to 2011, this section aims to define the Islamic film genre in a more exploratory sense, without dividing the genre into two periods; the New Order and post-New Order. This section is written with evidence that Islamic films from the two periods share many similarities unless demonstrated otherwise. The films discussed in this and subsequent sections may fall under the category of 'religious propaganda' especially when it is made explicitly for the purpose of *dakwah* or the propagation of Islamic teachings and ideas (such as *Kisah Anak-anak Adam* or *Sembilan Wali*, for instance). However, not all do and when they are not made for the explicit indoctrination of their Muslim audiences, they demonstrate other qualities, whether audio-visual

or marketing strategies that appeal to Muslims, that mark certain films as belonging to the Islamic genre.

Following the controversy of post-9/11 films¹⁷ that misrepresent Islam and Muslims like *Fitna* (Theo van Gogh, 2004) and *Submission* (Geert Wilders, 2008) in Europe, Tito Imanda argued that *film Islami* should be made to be more than 'a representation of Muslims practising their faith' (2012: 91). Another film critic, Ekky Imanjaya, believes that Islamic films must have a deeper impact on audiences at a spiritual level, guiding them towards doing good and strengthening one's faith (Imanjaya, 2009a). In light of the anti-Islamic sentiments emanating from right-wing politics in Europe and the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Eric Sasono takes a different view by suggesting that Islamic films should portray Islam and its adherents positively (2011a: 2-3).

Sasono argues that the Islamic film genre's aim can be achieved in two ways. First, in order to qualify as an Islamic film, teachings about the Islamic faith should be woven into the narrative to give the viewer a better understanding of the religion. Second, such films should encourage the viewer's emotional connection to the Islamic values and empathy for the spiritual development of the characters in the film (Imanda, 2012: 91). In contrast, the producer of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* and the director of Mizan Publications,¹⁸ Putut Widjanarko asserts that films about Muslims enhancing their spirituality are actually more universal in their themes and should not be labelled as 'Islamic'.¹⁹

I would expand the definition of *film Islami* beyond its audience or effects-oriented definitions outlined above. These definitions of the Islamic film genre can be linked to films made for the purpose of *dakwah* or religious propaganda in that Islamic messages are propagated via the cinematic

¹⁷ The influence of the aftermath of 9/11 on Islamic films in Indonesia will be explored in further detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁸ Mizan Production is a leading visual and print media company of Islamic films, television programmes, and books based in Jakarta.

¹⁹ Interview with Putut Widjanarko in Jakarta on 28th December 2011.

medium to improve the faith of its viewers. However, this section aims to depart from an audience and effects-oriented description of the genre because defining *film Islami* based on the purpose of instilling religious doctrine in audiences harks back to the early media theory of the 'hypodermic model' of reception. The model proposes that audiences receive media messages in a unilateral way and become directly affected by its reception (Hodkinson, 2010: 73). Following this view, film is regarded as a neutral medium upon which religious messages are imprinted. Furthermore, this definition of *film Islami* also negates the multiple and often opposing views of what is 'Islamic'. For instance, the widely regarded 'Islamic' film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* has been criticised by some Muslim clerics and audiences as having nothing to do with Islam at all (Heryanto, 2011: 94).

This section will present the case for my definition of the Islamic film genre: films made for the purpose of *dakwah* through the display of diagetic and extra-diagetic audio-visual and commercial conventions that mark them as 'Islamic' by filmmakers, critics, and audiences alike. As I will show below, the *film Islami* genre exhibits a pattern of iconography that emerges out of repetition and extends beyond its intended spiritual effect on audiences. The element of repetition and hence its recognisability are central to the identification of a film genre. But the differences between films under the same generic rubric are also crucial for the development and longevity of a genre (Neale, 2000: 173).

Rather than a genre principally defined to portray Muslims in a positive light and guide its audiences down the straight moral path, my definition of *film Islami* is drawn from a corpus of films about an individual or a group of people who overcome their spiritual struggle through Islamic principles. The Islamic film genre can be recognised through the incorporation of Qur'anic verses in the dialogue and the direct engagement by its characters with a set of Islamic symbols, such as the mosque, the veil, and the Islamic boarding school. For most other film genres, the spiritual ethics of production is barely considered as an element that contributes to the genre's recognisable attributes. In the case of *film Islami*, the Islamic

integrity of its filmmaker, actors, funders, exhibition, and filming practices are sometimes considered crucial to the film's association as a medium for *dakwah*. However, as discussed in the previous section, both the definition of *dakwah* and the Islamic film exist in a dialectical tension between filmmakers and their audiences.

The commercial success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* prompted the production of a string of big-budgeted films with Islamic content with unprecedented frequency; four a year in 2009, three in 2010, and four in 2011.²⁰ These films which share many conventions and elicit similar commercial responses from audiences can be seen as belonging to a genre. Film genres with a relatively lucrative track record usually generate the production of other similar films. The making of a film in a similar style ensures 'a financial guarantee' for filmmakers, as 'generic movies are in a sense always pre-sold to their audiences because viewers possess an image and an experience of the genre before they actually engage with any particular instance of it' (Maltby, 1995: 112). Therefore, the 'drives of genre are primarily industrial, and genre films lay bare the poetics of the marketplace' (Williams, 2005: 17).

For the time being, the identification of *film Islami* as a genre appears robust. With regard to Hollywood cinema, Jim Collins has identified three stages in genre formation: consolidation, the 'golden age', and decline. In the consolidation phase, specific narrative and visual conventions come together to form a recognisable configuration of features that correspond to a stable set of audience expectations (Collins, 1993: 246). This phase is followed by the 'golden age' during which the interplay between familiar features in films and stabilised audience expectations become subject to elaborate variations and permutations to great critical and financial success. The decline of a genre occurs when 'the played out conventions dissolve either into self-parody or self-reflexivity' (Collins, 1993: 246). The sporadic release of films with Islamic content between 1959 to 1998 in

²⁰ In 2009; *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1 and 2*, *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*, and in 2010: *Khalifah*, *Sang Pencerah*, and *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* in 2011: *Tanda Tanya*, *Ummi Aminah*, *Hafalan Shalat Delisa* and *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'abah*.

Indonesia may point towards the genre's consolidation. By virtue of the trail of generic films their success generated, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2 can be regarded as definitive Islamic films making the films made between 2008 and 2011 representative of *film Islami's* golden age. It remains to be seen how the genre manifests in its decline. At the time of writing in 2013, a few more Islamic films are still being made exploring the lives of Islamic figures (*Sang Kyai*, *The Kyai*, 2013) and forgettable love stories (*Cinta Suci Zahrana*, *Zahrana's Sacred Love*, 2012, and *La Tahzan (Jangan Bersedih)*, *Don't Be Sad*, 2013) although they lack the headline-grabbing novelty of previous films.

Genre films must also be an interplay of textual familiarity and innovation with a strong and clear generic structure that the target audience can recognise. In the case of Islamic films, the target audience is the spiritually discerning viewer whose interest is piqued through their recognition of the multiple generic structural cues exhibited in the film's sartorial codes, film title, previews, synopsis, film music, and other elements distinguished as generic parameters that I will discuss below. Genres tend to be recognised not just by the corpus of similar films but through their advertising, reviews, and merchandising before one watches a film because, as Richard Maltby argues, the generic categories 'have a broader cultural resonance' (1995: 107). How does the *film Islami* genre demonstrate its cultural resonance beyond an individual film? All films in the *film Islami* genre prominently feature very recognisable Islamic symbols – such as the mosque, Qur'anic recitations, prayer, and Islamic ethics of everyday behaviour, and their incorporation, both explicit and implicit, into the narrative of the film (Imanjaya, 2009a; Imanda, 2012: ; Sasono, 2012).

Clothing offer important visual codes to cinema audiences of the culture, time, and space of where scenes in a film are set. For Rachel Dwyer, the Islamicate Indian films, or Indian films which prominently feature Muslim characters and customs from a Mughal past, exhibit three main characteristics that are associated with Muslim cultures – Urdu language and its historical court culture, *qawwali* and *ghazal* songs and music, and 'Islamicate' clothing – small caps, the *sharwani* (a type of frock coat), fez

hats, and the *pardah* (Dwyer, 2006: 110-111). In a similar way, Indonesian cinema with Islamic themes utilise sartorial codes through the types of veils, turbans, and tunics worn by its characters to emphasise their piety and social status.

The veil and its more specific forms in Indonesia, the *jilbab* (tightly worn headscarf), *kerudung* (loose headscarf), and *cadar* (face veil) are the most recognisable signifiers of Muslim female identity. Each of the veil types have different cultural and political connotations in Indonesia and have come to signify the level of piety and religious affiliations. Perhaps as a way of defying conventions, not all films feature characters who demonstrate their piety through Muslim attire. Films such as *Cin(T)a* (Love, 2009, dir. Sammaria Simantunjak) is about an interfaith romance between a pious Muslim woman and Christian man but there are no characters who habitually wears the headscarf, not least the main female character. Films that defy this particular Islamic film convention are rare and considering that *Cin(T)a* is rarely credited as an Islamic film by critics, the press, and audiences, it should certainly not be considered exemplary of the genre.

When and where films are exhibited indicate further characteristics of a film genre. Such a case for *film Islami* can be made here. Although Islamic films are now shown in cinemas throughout the year, certain big-budget films are still released as special events during the Islamic celebration of Eid ul-Fitr, a religious holiday that takes place after the fasting month of Ramadan. For instance, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* and *Sang Pencerah* premiered on Eid Ul-Fitr in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Older Islamic films are usually screened on television during Ramadan as a spiritual respite from a year of spiritually unproductive entertainment.

Films with Islamic content have been known to be shown for prayer congregations within the vicinity of a mosque.²¹ According to film critic Eric Sasono, cinema audiences of Islamic films expect cinema spaces to

²¹ Interview with Aditya Gumay on 3rd February 2012.

reflect the Islamic spirit of the film. Some viewers of *film Islami* have complained that women and men sit together in the cinema theatre. Instead, they argue that gender segregation should be imposed and that women and men enter through separate entrances. To discourage covert mixing between the sexes, they recommend that film theatres be bright rather than conventionally dark during a screening.²²

Many Islamic films display visual conventions of the genre right from the outset of the film through the depiction of mosques and holy sites. Films that begin with scenes showing places of worship communicate to audiences that sacred spaces are the characters' primary surroundings or at least have a particular significance to them. Often, the buildings emerge before the characters themselves, underscoring the centrality of Islamic holy sites to the film.

The opening scenes of Islamic 'mission' films from the New Order period are preoccupied with Islamic places of worship. In the films about the nine holy men of Java made in the mid 1980s, the building of the Great Mosque in Demak, a symbol of Islam's establishment in Java, and the shrines to the holy men, dominate the opening scenes. In these films, the monuments of worship visually anchor the characters to a spiritual space. For instance, *Sunan Gunung Jati* (1985, dir. Bay Isbahi), about the eponymous Javanese mystic, begins with lingering scenes of shrines in Cirebon erected in the memory of various mystics. The scenes are accompanied with haunting gamelan music, melding together local culture with mysticism, Islam, and ideas about the nation.

Ummi Aminah (Mother Aminah, 2011, dir. Aditya Gumay) begins with aerial shots of a mosque and then scenes of the titular character giving a sermon to her all-female congregation (FIGURE 2). The aerial shots continue to hover above her congregation, a sea of headscarfs, emphasising her influence as a popular preacher amongst pious women.

²² Interview with Eric Sasono, on 30th January 2012.



FIGURE 2 Still from an opening scene of *Ummi Aminah*
(Mother Aminah, 2011, dir. Aditya Gumay).

The opening credits of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* (Mother Wants To Go On the Hajj, 2009, dir. Aditya Gumay) are imposed over tightly shot scenes of the Ka'abah in Mecca being painted with oils by the main character of the film, Zeinal. Street vendor Zeinal and his elderly mother are too poor to finance a pilgrimage to Mecca, the final wish of his mother before she passes away. But images of the various holy sites in Mecca which Zeinal's mother flicks through in a picture book are enough to bring her 'closer' to Mecca and the act of pilgrimage.

Extra-diagetic chanting or *zikir* may occur during a particularly dramatic, tense, or suspenseful scene, signalling a moral conflict on the verge of resolution. It also accentuates the religious 'mood' of the film. The near-constant chanting in the soundtrack of Chaerul Umam's *Al-Kautsar* (Abundance, 1977) accompanies nearly every major turning points in the film. In a gripping scene, the amoral thug in *Al-Kautsar* suddenly regains his moral direction, prays to God to the bewilderment of his family, and then sets out to punish his treacherous boss by burning his hut down. Throughout this astonishing climax, the film is set to the repetitive Islamic chanting of 'There is no God but Allah', as if redeeming the villain who later redeems himself. In the climax of the 2009 film *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*, Zeinal's desperate inner voice chanting his praise to God after winning a lottery ticket to Mecca dominates the audio-sphere of the film. But this

rousing soundtrack of Zeinal's inner chanting comes to an abrupt end when he is suddenly hit by a passing car.

Often the film title alone implies the religious character of a film. For instance, there are film titles that indicate some engagement between the characters with holy structures: *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'abah* (Under the Protection of the Ka'abah, 2011, dir. Hanny Saputra), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Inside the Mihrab of Love,²³ 2011, dir. Habiburrahman El Shirazy). The 2008 film title *Kun Fayakun* (God Wills It, And It Is So, dir. Haji Yusuf Mansur) is a popular Qur'anic verse on divine will and fate. Other film titles are peppered with terms for rituals and objects with Islamic connotations such as the *sorban* (turban worn by religious male leaders), *tasbih* (rosary), *syahadat* (vow of the faithful), and *doa* (prayer). They do not necessarily appear in the film but are enough to fulfill expectations of the genre²⁴.

The times when Qur'anic verses are delivered in a film and to the audience indicate the moment when a *film Islami* as a medium for *dakwah* becomes noticeably clear. When a religious dilemma is at stake, a character will dispense Qur'anic words of wisdom in a direct address to the audience. Such scenes break the fourth wall as the character appears to be speaking to the audience of the film. For instance the direct address occurs in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani) when the influential teacher, Haji Wali (played by the director himself), makes a case for the peaceful coexistence of different religions. In a close-up towards the audience/camera, he recites the Qur'anic phrase, 'Your faith is your answer, and my faith is mine'²⁵ (see

²³ *Mihrab* refers to the alcove or niche inside a mosque where the imam or head of the mosque would lead prayers.

²⁴ However, in some rare examples, film titles which contain the term 'doa' are not explicitly Islamic at all. Usmar Ismail's historical film *Darah dan Doa* (Lit. Blood and Prayer, or The Long March, 1950) is about the Siliwangi Division of the National Army's long retreat from Yogyakarta to West Java in 1948 and the eventual establishment of the Indonesian republic in 1950. The film does not make a reference to the positive role of Islam in nationalist struggles and not regarded by scholars and critics alike as an Islamic film.

²⁵ '*Bagi mu agama mu, bagi ku agama ku*' from the Qur'an (109: 1-6).

FIGURE 3). A similar tightly shot scene of Islamic advice takes place in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* when the leading man Fahri seeks the consultation of his best friend about polygamy to save the life of a woman. Looking slightly away from the audience, Fahri's friend sagely reiterates a decree from the Qur'an, to 'only take another wife if you can be fair to each of them.'

Commercial and marketing strategies of the Islamic film genre

Film genres are not just constructed based on the similarities shared between films alone but also concerned with the public and commercial discourse in which the films operate. The public and commercial discourse constitute the discursive environment that John Ellis calls the film's 'narrative image' (Ellis, 1992: 13). A film's narrative image refers to indicators of a film's characteristics built by the discourses of a film's publicity. A film's narrative image emerges from the 'inter- textual relay' (Lukow and Ricci, 1984: 29) that occurs between the film and labels generated by public expectation and critics. Inter-textual relay is formed through the 'discourses of publicity, promotion, and reception that surround films, [which] includes both trade and press reviews' (Neale, 2000: 2).

Elements of a film's narrative image; including advertisements, trailers, pre-release publicity, stills, theme songs, and film posters, perform as indicators of the general characteristics of an Islamic film. Like films of other genres, an Islamic film would be written about and reviewed in print and online newspapers, magazines, and blogs. Big-budget Islamic films by well-known filmmakers enjoy media attention well before their release through the publication of articles detailing events behind the scenes. Both *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* enjoyed heavy press coverage before release and took advantage of the prevailing promotional strategies of contemporary Indonesian films. As pre-release publicity, nearly all films in the post-New Order period have brief trailers or previews available for public viewing on official websites or on the video sharing website YouTube.



FIGURE 3 Haji Wali (Asrul Sani) delivers a Qur'anic message of tolerance ('Your faith is your answer, and my faith is mine') in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani).

Equally common in the marketing of films with Islamic themes is the soundtrack and more significantly, the theme song of the film performed by a popular singer or group. Theme songs and soundtrack albums operate as cross-promotional tools that financially benefit filmmakers, production houses, music performers, and record companies. The identification of a specific song with a film is a useful commercial device and if the song is popular it allows for an *immediate aural* identification with the film (Beeman, 1988: 10). Films with Islamic content in the post-New Order period depart dramatically from their New Order counterparts through their more consistent use of the cross-promotional properties of soundtrack albums and theme songs sung by popular singers and bands. The reliance on theme songs and soundtrack albums used for the promotion of a film is a reflection of the contemporary global trends and structures of film marketing. Theme songs now feature prominently in marketing strategies alongside posters and trailers of the films, reinforcing allusions to the genre's characteristics.

Rather than the traditional Islamic music genre of *nasyid* or *qasidah*, the theme songs of many if not all films of the post-New Order *film Islami* genre adopt the mainstream pop musical form but come incorporated with lyrical references to God and Islamic belief. And following the convention of pop songs in the post-MTV age, theme songs of Islamic films are also performed in often lavishly produced music videos. The titles of the film's primary theme songs are often the same as the film title themselves as in the case of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* films. Both song and film titles evoke love (*cinta*) and longing for God. Love is mentioned numerous times in Qur'anic verses, but the expression of love is a devotional one ascribed to God rather than a romantic form of love between people.²⁶ Whether intentionally or not, the films and their theme songs can exploit the slippage between devotional love and romantic love for another individual as a means of appealing to audiences who have enjoyed secular love stories such as *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (What's Up With Love, 2002, dir. Rudy Sodjarwo) and *Eiffel I'm In Love* (2003, dir. Nasry Cheppy). Furthermore, the preponderance of love in film titles and romantic plots in *film Islami* may be a reflection of a need for an Islamic version of popular films about young love.

The lucrative potential of the Islamic film genre has attracted the contributions of popular singers and songwriters who had not previously been associated with Islamic music. Melly Goeslaw, one of the bestselling singer-songwriters of film soundtrack albums, has produced songs for several Islamic films, including *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, and *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (Zahrana's Sacred Love, 2012, dir. Chaerul Umam). Goeslaw has also collaborated with Opick, a popular male singer of Islamic music in the production of film theme songs.

²⁶ An excerpt from the lyrics of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* by Melly Goeslaw:

Bisikkan doaku, Dalam butiran tasbih, Kupanjatkan pintaku padamu Maha Cinta, Tak bisa kupaksa walau hatiku menjerit.

Whisper my prayers, In the beads of my rosary, I convey my wishes to you,
Great Love, I cannot coerce [it] even as my heart cries out.*

*My translation

Before writing and performing theme songs for Islamic films, Melly Goeslaw was more well known as a singer-songwriter of theme songs in secular mainstream Indonesian films. After her conversion to Islam, Goeslaw claimed that she had been inspired by her pilgrimage to the Middle East to write songs for Islamic films (Mustholih, 2011). By writing and singing lyrics of an Islamic nature and professing her spiritual motivations behind doing so, Goeslaw's media persona is 'born again' from an edgy singer-songwriter to one less edgy and more in touch with her spiritual side.

Film posters and DVD covers of the Islamic film genre are not just for the purpose of advertising, but represent a singular visual, if highly stylised, snapshot of the film's content. Krishna Sen (1982: 18) and Karl Heider (1991: 117) found that advertising for New Order films often exploited eroticised images of women's bodies to sell films with the promise of sexual intrigue for the male gaze. The advertising that aimed to fulfill this promise usually featured images of women in provocative poses and various states of undress reflecting the inequality of gender and sexuality at work in the Indonesian film industry. In contrast to the sensationalised depiction of women in Indonesian film posters to titillate audiences, promotional posters of Islamic films are purposefully more sedate.

The film poster for *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (FIGURE 4) features a woman in active pose, rather than a passive, eroticised one. In the poster, the protagonist Annisa is on a rampant horse, a heroic posture reminiscent of portraits of emperors, kings, and war generals of centuries past. Annisa's triumphant pose is at once a remarkable and deliberate promotional gesture to suggest what the film has in store for audiences. The depiction of women in *film Islami* posters does not follow the visual logic of the film posters and advertising described by Sen. Instead of focusing on the female body and its sexualisation, posters of the *film Islami* genre may also feature the upper body or only the face highlighting the headscarf of the female protagonists.

In the case of Nurman Hakim's *Khalifah* (2011, FIGURE 5), the promotional poster features a face behind the face veil with only the eyes of the eponymous female character visible. The poster aims to showcase the novelty of the film's subject matter, the face veil, but reinforces aspects of Orientalism. An image of a Muslim woman reduced to a pair of eyes is a touchstone of Orientalist and Islamophobic assumptions of how the veil erases the personhood of its wearer. It is similar to images that connote the Islamic Other in other non-cinematic visual media, such as book and magazine covers, and news articles on Muslim women and the Arab world. Through its visual link with other forms of visual media, the film *Khalifah* best illustrates the way film posters may construct the narrative image of the film.



FIGURE 4 Film poster for *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman in the Turban, 2009, dir. Hanung Bramantyo).

In other instances, Islamic films follow the visual logic of posters of television dramas, with the main characters next to each other in the manner of a theatrical production (see FIGURES 6, 7, 8, and 9). The posters of Islamic films with romantic overtones prominently highlight the spiritual glow of the romantic couple while featuring little to no physical contact between them.

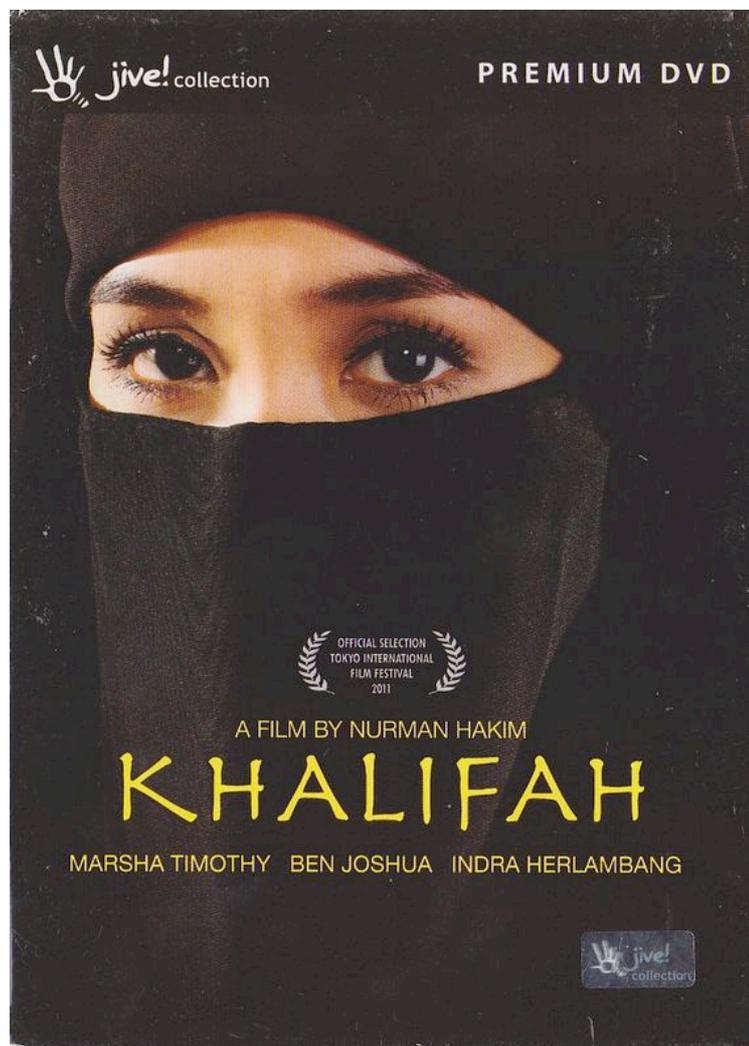


FIGURE 5 DVD cover of *Khalifah* (2011, dir. Nurman Hakim).

The DVD packaging are spaces for Islamic endorsements. If we were to pick up a DVD copy of *Mengaku Rasul* (Self-Proclaimed Prophet, 2008, dir. Helfi Kardit), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* or *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* for instance, we may find no synopsis of the film as one would normally expect on the back of an Indonesian DVD sleeve. In lieu of a synopsis is a list of endorsements by professional preachers, clerics, and politicians on the film's superior quality and 'realism'. Like the carefully selected text on film posters, sound-bites or snippets of praise on the DVD sleeve are

crucial to selling a film. Because of their brevity, snippets of text praising the film's fine delivery of the Islamic message immediately appeal to discerning consumers who are looking for a quality Islamic film.²⁷



FIGURE 6 Film poster for *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Glorifies God, 2009, dir. Chaerul Umam).

²⁷ Examples of sound bites include* :

'This film is extraordinary. Hopefully it will be included into the canon of Indonesia's best films' - Ustaz Jefri Al-Bukhori on *Mengaku Rasul*.

'This is excellent. One of its strengths is its Islamic message of change and appreciation for women' - Prof Din Syamsuddin, the chair of Muhammadiyah on *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*.

'I cried seven times when watching this film' - the entertainer Helmy Yahya on *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*.

*All my translation



FIGURE 7 Film poster for *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Inside the Mihrab of Love, 2010, dir. Habiburrahman El Shirazy).

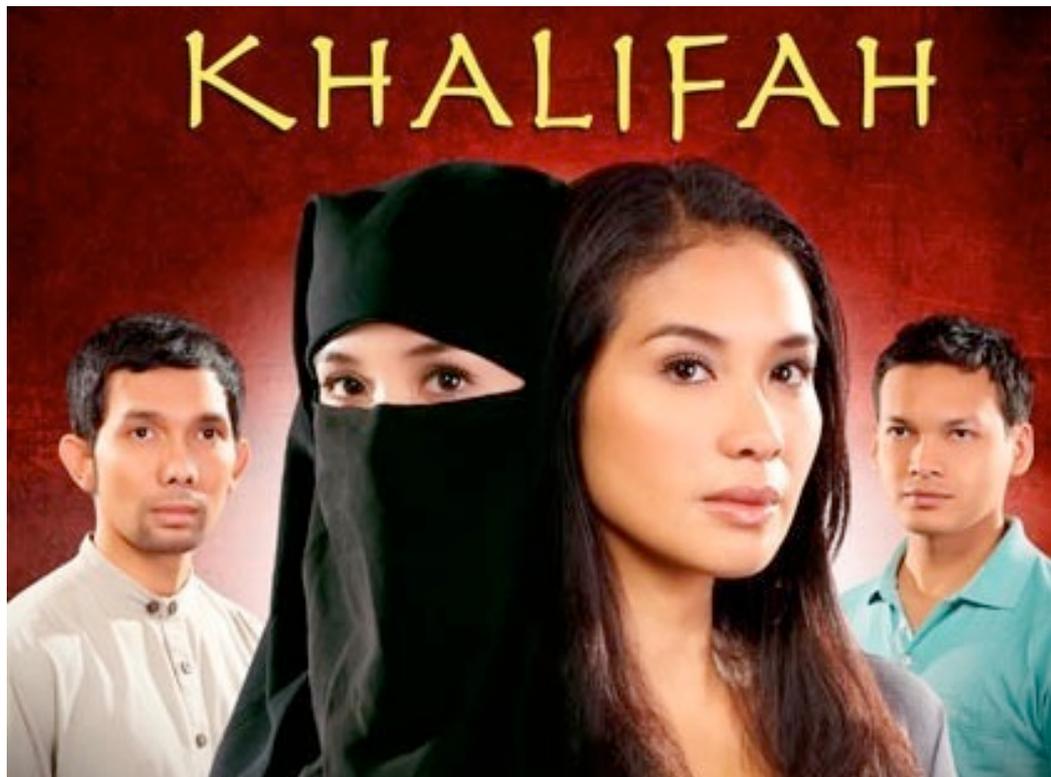


FIGURE 8 Film poster for *Khalifah* (2010, dir. Nurman Hakim)



FIGURE 9 Film poster for *Di Bawah Langit* featuring the Islamic singer Opick in the middle (Underneath the Skies, 2010, dir. Opick).

It may seem as if I am casting a wide net across films that share significant distinguishing features. But the boundaries of genre are far from fixed or precise. Films with Islamic content have the capacity to ‘respond’ to the media environment characterised by a shift in audience expectations, narrative procedures, and stylistic emphasis.

Also, films that may be recognised as characteristically Islamic can sometimes fall under different categories of film depending on their shared attributes with other films that do not have religious themes (Sasono, 2011b: 174). The marketing of films such as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* as films adapted from bestselling novels place them under the same marketing rubric as *Eiffel I'm In Love* (2003, dir. Nasri Cheppy). New Order Islamic films such as *Tjoet Nha Dhien* (1988, dir. Eros Djarot), the Javanese holy men or ‘mission’ films, and *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani), also belong to the historical film genre or historical biopics. As highlighted earlier, the horror or supernatural genre in the 1990s and early 2000s became linked with representations of Islam (van Heeren, 2007: 212).

The ability of Islamic films to absorb elements from other genres confirms that genres are actually less categorical and more open-ended. Frank Krutnick (1991: 8) reminds us that ‘the boundaries between genres are by

no means fixed and precise, and moreover a genre cannot simply be defined in terms of the elements it contains'. He adds:

Rather than seeing genre as a strictly rule-bound context, then, one should stress that any process of generic designation locates very broadly defined sets of discursive configurations, narrative procedures and stylistic emphases (Krutnick, 1991: 8).

A film may be Islamic because it adheres to an ethical framework of production. The ethics of film production is a unique feature of the Islamic film genre as a means of legitimising its 'Islamic' status and promotion as a film for *dakwah*. The next section outlines the various attempts at developing a Muslim ethic of filmmaking in the New Order period up to the years of Reform and thereafter. It discusses how the Islamic ethics of film production was thought to be a solution to moral decay in the media. How does one make films the Islamic way? Who can make and star in them? How are they financed?

Making films in an 'Islamic' way

Not all Islamic films are made in the 'Islamic' way, in that they adhere to guidelines issued by the MUI and promote the piety of its production crew and cast. With the exception of the MUI's approval, approaches to producing films of the Islamic genre are not officially Islamic by any means and neither is there one Islamic way of making films. But as this section will show, making films in an 'Islamic' way depends much on the filmmaker's discretion as having fulfilled an ethical framework that is compatible with their interpretation of Islam.

All films in Indonesia, however, are subject to production regulations to protect citizens from consuming material deemed blasphemous under Islamic law. Because of the restriction in Islam against the visual depictions of God, the prophet Muhammad, his family members, and other prophets, Indonesian films with Islamic elements are rarely about divine

beings, prophets or even stories from the Qur'anic texts. For these reasons, Sasono (2013b: 43) argues that Indonesian films about the lives of Muslim individuals and communities are not commensurable with the typologies of Indian Hindu and Hollywood Christian films which bring into focus gods, prophets and tales from sacred texts. Due to these restrictions, the Islamic film genre is very rarely about prophets or the personhood of God.

One filmmaker managed to circumvent production regulations regarding the depiction of Islamic prophets and their family members. The first Indonesian film to be based on Qur'anic stories about prophets was the 1988 production *Kisah Anak-anak Adam* (The Story of Adam's Children, dir. Ali Shahib). *Kisah Anak-anak Adam* is a retelling of the story of Adam's rivalrous sons, Qabil and Habil, who fight over their sister, Iqlima, with tragic results. The film's release coincided with the issuing of a fatwa²⁸ by the MUI on 30 May 1988 against the depiction of Islamic prophets and their family members in the media and film (Sukoyo, 1988). Ali Shahib, the film's director, evaded the fatwa by showing only the silhouettes of Adam and Eve in the beginning of the film though the actors playing Adam and Eve's four children were on full display. Curiously, the depiction of the prophet Adam's four children; Qabil, Habil, Iqlima, and Labuza, were allowed by the National Fatwa Council without censorship.

Ali Shahib took pains to establish the touchstones of Islamic filmmaking for the purpose of *dakwah*. Before the shooting of the film *Kisah Anak-anak Adam* began, the director led the actors and members of the production crew in prayer (Sukoyo, 1988). He was motivated to make a cinematic sermon, incorporating Qur'anic verses into the film with the belief that cinema can be used for preaching (Sukoyo, 1988). Film, he asserts, is an alternative, if more popular, way of preaching to audiences who were more keen to go to the cinema than to the mosque.

²⁸ A fatwa is a legal edict or learned interpretation on issues pertaining to Islamic law that a qualified Islamic jurist or mufti can issue.



FIGURE 10 A publicity editorial for Ali Shahab's 1988 film *Kisah Anak-anak Adam* (The Story of Adam's Children) entitled 'Cara Lain Untuk Berdakwah' (Another Way To Preach, my translation).

Films about the lives of the early disseminators of Islam in Java, more commonly known as the nine holy men or *wali songo*, were released in the mid 1980s to a warm reception and plentiful coverage by the press. As described earlier, these films were also made with the purpose of *dakwah* in mind (Sasono, 2013b). One film in particular, *Sembilan Wali* (The Nine Holy Men, 1985, dir. Raam Soraya) was deliberately made to adhere to a kind of 'Islamic criteria' involving the casting of pious Muslim actors to play the protagonists, while actors who were non-Muslim and Muslims who were less observant were given the role of antagonists (Hindun, 1989: 46). But even when it endeavoured to abide by an Islamic filming criteria, the film still attracted controversy. Scenes in the film depicting the holy men employing supernatural powers to defeat their adversaries were criticised by the MUI for associating sorcery (*syirik*) with Islam.

Although the subject matter of the Javanese holy men in film had in general won the approval of the country's highest ranking clerics, the MUI, the red tape involved in the production of *Sembilan Wali* and other films about the holy men was just as labyrinthine as for other secular films. In addition to the bureaucratic barriers of obtaining filming permissions from the Department of Information, Ministry of Industry, and the Court, filmmakers of the *wali songo* films were required to consult clerics who vetted the script before filming (Hindun, 1989: 40). The intricate New Order bureaucracy and need of endorsement from clerics were likely to have discouraged many filmmakers from producing Islamic films.

Despite the often elusive and reductive label of 'Islamic film', there have been attempts to make films in what is perceived to be the most Islamic way possible. Concerted attempts to create Islamic filmmaking organisations were established in 1996 by the mass Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah's ambition to develop an Islamic ethics and aesthetic in filmmaking emerged from the organisation's political victory against the government's proposal to forbid the formation of private religious media companies (van Heeren, 2012: 118). Their victory encouraged the formation of Islamic filmmaking clubs based in Muhammadiyah universities throughout Indonesia where young Muslim filmmakers were trained in the art of cinema (Haryano, Widjanto and Tjiauw, 1996).

In addition to the Muhammadiyah Islamic filmmaking organisations are other organisations founded for the training, screening, and discussions of films by Muslim filmmakers. Formed during the period of post-1998 Reform were M-Screen Indonesia (Muslim Screen Indonesia), Muslim Movie Education (MME), Fu:n Community, and the Salman Filmmaker Club, a film community connected to the Salman Mosque in Bandung (van Heeren, 2012 :119). In 2003, the collaboration of film companies and Islamic boarding schools established the now defunct Morality Audio

Visual Network (MAV-Net),²⁹ whose main objective was to challenge the dominance of foreign films and strengthen the role of Islamic 'visual ethics' in filmmaking (van Heeren, 2012: 120-121).

MAV-Net's view of Islamic films departs from the Ramadan offerings on television. Films deemed 'Islamic' by MAV-Net instead exist on the fringes of the mainstream media industry in the form of pirated VCDs of feature films and documentaries about warfare and military training from abroad (van Heeren, 2012: 121). These film organisations flourished during the period of *Reformasi* as more Islamic institutions welcomed the training of young Muslims in film and media production and the use of media as a medium for preaching (van Heeren, 2012: 84). However, despite the rise of Islamic film communities during this period, only one film was actually made by these Islamic film communities and with little financial success.³⁰

According to van Heeren, MAV-Net's manifesto of Islamic filmmaking mirrors the tenets of oppositional Third Cinema³¹ in its rejection of the hegemony of Hollywood cinema and local copy-cat films (2012 :121). By the late 1990s, conspiracy theories of Zionist domination through imported media representations became another incentive to produce images that inspired Islamic and anti-Zionist fervour in Indonesia. MAV-Net's manifesto symbolised their membership of and responsibility towards the global Muslim community in battling Zionist misrepresentations of Muslims that weaken the Islamic faith of Muslims who consume Western media (van Heeren, 2012: 122).

MAV-Net eventually disbanded when its own ethics for what was allowable on screen became too complicated. The portrayal of romance and what

²⁹ MAV-Net was comprised of six Islamic film communities and institutions: Fu:n Community, M-Screen, Kammi, Rohis Mimazah, IKJ, MQTV Bandung, and a representative from the Pesantren Darunnajah (van Heeren, 2012: 120).

³⁰ Interview with Katinka van Heeren on 25th January 2012.

³¹ Coined by Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Third Cinema is the final stage of a three-step process towards the liberation of cinema from the hegemony and appropriation of Hollywood cinema. Third Cinema would incorporate guerilla sentiments and the dismantling of the Eurocentric grammar of cinema (Gabriel, 1985: 355-369).

female and male actors can and cannot do in a film such as holding hands were hotly contested. In terms of financing, MAV-Net was interested in producing independent films to a wide audience through modest means. But with the success of films like *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008, filmmakers under the auspices of MAV-Net felt they could not compete with the broad appeal of big budgeted commercial Islamic cinema.³²

Without the existence of MAV-Net and its oppositional fervour driving its filmmaking practices, are Islamic films made post-MAV-Net still considered oppositional? I argue that Islamic film as oppositional cinema can be further refined as being oppositional not only towards anti-Islamic representations from the West but also oppositional within Indonesia. A few post-New Order filmmakers use the medium of cinema to oppose the 'Westernisation' of local Indonesian cinema and its preoccupation with the morally tainting elements of sex and the supernatural. The flooding of American cinema into Indonesia during the New Order became a commercial challenge for Indonesian filmmakers. However, American films from Hollywood were significant in influencing their work. Audiences are able to recognise poor Hollywood imitations and aesthetic cinematic techniques adopted from action, melodrama, and drama genres of American cinema (Heider, 1991: 6-8). And as I will demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, post-1998 Islamic films are arenas for contesting identities and projecting public anxieties about Islam within Indonesia while also opposing Islamophobia in the post-9/11 age.

Some filmmakers in the post-Suharto period also prioritise the piety of their actors when making an Islamic film. In the pre-production stages of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, a 'reality' television competition was broadcast to audition potential actors for the film. In addition to demonstrating their acting skills, young acting hopefuls went through a Qur'anic recitation and Islamic values 'test' that determined their spiritual suitability for a role in the film (Imanjaya, 2009a). The auditioning of pious actors echoes *Sembilan Wali* of the New Order era, as if the actor's religiosity was

³² Interview with Katinka van Heeren in Jakarta on 25th January 2012.

instrumental to her ability to act as a pious character. Moreover, the actor's religiosity is assumed to paint the film's publicity in a favourable, 'divine' light.

Conversely, there are fears that a non-Muslim actor playing a venerated Muslim character would be disastrous for the film's reception. When the actor who played Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the Muhammadiyah movement, in *Sang Pencerah* (The Enlightener, 2010, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) converted from Islam to Christianity during filming, his new religious identity was kept a secret until after the film's first screening. The film would have lost the backing of its funder, the Muhammadiyah organisation, if it was revealed that an apostate had starred as the organisation's most revered figure (Sasono, 2013a: 45). Although an exceptional case, concerns about the actor's offscreen religious identity demonstrate the moral responsibility attached to actors when playing key figures in Indonesia's Islamic history.

The faith of film producers and funders who back the making of Islamic films, however, is of little ethical consequence. The producers of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, Dhamoo and Manoj Punjabi, are not Muslim, but have an interest in making profitable films with a 'wholesome' message. The director of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* and *Ummi Aminah*, Aditya Gumay, collaborates with Catholic investors to produce films for 'family consumption'. Rather than an Islamic filmmaker, Gumay contends that his films convey good and universal values that also happen to be Islamic values.³³ By shunning the exclusivity of Islamic filmmaking, Gumay displays commercial and socio-religious savvy crucial to the axiom that Islam is not just 'everywhere' (Fealy, 2008: 15) but is for 'everybody'.

There are aspects in the production, exhibition, and marketing of other Islamic films that are not explicitly 'Islamic' in terms of ethics. Instead, they share many characteristics in these respects with other non-Islamic films. Filmmakers who make Islamic films also make non-Islamic ones. In fact,

³³ Interview with Aditay Gumay in Jakarta, 3rd February 2012.

many, like Hanung Bramantyo and Hanny Saputra, have started their careers directing secular teenage-oriented films and even sex comedies. Like non-Islamic films, Islamic films are not just financed by non-Muslim producers, but also shown at cinemas alongside non-Islamic films, and promoted in mainstream print media and video-sharing websites. For this reason, the Islamic film genre can be said to be part of the mainstream film industry rather than operating as a niche genre which makes the spiritual aims of filmmakers and, in the case of certain films made during the post-New Order period,³⁴ the transmission of *dakwah* compatible with mainstream filmmaking and popular culture. The absorption of Islamic film into the mainstream film industry confirms observations that 'Islam is everywhere' and that its coalescence with the secular public sphere is a feature of Islamic modernity at work in Indonesia. And as part of mainstream cinema, Islamic films are subject to institutional obstacles and censorship.

Obstacles and censorship

Censorship has long been a powerful force of state intervention on the Indonesian film industry since its inception under Dutch colonial rule (Sen, 1994: 69). Although the first locally-made feature film was released in 1926, films about Islam were not made until Sukarno came into power (Imanda, 2012: 92). During the colonial period, Islamic themes in films were restricted as they were perceived to be potentially threatening to the Dutch and the ruling elite. Further restrictions on Islam continued under the New Order regime. In 1978, the Indonesian government had enacted a ban on media content that would stoke 'primordial' tensions between ethnic communities (*Suku*), religions (*Agama*), races (*Ras*), and socioeconomic class backgrounds (*Antar-golongan*) (Sen and Hill, 2006: 12). Commonly referred to as 'SARA', the ban became useful in limiting

³⁴ *Sang Murabbi* (2008, dir. Zul Ardhia) and *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (2010, dir. Habbiburrahman El-Shirazy) are but a few examples of Islamic films that have been made and interpreted as 'dakwah films'.

news reports of ethnic-religious tensions and controlling the public discourse on political and social conflicts.

The restrictions against invoking the elements of SARA in the media also extended to film. However, some films with Islamic content were let off the hook and were allowed to be produced and exhibited because they propagated the government's ideology and did not portray religious tension.³⁵ During the New Order, it is the politicised manifestation of Islam that the government was more concerned with suppressing. As I will demonstrate in more detail below, even subtle cinematic references to political Islam could fall foul with the New Order government resulting in a change of film title, censorship, delay in release, or outright ban on filming altogether.

Although political or ideologically 'extreme' Islam was actively suppressed by the New Order regime, depictions of radical political Islamists were allowed so long as they were villains and defeated by 'moderate' Muslim heroes. One example is the portrayal of the Islamic militia and campaigners for the constitution of an Islamic state in Tasikmalaya, West Java in *Mereka Kembali* (They Have Returned, 1974, dir. Nawi Ismail). In *Mereka Kembali*, the militia are depicted as thieves and rapists who label the national army infidels for supporting the formation of a 'non-Islamic state' (Sasono, 2010: 50). In stark contrast to the militia, members of the national army belong to a variety of religions, underscoring their religious tolerance and unity in diversity. As pious men, the national army perform their prayers before beginning the long march from Yogyakarta to Bandung after the Renville Agreement was signed by representatives of the Indonesian and Dutch army in 1947.

In other cases, filmmakers face institutional barriers to exhibition when they convey implicit support for the New Order regime's Islamic opponents. The General Election in 1981 created obstacles to the

³⁵ *Dr Siti Pertiwi Kembali ke Desa* (Dr Siti Pertiwi Returns to the Village, 1979, dir. Ami Priono) features Islamic preachers whose corruption is protected by the ruling political party.

scheduled release of Asrul Sani's Islamic nationalist film *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* for two main reasons. First, several scenes from the film that suggested sympathy for an Islamic political party had to be removed from official release. Second, the film's title had to be changed from *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'abah* (From Under the Protection of the Ka'abah) to *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* because the Ka'abah, a sacred site in Mecca, was the logo of the Islamic political party contesting at the 1981 General Election. Fearing the political influence it might inspire, the film was denied a release in Jakarta before the 1981 General Election (Sen, 1996: 75). But following its delayed release, the film enjoyed only a limited distribution in East Java and West Sumatra (*Berita Buana*, 1992). As a result of political circumstances, *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* did poorly and was quickly forgotten by the general public.³⁶

Films that were not in keeping with the New Order regime's official position on history also encountered the blunt force of censorship. In 1981, permission to shoot a historical film on the power struggle between rival Islamic powers in early nineteenth-century Sumatra was denied by the Censorship Board under the recommendation of the Department of Education and Culture. The film in question, *Perang Padri* (War of the Clerics), was based on the anti-colonial Islamic wars between 1800 to 1837 in West Sumatra. But its complex re-telling of civil war between competing religious leaders and the demonisation of local customs was deemed to be too politically sensitive and threatening to ideas of national unity (Sen 1994: 79-80).

Even though the competing Islamic forces eventually fought together in alliance against the Dutch after 1820, it was feared that the first half of *Perang Padri* might revive tensions between local customs and Islam. The film was not meant to be a film about the role of Islam in the military and ideological struggle against the Dutch. Instead, the screenwriter Arto Hadi argued that the film would have been a profitable addition to the string of historical films that were popular with audiences at the time (Sen, 1994:

³⁶ Interview with Eric Sasono in Jakarta on 30th January 2012.

79). But as it turns out, historical accuracy is not a prerequisite for a historical film. The report issued by the Department of Education and Culture forbidding the shooting of the film explained that historical films should be made with contemporary audiences and present-day social and political circumstances in mind (Sen, 1994: 81). In other words, a manipulation of the past was necessary for the sake of national security.

During this same period, the *dangdut* singer and actor of Islamic films Rhoma Irama was subjected to a decade-long ban from appearing on television because of his support for the United Development Party, an Islamic opponent of the New Order regime. He was also placed on the government blacklist for refusing to support Suharto's political party (Imanda, 2012: 93). But being a *persona non grata* of the state did not dampen his popularity. State censorship against Rhoma's body of work made him a political figure amongst Islamic groups that were becoming increasingly disaffected with the New Order regime (Hanan, 2010: 114). Later in the early 1990s when government regulations over Islamic symbols were relaxed, Rhoma Irama went on to star in the political *dakwah* film *Nada dan Dakwah* (Tone and Commune, 1991, dir. Chaerul Umam) that was critical of the New Order regime with Asrul Sani as scriptwriter, and the popular cleric Zainuddin MZ as fellow actor.

During the post-New Order period, Marshall Clark (2008: 39) identifies an 'Islamic' turn in new forms of censorship pressured by Islamic groups in Indonesia. Two events ushered the Islamic turn in state censorship: the first was the outrage over a Danish newspaper publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad on 30 September 2005. The second event concerns the controversial launch of the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* in 2008. To appease various protesting Islamic groups, the Indonesian legislative assembly revived a broadly-defined 1999 anti-pornography bill termed the Anti Pornography and Porno-action Bill (*Rancangan Undang-undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi*) in 2006 even though laws regulating blasphemy and pornography were already in existence. The bill would prohibit the production, distribution, and consumption of anything deemed 'pornographic'. Critics of the bill feared

that a more repressive censorship law signalled the 'Islamification' of Indonesian society, culture, and politics (Clark, 2008: 40).

I argue that the outrage over the religious themes in Hanung Bramantyo's 2011 film, *Tanda Tanya* (Question Mark) or simply '?' is further evidence for the 'Islamic' turn in censorship. In August 2011, the broadcast of *Tanda Tanya* on the Indonesian terrestrial television SCTV on the night of Eid ul-Fitr was pulled after threats by members of the extremist group Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam) outside the SCTV television station in Central Jakarta (*Jakarta Globe*, 2011a). SCTV's decision to cancel the film's broadcast was criticised for giving in to the extremist group and raised concerns about the lack of security to protect the television station from a potentially violent attack (*Jakarta Globe*, 2011b).

The film had been screened in cinemas around Indonesia in April 2011 without calls for its ban. However, the FPI protested against television's ability to reach a mass audience across the country and into their homes compared to the relatively limited reach of cinemas in urban centres.³⁷ The basis for the censorship of *Tanda Tanya* on television may be on the surface an Islamic one, but it is actually in tension with greater creative and political liberties in cinema and rising extremism in Indonesia.

Tanda Tanya is a multiple narrative film heavy with political and religious messages about religious pluralism, apostasy, and inter-ethnic strife between indigenous Indonesians and ethnic Chinese Indonesians. Since the issuing of a fatwa against liberal interpretations of Islam, secularism, and religious pluralism by the MUI in July 2005, films and other mass media material which were brought to the council's attention as contravening the fatwa would be classified as forbidden or *haram*. Kyai Cholil Ridwan, the head of the MUI's Department of Culture condemned the 'blasphemous' statement on religious pluralism at the outset of the film: 'Each person walks from different points [of belief], but in the same direction; in search for the same thing with the same purpose, which is

³⁷ Interview with Ekky Imanjaya on 27th December 2011.

God' (*Republika*, 2011).³⁸ The film also faced objection from the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, for its portrayal of a church bomber who belonged to the organisation.

We should, however, note that there have been moments when the MUI played a role in protecting the commercial interests of the film industry and the intellectual property of filmmakers by declaring a fatwa against film piracy. Since 2005, the illegal counterfeiting, distribution, and utilisation of films were declared forbidden by the MUI³⁹ to safeguard the profits of the film industry by encouraging instead the purchasing of original DVDs and tickets at licensed cinemas. In Indonesia, fatwas are decrees issued principally by the MUI and by the two biggest Muslim organisations, the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (Hosen, 2008: 159). Because they are not legally binding, complying with a fatwa becomes a Muslim's moral responsibility. The desired effect of the fatwa on piracy is not simply to deter consumers from buying and consuming illegal DVDs and downloaded films but to raise feelings of moral guilt and sinfulness.

Summary

This chapter sought to address the thesis's first objective, which is to establish an analytical definition of the Islamic film genre in Indonesia. Existing definitions of the Islamic film genre put forward by film scholars and critics are functionalist and audience-oriented. At present, the Indonesian Islamic film genre is argued to function as a popular medium for *dakwah*. *Dakwah* involves the conveying of Islamic teachings to improve the faith of Muslims. In turn, Muslim audiences are thought to be enlightened and transformed by the experience of watching *dakwah* films.

³⁸ 'Semua jalan setapak itu berbeda-beda, namun menuju ke arah yang sama: mencari satu hal yang sama dengan satu tujuan yang sama, yaitu Tuhan.'

³⁹ MUI Decree No.1 MUNAS/VII/MUI/15/2005 concerning IP protection.

Islamic films are also thought to generate more 'positive' images of moderate Indonesian Muslims for audiences to empathise with. This function of the Islamic film genre is more political in the post-New Order period to counter the negative terrorist stereotypes associated with the global aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. And by the post-New Order period, Islamic cinema is regarded as a form of oppositional cinema to resist the immoral excesses that sometimes manifest in mainstream Indonesian and Hollywood cinemas. Because of their modes of exhibition and commercial success, some films of the Islamic film genre are thought to belong to mainstream Indonesian cinema even when their opposition to the sensationalistic imperatives to sell certain mainstream non-Islamic films (such as the need to inject graphic sex and the supernatural) may seem paradoxical. I argue, however, that adopting an oppositional stance against the sensationalism of certain mainstream non-Islamic films and being a mainstream Islamic film are not mutually exclusive. The tension between the commercial interests and spiritual aims of the Islamic film genre disassociates it from the sensationalist elements that make other mainstream Indonesian films successful. In other words, Islamic films that have made it into the mainstream are free from sex and violence. It is fair to surmise, however, that the tension is not easily resolved as the boundaries that separate commercial entertainment from spiritual reflection within the Islamic film genre are far from definitive.

My analysis builds critically on these perceived aims by suggesting that the film genre should be characterised beyond its functionalist mode of address. I propose that the Indonesian Islamic film genre consists of films made for the purpose of *dakwah* through the display of diagetic and extra-diagetic audio-visual and commercial conventions that mark them as 'Islamic' by filmmakers, critics, and audiences alike. They are usually films about individuals or a group of people who overcome their spiritual struggle through Islamic principles. The Islamic film genre can be distinguished through its incorporation of Qur'anic verses in the dialogue and soundtrack and the direct engagement by its characters with Islamic symbols. In some cases, the production of an Islamic film adheres to a set of moral ethics to establish the film's role as a medium for *dakwah*.

To fulfill Islamic cinema's function as a medium for *dakwah*, films may begin with excerpts from sacred texts, a sermon, or a statement to suggest that a lesson may be learned from watching the film. These devices have been criticised by prominent Indonesian filmmakers for being too formalistic and superficial in their evocation of Islamic principles. Despite the criticisms, the didactic devices are routinely incorporated into the Islamic film genre along with a standard narrative formula, aesthetic cues, ethics of film production, and extra-textual modes of publicity, such as poster art and theme songs.

The purpose of films as a medium for *dakwah* throughout the history of Indonesian film indicate the perceived role of cinema as a powerful source of moral good. But even then, the making of Islamic films is fraught with political, commercial, and ideological obstacles. Although the relaxation of strict media regulations after the fall of the New Order was welcomed by some, new media freedoms were greeted with a censorious backlash that was seen as 'Islamic' in its manifestation.

This chapter has outlined, with some detail, the definition and generic parameters of the Islamic film genre in Indonesia but has only occasionally raised cursory issues surrounding gender in the genre. Drawing from material raised in this chapter, a more substantial demonstration of how images of gender constitute the genre begins in the next chapter on the construction of women and men in New Order Islamic cinema.

Chapter 4

Gender, Islam and the nation in New Order Islamic films

In an essay on national identity in Indonesian cinema, Karl Heider (1994) states that New Order films are an effective medium for constructing an imagined Indonesian national identity and culture. Each film, he argues, is a 'fixed thing', a finished product enclosed with messages about the nation. Every copy of the film is 'sent out to cinemas across the country, offering identical images of [the] national culture to all audiences' (Heider, 1994: 164). The huge diversity of cultures in the Indonesian nation is, according to Heider, transcended in New Order national cinema.

Heider is judicious to add that not all films would be considered representative of Indonesian culture. Audiences who lament the gratuitous sex, horror, and violence in Indonesian cinema would argue that such themes are influences from Hollywood and against Indonesian culture. Heider proposes that films with strong elements of 'Indonesian-ness' are those that 1) '[emphasise] on social groups rather than on autonomous individuals and 2) [distinguish] the conflict between order and disorder rather than between good and evil' (Heider, 1994: 170).

This chapter builds on Heider's second suggestion by considering that the Indonesian nation in film is emphasised and conceived through the resolution between order and disorder. However, Heider does not consider how the themes of a unitary Indonesian nation as an Islamic project are played out in gendered terms in the New Order period. I will argue that specific kinds of masculinities and femininities are aligned with ideas of order and the national project in Islamic films of the New Order period. The films explored in this chapter are preoccupied with themes of nation-

building, whether through attempts at forcing out morally corrupt powers or establishing an ideology of national development. Islam is the motivating factor behind the portrayal of nation-building and it is intertwined with issues pertaining to the gender and sexuality of the central figures who are agitating for change in their nation-building campaign.

Throughout the country's modern history, Indonesian nationalist discourse has always been constructed in gendered terms (Sunindyo, 1998; Gouda, 2002). In the anti-colonial struggles in Java and Sumatra between 1945 and 1949, the struggle for the independence of Indonesia inspired freedom fighters to construct the 'Earth as female and Nation as Mother' (Sunindyo, 1998: 4). The idea of the nation as mother (*Ibu Pertiwi*) persisted even after Independence as a figure whose honour must to be defended (Gouda, 2002: 203) demonstrating how powerful the feminised imagery of the nation is. During the New Order, both Indonesian women and men have roles of equal importance in nationalist struggles. But their roles are differentiated by gender: men as defenders of the nation, women as producers and nurturers of fighters.

Even when Indonesian women take up arms in the military, they are reminded of their femininity as wives or mothers and through their sex appeal (Sunindyo, 1998: 9-12). When written into its discourse, women are by design supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women's 'proper' place in society i.e. in the home (Nagel, 1998: 243). In nationalist discourse, the project of nation-building, political violence, state power, and dictatorship are best understood as masculine projects that involve masculine institutions, masculine processes, and masculine activities (Pateman, 1989; Connell, 1995).

Islamic films from the New Order period are preoccupied with nationhood and progress but both are always on the verge of collapse and requiring the restorative role of women and men who are pious and emancipatory in spirit. They are also anomalies from their commercial contemporaries. Most of the films discussed in this chapter: *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* (The Warrior of Selarong Cave, 1972, dir. Lilik Sudjio), *Tjoet Nha Dhien* (1988,

dir. Eros Djarot) and *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani) depart from the sensationalism of Kompeni genre films identified by Karl Heider.⁴⁰

Kompeni films share several narrational characteristics with the historical Islamic films discussed in this chapter. In his brief description, Heider describes the Kompeni genre film as those that depict the conflict between Dutch colonials and Indonesians during a period roughly from the seventeenth century until the late nineteenth century (Heider, 1991: 40). A recurring plot that incites such conflict involves the heavy tax demands made by the Dutch on the Indonesian people. Kompeni films have a preoccupation with scenes of Dutch-inflicted torture and sexual violence against young village women. Historical Islamic New Order films also portray the suffering of Indonesian subjects under oppressive Dutch rule. But in contrast to Kompeni films, they are focused less on graphic violence than the Islamic message or *dakwah* championed by the protagonists.

All save for one Islamic film discussed in this chapter are legend-based and biopics or semi-biographical. Biopics of national heroes are cinematic representations of *exempla virtutis* or morally exemplary figures. Such films often serve as an arena in which collective morality is forged (and indeed, at times contested) and as a wellspring for national morale (Landy, 2001: 8). The biopics and semi-biographies discussed below are about men and women whose leadership are defined equally in terms of their Islamic faith and nationalism. As historical and modern biopics, they are made with contemporary audiences in mind but use history and ideas of modernity to articulate contemporary ideas of nationhood.

Ideas and representations of nationhood in the New Order period are aligned with capitalistic development under military rule. Characterised by economic progress and socio-militaristic repression, any opposition towards the regime was considered anti-nationalist and anti-progress (Sen, 1994: 69-70). The gendered rhetoric in New Order films about the

⁴⁰ The Kompeni genre films include *Pak Sakerah* (1982, dir. B.Z. Kadaryono) and *Pasukan Berani Mati* (The Brave Ones, 1982, dir. Imam Tantowi).

nation falls within these ideological constraints, the results of which are often simplistic gendered binaries of masculinity and femininity. The idealised gendered discourse of the nation and Islam in the films discussed below creates images of the Other against which the ideal can define itself. In the examples below, a dichotomy of idealised New Order Muslim masculinity and femininity and a corrupt version of manliness and lesser womanhood are constructed as diametrically opposed.

In this chapter, I will show that nationalised masculinity is very much central to *Sembilan Wali*, *Pahlawan Goa Selarong*, *Perjuangan dan Doa* and *Al-Kautsar* whereby a 'correct' and modernising Islam triumphs over un-Islamic social disorder across sixteenth-century and twentieth-century Java. This discussion is followed by a look at representations of femininity in *Tjoet Nha Dhien* and *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan*. In these two films, Muslim women are constructed as repressed by colonial powers but not sexualised or passive as in the *Kompeni* genre. Instead, they reproduce the nationalist discourse of gender equity on the front lines. But rather than participating in the masculine sphere of war and bloodshed, they fight from the hearth.

The men in white: mystics and a revolutionary prince

'Nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory,
masculinised humiliation, and masculinised hope'
(Enloe, 1989: 44)

This section discusses two historical biopics of Indonesia's legendary characters: the Javanese holy men, or *wali songo*, and a Javanese prince who led a rebellion against the Dutch. As pioneering Islamic leaders of both history and myth, they are reconstructed in New Order cinema as nationalist heroes who establish order in a proto-nation plagued by moral disorder. In this section, the gender essentialism of nationalism is examined in the construction of masculinity of these historical and legendary Islamic heroes. An analysis of their *visual* construction are

considered here, primarily in the attire they wear. Clothes, as 'evocative and complex signifiers, are a means of understanding the body or character who wears them' (Bruzzi, 1997: xiv). I will show that clothes can be mobilised to morally distinguish their wearer from others in an immediately visual way, evoking a range of political and religious signifiers.

Indonesian cinema in the 1980s saw the release of multiple films about the lives and missionary work of the early Javanese mystics typically referred to as the *wali songo* (lit. 'nine holy men' in Javanese). The films in question are *Sembilan Wali* (Nine holy men, 1985, dir. Djun Saptohadi), *Sunan Kalijaga* (1985, dir. Sofyan Sharma), *Sunan Kalijaga & Syech Siti Jenar* (1985, dir. Sofyan Sharma), and *Sunan Gunung Jati* (1985, dir. Bay Isbahi). These films, produced in quick succession of each other, belong to the *wali songo* 'mission' films of *film Islami*. Widely believed to be Muslim saints and heroes, the *wali songo* are revered for pioneering the spread of Islam in Java between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Piegeaud, 1976). Since the end of the seventeenth-century, the legend of the *wali songo* was read aloud as *babad* literature or court chronicles to large groups of people in mosques or performed as *wayang* storytelling traditions (Ras, 1986: 344). The entry of the *wali songo* into the *babad* literature was a significant indication of Java's transition from a long era of Hindu-Buddhist civilisation to an era of Islamic sultanates (Ringkes, 1996: xxxii).

The cinematic retelling of these figures depart considerably from the *babad* literature. From mystical preachers with a Sufistic-orientation, the *wali songo* are cinematically represented as '*dakwah* warriors' who promote the Sunni branch of Islam (Soenarto, 2005: 36). The shift in representation may be due to the paucity of historical detail about the individual lives of the nine holy men and their involvement in the building of the Demak sultanate. As the film critic Ismail Isbandi notes, the *wali songo* films blended fact with fiction to repackage the legends as material for *dakwah* (Isbandi, 1985). For instance, in *Sembilan Wali*, the nine men are depicted as contemporaries even though some had lived and

preached in different centuries and different locations.⁴¹ The fictionalised representation of the *wali songo* brought together as a super-hero league in film coincided with the revival of the *dakwah* movement in the 1970s and 1980s from which popular media producers and comic book artists drew inspiration (Soenarto, 2005: 37).

The nine mystics who represent the *wali songo* – Sunan Gresik, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Gunung Jati, Sunan Giri, Sunan Muria, Sunan Drajat, and Sunan Kudus⁴² are often cited as among the earliest and most influential propagators of Islam in Java. The missionary work of the earliest mystics, Sunan Gresik and Sunan Ampel, began during the collapse of the Majapahit kingdom at the end of the fifteenth century. Their missionary work took place during a period when Islam and Hindu-Buddhist cultures existed side by side.

The earliest evidence of Islam's presence in Indonesia dates back to the eighth-century but its expansion only occurred in the thirteenth-century beginning in the kingdom of Aceh at the northern-most tip of Sumatra, situated at what was the gateway to India and the Middle East (van Doorn-Harder, 2006: 21). The interweaving of local cultures and religious traditions during this period saw the merging of Hindu-Buddhist, Islam, and animist practices evident in funerary rituals, ancestral worship, and other customs (Daniels, 2012: 36).

Of all the *wali songo* 'mission' films, *Sembilan Wali* was the most successful in terms of box office sales and securing a reputation as a *dakwah* film. The production of the film involved the endorsement by and consultation with the MUI, who accept it as a bona fide *dakwah* film (*Pos Film*, 1985). *Sembilan Wali* begins with Sunan Gresik speaking to his disciples about the importance of establishing Islam as the guiding

⁴¹ In *Sembilan Wali*, Sunan Gresik is depicted as the earliest mystic. After his death, his mission to spread Islam and restore order to the chaos of the Majapahit kingdom is adopted by the other mystics.

⁴² The title 'Sunan' is used by the most revered early preachers of Islam in Java. It is also adopted by lesser Javanese mystics, among them Sunan Bayat, Sunan Sendang Duwur, Sunan Geseng, and Sunan Bejagung (Quinn, 2008: 65).

principle of the land. He warns of the retribution that awaits apathetic Muslims who do not challenge the evils of the Majapahit kingdom.

Many years after Sunan Gresik's death, his call to empower Islam as the civilising force is taken up by the rest of the *wali songo*. The film then becomes a patchwork of narratives depicting the different mystics preaching and thwarting the activities of criminals who prey on the suffering people of Mataram. All the holy men later come together to install a Muslim aristocrat, Raden Patah, as the next ruler to resolve the battle for the kingdom's leadership. Enthroning Raden Patah as sultan not only brings legitimacy to Islamic rule but also peace and order to the chaos across Java.

To gain widespread support for Raden Patah's ascendancy to the throne, the holy men increase their appeal by offering spiritual solace to the oppressed masses. The feudal lords who tax the people unfairly and plunder their villages are unequivocally ruthless and evil. Attempts by the people to stand up to the feudal leaders are ineffectual and fatal. Even the *wali songo* face regular resistance from the feudal lords' henchmen who outnumber them. But armed with religious authority and magical powers, they always emerge victorious and completely unscathed. Once the masses are mobilised for their support of Raden Patah, the Grand Mosque of Demak is built. The building of the mosque is shown as a community activity that brings people of all ages closer to live and work in harmony. But more importantly, the mosque becomes a site in which the people come together under the banner of Islam.

A key plot in *Sembilan Wali* is the persecution and eventual execution of the renegade mystic Syeikh Siti Jenar, who is condemned a heretic by the council of the holy men. Syeikh Siti Jenar's heresy⁴³ and his support for Rakeryan Patih Mahesa Kicak, a competitor for the royal throne of

⁴³ According to popular legend, Syeikh Siti Jenar was indiscriminate towards those who sought religious education from him. This meant that disciples who lacked the moral aptitude and prerequisite spiritual preparation were attributed to the spread of heresy (Isbandi, 1985).

Majapahit, are intertwined to display the corruption of Islam as an expression of treachery. Syeikh Siti Jenar's alliance with Rakeryan Patih Mahesa Kicak⁴⁴ casts him as a traitor to the Islamic cause for order and peace. But more incriminatingly, his heretical teachings of *wahdatul wujud*, or becoming one with God and thereby becoming God, is the unforgivable crime that results in his death at the hands of the other holy men. In the film's dark climax, the holy men and a crowd of people witness the death of Syeikh Siti Jenar. Rakeryan Patih Mahesa Kicak tries to rescue his mentor but is stabbed by a stray spear and lifted into the air. Following the deaths of the antagonists, the palace of the Majapahit kingdom is destroyed by repeated bolts of lightning, signalling the devastating end to chaos and moral decay.

Syeikh Siti Jenar's trial and eventual death sentence for heresy and apostasy for deviating from Islam are perceived as the 'purification' of Islam. However, according to Ermita Soenarto (2005: 62-64), the demonisation of Syeikh Siti Jenar in popular discourse oversimplifies the complexity of his teachings. One hypothesis for his turn as the villain of the film may be based on his Sufistic legacy and the need to establish Sunni Islam as the 'correct' brand of Islam in Java. Through the missionary work of the *wali songo*, Sunni Islam also triumphs over a corrupt and immoral non-Muslim adversary and restores moral order to Java. Javanese society before the arrival of Islam is depicted in *Sembilan Wali* as morally wayward, impoverished, and ruled by corrupt feudal lords who impose punishing taxes on their people. The subtext of the film is that Islam is a civilising element and a political framework for social and spiritual order, appropriate for nation-building.

It is when the story of the holy men ends that the film makes an overt declaration of Islam as a civilising force for the entire Indonesian nation. Completely unrelated to the film, the epilogue of *Sembilan Wali* is a documentary montage of Indonesian pilgrims performing the hajj in Mecca. Their presence in Mecca is indicated by scenes of the Indonesian

⁴⁴ Rakeyran Patih Mahesa Kicak is a fictional character created to add narrative drama by the filmmaker of *Sembilan Wali*, Djun Saptohadi (Isbandi, 1985).

flag that stands in the massive campsite for pilgrims. Accompanied by a soundtrack of Javanese gamelan music, a male voiceover extols the peaceful absorption of Islam into Indonesian culture thanks to the legacy of the *wali songo*. The voiceover states that faith, gratitude towards God, and diligence are the key traits of citizens of the Indonesian nation.⁴⁵ Islam is not only woven into the daily lives of Muslim Indonesians but becomes part of the national fabric.



FIGURE 11 A still from *Sembilan Wali* (The Nine Holy Men, 1985, dir. Djun Saptohadi). Sunan Giri (right) faces a thief.

As men, the *wali songo* are stoic and stern but benevolent father figures. They embody the notion of '*halus*' or refinement idealised in elite

⁴⁵ *Telah menjadi kenyataan sejarah Islam telah dipeluk sebahagian besar rakyat Indonesia dengan hati terbuka. Para wali telah merintisnya dengan sikap tassamuh dengan penuh kekerabatan. Dari hari ke sehari kemajuan kehidupan beragama dan syiarnya bukan saja untuk mendapat tempat terhormat di kalbu masyarakat. Namun juga semakin mendapat tempat seluas-luasnya dalam hidup berbangsa dan bernegara. Iman, takwa dan kerja keras melalui pengamalan syariat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.*

The warm embrace of Islam by the Indonesian people has become a historical fact. The holy men has left behind a legacy with grace and nobility. Throughout history their teachings and role in developing the religious lives of Indonesians not only have an important place in the heart of society but also nationwide. Faith, piety, and diligence in practising Islamic teachings in everyday life*

*My translation

Javanese masculinity (Clark, 2004: 119). Refined masculinity is valorised over the lack of emotional restraint in crude (*kasar*) masculinity of Rakeryan Patih Mahesa Kicak and his thug-like henchmen. Although they regularly find themselves in situations of conflict and political violence, the *wali songo* rarely engage in one-on-one combat with the enemy (see FIGURE 11).

Such is the emphasis on their emotional restraint and reluctance to fight, the holy men in *Sembilan Wali* end up appearing expressionless and wooden. The representation of the holy men in *Sembilan Wali* departs from Soenarto's findings (2005) on popular comic book representations of the *wali songo*. In the comic books, the *wali songo* are 'dakwah warriors' who are specialists in martial arts. Panels are dedicated to depictions of high octane combat similar to kung fu fighting scenes. While there are numerous violent scenes of combat in *Sembilan Wali*, the holy men do not directly participate in them.

Eric Sasono (2010) found that Islamic films between 1970s and 1980s were preoccupied with themes of progress, anti-colonial struggle, and national development. As in the case of *Sembilan Wali*, nation-building is a major theme even when the film is set before the formation of Indonesia as a nation. The anachronistic approach to the idea of nation in *Wali Songo* is consonant with the New Order regime's assertion that historical films should be made with the present audiences in mind and the contemporary political context (Sen, 1994: 79). Such an approach explains why the legacy of the *wali songo* is linked to the centrality of Islam to the Indonesian nation. But to what extent is the the Bintoro-Demak Sultanate in *Sembilan Wali* representative of a proto-Indonesian nation and how is it differentiated from the Majapahit kingdom?

In *Sembilan Wali*, the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit kingdom is a hotbed of wickedness and corruption while the Bintoro-Demak Sultanate is represented as orderly and enlightened. But in the successful big-budgeted spectacle New Order films such as *Saur Sepuh Satria Madangkara* (Saur Sepuh the Warrior of Madangkara, 1988, dir. Imam

Tantowi), the Majapahit kingdom is portrayed as a site of adventure and legend, distilling elements of Indonesian culture and a distant, if mythologised, past. For Karl Heider, *Saur Sepuh Satria Madangkara* is an example of a 'fixed' nationalist product shown all over Indonesia, including present-day West Papua in an attempt to project a continuous link between the past and present day (Heider, 1994: 169).

The Indonesian government's effort to restore the ancient Hindu-Buddhist temple complexes of Borobudur and Prambanan in Yogyakarta indicates not just pride in their resplendent architecture but an acknowledgement of the Hindu-Buddhist civilisation's cultural legacy on the Indonesian people. *Sembilan Wali*, however, paints an oppositional view through its negative representations of the decaying Majapahit kingdom. From the ashes of the Majapahit kingdom, the Islamic sultanate's rise demonstrates Islam's superiority and dominance in the nation.

Diponegoro, the proto-nationalist Islamic hero

Like *Sembilan Wali*, the next film I discuss, *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* (The Warrior of Selarong Cave, 1972, dir. Lilik Sudjio), follows a similar narrative of restoration of moral order and conflict with corrupt antecedent forces. *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* is about an Islamic reclamation of Indonesia from colonial moral degeneration by the proto-nationalist hero Pangeran Diponegoro.⁴⁶ Pangeran Diponegoro was often hailed as an inspiration for anti-colonial nationalism and independence in the early twentieth-century ever since his rebellion against the Dutch in the Java war (1825-1830) (van der Kroef, 1949: 426).

The film begins at the point when the Dutch begin levying heavy taxes on the hungry and impoverished Javanese people. Although the Dutch had arrived in the Malay archipelago in the early seventeenth-century, the project of colonialism had only become fully-fledged in the early

⁴⁶ Another film about the Java War led by Pangeran Diponegoro is *Teguh Karya's November 1828* (1979).

nineteenth-century. In Java, conflict between the colonials and their colonial subjects came to a head with Diponegoro's rebellion. Unfair taxes, tolls, and other economic pressures were placed by the Dutch on various central Javanese municipalities so that native leaders give up their control over their government to the Dutch. People living under the constrained local municipalities were beginning to revolt and saw in Diponegoro a powerful leader of their cause. Under the leadership of General De Kock, the Dutch fought back and Diponegoro faced defeat. Diponegoro was eventually exiled to Makassar where he spent his remaining years until his death in 1855.

The film adaptation of historical accounts of Diponegoro's rebellion, however, is more simplified and prominently highlights his influence as an Islamic leader during the rebellion. It begins literally in mid conversation between the Dutch resident Kapitein De Borst and the Sultan's chief minister, Danurejo, about raising taxes on the people of Tegalradjo, Mataram, and other Javanese districts. Diponegoro's crusade against the Dutch is represented to begin at this point where the Dutch are at their greediest for taxes. Furthermore, Diponegoro's land in Tegalrejo is encroached on by the construction of a trade road built for the Dutch.

In *Pahlawan Goa Selarong*, the devout masculine figure of Diponegoro is contrasted against the greedy Dutch through crude symbols of Westernisation and colonialism: alcohol and intoxication (Sasono, 2011: 51). A dramatic scene shows Diponegoro splashing alcohol in Danurejo's face in disgust and rejecting Danurejo's allegiance with moral evil. The Dutch are not only power-hungry but their greed gives rise to extreme suffering, torture, and enslavement of the people. As he rallies the people of Tegalradjo for support, Diponegoro reminds them that defending their homeland is an Islamic obligation (*membela tanahair itu sebahagian dari iman*). Diponegoro's campaign against the Dutch later became known in Indonesian history as the Java War. The Java War in *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* takes a more Islamic turn when Diponegoro mobilises the masses to join the war against the Dutch. They pray as a congregation of thousands before they begin their journey from the top of Selarong Cave,

the highest point in the province, to engage in war in Yogyakarta. When native soldiers desert their colonial masters and swear allegiance to Diponegoro's cause, they are told by Diponegoro that wearing the colonial uniform is forbidden in Islam.

Diponegoro's rebellion is also aimed at restoring the Kraton, the Sultan's court in Yogyakarta, to its former glory. This in turn restores his rightful authority over the land and people. To do this, Diponegoro and his army seize the Kraton under the cover of darkness. One of Diponegoro's soldiers reaches the top of the Kraton and thrusts a red and white flag there, much like the Indonesian flag, before dying from a stab wound. Unlike the *wali songo*, Diponegoro rides and fights in battle against the Dutch, unflinchingly killing colonial soldiers with his sword and spear. The film ends with Diponegoro riding through a burning village, ominously conveying news of his failed attempt at overthrowing Dutch rule.

But a male voiceover looms stating the Indonesian people's obligation to continue Diponegoro's mission to uphold the sanctity of the nation for the sake of justice, righteousness, and for God.⁴⁷ Like the *Kompeni* genre, *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* ends with ambiguity or 'dilemma' (Heider, 1991: 41). In the *Kompeni* films, the hero, who is usually assisted by a female aide, is ultimately triumphant but only in death. The final scene of *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* is similarly ambiguous. It depicts him in his last

⁴⁷ Bakar, menjalar, berkobar semangat membela bangsa. Kecepatan, kecekalan menuntut diri, kecerdasan serta kesadaran membuka hati untuk membelanya. Tidak sampai di sini perjuangannya, demi keadilan, kebenaran dan serta demi Allah. Ia segilintir dari segala pembela bangsa, ia seorang dari seantero Nusantara, ia satu diantara mereka: penggugah, pembangkit semangat, pembuka jalan pembinaan Indonesia merdeka. Dia adalah Pangeran Diponegoro. Kita wajib menyelamatkan serta mengisi apa dia dan mereka capai sehingga kini. Indonesia merdeka. Mari kita jaga dan bina!

The spirit to defend the nation burns. Speed. Determination to rely on oneself. Rigour and the consciousness are the qualities to defend the nation. But [Diponegoro's] struggle does not end here. For justice, truth, and Allah, he was one of the very few to defend the nation. He belonged to the archipelago, he was one of them: the mover and shaker, the pioneer of Indonesia's independence. He was Pangeran Diponegoro. We must continue to salvage and fulfill what he and others have struggled for. Independent Indonesia - let us protect and develop!*

*My translation

great battle before his surrender and retreat. The film ends with a freeze frame of Diponegoro on his rampant horse, an image that captures a momentary glory and defiance.

Both the mystics in the *wali songo* films and Pangeran Diponegoro share an outward appearance that exudes their Islamic authority and differentiates them from civilians, villains, and the Dutch. The mystics in *Sembilan Wali* and Pangeran Diponegoro wear Arab-style white robes and turban when they confront their antagonists (FIGURE 12). In contrast to the *wali songo* are the villains who are always bare-chested. Similarly, in a dramatic scene where Sheikh Siti Jenar reveals his heresy by declaring himself God, he is dressed in saffron Buddhist monk-like robes with his chest exposed. His hair is long and wild without a turban to tame it.



FIGURE 12 Still from *Pahlawan Goa Selarong* (Warrior of Selarong Cave, 1972, dir. Lilik Sudjio).

Pangeran Diponegoro (middle) motivates his followers before the war.

White, in contrast, is the colour of spiritual purity, modesty, power, and associations with Islamic learning. Half-nakedness is an expression of religious heresy and moral corruption. According to Kees van Dijk (1997: 55), Arab-style Muslim attire sometimes functioned as a 'battle dress' during the Dutch colonial occupation. Pangeran Diponegoro was reported to have fought in battle against the Dutch in his Arab-style long robe

(*jubbah*) and turban (Moertono, 1974: 33). A semi-historical account has it that Diponegoro took on a white robe and white turban on the day he decided to lead a rebellion against the ruling colonial power. As described in the *Chronicles of Diponegoro*, the attire that Diponegoro adopted reflected the Islamic nature of his cause: 'Pangeran Dipanagara was already clothed in the apparel of the Holy War; the breeches, jacket and head-dress were all white' (Carey, 1981: 87).

The leading men in the next section are also visually disassociated from their male antagonists through their clothing. But their differences from their antagonists are imbued with ideas of progress, modernity, and new approaches to preaching Islam to the masses. Rather than defeating non-Muslim villains, the leading men in the following films engage in a spiritual battle with other Muslim men whose deteriorated Islamic faith create chaos in their community. In the next section, we encounter the Muslim modernisers who introduce modern ways of being Muslims while restoring moral order for the masses.

Islamic masculinity and the modern Indonesian nation

Chaerul Umam's *Al-Kautsar* (Abundance, 1977) was the first Islamic film since Asrul Sani's *Tauhid* (The Oneness of God, 1964) and the first to be financially successful (Bilal, 1977). *Al-Kautsar* tells the story of Saiful Bachri (played by the actor, poet, and playwright W.S. Rendra), a young Islamic male teacher who is sent to a remote village to teach in an Islamic school. Saiful is chosen by the head of his school, Haji Mustofa, for his extensive Islamic knowledge and farming skills. On his way to the village, Saiful encounters the rogue cleric and local thug, Harun. Although Harun was trained to be an Islamic scholar, his obsession with money corrupts his moral compass. Money, he asserts, is more important to humanity than religion in this modern age.

Saiful's arrival leaves a poor impression on the village's acting religious leader, Haji Musa, who is suspicious of Saiful's role as both Islamic

teacher and agricultural expert. No one can be both an Islamic expert and a farmer, the rigid Haji Musa argues. Saiful's arrival is also noticed by a young widow, Halimah, who Harun intends to take as his wife/lover. However, Halimah is uninterested in him and instead chooses to remain close to Saiful in the hope of winning Saiful's heart. Humiliated, Harun and his henchman, Kamaruddin Satun, exact a revenge by tarnishing Saiful's moral reputation.

The title of the film has a symbolic role in the film's *deus ex machina*. Named after the 108th sura of the Qur'an, al-Kautsar is, in the Islamic tradition, a river in paradise from which its dwellers drink and never become thirsty again. In a community effort to construct and irrigate paddy fields organised by Saiful, a woman falls into a river and is swept away by the current. Saiful rescues her and performs mouth to mouth resuscitation. Harun interrupts this and incites the community to condemn Saiful for 'kissing' the woman, an 'immoral' act tantamount to adultery.

Saiful's school is destroyed as a result of the accusations. Kamaruddin Satun chastises Saiful's unwavering faith that keeps him in the village. But Kamaruddin's cynicism about the redemptive power of Islam reveals a back story: he was once a learned and pious man whose reputation was sullied by a desperate act of theft many years ago. But he suddenly regains his piety when he becomes touched by Saiful's spiritual fortitude during a time of crisis. The film ends with themes of redemption and the spiritual struggle that exists on the fine line between piety and moral corruption.

Saiful's agricultural skills are barely represented in the film but they are nonetheless crucial to the narrative. Coming from more developed part of Java, his youth and urbane presentation become a talking point for the other village men. The village Saiful enters is cut off from modernity brought about by education and 'practical' Islam that can transform the villagers into better and self-sufficient Muslims. Saiful not only brings progress and enlightenment to the villagers but demonstrates the virtue of maintaining a connection with an urban-based religious institution.

Everyone in the village are Muslims but they lack a strong pious male leader who can lead them back to the right moral path. But when Saiful arrives in the village, he delivers an embodiment of heroism alternative to the typical leading man in Indonesian film (Abdullah, 1977). Saiful's heroic virtues and piety are expressed through extreme emotional and physical restraint. Saiful is the 'strong silent type', a persona he maintains in contrast to his two belligerent antagonists, Satun and Harun.

In his Western-style shirt, tailored trousers, and tie, Saiful is the modern everyman. No longer associated with Western colonialism, Saiful's attire not only speaks of forward-looking values and worldly knowledge (Sasono, 2010: 52), but it also challenges the established authority of older, more traditional but corrupt religious male members whose remoteness cut them off from progressive Islam. As the modern Muslim man, Saiful is highly educated and oscillates between urban and rural spaces with ease. He has a clear purpose of civilising those around him with practical Islam. Practical Islam, as promoted in *Al-Kautsar*, is described as a new kind of Islam that emphasises the utility of Islamic principles in the everyday. A backward version of Islam from which Saiful is steering the villagers away has resulted in lax and corrupted behaviour personified by Satun and Hasan.

In general, images of masculinity especially that of the agricultural expert are often suffused with notions of technological progress and mastery over nature (Brandth, 1995: 132). The farming knowledge that Saiful Bachri brings to the village, along with his spiritual responsibility as religious leader and a masculinised symbol of progress, constitute modernising elements that benefits the rural masses. The figure of the urban middle-class professional who 'modernises' the rural masses is a recurring feature in New Order cinema in the 1970s and early 1980s. The late 1970s saw many films that pitted the professional reformers against backward and superstitious masses (Sen, 1994: 120). Such a representation of socioeconomic class relations in film coheres with the New Order government's vision of modernisation as a process in which

'the elite sets tasks for the masses and control the style of mass participation' (Schiller, 1978: 38 quoted in Sen, 1994: 120).

Films about figures who represented progress such as scientists and technocrats were lionised for being bringing prestige to the nation.⁴⁸ The portrayal of young, progressive Muslim men in Indonesian cinema during the New Order era anticipated the resuscitated calls for the modernisation of Islam in Indonesia during the 1980s. At the forefront of this call is the Muslim intellectual Nurcholis Madjid and the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals or *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia* (ICMI), who promoted an Islam that was aligned with modernisation, not Westernisation (Sasono, 2010: 53). Furthermore, the modernised image of Islam worked hand in hand with the New Order's programme of nation-building, one that maintained a moderate, non-extremist political Islam in the public sphere.

The clash between new and old ways of propagating Islam takes a musical turn with the appearance of Rhoma Irama's films and his distinct, flamboyant style. The formula of the films starring Rhoma Irama, a *dangdut* singer and self-styled preacher, is based on the presumption that pop-inflected religious teachings with mass appeal can triumph over the staid and rigid face of Islam. Rhoma Irama is an Islamic cult hero of the working class who sings, romances, fights (to protect the woman he loves), and preaches the word of God (Frederick, 1982; Weintraub, 2008).

He makes his first cinematic appearance as a pop singer-preacher in *Perjuangan dan Doa* (Struggle and Prayer, 1977, dir. Maman Firmansyah). In the film, Rhoma Irama establishes an example of an Islamic pop star who rejects the immoral lifestyle of alcohol and pre-marital sex associated with mainstream popular and rock music. Rhoma projects himself as a man of the people: in the opening scenes of the film, we see a pair of mysterious feet that wander around the city 'witnessing' the sins of other

⁴⁸ Kode Etik, 1981: 177.

people. Motivated by these observations, he writes music about everyday sins to remind Muslims to return to the right moral path.

Like Saiful Bachri in *Al-Kautsar*, Rhoma Irama introduces a new and modern way of preaching Islamic principles. In several scenes in *Perjuangan dan Doa*, Rhoma Irama's distinct Islamic masculinity is emphasised against the traditional image of the learned Muslim man or *santri*. Sartorially, Rhoma Irama stands out from the other *santri* who wear uniform white shirts and trousers. Both represent modern Islamic masculinity, but in stark contrast to the business-like Islamic masculinity of Saiful Bachri in *Al-Kautsar* is Rhoma Irama's flamboyant aesthetics made up of a combination of 1970s silver bell-bottomed trousers and Orientalist couture (Frederick, 1982: 113). As discussed in the previous section, clothes play an important role as marker of an authoritative Islamic identity but Rhoma Irama demonstrates no interest in pursuing the traditional look of a pious Muslim leader. Rhoma Irama's distinct style in preaching and attire speaks volumes of a conscious departure from a conservative and typical Islamic image.

Rhoma Irama acts as the masculine role model in *Perjuangan dan Doa*. All other men in the film, including members of his band, Soneta Group, demonstrate moral weaknesses through mixing with women and becoming belligerent when drunk. Like Saiful Bachri, Rhoma Irama's main antagonist is a fellow Muslim man who lives an immoral life. The moral conflict against the antagonist is more challenging because he is the father of Rhoma's girlfriend, Laila. Although a Muslim who claims to have read the Qur'an, Laila's father is an unrepentant alcoholic.

Meanwhile, the male *santri* at an Islamic teaching school, of which Rhoma is an alumnus, are jealous and combative towards the pop preacher. When Laila spurns the advances of one male student, he challenges Rhoma Irama to a religious discussion forum at the Islamic teaching school. Rhoma confidently accepts the challenge to publicly defend his unique preaching style. The purpose of the forum is to place Rhoma Irama in the dock for mixing music with Qur'anic texts and making people dance

to his music. But he remains calm when faced with such an accusation and proceeds reassuringly with his defence. The Qur'anic texts are not mixed with music, he asserts. Instead, the texts appear separately from the songs.

Rhoma reassures the audience that Qur'anic texts are recited only *before* the beat of the music begins and when the song starts, the lyrics are not Qur'anic texts but interpretations of the text. He tells the audience that *dangdut*, rather than other musical genres including Islamic ones such as *nasyid* and *qasidah*, is the music of 'the people' (*masyarakat*) and that his chosen genre is most effective in getting the message of *dakwah* across to Muslims. Catchy Islamic *dangdut* music may steer young people away from consuming Western music, a form of music filled with immoral messages, he continues. Needless to say, Rhoma Irama emerges victorious from the discussion forum but not without an ambivalent statement from the principal of the Islamic teaching school that music can only be a source of moral good in the right hands.

Towards the end of the film, Rhoma Irama rescues Laila from an attempted sexual assault by her drunken father whose alcoholism diminishes his morality. Laila's father is rendered unconscious by a blow from Rhoma Irama and when he wakes up, he is shocked to hear of his attempted rape and immediately repents. To demonstrate his return to an Islamic life, Laila's father is shown leading his family in prayer. The scene also shows that an acknowledgment of one's sins and repentance are enough to turn a new leaf without the need to face the judiciary. The audience is led to assume that, through renewed spirituality, Laila's father is an irrevocably changed and pious man.

Redemption is a major theme in both *Perjuangan dan Doa* and *Al-Kautsar* as it features in the most dramatic scenes of the two films. Characters redeem themselves when they face a turning point that could threaten the lives of others and their own. In *Perjuangan dan Doa*, Laila's father is only prevented from committing the crime of incest when Rhoma Irama

intervenes. Following this intervention, he atones for his misdeeds before reinstating his Islamic beliefs.

In *Al-Kautsar*, Satun redeems himself in prayer before threatening to kill himself and Harun in a burning hut if the latter does not repent. Saiful Bachri rescues both men from the fire after which the two men beg the forgiveness of their family. Redemption is therefore a cornerstone of modern *dakwah* films in the New Order, conveying a reminder to Muslim audiences that salvation is attainable however grievous the sin. The films utilise sensationalistic moral dilemmas and extreme characters to heighten the dramatic effect of the film while making discrete and one-dimensional references to what is and is not a virtuous Islamic life.

As a self-made preacher and Islamic teacher who are neither aristocratic nor blessed with mystical powers, Rhoma Irama and Saiful Bachri represent the modern Islamic masculinity in New Order cinema. They also have the 'human touch' in that they are in some ways part of the masses, but through religious authority, they rise above them. Both Saiful Bachri and Rhoma Irama demonstrate other qualities of Islamic masculinity that add to their humanity. Their masculinity is 'proven' through their heterosexuality and their superiority over women. They rescue both women and other men of inferior masculinities back into the moral fray.

Rhoma Irama's ultimate moral victory is saved for the film's final scene when his band is invited by the Indonesian government to perform for the National Council of Ulama and other dignitaries. The purpose of the event is to oversee the role of Islam in the development of Indonesia. When the band sing their final number in the film, Rhoma Irama receives an endorsement for his Islamic preaching at a national level. The enormity of such an endorsement is depicted in a bizarre fantasy scene that intersperses between scenes of them performing at the formal state event. In the fantasy scenes, Rhoma and the Soneta Group emerge from a military tank and begin to perform in a war zone (FIGURE 13). Each band member wears a red and white Indonesian flag bandana around their heads, looking unperturbed by their precarious surroundings. The military

fantasy scene sutures Rhoma Irama and his band's service to the nation and their fight, albeit through the power of pop music, against immoral foreign forces.



FIGURE 13 Still from *Perjuangan dan Doa* (Struggle and Prayer, 1977, dir. Maman Firmansyah). A Soneta Group band member performs in a war zone.

This section has demonstrated how nationalist discourse is expressed in masculine terms in New Order Islamic films; through leadership, combat, nation-building, progress, and restoration of moral order. Hence in a discussion concerning nationalist discourse and masculinity, it is pertinent to mention here that gender roles represent an important organising element in the imaginary of the nation-state. Men venture forth into the public sphere and actively reinforce, protect, and define the boundaries of the nation. Women, as I will show in the next section, embody tradition, culture, and nation that require masculine protection while remaining firmly insulated in the private sphere (Sunindyo, 1998: 6).

The notion of modernity as masculine appears within a nationalist and anti-colonial discourse. While femininity concerns a preservation of the past, masculinity gazes forward towards progress. But what happens when a woman is at the helm of a nationalist struggle? The next section considers two films that have been praised for their depiction of bold leading women within the context of anti-Dutch rebellion. Do they subvert

masculine connotations of Islamic leadership? Do the women become de-feminised in their revolutionary roles?

Woman as mother of an Islamic nation

One of the epic films (*film kolosal*) from the late 1980s was *Tjoet Nha Dhien* (1988, dir. Eros Djarot). The film stars the famous actor Christine Hakim as the eponymous Acehese guerilla leader who fought the Dutch colonial army in the Aceh War between 1873 to 1905. It was also the first Indonesian film to be invited to the Cannes Film Festival in 1989. The film begins in 1896 with the voice of Tjoet Nha Dhien reading aloud a fictionalised letter to her husband, Teuku Umar Djohan Pahlawan, about their fight against colonialism. Her voice hovers over the panoramic image of the Acehese people on a long nomadic trail across the hills to a settlement safe from Dutch forces.

After her husband dies 'a martyr' in battle in 1899, Tjoet Nha Dhien takes over his leadership and leads an army of 35,000 to a number of battles. Although the Dutch colonials are the villains of the film, the film depicts moral ambiguity on both sides of the war: there are Acehese informants for the Dutch and Dutch colonialists who collude with the Acehese to supply the latter with arms. The film nevertheless contrasts the greed of the commercially-motivated Dutch colonial administrators with the faith and piety of Tjoet Nha Dhien and her followers. Like the Java War led by Pangeran Diponegoro, the Aceh War against the Dutch is an Islamic crusade to flush out the infidel Dutch (*Kafir Ulanda*) who oppress their colonial subjects.

The incredulous reaction from the Dutch at Tjoet Nha Dhien's ability to mobilise her people and skillfully evade the Dutch challenges their initial perception of Acehese women. During the colonial period, Acehese women and men were subject to an essentialist classification system created by the Dutch police that constructed men as the enemy (*vijand*) and women as either 'innocent' civilian non-targets or as housewives

(*huisvrouwen*) (Siapno, 2002: 26). Thus Tjoet Nha Dhien's unusual position as both a rebel leader and a woman disrupts the colonial construction of Achenese femininity. Furthermore, Tjoet Nha Dhien's indomitable Achenese femininity is shown as superior to Dutch white femininity. Dutch white femininity, as personified by the Governor General van Heutz's wife, is represented as petty and idle. In contrast to his wife's preoccupation with domestic social demands that irritates the Governor General, Tjoet Nha Dhien's militant spirit awes yet terrifies him.

Although Tjoet Nha's leadership and fighting spirit are emphasised to awe-inspiring proportions, these qualities are always complimented with, and perhaps feminised by, her nurturing side. When her daughter, Gambang, begins to show an admirable military spirit, Tjoet Nha reminds Gambang of her real role, as wife and mother of defenders of the nation. In fact, it is in the conversations between Tjoet Nha and her daughter where women's roles in national struggles are rendered ambivalent. After Teuku Umar dies, leaving Tjoet Nha at the helm, Gambang asks her mother if women can be leaders. Tjoet Nha only replies, 'Subhanallah' (Glory be to Allah).

Tjoet Nha Dhien's reply may suggest her apparent reluctance to lead her people, particularly since her new role was a result of her husband's unexpected death in battle, and that her leadership is willed by God. Although a formidable military strategist in her own right, her leadership is legitimised through her status as the widow of Teuku Umar. Tjoet Nha Dhien's staunch nationalist stance on women's primary roles as mother is consistent with Nira Yuval-Davis's assertion that women are assigned the duty of 'biological reproduction of the nation' (1997: 26) and the 'cultural reproduction of the nation' (1997: 39).

Years of battle and hiding in the jungle take a toll on Tjoet Nha Dhien's physical state and she succumbs to blindness and paralysis. In his desperation to seek medical help for Tjoet Nha Dhien from the Dutch, her hiding place is revealed by her closest advisor, Pang La'ot. With great reluctance, Pang La'ot surrenders Tjoet Nha Dhien to the Dutch on the condition that she remain in Aceh. The film ends with her capture and exile

to Sumedang in West Java where she dies in 1908, breaching the agreement made between Pang La'ot and the Dutch.

When she is found in the depths of the jungle, enfeebled, and soaking in the rain, one cannot help but sense the melancholy of her struggle in the film's bleak conclusion. In the film's closing scene is an inter-title: 'the Acehnese continued to fight' which suggests the freedom fighters' legacy in Aceh. But according to Schultz (2007: 174), Tjoet Nha Dhien's legacy had inspired the 'liberation of Indonesia'. The assumption that Tjoet Nha Dhien's legacy was a fight for Indonesia's independence belies the enduring tensions between the Acehnese separatist organisation, *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (The Free Aceh Movement, GAM) and the Indonesian government during the New Order.

Despite the continuing campaigns for the secession of the Acehnese state from Indonesia and the government's demonisation of GAM, the biopic of Tjoet Nha Dhien was widely acclaimed by the Indonesian national press and Java-based cultural elite. Film critics have argued that the film was a thinly-veiled Acehnese separatist film against hegemonic Javanese powers (Sasono, 2010: 52). But because it explicitly depicts a nationalist struggle against the Dutch and not Javanese dominance, the film was not regarded as inciting separatist sentiments.

In spite of the film's contested subject, Tjoet Nha Dhien's critical success in film festivals is attributed to the appropriation of the Acehnese narrative of Islamic nationalism by auteur cinema and for the construction of Indonesian, and not specifically Acehnese, history. In the local press (*Merdeka Minggu*, 1987; *Merdeka*, 1987; *Suara Pembaruan*, 1988), the figure of Tjoet Nha Dhien is hailed as 'the face of Indonesia' (*wajah Indonesia*), 'mystical woman' (*wanita ajaib*), and a heroine (*pahlawan*) - all of which underlines an oblique statement about female heroism and leadership. Tjoet Nha is among the most famous of female Acehnese freedom fighters. Others of her rank include Teungku Fakinah, Pocut Bahren, and Tjoet Meutia.

For a highly praised cinematic achievement about a national hero⁴⁹ and freedom fighter, the film portrayal of Tjoet Nha Dhien downplays the legend of her physical strength and ferocious determination. Instead, the film emphasises her role as the sacrificial wife and mother-like figure of the nation. She pays for the spiritual and anti-colonial struggle with her well-being. The national heroine lies mostly bedridden halfway through the film, requiring the help of her male troops to transport her from one hide-out in the forest to another. Perhaps within the corporeal paralysis of a woman lies a strength that transcends the physical which makes her all the more extraordinary. But the film's focus on the twilight years of Tjoet Nha Dhien's political life also diminishes her masculine trait of leadership and instead recuperates feminised characteristics of delicate physicality and weakness.

War is typically constructed as a male arena, with women at the margins as supporters of the war effort and defenders of the hearth. Women's proper roles outside of the battlefield are suggested in the film through the absence of scenes featuring Tjoet Nha Dhien fighting alongside her male soldiers in battle. She does not lead her male soldiers into battle in the manner her husband did. However, she is unflinching when disposing of traitors to her cause. In an ambush on the treasonous nobleman Teuku Leubeh's travelling party in the forest, Tjoet Nha Dhien stabs him to death for colluding with the Dutch and betraying the Acehnese/Islamic cause. This is the only scene when she is shown carrying a weapon and using it to kill another person. She is also a brilliant strategist and a skilled diplomat whose abilities are viewed with ambivalence by her male collaborators because of her gender.

Eros Djarot's choice to focus on the military leadership of Tjoet Nha Dhien instead of her husband Teuku Umar was compelled by a need to depict 'strong' women in film (*Merdeka Minggu*, 1987). But it is also a remarkable decision seeing as Tjoet Nha Dhien did not leave behind written records about her struggles compared to Raden Ajeng Kartini who wrote letters

⁴⁹ Tjoet Nha Dhien was hailed a national hero in 1964.

detailing her rebellion. The lack of the recorded experiences and thoughts of the guerilla fighter renders her a 'voiceless' figure of Indonesia's national history (Siapno, 2002: 25) who only comes alive in Djarot's cinematic vision.

The focus on Tjoet Nha Dhien as a fighter during the height of her leadership and in ageing years stands in contrast to other existing representations of her as a national heroine dressed in aristocratic attire. The most popular image of Tjoet Nha Dhien in Aceh shows her in royal jewellery and dress. Wearing a *selendang* (a thin, loose veil) that half-covers her head, she is portrayed as distinguished and proud, showing no signs of defeat (Siapno, 2002: 26).

By highlighting the political career of a formidable female guerilla leader, Tjoet Nha Dhien departs significantly from the mainstream representations of women in New Order film. The departure from common feminine representations in New Order Indonesian cinema is further emphasised by the fact that Christine Hakim was made to look much older throughout the film. Far less represented than younger women, older women are rarely portrayed as powerful figures. Instead, they are subject to stereotypes of frailty, unattractiveness, and asexuality (Bazzini et al, 1997). As an elderly but strong guerilla leader, Tjoet Nha Dhien must engage with men who, in contrast, are weaker or morally suspect. Pang La'ot's betrayal of Tjoet Nja Dhien casts him as a weak Muslim and a traitor to the nationalist cause (Marselli, 1988). The imbalanced gender dynamic that places strong women alongside weak men has been noted by Heider (1991:121) to show that gender egalitarianism in New Order Indonesian cinema does not exist.

Nationalist images of women in the military have a long history in Indonesia. Under Sukarno's presidency, an aspiration for gender egalitarianism was found in women and men's equal participation in the military (Douglas, 1980: 166). Because military service constitutes a higher order of citizenship, women in the military were viewed as emancipated women (Sunindyo, 1998: 8). A similar view of gender equality

via equal military participation continued under Suharto's New Order in which women were considered legitimate defenders of the nation. However, the concept of *kodrat* (female biological destiny) is reinstated among the female armed forces as a reminder of women's essentialised femininity. To ensure that female soldiers retain and accept their *kodrat*, they were assigned an *ibu asuh* (surrogate mother) as their guide and guardian (Sunindyo, 1998: 13-14). Feminist scholars have commented on the contradictory expectations of women's capacities and roles in nationalist discourse. They have shown that women's involvement in armed anti-colonial struggle was championed as evidence of gender equality, but when the struggle is won women are relegated to the domestic sphere to rebuild the nation as mothers and wives (Sunindyo, 1998: 6).

Furthermore, representations of women as military defenders are sometimes sexualised to emphasise their femininity and are usually juxtaposed with erotic masculine symbolism in phallic weaponry and military vehicles (Sunindyo, 1998: 12). The sexualised image of military women or women as armed freedom fighters can also be found in Krishna Sen's analysis of the 1985 film *7 Wanita Dalam Tugas Rahasia* (*7 Women On a Secret Mission*, 1983, dir. Mardali Syarief). The titular female characters are the lovers, wives, and sisters of male soldiers in battle. Being soldiers themselves, they are members of an anti-Dutch mission. The film's soft-core pornographic visual codes in its portrayal of the women in several scenes sexually objectify the women and fetishise their suffering when they are attacked by men (Sen, 1994: 153-154). Eroticised images of women in the military diminish their equality with their male counterparts as they are exposed to a range of sexual threats that men do not endure. Tjoet Nha Dhen is different from these examples of sexualised military femininity on several counts; the Acehnese heroine is a leader of men, she is desexualised as an elderly woman and mother, and towards the end of her crusade, severely disabled.

Modern day Aceh is far removed from the pre-Independence period when women and men fought alongside each other. Women's participation in

the Acehnese public sphere has been restricted since Independence particularly after the enactment of Sharia law in 2001 (Blackwood, 2005: 852). Rather than evoking New Order anxieties of a female leader of an Islamic state, the heroic deeds of Tjoet Nha Dhien are hailed as a figment of an inert distant past. In the film, she is a feminised emblem of nationalism but above all a symbol of national motherhood. I will now turn to another film set in early twentieth-century Sumatra which depicts a similar version of nationalist femininity that is at once revolutionary in political terms but circumscribed within the domestic arena.

A woman driven to apostasy: female emancipation as political emancipation

Indonesian films very rarely deal with the controversial topic of apostasy, the act of renouncing Islam.⁵⁰ In the case of *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani), the central character's crumbling marriage and political beliefs push her to the brink of apostasy. Filmed on location in West Sumatra and set in the 1920s, anti-colonial revolt is portrayed as an Islamic struggle against the Dutch government. The film's narrative is shown in flashbacks, beginning with the leading protagonist Halimah in prison for inciting anti-colonial statements. She declares, in a voiceover, that progress in politics, culture, and religion can only be achieved through struggle and progress. Her politically and feminist emancipated views set the overall tone of the film. What is told in flashback is the political and spiritual journey that she has undertaken that results in her eventual imprisonment.

The story of Halimah's awakening as a freedom fighter and campaigner begins with her refusal to comply with the subservient role of wife. She is a regular attendee of anti-colonial lectures, an activity that her husband forbids. Halimah's marriage to her husband, Sidi Marajo, is later suspended as a punishment (*nusyuz*) for supporting the anti-Dutch

⁵⁰ Another film that does this is the 1974 film *Atheist* (dir. Sjumandjaya).

campaigns. According to Islamic tradition, the *nusyuz* can be pronounced by a man against his 'disobedient' wife. Once effective, the *nusyuz* prohibits a married woman from attaining financial support from her husband and she is denied the right to divorce him. Sidi Marajo's decision to punish his wife is backed by Haji Makmur, the local judge (*kadi*). As a supporter of the Dutch, the *kadi* brandishes a misogynist version of Islam to silence Halimah's pleas for a fair hearing of her case. For the *kadi*, his cherished medals from the Dutch are symbols of his legitimacy as an indisputable Islamic leader.

The only person who would favourably consider Halimah's case is Haji Wali, played by the film's director Asrul Sani. Haji Wali, who runs a mosque in Padang Panjang and edits a political literary magazine, *Menara* (The Watch Tower), is a champion of a progressive, women-friendly Islam. His support for inter-faith harmony and democratic debates about faith issues with his congregation further demonstrates his liberal views.

After receiving a letter from Halimah about her predicament, he calls on other clerics to meet and discuss her case. He is supportive of Halimah from the outset, believing that the *nusyuz* has no theological basis in Islam. The decision to call for the meeting of clerics in the region is also a political one and an affront to both Haji Makmur's authority and the Dutch who prohibit the meeting. When Halimah approached Haji Makmur for a fair hearing, he declares that his edict on her punishment cannot be challenged by any other cleric. By contrast, Haji Wali's embrace of open religious debates and respect for dissenting voices place him in complete opposition to Haji Makmur's arrogant version of Islam.

Denied a divorce by her husband, Halimah contemplates leaving the faith to separate from him as the *nusyuz* would not be applicable to an apostate. Halimah's decision to leave Islam becomes the talk of her village, turning her into a social pariah. Only her fellow male comrades-in-arms support her in this controversial decision. Together, Halimah and the young men walk to the village mosque past the jeering masses to make her renunciation public to all. But when Halimah arrives at the entrance of

the mosque, she has a spiritual experience, represented by an inter-title with the name of God beaming at the audience, and as a result, remains a Muslim. Halimah's change of heart is unexplained except for the possibility that a divine intervention in the mosque restores her faith in Islam (FIGURE 14). Her journey to the mosque and spiritual enlightenment coincides with the meeting of clerics on her marriage. Presided over by Haji Wali, the meeting unanimously condemns Sidi Marajo and Haji Makmur's declaration of *nusyuz* against Halimah. Following their collective agreement, Halimah's marriage to Sidi Marajo is terminated and the *nusyuz* ceases to be effective.

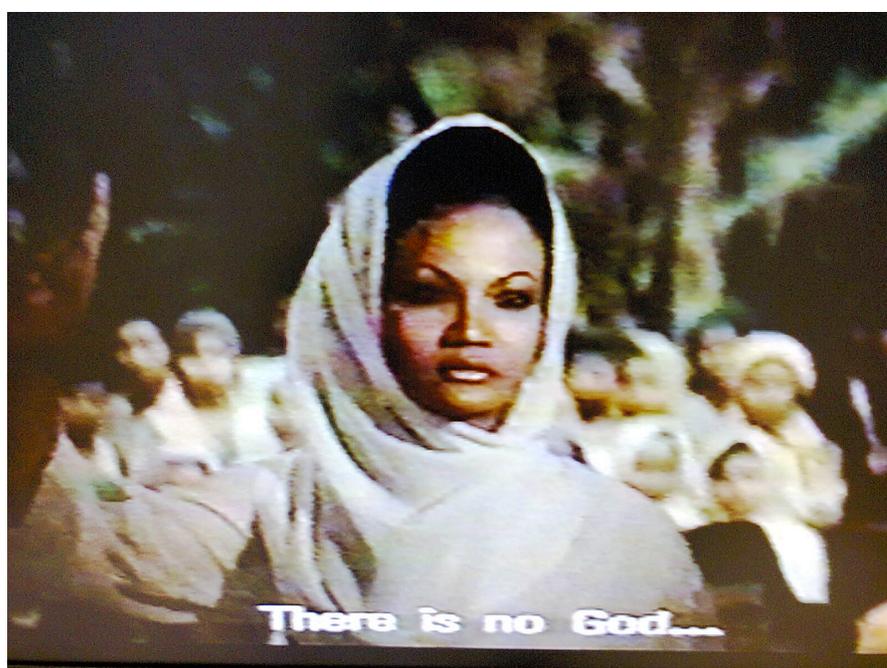


FIGURE 14 Still from *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani). At the last minute, Halimah declares, 'There is no God ... but God'.

With her faith restored, Halimah joins the women's movement against the Dutch and teaches other women domestic skills such as needlework. In the film, Dutch colonialism is presented as not only an immoral force to be defeated under an Islamic banner but is also anti-women, forbidding the political mobilisation and education of women.

Meanwhile, Halimah's emancipatory politics and strong religious affiliations are diametrically opposed to Zainab, a young unmarried woman in the film. Zainab is the daughter of Dutch-sympathising parents. She

displays elements of Western-colonial sensibility befitting an elite Sumatran woman in the 1920s: she adopts a Western style of attire consisting of skirts and blouses and unquestioningly adheres to a colonial education. Unmoved by anti-colonial sentiment, she sings the Dutch anthem in school with the zeal of an obedient colonial subject. Zainab lacks the political consciousness of Halimah but this may be influenced by her father's loyalty towards the Dutch. As her patriarchal guardian, Zainab's father, Haji Jakfar, determines her future. She is to marry a wealthy man and lead a domestic life. Thus compared to Halimah, Zainab is complacent and anti-intellectual about the position of her people under Dutch rule.

Zainab's femininity reflects the expectations pressed upon educated elite Indonesian women to follow the 'Western patterns of the modern woman as wife and mother' (Locher-Scholten, 2000: 28). Although Zainab displays a Western-style sensibility in her Western attire and in her political support of the Dutch, it does not spur her to be as ambitious, independent, and forceful as Halimah. In other words, Zainab's embrace of Western-colonial culture does not engender enlightenment. Conversely, Halimah is progressive and challenges tradition but retains the outward appearance of a 'proper' Minangkabau woman in her *kebaya*, a traditional two piece dress, and loose veil that drapes over her hair.

Meanwhile, the other revolutionary men who fight alongside Halimah dress in Western style clothing and question the religious authority associated with turbans and Islamic robes. Perhaps because as a woman enmeshed in nationalist discourse, Halimah must dress in traditional attire as she carries 'the burden of [the national] collectivity's identity and honour' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 45). Unlike men's traditional attire, Halimah's traditional clothes are the most obvious if essential marker of her people's cultural identity.

In contrast to Zainab's resigned domesticity, Halimah remains determined to be a single woman devoted to politics. After Halimah is free of Sidi Marojo, she declines the mayor's demand for her to remarry. The mayor is

suspicious of Halimah's activist work with the local women and sees marriage as a means of curbing her movement. In the end, she takes the role of an anti-Dutch agitator herself and gives speeches about political independence in the local mosque. Her Islamic-nationalist activism in the mosque mirrors the kind of leadership held by her male predecessors who are clerics. Halimah's political activism and emancipated views about women's rights do not, however, go unpunished. Her declaration of an 'Indonesian nation' (*Bangsa Indonesia*) and independence (*Merdeka*) falls foul of the spying military police as such proclamations are illegal. Like her predecessors, she is imprisoned for two years by the Dutch government for inciting anti-colonial views in a local mosque.

Revolutionary Islam is therefore envisioned as a feminist struggle in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* whereby women and men are equal as leaders in faith and politics. But more importantly, an emancipationist version of Islam liberates women. It could also be said that other women in Halimah's village are yet to be liberated and enlightened by 'true' Islam themselves, as she faces subtle opposition from other women who beseech her to passively accept a woman's destiny or *kodrat*. Moreover, her journey towards political emancipation is short-lived and this may have to do with her gender. Egalitarian policies in nationalist struggles have been found to be temporary and strategic to rally women's support. Once the struggle is over, women are expected to return to their 'appropriate' roles in the domestic sphere (Sunindyo, 1998: 7).

The film is an adaptation and an elaboration of a few pages taken from Hamka's⁵¹ semi-biographical accounts of his father's life in the 1920s, *Ayahku* (My Father, 1955). Halimah's plight as a woman wronged by patriarchal interpretations of Islam is based on the accounts of the many west Sumatran women who renounced their faith to escape abuse by their husbands. Helping the women with the Islamic legal procedures pertaining to their marriage is Hamka's father, a well-known Minangkabau preacher.

⁵¹ Better known as Hamka, Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908-1981) was a renowned Indonesian ulama, novelist, and political activist.

Characters in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* have historical parallels. The 1920s was a high point for Islamic anti-colonial politics when radical and moderate Islamic political parties set their ideological differences aside to undermine Dutch rule. It was also during this period when most Islamic parties established women's wings, branches, or sections to further their support base and reach (Blackburn, 2008: 86). Female members of Islamic political parties who became more defiant and 'non-cooperative' toward the colonial government not only shocked colonial observers but faced similar levels of scrutiny and harassment to their male counterparts (Blackburn, 2008: 87). Female activists like Rasuna Said who fought the colonial system were jailed for their anti-colonial activities. Revolutionary men who belonged to the *Kaum Muda* (The New Generation) stressed the importance of women's education and roles in society, along with modernisation and democracy (Abdullah, 2009: 21).

Asrul Sani's choice to highlight the female-oriented perspective of anti-colonial struggles in 1920s West Sumatra is argued to reflect the matrilineal traditions of Minangkabau society.⁵² Although not shown in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan*, Minangkabau society has long experienced tensions between its adherence to a matrilineal set of customs and a strong commitment to Islam. Elements of Minangkabau culture pervade throughout Asrul Sani's film nonetheless, underlining not tension but rather a harmonious co-existence between Islam and Minangkabau customs.

However, the film's depictions of Minangkabau culture is only cursory in its location, soundtrack featuring traditional Minangkabau music, local batik worn by a few men, and a scene showing a traditional Minangkabau wedding ceremony. The dialogue is in standard Indonesian and there are no allusions to forming a free West Sumatra. In contrast to *Tjoet Nha Dhien*, calls for political independence and nationalist fervour in *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* is explicitly made in the name of the Indonesian nation. *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan*'s aesthetic references to Minangkabau culture concur with Heider's view that New Order cinema has a reductive

⁵² 'Pioneers of Independence' Monash University VHS Pal video synopsis.

or superficial approach to cultural diversity in order to project New Order notions of Indonesian-ness (1994: 163). Following Heider's logic, the film presents to its audience Indonesian history, the apparent roots of nation-building, and national culture.

Summary

This chapter has considered how, in certain Islamic films produced during the New Order, nationalised images of men and women are reproduced in narratives about proto-nationalism and the Indonesian nation. These images thereby represent the gendered dimension of New Order films that construct 'Indonesian nation and culture' (Heider, 1994: 164). Masculinity in New Order Islamic films emphasises the role of men as restorers of order in a morally wayward society. Films that engage this theme: *Sembilan Wali*, *Pahlawan Goa Selarong*, *Al-Kautsar* and *Perjuangan dan Doa* feature men who personify social change and guide their fellow Muslims to a new understanding of Islam and (proto)-nationhood.

As men on the side of 'correct' Islamic practice, their masculinity is expressed in stark dichotomy to their male adversaries through their approach to conflict and clothing. The mystics in *Sembilan Wali* do not participate in physical combat with their moral and political detractors, underlining their refined masculinity. In scenes depicting battles over morality and the nation in *Sembilan Wali* and *Pahlawan Goa Selarong*, the Islamic heroes are clad in white attire in contrast to their sometimes half-dressed enemies. As figures of legend and history, the Javanese mystics and Pangeran Diponegoro are reconstructed to tell a story about the origins of the nation and the role of Muslim men in its construction.

The male protagonist in *Al-Kautsar*, Saiful Bachri, personifies modernity and progress in dress and ideals. Dressed in Western-style shirt and trousers, he marries technology and Islam in his appeal to a rural Muslim society in want of a moral and socio-economic development. Like Saiful Bachri, the flamboyant Rhoma Irama in *Perjuangan dan Doa* advances a

novel approach, albeit a musical one, to propagate his Islamic message to Muslims in need of spiritual guidance. The men in the New Order Islamic films discussed in this chapter reproduce the 'spheres of action' (Sen, 1994: 116) that concern masculine tropes of nationhood and progress, through their engagement with other men. But such spheres of action are framed through an Islamic lens that is consistent with state ideology of the New Order.

In New Order Islamic films where female characters have prominent roles as rebel leaders of an emerging nation, their leadership is offset by an emphasis of their domesticity; namely their roles as mothers and wives. Two films discussed in this chapter exemplify the paradox of female leadership: *Tjoet Nha Dhien* and *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan*. *Tjoet Nha Dhien* is an anomaly in Indonesia's film history in that it is an auteur film that focuses on the extraordinary rebellion against the Dutch led by a woman. Although a formidable leader, Tjoet Nja Dhien is ambivalent about her role seeing as it was passed down to her following the death of her husband Teuku Umar. *Tjoet Nha Dhien* reminds her successor, her daughter, of women's real roles as wives and mothers of the nation.

Para Perintis Kemerdekaan also tells a story of anti-colonial struggle through a woman's voice and experiences. But her struggle is not one defined by armed struggle typically reserved for men. Halimah's proto-nationalism is both an intellectual and a domestic one. Marital breakdown is akin to religious crisis which leads Halimah's attempt to renounce her Islamic faith. This feminised theme of faith-based domestic oppression would occur in later films during the post-New Order period discussed in the next chapter. Both *Tjoet Nha Dhien* and *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* show that for women, their public political struggles are intertwined with their roles in the private sphere as wives and mothers. In contrast, the leading male characters in the films discussed in this chapter are not in any way men whose nationalist and spiritual struggles are defined by their roles as husbands or fathers.

With the exception of *Tjoet Nha Dhien*, which was shot partly in Acehnese language and on location, regional and cultural specificities in New Order cinema are diluted or flattened-out to accommodate a broad image of 'Indonesian-ness'. The motivations behind the dilution and flattening-out of regional and cultural differences may serve the New Order's ideology of national cohesion and unity. But such an imposition of cohesion and unity involves the hegemonic modes of representation that marginalise the subjects whose stories are told by elites. Discourses about the nation are tacitly implied in the subsequent chapters on representations of gender in post-New Order Islamic films as their themes move away from nation-building and more towards individualist and transnational concerns.

The films discussed in this chapter are categorised as 'Islamic films' because of the over-arching and prominent presence of Islamic symbols that permeate the narrative, aesthetic qualities, and for films such as *Sembilan Wali*, the ethics of film production. While all the films belong to the *film Islami* genre, most of them are also historical, and only one, *Sembilan Wali* can be regarded as a *dakwah* film for its adherence to the guidelines of the MUI and being an explicit vehicle for conveying Islamic teachings. Through their rigid and stratified gender roles (the men as religious and nationalist leaders, the women as domestic figures and emblematic of the nation), the central figures of the films invoke the redemptive power of Islam and communicate the message of modernity and nationalism as Islamic projects.

**Empowered Muslim femininities?: representations of
women in post-New Order *film Islami***

For Sonja van Wichelen (2011), the Islamic discourse in post-New Order Indonesia has taken on a gendered character in that debates concerning public moral hygiene and Islamic practice are defined in the contested leadership of former president Megawati, polygamy, the anti-pornography bill, and the popular sensuality of performer Inul Darasista (van Wichelen, 2010). But more fundamentally, these debates bring to light how certain Islamic practises and regulations disadvantage Muslim women more than Muslim men. This chapter shows that the themes portrayed in the films discussed herein are also 'gendered' Islamic issues, issues that contest Muslim women's participation in the public sphere. The films demonstrate that Islamic issues such as religious leadership, the face veil, interfaith relations, religious conversion, and an Islamic persona in the film industry cannot be separated from the performance of gender.

As a challenge to global Islamophobia, the women in films discussed in this chapter have agency and independence, but they cannot have too much of either. The women continue to encounter the enduring resistance against female independence beyond the domestic sphere and painful negotiations between self-actualisation and family demands. As a feature of resistance, the theme of agency runs through this chapter, as a gateway to discussions about female domesticity, oppression, and empowerment in Islamic cinema. Agency here is understood as 'the power within' that manifests through 'bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance' (Kabeer, 1999: 438).

Through the themes of agency, female suffering, and domesticity, I will show that certain films in the Islamic film genre about women share characteristics of the 'woman's film', as defined by Mary Ann Doane:

The 'woman's film' obsessively centres and re-centres a female protagonist, placing her in a *position of agency*, it offers some resistance to an analysis which stresses the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the woman, her objectification as spectacle according to the masculine structure of the gaze. (1987: 286, italics mine)

On the one hand, efforts to portray 'strong' and independent Muslim women are driven by a sense of protest against Islamophobia. But on the other hand, the production of such images are dominated by Muslim male filmmakers, reinforcing another critique of Islam as a male-dominated faith. Women in the Indonesian filmmaking industry I interviewed are cynical about the ability of male filmmakers to produce meaningful portrayals of Muslim women. The filmmaker and producer Nia Dinata argues that male directors are never conscious of gender when they make films. Instead, even when representations of women are prominent and powerful, she believes that women's images and voices are appropriated for their masculine artistic and political vision.⁵³

Dinata's critique of representations of women by male filmmakers raises an important proviso; depictions of 'empowered' Muslim female characters in Indonesian film need to be carefully examined within the context of the narrative and not taken simply at face value. Krishna Sen stresses that when analysing images of 'strong' women, one must ask 'to what effect and in whose interest is this strength mobilised' in film (1994: 135). And so at this juncture, it would be instructive to bring forward a set of questions related to the context of those images of women (strong or otherwise) in Islamic films. Whose interests are being met in depictions of strong pious women? What influence do feminist critiques of representations of women have on post-New Order *film Islami*? Have representations of women in

⁵³ Interview with Nia Dinata in Jakarta on 3rd February 2012.

Indonesian film, as exemplified in the *film Islami* genre, become more Islamic? What does Islamic femininity come to signify in post-New Order Indonesian film? Does it embody, as Sonja van Wichelen identifies (2011) in the Indonesian public sphere, the 'gendered' discourse of contemporary Islam?

Because of its aesthetics and themes that oppose Western and Westernised local mass media in Indonesia, Katinka van Heeren classifies the *film Islami* genre as a type of oppositional cinema (2012: 122). If she is right, then the genre is also in opposition to the Islamophobic view of women's oppression in Islam. In this chapter, I argue that this oppositional stance of the genre is more prominent during the post-New Order period as the genre joins the chorus of protest against the Islamophobic discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 that connects extremist misogyny with Islam.

Theo van Gogh's short film, *Submission*, which caused outrage worldwide and allegedly led to his assassination, is one such example of cinematic Islamophobia. First screened on Dutch television in 2004, *Submission* depicts four women who call on Allah for an explanation of the male-perpetrated violence they experience. It is not just the narrative of the film that courted criticism from Muslim commentators and protest. Cries of blasphemy were also targeted towards the film's depiction of Qur'anic inscription on the women's exposed bodies (MacDonald, 2006: 7).

This chapter first aims to address the tensions between challenging representations of global Islamophobia and those of Muslim women's participation in the public sphere. The first half of the chapter examines two films that engage with Muslim women's roles in the public religious sphere and how they are beset by familial relations that threaten their Islamic careers and a return to the domestic sphere. *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman in the Turban, 2009, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) can be described as a feminist melodrama about a young woman, Annisa, who overcomes patriarchal obstacles to pursue her passion for education, reading, and literature. With its critical stance towards bigotry within

Islamic institutions and the incorporation of controversial Islamic scripture in the dialogue, the film is a fine example of an oppositional post-New Order Islamic film on the status of women in Islam.

Ummi Aminah (Mother Aminah, 2011, dir. Aditya Gumay) on the other hand, is a more innocuous critique of middle class Muslim women's burden of maintaining a successful career and being the primary carer of the family. As a popular female religious leader, Ummi Aminah cannot 'have it all.' She, like Annisa, must battle with domestic conflict before she is free to pursue her career and life aspirations outside the home. In my analysis of the film and themes of female suffering, I will show how *Ummi Aminah* is an Islamic 'women's film' and maternal melodrama that sets it apart from other films in the genre.

The second half of the chapter explores themes unique to post-New Order Islamic cinema: the meaning of the face veil (*cadar*), the gender dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations, and the rise of the Islamic film star. In Lukman Hakim's film *Khalifah* (2011), the *cadar* lies at the intersection of global and local discourses about gender and Islam. The film directly engages with the aftermath of 9/11 in which the veil and face veil have been reconstructed by Muslim women as a symbol of resistance to secularism and Islamophobia. *Khalifah* complicates the connotations attached to the veil, however, by making the simple headscarf (*jilbab*) and *cadar* cultural opposites of each other. Representations of the *cadar* also bring into light the ambivalent economic and cultural exchange between Indonesia and Arab nations.

In *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) and *Syahadat Cinta* (Vow of Love, 2008, dir. Gunawan Panggaru), Islam's image as tolerant towards religious difference is promoted to counter Islamophobic misconceptions that the religion is hostile to diversity and intent on global domination. The implicit engagement with religious pluralism is found in subplots about interfaith romance between a Muslim man and Christian woman. However, the advocacy for diversity is undercut by religious conversion by the

Christian women into the Islamic faith. Furthermore, the representation of Christianity in both films is feminised within an Islamicised discourse of interfaith romance and religious conversion. The films demonstrate the Christian women's attraction to the values within Islam as a sign of the religion's positive view about women.

The popularity of female film stars who adopt a pious offscreen persona subverts several misconceptions about Islam and women who work in the film and entertainment industry. Their appeal as film stars rests not only on the maintenance of a public Islamic image and wearing the *jilbab*, but also their ability to successfully construct new and aspirational Muslim femininities in the public sphere. These Muslim film stars are dynamic and resourceful. They cross the boundaries of their onscreen careers in cinema to become political campaigners, writers, models, and singers to further consolidate their Islamic images. Moreover, their media presence is boosted by new modes of communication and media technologies that were largely unavailable during the New Order.

Other than *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Syahadat Cinta*, each of the films discussed in this chapter engage with Islamic debates concerning women's roles in the public domain through a central Muslim female character as a way of countering Islamophobic images of Muslim women. Contrary to images of downtrodden women are images of highly educated pious Muslim women who wear the veil and take control over their lives with careers outside the home. However, the attention given to producing counter-hegemonic images of Muslim women in film has resulted in the reinforcement of the status quo with regards to the internal debates concerning images of women in Indonesian cinema.

Domestic struggle as spiritual struggle

A few female-led films made in the last decade by women filmmakers have dealt explicitly with 'women's issues,' issues pertaining to mother-daughter relationships (*Pasir Berbisik* (Whispering Sands, 2001, dir. Nan Achnas),

abortion and female sexuality (*Perempuan Punya Cerita*, Chants of Lotus, 2007, dirs. Upi Avianto, Nia Dinata, Fatimah Rony, and Lasja Fauzia Susatyo), and polygamy (*Berbagi Suami*, Love for Share, 2006, dir. Nia Dinata). In the case of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, however, it is directed by a male filmmaker and overtly focused on a range of women's issues.

Adapted from a novel of the same name by Abidah El Khaleiqy, a feminist Islamic scholar, the film's critical stance on patriarchal domination by Muslim men attracted outrage from the head imam of Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque in 2009. Conversely, the film won praise from Meutia Hatta, the women's issues minister for challenging retrogressive socio-religious attitudes towards women in the domain of popular culture (Belford, 2009).

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban is centred on the trials and tribulations of strong-willed Annisa, a daughter of a *kyai*, the head of the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and local community. Annisa is intent on challenging the norms of her conservative Islamic upbringing by insisting on continuing her studies far from home in Yogyakarta, much to the disapproval of her father. To quell her independent spirit, Annisa is forced into marriage with the son of another *kyai* but soon suffers from domestic abuse, marital rape, and the humiliation of entering a polygamous marriage without her consent. After a painful divorce, Annisa reinvents herself as a women's refuge counsellor then religious school teacher in her father's *pesantren*. At the *pesantren*, she distributes secular and politically-charged novels to her students despite criticisms from her father that the content of the books is 'un-Islamic.'

After her first marriage, Annisa rekindles her relationship with a childhood sweetheart, Khudori, a recent graduate of al-Azhar University in Egypt. When the two face accusations of sexual impropriety and threats of punishment by stoning, they decide to marry. As a survivor of rape and domestic abuse, Annisa is wary of intimacy. But she later overcomes her trauma when she initiates sexual contact with her husband. Although the

film does not depict the consummation of their marital relationship, Annisa's sexual fulfillment is later suggested in a scene where she looks joyous and triumphant. Thus the film hints favourably at female sexuality although only within the context of marriage. Furthermore, it also considers the considerable trauma experienced by survivors of violence and the sympathetic Muslim men who do not demand sexual intercourse as a marital right.

Khudori's demure and sympathising character has, however, attracted criticism. Eric Sasono, a consultant on the writing of the film's script, argues that Hanung Bramantyo has deliberately portrayed Khudori as a 'weak' man.⁵⁴ By contrast, Annisa's father and first husband, in Sasono's view, are portrayed as one-dimensional caricatures of oppressive men. The film is reduced to a crude melodrama, says Sasono, as Annisa's escape from her family and first marital home becomes a predictable choice that diminishes the complexity of her life choices and character.

Annisa's tribulations and ideals bear some semblance to the politics of Muslim women's political mobilising in Indonesia. In her book on Indonesian women's leadership in Islamic organisations, Pieterella van Doorn-Harder (2006) reveals the role and influence Muslim women have in challenging the patriarchal reading of Islamic scripture in Indonesia. However, the rise of women's leadership in Islamic organisations occurs alongside rising Islamist extremism. Despite these obstacles in certain parts of Indonesia, Muslim women in general have access to thousands of other institutions where women are trained to become specialists of Islam, allowing them to learn and interpret Islamic scripture (van Doorn-Harder, 2006: 1-2).

⁵⁴ Interview with Eric Sasono in Jakarta on 30th January 2012.



FIGURE 15 Closing shot from *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman in a Turban, 2009, dir. Hanung Bramantyo). Annisa as the Muslim woman who rises above the rest despite the odds.

Among these institutions is the *pesantren*, where female and male students spend many of their formative years studying Islamic texts. These schools have produced female intellectuals, preachers, and feminist activists who actively engage in religious debates equipped with substantial knowledge of Islamic scripture and command of classical Arabic (van Doorn-Harder, 2006: 2). These trends suggest a culture that promotes the betterment and intellectual development of Muslim women. Muslim women in Indonesia, as in the rest of Southeast Asia, wield a relative amount of freedom to move and resist repression. They also have greater economic autonomy and physical mobility than many women elsewhere in the Muslim world (Robinson, 2010: 135).

But women's active participation in public discourse and leadership does not, however, mean that Indonesia is a feminist utopia. Not far beneath the veneer of relative economic and social egalitarianism, there are intersecting inequalities that underlie specific contexts. Even when religious institutions promote women's education, greater participation, and notional leadership, women's direct and autonomous leadership are usually denied. For example, the women's branch of the mass

Muhammadiyah movement continues to be subservient and marginalised in relation to their male counterpart despite exhibiting strong and capable leadership (van Doorn-Harder, 2006: 43).

The repeated obstacles that Annisa faces in her journey towards self-actualisation are not only domestic in nature but created by the men closest to her: her father and first husband. Annisa's father and first husband's unremitting desire to deny her access to higher education is contrasted with her second husband Khudori's support, empathy, and formidable academic qualifications. Khudori's masculinity has been commented by Hoesterey and Clark (2012: 217-218) as being part of a new shift in representations of men in Indonesian cinema towards pro-femininity. However, Khudori's gentle demeanour vis-à-vis Annisa's heroic persona may be a hangover of Karl Heider's formulation of what he considers the strong-woman/weak man dynamic in New Order cinema (Heider, 1991: 121).

Domestic conflict and gossip blight the life of the central female character in *Ummi Aminah*. In *Ummi Aminah*, the titular character is a mother to five children and grandmother of one. In her role as a popular *ustazah* or female preacher, she is also 'mother' to her all-female congregation who pray with her and listen to her sermons. Soon, indiscretions within her family turn Ummi Aminah's life and career upside down. Rumours surrounding her oldest daughter Zarika's romance with a married man and her son Zainal's arrest for drug trafficking threaten to tear her family apart and tarnish her reputation as a morally upstanding religious leader.

Ummi Aminah faces repeated public humiliation in front of her female congregation because of her children's failings. Her humiliation begins with rumours that spread via social media of Zarika's affair with a married man. During Ummi Aminah's sermon, members of her congregation read Twitter messages with both amusement and disdain. In another instance, when Ummi Aminah is driven to a public lecture by her son, he is arrested by the police before her bewildered congregation. Ummi Aminah's public humiliation reaches its peak when nation-wide press reports and television

broadcasts of her son's arrest question her moral integrity as an *ustazah*. The size of her congregation diminishes dramatically and her sponsors cancel all of her future public sermons. Deeply affected by the turn of events, she descends into depression and withdraws from public life.



FIGURE 16 Ummi Aminah (right) admonishes her daughter Zarika for having an affair with a married man (*Ummi Aminah*, 2011, dir. Aditya Gumay).

It is only when her family band together to restore Ummi Aminah's self-worth and remind her that her strength lies within the confines of the nuclear family that she recovers from her depression. With most of the family crises resolved, not least the end of Zarika's affair with a married man, Ummi Aminah's family rally around her, boosting her confidence by reinstating her in the primary role of mother. Things begin to improve further when a radio station invites Ummi Aminah as a guest on a religious programme. She is hesitant at first, but is encouraged by her husband to return to her public role. The radio broadcast is a success, demonstrated by her family and her congregation who listen in proudly to the broadcast in unison. Following Ummi Aminah's successful comeback, her son Zainal is released from prison after he is found to have been wrongly convicted. With the return of Zainal, her career as a popular *ustazah* resumes, emphasising that as a working mother, she should prioritise her family over her public role.

In accordance with Islamic tradition, a female religious leader must only lead an all-female congregation (Silvers and Elewa, 2011: 142). The only time Ummi Aminah's authoritative voice is heard by a mixed-gender audience is in a radio broadcast in which she sermonises about the importance of maintaining traditional family values. What this scene suggests is that the practice of female leadership and the deference she receives from the role are defined through medium and space. Her authority in the public sphere as a religious leader is confined to an all-female space and to the medium of sound. Conversely, she is not shown to speak as a religious leader in the presence of men. Thus ideas of what makes an acceptable female religious leader are interwoven in *Ummi Aminah*. The film also perpetuates traditional expectations of motherhood and the role of faith in the family in that family responsibility trumps a woman's role in her faith community. Ummi Aminah's husband is portrayed as a patient and caring helpmeet to her public role with little impact on his masculinity. In contrast, Ummi Aminah bears the personal cost of subverting traditional femininity.

The tag-line of the film, '*Film untuk ibu-ibu yang mencintai ibu*' could be read as 'a film for women who love their mothers,' emphasising the centrality of women's roles as mothers. In a television interview with the film's director Aditya Gumay and the cast of *Ummi Aminah*, the director states that the film is about the 'irony' of a woman who has the ability to lead a congregation of thousands but lacks the ability to maintain harmony within her own family.

As a mother and popular *ustazah*, the character of Ummi Aminah was meant to appeal to a larger if more female-oriented audience, along with non-Muslim and family audiences. For the film's director, Aditya Gumay, the film was less a commentary on the Islamic faith or women's leadership in Islam than about the challenges of a family in crisis and the means through which a mother, as saviour, pulls the family back from fragmentation.⁵⁵ But even though the film lacks a conscious commentary

⁵⁵ Interview with Aditya Gumay in Jakarta on 3rd February 2012.

on gender and public Islamic affairs, it nevertheless raises a number of important if implicit questions about female leadership in Islam. The film's silence on the under-representation of female Islamic leaders speaks volumes of the reinforcement of traditional female roles in Indonesian society and Islamic practice. As a film about female leadership, albeit a vulnerable one, in a religious community and in the home, *Ummi Aminah* portrays the boundaries between the two spheres that Muslim women must tread with peril.

Ummi Aminah has all the elements of a melodrama and its subclass, the 'women's film'. It has the mode of address of a women's film; made for 'women who love their mothers' and as an Indonesian melodrama, it is about a suffering female protagonist caught in a family crisis (Sen, 1993: 208) and evokes emotions in its female audiences. But it is also a 'maternal melodrama' with paradoxes, a type of melodrama identified in a study by Linda Williams:

The device of devaluing the actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood is typical of the 'women's film' in general and the subgenre of the maternal melodrama in particular. In these films it is quite remarkable how frequently the self-sacrificing mother must make her sacrifice that of the connection to her children - either for her or their own good (1987: 300).

Feminist literature on the maternal melodrama in film has commented on the centrality of the 'passive' mother implicated in family-related conflicts. But the passivity of the mother is often not what it seems and may actually be paradoxical. The suffering mother may find 'joy in pain [and] pleasure in sacrifice' (Williams, 1987: 299), suggesting not empowerment but rather agency allowed within the constraints of the private and public arena. *Ummi Aminah's* pain meanwhile appears stripped of joy as she falls into a depression. She is reinstated to her role as a religious leader after gaining the approval of her family and regains the agency to rebuild herself.

Both *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Ummi Aminah* show that the closer a woman gets to complete autonomy in the religious public sphere, the greater her domestic struggle. Despite the demands of domestic life that threaten to restrict the lives of Annisa and Ummi Aminah, their careers within the Islamic context remain intact in the end. For Annisa and Ummi Aminah, their circumscribed spiritual lives are closely intertwined with their lives as working women. The devastating domestic crises faced by the two women underline a deeply ambivalent view of educated Muslim women stepping out independently into the public arena.

Both Annisa and Ummi Aminah resolve tensions on the matter in the end, but not without trauma and threats to family unity. The lesson that the two female characters must accept is that independence and aspirations come with a price in both the domestic and public sphere. The role of daughter and mother are pressed upon Annisa and Ummi Aminah respectively in spite of their resolve to develop their personhood beyond it. They have some, but nevertheless hard-won, autonomy in the public sphere. In this respect, they move progressively forward from Heider's findings that independent women in New Order cinema can only be found in the domestic arena (1991: 120).

What can *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Ummi Aminah* tell us about the images of women produced by Indonesian male filmmakers? At present, a number of high profile male filmmakers are just as likely as their female counterparts to make films about women and 'women's issues'. Other post-New Order male filmmakers such as Riri Riza, Slamet Rahardjo, and Hanny Saputra, have directed onscreen portrayals of resilient femininity (*Eliana Eliana*, 2002, dir. by Riza; and *Marsinah*, 2002, dir. by Rahardjo) and active female sexuality (in *Virgin*, 2005, dir. Saputra) in the 'secular' public sphere.

Marshall Clark identifies the cinematic efforts of these male filmmakers of women-centred films as 'challenging the normative gender dynamics and constructing non-patriarchal models of subjectivities and practices' (2010: 95). Granted, the images presented by these male filmmakers do to some

extent dislodge the normative gender dynamics that reproduce feminine weakness and male aggression. But whether or not they construct non-patriarchal models of subjectivities and practices is less clear, especially when male entitlement to power, authority, and access to female sexuality and bodies in the films are not dismantled. These male-produced images of women, Annisa and Ummi Aminah included, nonetheless transcode the post-*Reformasi* zeitgeist of increased participation by Indonesian women in public, often male-dominated, domains.

Although men still dominate the visual production of Muslim women in Indonesian cinema, their portrayals of ideological subversion is minute in scale but nonetheless noteworthy. A significant example of ideological subversion can be observed in the titles of their films. For instance, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, which roughly translates as the woman who wears the turban around her neck, suggests a woman's attempt to assume the authority of a male Islamic leader who typically wears the turban. Rather than wearing it as a head accessory, Annisa feminises the symbol of masculine Islamic authority by wearing it as a neck piece (the verb *berkalung* means to wear as a necklace). A similar kind of ideological subversion can be found in the film title of *Khalifah* (2011, dir. Nurman Hakim) discussed in the next section. *Khalifah* is both the name of the film's central character and the Arabic term for supreme leader of an Islamic empire or caliph. As the heirs to the Prophet Muhammad's leadership in Islam, only men can be caliphs. However radical it may seem to name a woman *Khalifah*, it is the only ideological subversion the film attempts as we shall see in the next section.

***Khalifah*: Muslim femininity reduced to a pair of eyes**

As discussed in previous chapters, the veil is an important marker of Islamic femininity. However, the meaning of the veil is often contested. The veil has many political and social symbolisms related to Indonesian women's Islamic identity and connotes an index of a changing society. In cinematic representations, the veil is different in that it functions as a

narrative device to convey spiritual fortitude, difference, and food for thought for the Indonesian-ness of Islam. When Indonesian audiences encountered the *cadar* for the first time in the romantic melodrama *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008, the *cadar* enhanced the beauty, piety, and exoticism of its wearer, Aisha, the Turkish-German love interest of the polygamous hero Fahri.

This section examines the ambivalent meanings of the veil in the 2011 film *Khalifah* and the film's departure from previous representations of the veil in post-New Order Islamic cinema. The veil in this section refers to the typology of Islamic headwear for women, from the more common headscarf or *jilbab*, the traditional loose scarf or *kerudung*, and the face veil or *cadar*. And as the film discussed in this section shows, the types of veiling connote different meanings that reveal aspects of gender and socioeconomic class relations, global cross-cultural flows, and nationhood.

The transnational influences of veiling can be traced to the period of Islamic resurgence in the Middle East in the late 1970s. Inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979, Muslim societies outside Iran and the Middle East revived their own Islamic fervour in politics and social life. One of the most visible influences of the Islamic revivalism during the period was the widespread adoption of the veil by Muslim women. Although the *chador* in Iran, the *burqa* in Afghanistan, and the *niqab* and *abaya* in Saudi Arabia were state imposed, many Muslim women voluntarily wore the veil in countries where the veil was not compulsory (Ahmed, 1992: 53).

Not explicitly stated in the Qur'an as compulsory for women, the wearing of the veil has nonetheless been interpreted as a requirement for women and post-pubescent girls in certain societies and groups of Muslims (Ahmed, 1992: 54). Commonly associated with Islam, the practice of veiling did not originate in Muslim culture. Upper class women adopted the veil in pre-Islamic Arabia, Greece, Assyria, and Byzantium (Ahmed, 1992: 55). Islamic revivalism in the late twentieth-century, and more notably in the aftermath of 9/11, has intensified associations, often negatively, between the veil and Islam.

In Indonesia, the *jilbab* is the most common form of veiling. The *jilbab* is a tight headscarf which covers the hair, ears, neck, and often extends over the chest area. The dominant meanings attached to versions of the veil have shifted since their first association with radical expressions of Islam and the appellation of *jilbab beracun* (the poisonous headscarf) in the mid-1980s (Arimbi, 2009). Opposition to the practice of veiling in the 1980s was founded not on the basis that it was 'Islamic', but rather because it was perceived to be 'Arab' in origin and therefore foreign, unusual, and unsuitable to local Indonesian culture (Brenner, 1996: 674). In a sea change of attitudes, the end of the 1990s witnessed the wave of *jilbabisasi* (jilbab-isation) that spread from beyond universities in Indonesia, the main bastion of the *jilbab*, to the rest of the public sphere.

The widespread embrace of the *jilbab* in universities was compelled by a variety of motivations. Veiling by educated Indonesian women was inspired significantly by solidarity with Islamic student movements and the global Islamic community (*ummah*) during the wave of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East throughout the 1980s and 1990s. To an increasing extent since the 1990s, the practice of veiling has become a fashion statement, displaying the easy coalescence between Islamic politics and modern consumerism. More women in parliament, films, and national television were seen wearing the headscarf as it became more acceptable for public figures to veil without losing their popularity because of the *jilbab* (van Wichelen, 2010 : 86). The period between the 1990s and 2000s became a turning point when the idea of the veiled woman as backward or extreme became de-stigmatised and transformed into the notional modern Indonesian Muslim woman (Brenner, 1996; Robinson, 2007; van Wichelen, 2012).

In her study of the veiling phenomenon in Java in the 1990s, Susan Brenner found that the *jilbab* heralded a new age in Indonesian history that 'deliberately disassociated itself from the local past' (1996: 673). Women who adopted the veil in Java have done so due to personal spiritual enlightenment or awareness (*kesedaran*) and a renouncement of a less

pious past. Although the veil has entered an age of public acceptance, its negative connotations have not completely disappeared. The practice of veiling has been criticised as a sign of controlling women's access to the public sphere and the rollback of the gains Indonesian women have made in the twentieth-century (Robinson, 2007: 40).

The veiled Muslim female identity also intersects with socioeconomic class. Veiling practices in Indonesia are not simply an indication of the Islamisation of femininity, but also illustrative of class dynamics played out in public representations of piety (van Wichelen, 2010: 17). This means how women wear the *jilbab* and what type of *jilbab* can sometimes be a marker of socioeconomic class (Brenner, 1999: 43). The *jilbab* also has a temporal quality. Some women but more notably Indonesian media personalities wear the *jilbab* only during Ramadan, the fasting month. The temporary adoption of the *jilbab* during Ramadan has been regarded as a marketing strategy to appeal to media consumers rather than as religious commitment, for when Ramadan is over these women will remove their headscarf. Furthermore, there are women who wear the *jilbab* only when they go to work, or for special occasions such as funerals and attending prayers at the mosque. The temporality of the veil shows that the Islamisation of femininity is fluid and context-specific rather than fixed.

Khalifah begins with the voiceover of the beautiful titular protagonist, Khalifah, a young working-class woman who lives in Jakarta. She muses about the importance of appearances and the way individuals spend money to beautify themselves for friends and lovers. She questions these practices while making a point about the inner self as being important to the individual as their physical appearance. Ironically, the opening scenes take place in a hair and beauty salon where Khalifah works. From the outset we also learn that Khalifah is a woman with unfulfilled ambitions. A female customer who is about to complete her university education asks Khalifah why she abandoned the opportunity to gain higher education even though she was offered a place in university. To this Khalifah replies that she had to prioritise her family's financial needs before her higher education.

When Khalifah returns home from work, she discovers that her father has plans to marry her off to Rasyid, a trader who sells imported goods from Saudi Arabia. Marrying Rasyid will alleviate the financial troubles of her family. Khalifah and her family struggle to make ends meet after shouldering the huge cost of her late mother's hospital bills. Her brother is hardworking in school but financial difficulties may spell the end of his education just as it had ended hers. A dutiful daughter pressured by her family's predicament, Khalifah agrees to marry Rasyid.

Once married to Rasyid, he makes symbolic attempts to persuade her to wear the headscarf. He does this initially by placing an apron over her head! Soon, out of her own volition, Khalifah adopts the *kerudung*, affecting perceptions of those around her. She is praised by friends for looking 'more beautiful' since wearing the headscarf. Men in her neighbourhood stop harassing her signalling their respect for Khalifah's new display of piety. The *kerudung* has also effected changes in Khalifah's work place. Her new-found Islamic piety prohibits her from working on men's hair as touching between unrelated Muslim women and men is forbidden.

Suddenly, a tragic turn of events quickly leads to further transformations of her identity. While Rasyid is abroad for work, Khalifah miscarries her baby and her male neighbour Yoga comes to her rescue. On his return, Rasyid blames the lack of modesty in the way she is dressed for the miscarriage. After chastising her, he hands her pieces of black cloth brought back from his travels in Saudi Arabia that would be sewn to become long shapeless tunics and the *cadar*. Later, a scene shows her putting on the *cadar* and looking into the mirror at her new self (FIGURE 17).



FIGURE 17 Khalifah wears the face veil for the first time
(*Khalifah*, 2011, dir Nurman Hakim).

When Khalifah wears her new clothes in public for the first time, her appearance is dramatised in a scene shot in slow motion with Arabian-style music on the film's soundtrack. Her entry into another culture appears complete. But the reaction Khalifah receives from the public, her family, and her co-workers is mixed. The owner of the hair salon where she works is pragmatic; she allocates Fridays and Saturdays as women's days only to adapt to Khalifah's beliefs. Her father and friends, however, are less jubilant. While wearing the simple headscarf as an expression of piety is acceptable, even desirable, they regard the face veil as a step too far.

Although men have stopped harassing her, Khalifah becomes a target of attacks by other strangers on the street who accuse her of terrorism and extremism. Instead of apprehending her attackers, Khalifah is detained by the police where she is cross-questioned about her religious and political activities, namely whether she belonged to a fundamentalist group or has any knowledge of al-Qaeda, the international terrorist organisation. Lacking the worldliness or awareness of current affairs, Khalifah is ignorant of the association of the *cadar* with extremist interpretations of Islam.

Khalifah's message from the outset is that Muslim women's clothing have the power to shape public perception, to trigger and defuse male attention, consume and even erase the wearer's identity. Allusions to *Khalifah's* loss of identity are made at several points in the film. Since all women who wear the face veil also wear the long black tunic, *Khalifah's* employer mistakes another woman on the street for her. *Khalifah's* father tells her he has lost the ability to identify her emotions because her facial expressions are concealed behind her face veil.

The film reaches its climax when *Khalifah* is confronted by the ultimate repercussions of wearing the *cadar* in Indonesia. As *Khalifah* and her family watch the news on the television together, they learn of the dangerous associations of the face veil. The news item reports a male member of a terrorist organisation who had been gunned down by the police for attempting to shoot innocent people. Most damning of all was the terrorist's disguise behind the face veil and female clothing during his attempted attack. The perils of wearing the *cadar* are finally brought to *Khalifah* and her family's attention by the news report prompting her to change her mind about covering her face in public.

Another revelation appears shortly after they watch the alarming news report. The police arrive at *Khalifah's* family home to announce that her husband had died in hospital. When she encounters his body in the hospital mortuary, she is not told of the reasons behind *Rasyid's* death. In the mortuary, she meets another woman in a face veil and a small child. The woman reveals herself to be the other wife of *Rasyid*, or rather, *Ahmad Zamzori* - *Rasyid's* alter ego. The shock of *Rasyid's* deceit and polygamous secret signals the final blow to *Khalifah's* sense of self and her relationship to the *cadar*. In the film's closing scenes, *Khalifah* stops wearing the *cadar*, but reverts to the *kerudung* worn earlier. There are clues that suggest *Khalifah's* return to her former identity without the headscarf as the final scene depicts her looking into the mirror at home with her long hair exposed. In the closing shots, she makes a direct address to the camera/audience, breaking the fourth wall, and proclaims, 'I am *Khalifah*.'

Few films have directly engaged with the veil more critically than *Khalifah*. In fact, nearly all Indonesian films with Islamic themes have treated the veil unproblematically. In films prior to *Khalifah*, rarely, if ever, do female characters who veil reveal their motivations for covering their hair and face. *Khalifah* asserts that she was not forced into wearing the headscarf and then later, the face veil. Rather it is through her compliance and agency that she makes the decision to conceal her hair and face, chiefly to save her marriage and to lift her family out of abject poverty. Sadly, in spite of her conscious decision to wear the face veil, *Khalifah*'s naïvety about the public perceptions of her new identity leads to traumatic repercussions.

A wealthy female customer to the hair salon who befriends *Khalifah* reinforces the notion of agency to wear the face veil. *Khalifah*'s new friend lived in Saudi Arabia where all women are cloaked from head to toe in black. Compelled by habit and comfort, her friend's decision to maintain a similar attire in Indonesia is at odds with *Khalifah*'s traumatic experiences at the hands of the public and the police. Socioeconomic class differences between the two women may explain the contrasting experiences behind the face veil, but *Khalifah* does not identify this. Though different, the motivations of the two women to cover their faces are nonetheless founded on agency, understood as a dialectic between freedom and constraint. However, unlike her friend who has returned from Saudi Arabia, *Khalifah* has little freedom to pursue a range of life choices, sartorial ones included, that will liberate or fulfill her. Rather, the choices she makes are to alleviate the constraints suffered by her family members and to conciliate her husband.

Although there are subtexts in the film about the cross-cultural discourse of the face veil worth illuminating, the film makes a cruder, more graphic assumption about the veil in general. The film presents a simplistic visual dichotomy of acceptable female piety represented by the *kerudung* and unacceptable ultra-conservatism of the *cadar*. *Khalifah* initially wears the *kerudung*, a type of veil worn loosely over the head with her hairline

showing. While the *kerudung* is claimed by her friends to enhance Khalifah's beauty, the face veil does the opposite: it conceals her physical charms and renders her undesirable.

In the film, two Muslim feminine binaries interact with one another. The first binary functions to position the Indonesian Muslim female identity apart from generic associations of Arab culture and extremism attached to the face veil. The second binary meanwhile consists of the Islamophobic representations of the silent passive Muslim woman placed in opposition to the Muslim woman with agency who chooses to wear the headscarf. These binaries are played out in Khalifah's agency and the visual juxtapositions in the film's key scenes. In the opening credits of the film, Khalifah looks through a shop window behind which stands a mannequin in a Western-style dress, a cultural reflection of herself as an Indonesian woman.

Later in the film, when she adopts the face veil, she compares herself again with the same mannequin in an act of looking at a past self, the antithesis of the fully covered Muslim woman (FIGURE 18). Both binaries are centred around the discourse of veiling and unveiling that defines female sexuality through the logic of visibility. A woman who conceals her body from the world also shrouds her sexuality yet incites the fascination to unveil her (MacDonald, 2006: 13-14). The tantalising beauty of the unveiled Khalifah is signalled through the unwanted male attention she receives in her neighbourhood. After she is veiled, she is no longer attractive to male eyes. In fact, she becomes victimised after she is fully veiled and her victimisation will only end if she removes her face veil.



FIGURE 18 Khalifah compares herself to a mannequin and sees a past self in it
(*Khalifah*, 2011, dir Nurman Hakim).

The beauty salon where Khalifah works becomes a site of irony at her expense. When her employer develops anxieties about Khalifah working behind the face veil, her concerns arise from the assumption that Khalifah's new pious identity will drive customers away. For Khalifah's employer, women who wear the face veil represent the antithesis of women who frequent beauty parlours. The latter reveal their beauty for the enjoyment of themselves and others while women behind the face veil conceal theirs, denying enjoyment to all except close kin and other women. The irony therefore lies in Khalifah's service in the beauty parlour, a temple to feminine beauty, in which she abnegates typical femininity and beauty by refraining from making them visible to the public.

Once the beauty parlour imposes gender segregated opening times to accommodate Khalifah's beliefs, there would be time for a women-only space where Khalifah and customers like her can remove their face veils. As a private space for women to remove their *cadar*, the beauty salon becomes the place where the binary of veiling and unveiling is transcended, a place where women who veil inhabit both subject positions. Within this context, the beauty parlour evokes the discourse of the harem, where those who are circumscribed by public restrictions are

cloistered in a hidden world where they are free to participate in feminine pleasures of grooming (MacDonald, 2006: 14).

The film mobilises a critique of the Arabisation of Islam in Indonesia and its apparent oppressive influences on women. However, Khalifah is influenced by Arabian culture only through other people, her husband in particular who is an Indonesian trader in Arab goods. He is duplicitous and hypocritical rather than virtuous despite his business dealings in Saudi Arabia where citizens are governed by sharia law. Through Rasyid's suggestion that she conceals herself like women in Saudi Arabia, Khalifah is at the receiving end of unsavoury cultural flows from the Arab world.

Key scenes of the film indicate the face veil's connotations with extremist Islam that mark it as un-Indonesian. Even the background music that accompanies the opening credits has an Arabian slant, with drums and stringed instruments that play in distinctly Middle Eastern musical modal structures. Conversely, in other Indonesian Islamic films, some elements of Arab culture are deemed desirable and aspirational such as the attainment of higher education in Cairo as depicted in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2.

The ambivalent meanings of the veil in *Khalifah* demonstrate that the veil is 'rooted in specific moments and locations; its depiction is similarly contingent and its adoption, adaptation, and rejection is always itself relational' (Lewis, 2003: 10). The *cadar* is considered an 'extended' version of the *jilbab* but its status as a requirement for Muslim women is contested in Indonesia (Ratri, 2011: 29). Compared to the socially-approved *jilbab* and *kerudung*, women who wear the *cadar* in Indonesia are considered 'strange' or linked with an extreme interpretation of Islam (Nisa, 2013: 3).

As if history is repeating itself, those who adopt the *cadar* have been labelled by the Indonesian media as the 'terrorist's wife' (Ratri, 2011: 30) akin to the poisonous *jilbab* in previous decades. Women who wear the face veil are still a relatively rare sight in Indonesia even in the north

Sumatran region of Aceh, where sharia law imposes strict codes of modesty on women. Their lack in numbers in Indonesia more generally may be attributed to their lack of visibility in public spaces. Many women who wear the face veil stay indoors, restricting their movement in public spaces. Although most dress in the signature black flowing headscarf and face veil, the women who wear them are rather diverse in background. Most, however, belong to the Salafi movement and are of the younger, university-going age (Nisa, 2013: 3).

This section has demonstrated that exoticism and negative media press relating to the face veil are intertwined and reinforced in *Khalifah*. Like the niqab-wearing Aisha in *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, when Khalifah is behind the face veil, she exudes Orientalist mystique. But the reactions to the face veil in the two films could not be more different. The divergent reactions can be attributed to the different locations in which the two films are set. In *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, Aisha is a wealthy German-Turkish young woman who lives in Egypt where most women are perceived to observe the Islamic veil. In the film, Aisha's exotic femininity and desirability are intensified through the camera close-ups on her captivating eyes. Khalifah, in contrast, is not wealthy. She lives in a small house in Jakarta and has a modest career as a hairdresser. Her class position makes her an unlikely candidate for connotations of romance and liberation that the leisure class can enjoy. Instead, Khalifah's *cadar* connotes Otherness in a visual opposition to Indonesian-ness.

This section has also shown that the discourse of Indonesian Islam and the demonisation of what is not Indonesian Islam are inscribed on the body of Khalifah in visually oppositional terms. The next section demonstrates how the portrayal of Christian women are used to imply a version of Indonesian Islam and its superiority over Christianity through the theme of inter-faith romance and religious conversion.

Women who need salvation: the gender politics of inter-faith romance and religious conversion in *film Islami*

The subject of inter-religious romance and marriage in film, usually between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, is deployed as a superficial statement of tolerance and acceptance of irreconcilable differences between two faith groups. Bollywood cinema has been known to transcode the Indian nation's tensions with Pakistan into romances with an inter-religious couple at the centre of the narrative. The films may foreground the traumatic legacy of Partition as in *Henna* (1991, dir. Randhir Kapoor) and *Veer Zaara* (2004, dir. Yash Chopra) and the 1993 anti-Muslim riots of Bombay in the film *Bombay* (1995, dir. Mani Ratnam) but all emphasise the sharing of values between the interfaith couple. Ultimately, the films create simplistic characters who love their nation and remain devoted to their family despite complex historical and inter-faith tensions (Hirji, 2008).

A similar glossifying approach is employed in Indonesian Islamic films from the post-New Order period. The films also provide a few clues to the way Christians and Christianity are portrayed in Islamic films. *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Syahadat Cinta* depict the religious conversion of two Christian female characters to Islam after developing a romantic relationship with the Muslim male protagonists. Both films share some similarities, in that the male protagonist is a student in a religious institution and becomes the object of desire of several women, one of which is a Christian woman. The Christian women convert to Islam for different reasons but then encounter tragedy and abuse.

Although commonplace, inter-faith romances and religious conversion for marriage are less than welcome in Indonesia. And despite the religious diversity that exists in Indonesia, inter-religious marriages are socially discouraged (or altogether opposed) and legally difficult to obtain (Aini, 2008: 670). In 1986, the popular male actor and singer Jamal Mirdad married another popular female actor, Lydia Kandou, to a frosty reception from the Indonesian public because Jamal Mirdad was a Muslim and Lydia

Kandou a Christian. Another mixed-faith marriage, between the Muslim pop singer Yuni Shara and Christian Henry Sihaan took place outside of Indonesia because of legal obstacles, possibly because Shara is a Muslim woman who intended to marry a non-Muslim man (Aini, 2008: 669). Other female stars, Dian Sastrowardoyo, converted to Islam following a marriage to a Muslim man. Although new converts are praised and speak of immersing themselves in their new identity, they are sometimes criticised for 'selling' or 'disposing' of their God (*menjual Tuhan*) for the person they love (*KapanLagi*, 2012).

Tensions and violence between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia have entrenched disapproval towards inter-religious relationships. During and after Suharto's regime, bloody sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians erupted across Indonesia (Abuza, 2006). Muslim leaders have expressed essentialised differences between the two faiths as the cause of such tensions. The proscription against inter-religious marriage in Indonesia has been suggested to have historical roots. Historical precedence against inter-religious marriage can be found in the strict segregation between faith groups during wartime under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, the Christian-Muslim tensions brought upon by the Dutch colonial method of divide and rule in the East Indies, and the nationalist conflation of Dutch colonialism with Christianity that led to long-lasting suspicions against indigenous Christians (Aini, 2008: 669).

Ayat-ayat Cinta concerns the dilemma of an Indonesian male graduate student, Fahri, in Egypt in his pursuit for marriage. He faces the challenge of marrying two women: Aisha, a wealthy young woman of Turkish-German descent, and Maria, his neighbour, an Egyptian Coptic Christian woman. A model Indonesian man, Fahri is a hardworking student who takes his religious obligations seriously. His Islamic faith turns him into a reluctant polygamist, unsure if he could be fair to both his wives in accordance with Islamic tradition. His first marriage to Aisha disappoints Maria who later falls into a coma. Two other women who vie for his attention: a fellow Indonesian student and another Egyptian neighbour, are similarly disappointed. In revenge, the latter accuses Fahri of rape when

he rejects her advances. When he is thrown into jail and sentenced to death by hanging, only Maria can stand as witness to Fahri's innocence. Upon his acquittal, he fulfills the request of the ailing Maria by taking her as his second wife on her deathbed, with Maria converting to Islam. Not long after a brief polygamous arrangement, Maria dies leaving Fahri and Aisha together at last.

Before Maria's conversion to Islam, she is depicted as a morally upstanding character who helps Fahri with his studies. As a devout Christian, she is shown in several scenes praying at the altar. She wears a crucifix around her neck and possesses a tattoo of a cross on her wrist. But she also shows interest and knowledge in Islamic texts and cites the verse on the Virgin Mary from the Qur'an, 'Meryam' the 19th sura, as her favourite. More impressively, Maria knows it by heart. When news reaches Maria that Fahri is marrying Aisha but is then wrongly accused of rape, she is shown tearfully praying at home.

In the film, Maria's decision to become a Muslim is founded on her desire to be Fahri's wife and not die of a broken heart. Her conversion to Islam is shown in a scene of her praying alongside Aisha and behind Fahri, who leads them in prayer. Unsurprisingly, the conversion sub-plot in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is not without its critics. On the popular Indonesian media literacy online discussion group, *Mediacare*, commentators have criticised the contradictory messages conveyed in the film's purported valorisation of religious diversity (Paramaditha, 2010: 86). If the film pays tribute to religious diversity, why must Maria convert to Islam? They question whether a similar film would portray a Muslim character converting to another faith without incurring angry protest or censorship. Some on the online forum argue that the conversion sub-plot implies Islam's superiority over other religions and faith traditions (Paramaditha, 2010: 86).

Different from the film from which it was adapted, Maria's reason for her conversion to Islam in the novel also courted criticism. In the novel, Maria meets the Virgin Mary in a dream who tells her a symbolic key is required to enter heaven. That key is her conversion from Christianity to Islam.

However, in the novel, not only does Maria convert to Islam. An American reporter, Alicia, who Fahri defends from xenophobic Egyptian men, also converts to Islam in her admiration of Fahri's Islamic righteousness. The film adaptation, however, does not depict Alicia's religious conversion but only her show of gratitude to Fahri. The critical stance against the conversion sub-plot in both the film and novel is significant. But there is also indifference towards Maria's conversion in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* seeing as religious conversion is commonplace in multi-faith Indonesia (Hatley, 2009: 57).

Released within months after *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, *Syahadat Cinta* also features a sub-plot of religious conversion to Islam. It tells the story of the wealthy and wayward Iqbal who has never prayed and is not able to read the Qur'an. After a night of heavy drinking he accidentally injures his mother, sending her straight to hospital. While there, he is told to pray for her, at which point he admits to having no ability to do so. He vows to mend his ways the Islamic way by enrolling to a *pesantren* where he would learn to be a better Muslim. Gradually, he begins to pray and develops a more religious identity. But when he has a falling out with the headmaster's daughter, Aisyah, he leaves the *pesantren* out of anger.

Away from the *pesantren* and homeless, he strikes a friendship with Pricilia, a young Christian woman. Pricilia's committed Christianity is alluded to from the outset, when she is shown cradling her bible when she first meets Iqbal on a bus. When Iqbal is falsely accused of terrorism and serves a jail sentence, Pricilia finds a lawyer to prove his innocence and release him. Upon his release, he attends a ceremony for Pricilia's conversion to Islam. Unfortunately, her conversion is not welcomed by her father. He rejects her newfound religion and violently attacks her for following a path of deviance (*jalan sesat*) and choosing hellfire over salvation in Christianity.

Like Maria, Pricilia's Christian faith prior to conversion also appears robust. But it is rendered fragile when she witnesses Muslims in prayer. After becoming a new Muslim, Pricilia wears the headscarf but faces

physical abuse at home for her faith. Seeking Iqbal's protection, she runs to him at his *pesantren* where he resumes his study following his wrongful detention. The students at the *pesantren* catch Pricilia running into Iqbal's arms and accuse him of inappropriate sexual behaviour. He is dragged to the mosque to defend his sexual purity. Unable to placate his accusers, all of whom are male, Iqbal agrees to leave the *pesantren* for good.

Parallels can be found in Maria and Pricilia's journey from Christianity to Islam. The interest and knowledge in Islam that both Maria and Pricilia share make their decision to convert a little credible. Thus their attraction to Islam suggests the faith's potential as a source of fulfillment for women and their agency to embrace Islam is emphasised for this reason. Before Pricilia recites the *shahadah*, or the vow of the faithful, during her religious conversion, she is reminded of her agency so that witnesses to her conversion know that she has not been coerced into embracing Islam. She declares the wish to become a Muslim willingly and aspires to adhere to the Islamic faith to the letter.

But for all their agency, both Maria and Pricilia represent women who need to be saved by their Muslim male heroes. Fahri grants Maria momentary longevity through matrimony while Pricilia is a damsel in distress who turns to Iqbal to protect her from her tyrannical Christian father. By embracing Islam, their destiny in the afterlife is ostensibly sealed but not without challenges in life. Interestingly, both Fahri and Iqbal also require rescuing by the women following false accusations of a crime they did not commit. Here, both male and female characters demonstrate distinct kinds of vulnerability that dislodge traditional gender dynamics.

Fahri and Iqbal are respectful towards the Christian beliefs of the two women but they are uninterested in Christianity. The men's respect towards the women's faith goes as far as refraining from attempting to convert the Christian women through proselytising. The romantic sub-plots between Fahri and Maria, and that of Iqbal and Pricilia can be understood as an attempt to frame inter-faith relations through a soft-focus lens, romanticising the interactions between individuals of different faiths. But

the films show a one-sided relationship across the religious divide. The men do not show interest in Christianity or praise the key figures of that faith. Their silence on Christianity in contrast to the women's enthusiasm about Islam speaks volumes about the film's pro-Islamic stance on religious diversity. The underlying message is that non-Muslims are respected if they respect Islam but the reverse cannot be guaranteed.

Why a heart-warming and romantic inter-faith sub-plot should end with the Christian woman converting to Islam will elicit a number of possible explanations. Thus far, there has not been a film about male characters who convert to Islam for the Muslim woman they love. Characters who are male and Muslim make a particularly potent combination for notions of leadership, dominance, and moral exemplar for others, in this case non-Muslim women who in the end follow his faith. Men who convert to Islam in the name of love may upset traditional gender and religious power dynamics in Islamic films. Why the conversion of Christian women should re-occur in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Syahadat Cinta* is fascinating for two reasons; it suggests a public fascination in Indonesia with young Christian women who convert to Islam, and it is a romanticisation of inter-religious relations that flatters the Islamic faith. When the popular female actor Dian Sastrowardoyo converted from Catholicism to Islam in 2011, the extensive media coverage of her conversion was usually accompanied with images of her in the *jilbab* even though she does not wear it daily (Paramaditha, 2010: 87). Her much-publicised veiling following conversion underlines the visual dimension of conversion that attracts media fascination and contributes to the discourse of aspirational Muslim femininity.

The religious conversion sub-plot in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Syahadat Cinta* conveys the messages of Islam's appeal to women and writes back to the rhetoric of women's oppression in Islam: if Islam is oppressive to women, why do women willingly embrace it? Conversion to Islam is therefore seen as a political expression, particularly during the period after 11 September 2001, whether the convert intends it or not (van Nieuwkerk, 2009: ix). The argument that Islam is not oppressive to women is enhanced further by the media construction of female Muslim actors. Female actors marked or

marketed as 'Muslim' push the boundaries of female liberties and aspirations in the public sphere. The section below discusses a few examples of female actors who personify the convergence of Islamic belief, conspicuous piety, media shrewdness, religious commodification, and idealised Muslim femininity.

The rise of the Islamic film star

A noticeable shift in the star image of female actors during the post-New Order period is the adoption of the headscarf as part of their offscreen persona. The shift emerged from the destigmatisation of the headscarf and the women who wear it in Indonesian popular media and public life. The adoption of the *jilbab* by the film actor Inneke Koeshrawati in 2001 and the transformation of her career in the public eye signalled an important turning point in the public reception of the veiled media figure. Inneke's Islamic image not only challenged the stigma previously attached to the headscarf, but also played a part in promoting the cultural mainstreaming of pious Indonesian womanhood (van Wichelen, 2010: 87). She combined glamour and modernity with Islamic values, making herself a role model for other middle class Muslim Indonesian women with modern aspirations.

Inneke's Islamic image was not only confirmed by her public adoption of the veil but also in her onscreen roles in television dramas and Islamic singing career. Her transformation into a 'repentant star' was significant because of her past as an actor of seductive and sexy roles in film. A biracial 'Indo', or of white European and indigenous Indonesian heritage, Inneke began her career as a model and established herself as one of the sex symbols of Indonesian cinema in the 1990s (van Wichelen, 2012: 98).

Other female media personalities and actors in Indonesia have followed Inneke's footsteps by taking up the *jilbab*, going to Mecca for pilgrimage, and making their religious transformation as public as possible. A similar example of a redemption narrative played out on and offscreen is that of

the female actor Desy Ratnasari. Sometimes known as the ‘no-comment’ actor who refuses to engage with entertainment news tabloid journalists regarding her controversial love affairs, Ratnasari performed the hajj and wore the *jilbab*, albeit inconsistently. There are also male counterparts of ‘born-again’ narratives and the reconstruction of the men’s public persona from nominal or non-Islamic background to a more visibly Islamic one (see van Wichelen, 2010: 90).

The construction of the Islamic star image is associated with allusions to ‘playing oneself in each role’ (Hollinger, 2006: 47). This means the construction of the Islamic star image, and the popularity thereof, rely on the similar kinds of roles and moral connotations pursued by an actor both onscreen and offscreen. The Islamic star image may reward female film actors and media personalities with a bigger fan base and a career boost. However, the construction of such an image can come with a price. Pious female actors are placed under intense public scrutiny to perform their Islamic identity appropriately (Krier, 2011: 136).

This section illustrates the construction of the Islamic star image in the post-New Order period by examining the careers of young female actors Oki Setiana Dewi and Zaskia Adya Mecca, stars of Islamic cinema. More typical of younger Muslim female actors who wear the headscarf, Oki’s Islamic star image is not constructed around the redemption narrative represented by Inneke Koeshrawati and Desy Ratnasari. From the inception of her film acting career, Oki has worn the *jilbab*, marking her out as a pious star from the outset of her career.

Best known for her role in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2, Oki has written books and news articles, sang inspirational songs, and endorsed campaigns - all of which are publicised in the Indonesia media. Oki’s publicity campaign through her official website displays the media-savvy dimension of Islamic popular culture. On her official website, www.okisetianadewi.co.id, visitors can read her blog posts, interact with her on social media, watch videos, and purchase her books and music. Her profound piety is prominently featured on the homepage with images

of her in Mecca and standing next to verses from the Qur'an and hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) (FIGURES 19 and 20).

In a media interview, Oki declared that she would only choose roles that were appropriate for a pious Muslim young woman like herself (*KapanLagi*, 2010). This would mean not playing characters who were by some definition immoral; roles that would jeopardise her moral public persona such as playing promiscuous, adulterous, and other versions of 'fallen' women onscreen. Favourable comments made about her longer, hence more modest, *jilbab labuh* on entertainment websites and blogs indicate the moral judgement that viewers and fans alike make of Muslim female actors in Indonesia who don the headscarf.

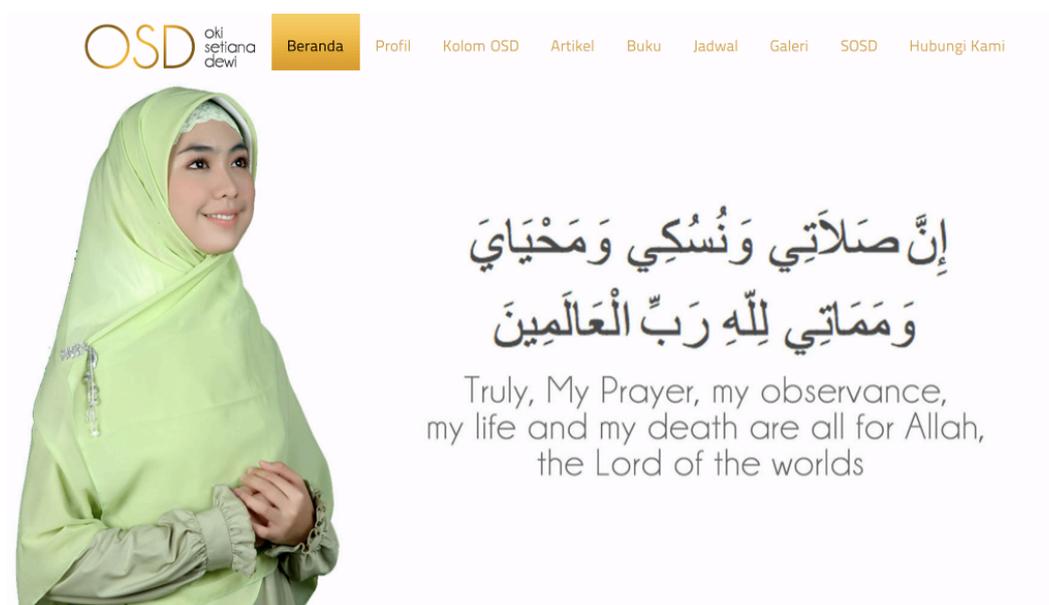


FIGURE 19 Home page from Oki Setiana Dewi's official website.

There have been instances whereby a female actor's moral conduct is questioned, particularly when her offscreen persona is believed to be a mirror image of her onscreen counterpart. In 2008, photos of the young rising star of Islamic television drama, Zaskia Adya Mecca, smoking a cigarette elicited a wave of public opprobrium. Associated with religious made-for-television films, and later, the Islamic film *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, Zaskia is known for publicly endorsing socially conservative campaigns and as a 'wholesome' female actor. She is also known as a trend-setter of stylish headscarfs through her video tutorials online. Thus the negative

responses from the public who call to attention her wholesome Islamic star image suggest that their expectations intertwine with gender and religious ideals within and beyond the cinematic text.

It can be argued then, that in Islamic cinema, art should imitate life. The linking together, and at times, conflation, of public religious identity and cinematic representations therefore makes it an important issue in a discussion about gender, Islam, and film. The pious Islamic film star image of female actors is created by the entanglement of three spheres: their private lives, their public lives, and the fictional lives they play on screen. Public scrutiny and fascination with pious or redeemed female actors reveal the gendered and embodied dimension of Islamic cinema. Star images after all act as vessels for an aspirational gender ideology for a mass audience (Dyer, 2004: 4) as they circulate in Indonesian society mainly through film/visual images, journalistic, and political discourses (Ida, 2011: 5).



FIGURE 20 A page from Oki Setiana Dewi's official website. The text translates as 'The bestselling writer of *'Drawing Rainbows'* and *'A Million Rainbows.'*'
Source: Oki Setiana Dewi's official website.

The media fascination with the private lives of Muslim female film actors can be attributed to the tabloidisation of news media and the rise of infotainment since the boom years of private television companies in

Indonesia (Ida, 2011: 3). In congruence with the rise of celebrity culture is the growth of management agencies for female actors and modelling schools (Faizal, 2003: 26, 33). Given the confluence of media trends and new business ventures that produce actors of star quality, it is as if every beautiful Indonesian woman would have the opportunity to become a star. But film actors who audition for roles in Islamic films may need to demonstrate their pious offscreen persona by wearing the *jilbab* in 'real life' and the ability to recite prayers in fluent Arabic (Widodo, 2008; Imanjaya, 2009a).

Describing the similar phenomenon of veiled female actors in Egypt, Lila Abu Lughod (1995: 57) suggests that 'born-again' narratives of Muslim media stars are more closely associated with women because of the enduring view that female performers are disreputable. Female performers are perceived to be akin to prostitutes because of their work that requires them to mix publicly with unrelated men. Thus the moral onus weighs more heavily on women in patriarchal societies making the 'sin' of the female performer greater.

Furthermore, the lifestyles of the rich and famous are thought to be full of sin and hedonism. Seen in a variety of acting roles, female actors are assumed to be independent from family control, challenging the conservative expectations of women's dependence and place within the family. Married and divorced Muslim female stars alike in Indonesia stress the centrality of their family and claim to prioritise the needs of their children ahead of their careers (van Wichelen, 2010; Ida, 2011). Such public proclamations serve to restore their traditional femininity in the morally suspect world of media entertainment.

Traditional offscreen roles that extend beyond their primary subjectivity as Islamic stars are deemed necessary for female actors in Muslim societies in order to be accepted into what Abu Lughod (1995) calls the 'moral community' of their audiences. The moral community refers to a group of media consumers who share and promote a moral standard that is expected of their favourite stars. In the moral community, media

consumers and their favourite pious stars are thought to share 'a world where religion and morality are taken for granted as the foundation for social existence' (Abu Lughod, 1995: 64). Although the wealth, fame, and beauty of the female actors distance the star from their viewers, their redemption narratives and pious images bring them closer to their less privileged audiences. In other words, redemption narratives and piety can transcend the divisions of socioeconomic class and lifestyles.

Like the Egyptian 'clean' cinema populated by pious female actors who take up the veil and conservative roles onscreen, the Indonesian Islamic film genre can be regarded as 'a mode of cultural production and consumption linked to representations of the body in films' (Tartoussieh, 2007: 32). These representations of bodies are compelled by the reconfiguration of media stars, especially those who are female, to fit within the normative religious project in Indonesia that has been gaining momentum since the 1990s. Among the characteristics of the normative religious project is the gentrification of piety and Islamisation of popular culture. Central to this project are moral and proper bodily comportment and piety. On the visual level, pious female Muslim stars eschew explicit displays of sexuality, improper relations between the sexes, and relative nudity, involving the exposure of the cleavage, stomach, upper arms, and thighs. For the reasons spelled out above, Muslim female film stars help define the Islamic film genre and become the linchpins of its popularity. They are also exemplars of a new cinematic morality that echoes a moral sensibility that places an emphasis on public piety.

Summary

The image of the veiled Muslim woman in post-New Order Islamic cinema is caught in the geopolitical discourse of the post-9/11 era. Although she demonstrates agency, her body is prominently foregrounded in cinematic narratives and visual codes as a site for Islamic and moral issues. She embodies geopolitical discourse through the veil she wears and her Muslim femininity is defined through suffering and abuse. Like the much-

condemned use of the female body in Theo van Gogh's *Submission* (2004), the Muslim woman's body in Indonesian Islamic cinema becomes the site upon which protest and anxieties about Islam and its Other are inscribed. This chapter, however, makes a case for agency displayed by the female characters discussed even though their images are produced by Muslim men in the service of debates about women and Islam.

Domestic challenges to independence and career are the main themes in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Ummi Aminah*. Annisa in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* overcomes every challenge to achieve her dream of a university education, to write and teach. The obstacles to her aspirations are the masculine personification of women's oppression: the patriarch who detests an educated daughter and an abusive husband who dehumanises women. Ummi Aminah's crisis also begins at home. Her successful career as a popular religious leader suffers when her children's personal tribulations fall under public scrutiny. Both films convey a sexist commentary on the double burden women must face when balancing the demands of domestic life and a career.

The veiled female protagonist heralds a 'new' kind of woman in Indonesian cinema, emerging in opposition to anti-Islamic Western discourse that regards the headscarf as the symbol of Muslim women's oppression. In Lukman Hakim's *Khalifah* (2011), the face veil is contested not as a symbol of women's oppression but rather as the Other to Indonesian Muslim culture. The simple headscarf (*jilbab* and *kerudung*) is considered an acceptable symbol of Muslim femininity as it has been adopted widely for apolitical reasons. However, the film reinforces the Orientalist tropes of the face veil rather than the headscarf. In *Khalifah*, the face veil is exotic, self-effacing, and dangerous to her, her family, and the nation.

In *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Syahadat Cinta*, Christian women who convert to Islam are tragic figures. They are denied a happy ending with Muslim men and must either suffer or die after immersing themselves in their newfound faith. But the portrayal of these women is also a commentary on religious conversion that goes straight to the sensitive heart of inter-faith relations in

Indonesia. Inter-religious romance paints a rosy portrait of harmonious if fragile Muslim-Christian relations in the country. But the romantic narrative leaves a bitter aftertaste. Islam is cast as the dominant religion of the two when the women convert from Christianity to Islam to complete their spiritual journey. The use of romance as a narrative device to smoothen out the creases of religious differences is populist at best but superficial at worst. The cheerful message of harmony between faiths is undermined when conversion to Islam become inevitable for Christian characters who are sympathetic towards Islam and Muslims.

An analysis of the rise of Islamic film female actors reveals the inter-textual relationship between film and offscreen image that articulates a new moral cinematic aesthetic and regime of representation in post-New Order Indonesia. The focus on the veiling of film stars sheds light on audience expectations and the norms of public piety that have transformed since the 1990s. Muslim women who veil are one of the most visible and recognisable symbols of Islam and it is little wonder that their images are crucial to the look of Islamic cinema during the post-New Order period.

Chapter 6

Poor, polygamous, but deeply pious: Muslim masculinities in post-New Order *film Islami*

Portrayals of men in Indonesian cinema are now receiving more scholarly attention than ever before. The current scrutiny on such portrayals could not be more timely, particularly when debates about Muslim men have become more pointed in the aftermath of 9/11. The 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the US followed by the Bali bombings in 2002 were regarded as acts of Islamist extremism. In a blanket reaction to the attacks, all Muslims, and especially Muslim men, became the target of greater vilification, Othering, and state-sanctioned torture. Hence, attempts to recoup the image of the Muslim man in Indonesian cinema as tolerant, progressive, and respectful towards women have become more urgent after 2001.

The prototypical Muslim man in post-New Order cinema, particularly after the success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in 2008 and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2 in 2009, is highly educated and aware of his place in the world, a world that conflates Muslim masculinity with violence and oppression. Other similar images of sensitive and pious Muslim men emerged in Indonesian mass media as counterpoints to the stereotypical young Muslim male terrorist and suicide bomber (Nilan, 2009: 328-329). But as this chapter will show, strategies to reclaim the image of the good Indonesian Muslim man reproduce neo-Orientalist tropes to construct the Other: the extremist, the heretical, and the Arab man. But while the Arab man is a spectral figure insinuated as the Other, the figure of the heretical and extremist

Indonesian man represents the literal embodiment of internal anxieties about the nation and Islam.

This chapter begins with a study of the critical treatment of polygamy in *Mengaku Rasul* (Self-proclaiming Prophet, 2008, dir. Helfi Kardit). Critical of the sexual excesses of men who enter polygamous marriages based on heretical or patriarchal interpretations of Islam, the film transcodes the public contestations over polygamy, Muslim male privilege, and male sexuality in Indonesia. The film associates male sexual excesses implicit in polygamy with heresy, making it a thinly-veiled indictment of the Ahmadiyya faith, a long persecuted minority Muslim sect in Indonesia. Through an analysis of *Mengaku Rasul*, I will trace the way Muslim masculinities are constructed through the critique of polygamy as male sexual excess and abuse of male power in Islam.

The Islamic version of masculinity in crisis in Indonesian cinema is discussed in the middle section of this chapter. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Clark found that representations of embattled men gripped in a struggle against poverty and failure to be breadwinners have turned these subordinate masculinities to a life of violence and gangsterism in order to accrue aspects of hegemonic masculinity. But in two films discussed in this section, *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* (Mother Wants to go on the Hajj, 2009, dir. Aditya Gumay) and *Kun Fayakun* (God Wills It, and It Is So, 2008, dir. H. Guntur Novaris), I show that the men are embroiled in a *spiritual crisis of masculinity* because of their abject poverty and failure to live up to to their respectable gender role as the main breadwinner of the family. I will also demonstrate that the men's unwavering faith has the power to redeem their masculinity as worthy sons, husbands, and fathers.

The final section of the chapter considers Nurman Hakim's 2008 film *3 Doa 3 Cinta* (3 Wishes 3 Loves), a film that re-imagines young Muslim men of the *pesantren* as models of moderate Islam. While debates surrounding the face veil and its associations with undesirable Arab culture and extremism are inscribed on women's bodies in post-New Order Indonesian cinema, suspicions of terrorism and adoption of Islamist

mythologies are seen as issues pertaining to Muslim men. In *3 Doa 3 Cinta*, I trace martyrdom mythologies, fears of the terrorist and neo-Orientalist tropes surrounding a young man whose masculinity is situated at the fault lines of sexuality, the nation and beyond its borders.

This chapter is about films that engage with, and at times depart from, what Ariel Heryanto (2010: 7) calls the 'masculine' spheres in Indonesia: modernisation, nation-state building, the economy, war and corruption. These spheres have typically upheld the dominance of hegemonic masculinity but in the films discussed below, they dismantle different forms of masculinity only to restore them at the last minute, through the power of prayer or the triumph of 'correct' Islam. The restoration of post-New Order Muslim masculinities argued for in this chapter does not necessarily offer a 'positive' reading of order reinstated, but rather an open-endedness and ambiguity about the relationship between Islam, sexuality, class relations, and masculinities in post-New Order Indonesian cinema. It also offers an analysis of the masculine embodiment of anxiety within Islam in Indonesia, dislodging the centrality of prototypical Muslim masculinity as heroic in Islamic cinema.

The polygamous Muslim man who meets his comeuppance

Every society creates images and visions of those forces that threaten its identity
Zygmunt Bauman, 1998: 73

Opinions regarding polygamy as a practice with Islamic legitimacy cannot be neatly divided into avid supporters and firm objectors. Although polygamy has long been a bugbear for the majority of the Indonesian public, and women in particular, its discourse has changed significantly during the post-New Order period. Once restricted and stigmatising for the male civil servants working under Suharto's regime, Muslim men who were married to up to four wives simultaneously felt they could proclaim

their controversial marital status more publicly in the post-New Order period. The reasons for this shift in discourse rests in the relaxation of legal restrictions on polygamy pressured by Islamic organisations and the relative openness of high profile figures to express their support for polygamy (van Wichelen, 2010: 74).

Polygamy became a point of sensational public interest when a highly successful fried chicken businessman, Puspo Wardoyo, sponsored and handed the first ever 'Polygamy Awards' in 2003 to men who were deemed fair and 'successful' with their multiple wives. Perhaps to no surprise at all, the combination of aspirational middle-class lifestyles and spiritual 'upgrading' through the promotion of polygamy courted the ire of the public, feminist activists, and Islamic clerics who felt Islam was being exploited to fulfill the sexual excesses of men (Brenner, 2011: 220). The public condemnation of the erstwhile popular preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar, also known affectionately as Aa Gym, for taking another wife confirmed the strongly-held view against polygamy in Indonesia.

As a marginal practice sanctioned in Islam but ubiquitous in political and feminist debates in Indonesia, polygamy is a prominent subject for filmmakers in Islamic post-New Order films. In this section, the 2008 film by Helfi Kardit, *Mengaku Rasul* is examined to illustrate how its representation of polygamy is used not only to condemn heresy but to critique male sexual excess and the abuse of Islamic male privilege. This section builds upon Sonja van Wichelen's analysis that polygamy in the post-New Order period is less about Islam, and more about Muslim masculinity and Muslim male privilege (van Wichelen, 2010: 75). In other words, concerns about Muslim masculinity and male sexuality underpin the contestations over polygamy in Indonesia.

Mengaku Rasul begins with a foreboding caution to audiences of the dangers of heretical teachings.⁵⁶ Following the cautionary advice, *Mengaku Rasul* traces the rise of Guru Samir, the charismatic leader of a new Islamic sect and self-styled latter-day prophet. The film is told in flashbacks and begins with the aftermath of the sect's destruction survived by a former follower of Guru Samir's cult, a young woman called Rianti. Rianti is admitted into hospital following an arson attack on a cult meeting with Guru Samir in a village hall. She had joined the cult after leaving her rock musician, tattoo-covered boyfriend, Aji.

In order to win Rianti back, who later falls for Guru Samir, Aji has to prove that the self-styled prophet is a fraud. But he is also determined to end the cult's heretical practices, which include praying to Guru Samir to absolve one's sins, attending an exclusive course that will guarantee a place in paradise, and having faith in Guru Samir's status as a prophet, a messenger of God. There are other displays of apparent miracles that are abused for Guru Samir's personal pleasure. Guru Samir can be in two places simultaneously if he needs to; he can be both in his office and in a decrepit shed secluded in the forest where he can have sex with women. Guru Samir's sexual excesses are made just as damning as his prophetic pretensions. He also bends the Islamic law on polygamy in his favour by justifying his need for a fifth wife, Rianti.

In Aji's pursuit of Rianti he discovers the truth behind Guru Samir's mystique. Instead of a latter-day prophet with messianic qualities, Guru Samir is adulterous and deceitful of his ability to perform miracles, namely the ability to re-grow his amputated arm. The 'miracle' is debunked when Aji finds that the amputee was in fact Guru Samir's identical twin who is later murdered by the false prophet. Aji concludes that Guru Samir is not only a mere mortal but a ruthless murderer bent on captivating his

⁵⁶ *Film ini dibuat sebagai bekal keimanan dalam mengantisipasi maraknya ajaran sesat*

This film was made as a spiritual guidance when faced with the perils of heretical teachings*

* My translation

impressionable followers. When Aji and Guru Samir's estranged stepson burn the meeting hall down, destroying the cult, they uncover the mystery behind Guru Samir's other miracles. But before Aji can warn Rianti of Guru Samir extraordinary duplicity, she murders the latter-day prophet by stabbing him on their wedding night. To end the spread of heresy, Rianti had secretly planned to murder the man all along.

Aji and Guru Samir are portrayed as unlikely opposites; the 'good' Muslim against the 'bad' respectively. On the one hand, the tattooed Aji who wears casual Western attire is not the conventional Muslim hero typical of other Islamic films. We do not know if he has had a traditional Islamic education, prays or knows how to read the Qur'an. On the other hand, Guru Samir wears elaborate Islamic gear; a turban and long flowing tunic. There are a few parallels in the portrayal of Guru Samir and the depiction of the New Order heretical mystic in *Sembilan Wali* (discussed in Chapter 4). While both are villains in the conflict over 'true' Islam, their representation as 'the outsider' is different. Syeikh Siti Jenar, the heretical mystic in *Sembilan Wali* is barely clothed, has wild long hair and unrestrained gesticulations. However, Guru Samir takes on the appearance of the traditional Islamic male leader, which suggests that the outsider may or may not be easily distinguished amongst pious-looking Muslim men. Thus the extensive focus on the villain, Guru Samir, who has considerable screen time in the film, functions to define the contours of his 'bad' Muslim masculinity, and subsequently mark him out as Other despite his appearances to the contrary.

Didactic in narrational style, *Mengaku Rasul* is a trenchant critique of distorted religious teachings characterised by sorcery, exploitation of women, and unscrupulous politicking. The film establishes the accentuation of heretical Islamic practices by unprincipled and lascivious passions. The portrayal of Guru Samir as the religious charlatan who takes advantage of his position ends with his murder, which occurs during the throes of passion with his new wife, Rianti. The film therefore links sexual exploitation and heresy with unscrupulous male spiritual leadership

to disaggregate the Muslim male villain from the familiar Islamic male leader.

Mengaku Rasul shows that the theological weight of Qur'anic justification for polygamy is undermined when it is practised alongside heresy. The film shares a critical view on polygamy with other post-New Order films, namely *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share, 2006, dir. Nia Dinata). However, the deployment of critique in each of the films is very different in style, degree of frankness on sexuality, denouement, and how the issue of polygamy is mobilised alongside other concerns surrounding the characters and their environment (see Hatley's comparative study of *Berbagi Suami* and *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (2009) for a more detailed discussion).

Guru Samir personifies a Muslim masculinity that has gone far astray not only from the righteous path of mainstream Islam, but from the normative image of man as trusted head of the home and community. He is also a masculine embodiment of new anxieties percolating in Indonesia about 'correct' Islamic practice and the abuse of Muslim male privilege in polygamy. Hence the double condemnation of heresy and polygamy serves to highlight the excesses of Muslim masculinity if left unchecked.

The demonisation of polygamy in modern Indonesia has a modern history that can be traced back to the notoriety of President Sukarno as a womaniser and polygamist. As discussed in Chapter 2, Sukarno's 'excessive' masculinity or hypermasculinity is perceived as a masculine weakness in contrast to the sexual restraint of other men with opposing ideological views. His sexual excesses were criticised even by supporters of his government and became the basis for the sense of 'order' that men of Suharto's New Order regime needed to abide by (Paramaditha, 2007: 49). The New Order regime enforced strict regulations against polygamous marriages on male civil servants in 1983, who were only permitted to marry another woman with permission from their superiors, the express consent of the wife/wives and the judgment of the sharia court (van Wichelen, 2010: 74).

Mengaku Rasul was made during a period of violent divide within the Muslim community in Indonesia. According to the film critic Eric Sasono (2012), the release of *Mengaku Rasul* coincided with the Joint Ministerial Decree in 2008 that denied the propagation of the Ahmadiyya faith⁵⁷, resulting in rising aggression towards them throughout Indonesia (*The Jakarta Post*, 2008). The director of *Mengaku Rasul*, Helfi Kardit, professed that his purpose in making the film was to 'to foreground the phenomenon and anxiety of the (mainstream) Muslim community towards heretical sects that are becoming wilder and more brutal', and 'promote the love for the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), the final prophet of Islam.'⁵⁸ Kardit's express intention in making the film may not be an explicit call to condemn the persecution of the minority sect but may nonetheless intensify tensions by reinforcing their alienation from 'true' Islam.

Widely labelled by mainstream Islamic groups as members of a heretical sect (*aliran sesat*) and condemned by the MUI as apostates,⁵⁹ the Ahmadi and their places of worship have been the target of violent attacks by militant radical Islamist groups. The situation of the Ahmadi Muslims is a lightning rod for debates about the protection of religious freedom and the acquiescence in violent acts towards the Ahmadi by extremist groups. Founded in India in 1889 by Mirza Gulam Ahmad as an Islamic revivalist movement, the Ahmadiyya movement distinguished itself from orthodox Sunni and Shia Islam in one major if controversial aspect: the founder regarded himself as a Muslim reformer and post-Muhammadan prophet bearing the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad (Burhani, 2014: 136). Thus the greatest heresy of the Ahmadi is the belief that divine revelations continue to be conveyed by chosen prophets after

⁵⁷ Interview with Eric Sasono in Jakarta on 30th January 2012.

⁵⁸ 'Film ini mengangkat fenomena dan keresahan umat Islam terhadap aliran-aliran sesat yang semakin liar and brutal, dan sebuah langkah kecil dari saya sebagai pembuat film ini untuk menumbuhkan rasa cinta yang dalam kepada Rasulullah Muhammad SAW sebagai Nabi dan Rasul hingga akhir zaman.'

⁵⁹ Apostasy, or the abandonment of Islam and/or conversion to another faith, is considered a grave sin in Islam and is purportedly punishable by death, although several scholars argue that there is no Qur'anic statement that sanctions capital punishment on apostates (Saeed and Saeed, 2004: 69-87).

the demise of the Prophet Muhammad whom other Muslims believe to be the last. Possibly driven by persecution in India, the Ahmadiyya faith had spread beyond its place of origin to other predominantly Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Malaysia, and Indonesia in the early twentieth-century (Burhani, 2014: 141).

Beginning in 1929, the MUI has issued numerous fatwas forbidding the designation of the Ahmadiyya faith as an Islamic sect (Crouch, 2009: 5). Later in 1965, the sect gained official recognition as a religious community in a decree by the Minister of Justice but on the condition that the tenets of the Ahmadiyya sect fall within the boundaries of Islam. Failing to assimilate into orthodox and mainstream Islam would deny the Ahmadis from being included in the six main religious groups in Indonesia - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Confucians - as enshrined by the Indonesian government and in federal law. With 50,000 to 80,000 Ahmadis living in Indonesia today, they represent a small but significant religious minority in the country (Crouch, 2009: 6). The Ahmadiyya faith is not the only religious group subjected to persecution and denounced as heretical by mainstream Islamic groups in Indonesia. Darul Arqam, al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah, the Madi, and Lia Eden's 'cult' have all had similar appellations attached and suffered similar persecution (Burhani, 2014: 138).

The root of the persecution of the Ahmadis is the Islamic and political construction of religious groups and citizens in Indonesia. Because they are denied a place alongside other official religious groups in Indonesia, the Ahmadis are rendered outside the nation. At this juncture I would like to return to how the character of Guru Samir is identified as a heretic and therefore dis-identified as a citizen because his version of Islam is rejected by the state. Violence towards and destruction of groups deemed heretical are therefore legitimised by the state, making men of such groups like Guru Samir particularly threatening figures to be vanquished. His dis-identification as a citizen is also sexualised; Guru Samir promotes a non-Indonesian brand of Islam that mistreats women and abuses his Muslim male privilege to satisfy his sexual excesses.

In sum, I have shown in this section that the villain in the conflict over 'true' Islam may take on the familiar appearance of the traditional Islamic leader. The unusual emphasis on the false prophet in an Islamic film like *Mengaku Rasul* acts as a means to draw out aspects of his status as an outsider to authentic Islam, namely as a heretic and non-Islamic polygamist. In the next section, the moral divide separating 'bad' and 'good' Muslim masculinity is less distinguished. Instead, other versions of Muslim masculinities emerge through the socio-economic class divide.

Rich man, poor man: Islamic commentary on socioeconomic class and masculinity

Class relations in Indonesia should be seen as more than differences in economic, social, and symbolic production and accumulation of capital but also as relationships that are worked out historically through a process of self and mutual definition (Sidel, 2006: 18). This is a more fluid, contextually-driven definition of socio-economic class that lends itself well into the formation and transformation of various social classes from the Dutch colonial era through the Sukarno era (1950-1965) to the New Order period (1966-1998) and up to the present day.

Because of its potential to stoke tensions, socio-economic class as a concept and term were rarely spelled out during the New Order regime (Sen, 1994: 128). Commonly used in pre-1965 political discourse, the term 'class contradictions' was replaced with 'social difference' (*kesenjangan sosial*) under Suharto's leadership. In fact, the word 'class' was usually censored in Indonesian cinema. But as Krishna Sen argues, even when the word class is verbally excised from a film, images of class differences between the have and have-nots that are left uncut in film speak louder than words (Sen, 1994: 128).

Sen's notion of mimetic strategy is helpful in identifying images of the affluent Muslim middle class in post-New Order cinema. Mimetic strategies

reproduce particular behavioural patterns of the different socioeconomic classes in film texts. The strategies aim to distinguish the qualitative differences that separate the rich from the other classes through images of their manner of consumption (Sen, 1994: 129). Her method of identifying class relations in New Order films highlights the qualitative distinctions (ownership of expensive consumer goods, personal transport, larger homes) between the ostensibly rich and the 'masses' (*rakyat*) (Sen, 1994: 129). All the signifiers of wealth, such as luxury cars and multiple servants, are also displayed in post-New Order films discussed in this section. But in addition to these undisputed symbols of wealth is the centrality of piety in the lives of the characters who yearn for spiritual fulfillment.

Issues related to, and visual markers of, affluent middle class lifestyles are usually emphasised in post-New Order Islamic films and may be a reflection of the prevailing discourse of middle class Islam in post-New Order Indonesia, where piety and material prosperity are often linked together as an expression of successful Islamic personhood (Heryanto, 1999; 2011; Noorhaidi, 2009). The shift in public Islamic piety by the Muslim middle class in Indonesia towards being associated with wealth and urban lifestyles began in the mid 1980s (Heryanto, 1999). This shift is characterised by the social transformation of the *santri* class (pious and learned Muslims) into the Muslim bourgeoisie who exhibited 'the aestheticisation of their lifestyle, the display of wealth, and exuberant consumption' (Heryanto, 2011: 52).

During much of Indonesia's modern history and popular memory, white Westerners and ethnic Chinese Indonesians were considered by indigenous Indonesians as the wealthiest in Indonesian society. Just below the white Westerners and ethnic Chinese in the hierarchy of perceived affluence are the members of the government elite. Heryanto notes that wealth has long been frowned upon in Indonesia and compared to the rich, the poor and rural indigenous Indonesians were morally superior (1999: 163). By the 1990s, however, the gentrification of the occasionally overlapping classes of the indigenous middle class and

Muslim elite culminated in the promotion of the idea that 'it is cool to be rich' (Heryanto, 1999: 163).

This section considers representations of post-1998 Muslim masculinity which are constructed through visual markers of unequal socioeconomic class relations and expressions of piety. Images of men from different class background in this section illuminate not only diversity between men but also how unequal socioeconomic class relations between men affect their spiritual aspirations. Using two films, *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* and *Kun Fayakun*, this section foregrounds the theme of disempowered masculinity precipitated by the main male character's economic deprivation. The crisis of masculinity is defined by the collapse of structural patterns that (mainly heterosexual) men have traditionally followed to fulfill their concept of masculine behaviour, namely through the adoption of the breadwinner role and dominant paterfamilias (Kimmel, 1987; Morgan, 2006).

Emak Ingin Naik Haji was highly acclaimed by film critics, Islamic clerics, and politicians alike for its apparently 'realistic portrayal of Indonesian society' and 'demonstration of an individual's highest love for her Creator'.⁶⁰ The premise of the film - that financial shortcomings hinder religious obligations - involves the dramatisation of the yawning economic divide that separates the cast of characters. In *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*, the roles of the three main male characters are positioned in relation to the symbolic significance of the hajj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Zeinal is an impoverished artist and street trader who intends to fund his elderly mother's trip to the holy land; successful businessman Haji Sa'un is planning his sixth pilgrimage in an effort to improve his piety but still feels inadequate in religious matters; while Pak Joko is convinced that going to

⁶⁰ *Film ini menggambarkan puncak kecintaan seorang hamba kepada Tuhannya* ('This film portrays the peak of a Muslim's love for her God') - Ustaz Jefri Albukhori. DVD sleeve of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*.

Satu dari sedikit film yang mendidik, akting yang baik sekali dan mengharukan ('A rare film that teaches, [with] excellent and heartfelt performances') - Hajriyanto Tohari, member of the People's Consultative Assembly. DVD sleeve of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*.

*My translation

Mecca will enhance his political image and boost his mayoral campaign. All three men are driven by different desires, some more noble than others but their relation to the pilgrimage becomes a yardstick of how 'good' a Muslim they are.

Set in Jakarta where the very rich live side by side with the desperately poor, the audience catch a glimpse of Zeinal and his mother's poverty in relation to Haji Sa'un's wealth through an aerial shot over their homes. Haji Sa'un's ability to make multiple pilgrimages to the Middle East for the hajj and *umrah*, a lesser pilgrimage, becomes the marker of his wealth rather than his piety. The financial stakes are against Zeinal and his mother who are unable to secure funds for her first trip to Mecca as the travel costs increase year on year.

The film paints a cynical image of traditional gender roles expected of Indonesian men, as Zeinal's mother, his former wife, and child all cling to him as dependents despite his financial failures. Zeinal is encumbered by his paternal obligation to pay alimony to his former wife who looks after their son. His financial difficulties become more acute when his son requires hospital treatment and aggravated by his demanding ex-wife who shows little pity or empathy towards Zeinal's predicament. Living with his widowed mother in a household without a father, Zeinal is portrayed as the hapless man of the house who struggles to make ends meet.

The stark contrast between the impoverished circumstances that Zeinal and his mother endure and the affluence of Haji Sa'un and Pak Joko is a commentary about piety and wealth. Haji Sa'un's wealth sends a message about the tenuous link between a man's spirituality and class status. Obverse to Zeinal's mother and her noble intention to travel to Mecca is Pak Joko's pilgrimage as a political strategy, appealing to what his personal assistant describes as his 'fanatical Muslim' constituents. Pak Joko's well-publicised pilgrimage echoes Suharto's visit to a number of holy sites in the Arabian peninsular in 1991 at the peak of his Islamisation programme (Noorhaidi, 2009: 235). By virtue of his power, authority, and status as a politician, Pak Joko is an embodiment of hegemonic

masculinity, but his cynical claim to the humbling experience as a pilgrim belies his moral bankruptcy.

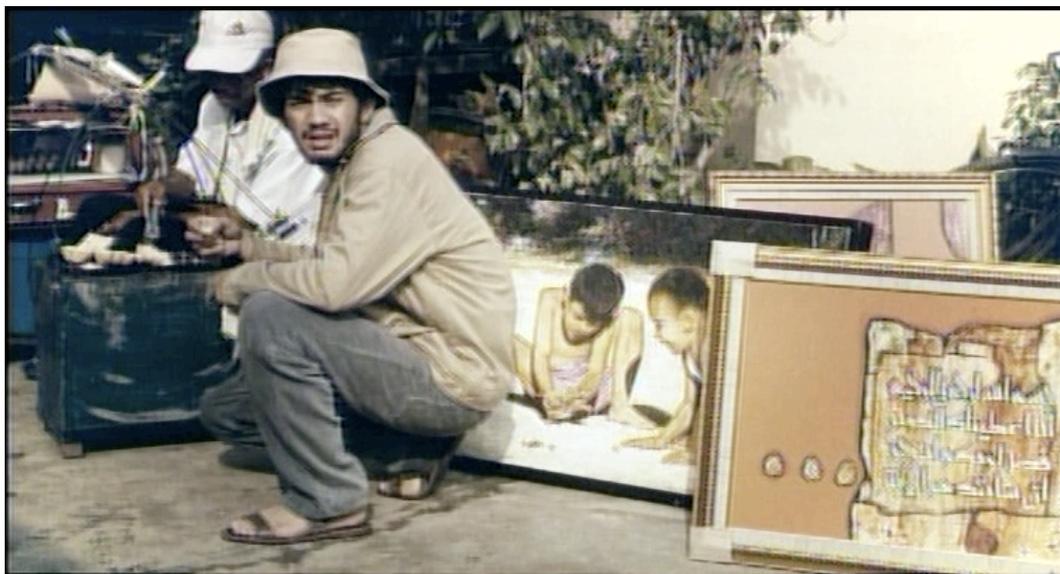


FIGURE 21 Zeinal, the struggling street trader of framed paintings in *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* (Mother Wants To Go On the Hajj, 2009, dir. Aditya Gumay).

Although the film is a critique of wealth, power, and the rise of the pious middle class it spares little sympathy for men like Zeinal who have neither wealth nor power. In fact, the film's spiritual message is that true piety eludes those who have too much and too little. When Zeinal fails to fulfill his duty as the breadwinner of his household he resorts to robbing Haji Sa'un's house. However, upon entering the house, the sight of the Qur'an stops him in his tracks and he leaves the house like a moral fugitive.

For powerful men like Pak Joko, his public display of piety is not a reflection of his personal moral responsibility and ethics. He cheats on his wife because his power and authority entitle him to do so. Haji Sa'un is flummoxed by the materialism of his children despite their multiple visits to the holy land and has little religious influence to educate them on the value of money. For Haji Sa'un's children, going on the pilgrimage is little more than a chance for a picnic, an opportunity to encounter Indonesian celebrities abroad on their spiritual journey.⁶¹

⁶¹ Interview with filmmaker Aditya Gumay in Jakarta, 3rd February 2012.

The three men - Zeinal, Haji Sa'un, and Pak Joko - each personify a flawed version of traditional male roles; a son and breadwinner, a family man of financial means, and a male leader of his people, respectively. Moreover, their inadequate Islamic spirituality affects their roles as men. Zeinal's inability to support his family leads him to robbery and gambling. Pak Joko is a dishonest leader of his community who exploits his religious image to buy votes. Haji Sa'un is a spiritually hollow family man despite his immense wealth. The film thus makes a clear statement that a Muslim man's poverty can weaken his faith but even wealth and power cannot guarantee spiritual improvement.

Zeinal's responsibility as primary provider puts his morality to the test as he is tempted to steal money from Haji Sa'un and gambles his way to win the lottery to Mecca. The irony of gambling, which is forbidden in Islam, as a means to Mecca appears to be lost to Zeinal. When Zeinal discovers a winning lottery ticket discarded in a rubbish bin, he rushes back to his mother to reveal the tremendous news in the film's climax. Accompanied by Zeinal's desperate inner voice chanting his praise to God, his run home is more ominous than jubilant. This scene takes a shocking turn when Zeinal is suddenly knocked down by Pak Joko's car. His winning ticket to Mecca is shown flung into the air in slow motion, into a void of hopelessness where Zeinal's fate appears to lie.

The film closes with the interlinking fate of Zeinal and Haji Sa'un's family. Zeinal is sent to hospital for treatment just as Haji Sa'un's eldest daughter goes into labour. The coincidental meeting between Haji Sa'un's family and Zeinal in the same hospital makes for a propitious *deus ex machina*. When Haji Sa'un celebrates the arrival of his grandchild in an Islamic ceremony of thanksgiving, his daughter grants Zeinal's mother an all expenses-paid round trip to Mecca to perform the hajj. The kindness and generosity of Haji Sa'un's daughter may appear random and inexplicable but it is an example of patronage and keeping working class Indonesians in their place. Zeinal and his mother may never be able to afford a single trip to Mecca let alone live comfortably without economic constraints. They

accept the kindness of Haji Sa'un's family whose wealth is at risk of corrupting their own spirituality.

It bears noting that the film is not, however, a searing critique of the scandalous inequality of wealth in Jakarta as the cause of spiritual crisis nor does it end with ways to redress the socio-economic imbalance. Instead, it is about the failure of masculinity when faced with the double challenge of piety and socio-economics. Just as significantly, it is about how family units both poor and wealthy can maintain the spiritual equilibrium through charity and prayer. Haji Sa'un and his family represents the 'pietisation' of the affluent Muslim middle class discussed in current literature (Noorhaidi, 2009; Heryanto, 2011). Although the upmarket piety of Haji Sa'un and his family is sometimes portrayed in an unflattering light, it is redeemed through their act of charity that guarantees Zeinal's mother's pilgrimage to Mecca. The film evinces that piety alone is not enough to fulfill one's Islamic obligations or be a good Muslim.

More than just a depiction of class-related crisis of piety, *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* is a portrayal of the wealthy class of Indonesians who benefitted from the corrupt modes of feudalistic politics of the New Order. Seeing as the film ends 'happily' with the poor receiving charity from the rich, it perpetuates the feudalistic politics of patronage of the New Order. Hence, in *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* we will find an extension of an older story from the New Order regime, a 'discourse of legitimation of unequal access to wealth in New Order Indonesia, a legitimation of an exceptionally luxurious lifestyle, accessible to only a few but acceptable to many' (Sen, 1991: 146).

Not all films conflate wealth and prosperity with the degradation of piety. In stark contrast to *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* is a film that places wealth and generous alms-giving as central to Islamic faith. Islamic alms-giving and charity are important features in the concept of prosperity Islam whereby the distribution of one's wealth to people in need can strengthen the Muslim community. The source of wealth through halal, or permitted, means is also stressed in prosperity Islam. These themes are conveyed in

Kun Fayakun (God Wills It, And So It Is, 2008, dir. H. Guntur Novaris) through a didactic rags-to-riches story.

Kun Fayakun is a moral parable about the power of prayer to redeem the hard work of faithful Muslims. Before the film begins, there is a three minute sermon by Ustaz Yusuf Mansur, the founder of Wisata Hati, the film's producer. The sermon serves as an introduction to what the audience will expect from the ensuing film, namely how the film will educate the viewer about the 'power of prayer.' But the opening sermon is also a marketing opportunity. Before finishing his sermon, Ustaz Yusuf Mansur invites the audience to visit the Wisata Hati website for further Islamic guidance through religious self-help programmes, all for a fee.

When the film starts, it follows the daily hardship of the mobile mirror trader, Ardan, who struggles to shift his goods and make ends meet. His hardship is endured with forbearance as Ardan and his wife are model Muslims: they are pious, patient, and resigned to the power of prayer that will eventually turn their fortunes around. The Qur'anic phrase, 'kun fayakun' which means 'God wills it, and so it is', or literally, 'be and it is', is meant to encapsulate how Ardan and his family's fate resides entirely in the hands of God.

The opening scenes of the film establish an image of abject poverty; Ardan pushing his mobile stall of picture frames and mirrors in a state of exhaustion and hopelessness (see FIGURE 22). He faces the daily humiliation of a failing business that provides precious little to his family when he returns home. His wife is a paragon of sacrifice and patience, holding back her disappointment and despair when her husband returns yet again without a single sale. As the sole breadwinner of the family, Ardan befits the hardworking but unlucky man whose diligence and fortitude are slow to be rewarded. His masculinity is dishonoured.

The film also upholds the notion of family unity that survives not through the support of community but only through faith and prayer. But Ardan's steadfast belief in the power of prayer alone to lift them out of poverty

turns him into a man verging on madness which distresses his wife. In a tearful prayer to God, she begs for his success in selling a lovingly polished mirror the next day. The inner voices and constant prayer of Ardan and his family members in their moments of despair demonstrate the purity of their spirit that matches the worship that they commit to physically. But Ardan's perseverance is tested by a series of humiliating and frustrating events. On one occasion, when he nearly makes a sale of a mirror, a fight breaks out smashing the mirror in the hands of a potential buyer. Overcome by anger and exhaustion, he faints but is rescued by a group of Muslim men dressed in religious attire. They feed and nurse him back to health but this adds to Ardan's shame in not having the ability to fend for himself.



FIGURE 22 Ardan pushes his street cart of picture frames and mirrors for sale in *Kun Fayakun* (God Wills It, And So It Is, 2008, dir. H. Guntur Novaris).

Ardan's inability to return home with money for his family and the disgrace he experiences as a failed father and supporter of his family is a portrait of masculinity in crisis. Much of the film shows him at the mercy of his poverty, the disregard of society towards the poor who refuse to buy his products, and the persistent setbacks to attaining the most basic of human needs: food. When he returns home from yet another challenging and unfruitful day, Ardan is upset to find more food on the table than usual. His anger arises from the shame in his inability to provide for his family. He is

emasculated by his family's need to depend on other sources of food than he himself can provide.

Ardan later reveals to his family that not only do they need to continue praying for God's material blessing (*rezeki*) in the form of money and relative comfort, but he himself will work harder towards improving their fortunes. He adds that he has ambitions in financial empowerment by becoming an owner of a large mirror and picture framing business and will donate a handsome sum to the poor. Charity is the highest form of piety and an expression of honour to one's fellow humanity, he states, in a messianic tone.

When Ardan's youngest son is sent to hospital after being struck by the car of a wealthy man their fortunes begin to change for the better. It turns out that the wealthy man in question, Bramastyo, is a former boyfriend of Ardan's wife who had broken her heart after leaving her many years ago. Committed to mend the past, Bramastyo and Ardan agree to a business deal to a much more cheerful film soundtrack. Ardan pledges to turn Bramastyo's compensation into a loan to start a business and donate ten percent of his profits to an orphanage, the prayer house, and to the needy. God's will is enumerated by Ardan; 'when one gives away ten percent of their earnings to charity, God will reward him ten times the figure, making him wealthier by one hundred percent.' With the newly gifted cashflow, Ardan is able to lighten his daily burden at work: he has a pick-up truck and helpers to carry his goods to his new picture framing shop.

Ardan's greatest reward for his prayers and perseverance awaits him in the closing scene depicting his situation three years later. In a scene befitting a dream sequence with little rhyme or reason, Ardan and his family are driven to a venue to launch his booming mirror and picture framing business. Their path to the venue is flanked by people dressed in bright white Muslim attire as if Ardan and his family had arrived in a wintery paradise. They step out of their large, chauffeur-driven vehicle also dressed in white, denoting their newly acquired prestige and richly-deserved symbol of purity. Before cutting a ceremonial ribbon to launch

the expansion of Ardan's business (see FIGURE 23), his wife has a flashback that takes her through images of their painful poverty-stricken past. This flashback functions as a reminder that they are blessed thanks to their unwavering belief in the power of prayer.



FIGURE 23 The piety of Ardan and his family is rewarded with a ribbon-cutting ceremony commemorating the success of his mirror and picture framing business. *Kun Fayakun* (God Wills It, And So It Is, 2008, dir. H. Guntur Novaris).

Tied to his masculinity as the rightful breadwinner, Ardan's piety and pride impel him to reject alms from others. He feels humiliated when he is forced to accept financial help. Such a feeling of humiliation places his masculinity constantly on the verge of collapse throughout the film. Ironically, his pious masculinity is salvaged by the helping hand of the generous Bramastyo whose act of charity arises from the latter's own need to absolve his past indiscretions. This ironic twist in the tale dissolves the reproach to socio-economic class disparity, as demonstrated in the extreme wealth gap between Ardan's family and Bramastyo's.

In lieu of a class critique, *Kun Fayakun* reinforces the individualisation of the struggling breadwinner's masculinity and the causes of its crisis rather than embed Ardan's masculinity within a larger framework of oppressions that exist in Indonesia. The film constructs Muslim masculinity upon a religious version of the libertarian myth that success can simply be had

through the hard work of individuals no matter their station in life. Thus it can be said that *Kun Fayakun* offers a different reading of the effects of wealth on piety from *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*. Instead of corrupting, wealth in *Kun Fayakun* is to be desired as it enhances the faith of Muslim individuals.

In his assessment of Islamic films of the post-New Order period, Eric Sasono (2010) finds a broad theme of individualisation of Islamic spirituality through the preoccupation with personal gain as an Islamic experience. Sasono identifies three main themes in these films; finding a life partner, self-identification with Islamic consumer culture, and personal achievement (2010: 54-58). These themes are prevalent in the definitive and most successful Islamic films of the period, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2. In fact, they are concerned with the lives of the young, pious, and aspirational, characters that mirror the putative target audience (Heryanto, 2011). The themes of individualistic Islamic spirituality depart from images of Islamic experience as a nationalist and communal concern in New Order cinema (Sasono, 2010: 62) making them consistent with theories of the rise of individualism and late capitalist logic of consumerism as an aspect of identity formation (Jameson, 1985: 114-115).

Even though the Islamic film genre is no longer preoccupied with nationalism in post-New Order period, the genre continues to imagine the nation but in ways different from New Order Islamic cinema. In the next section, images of Indonesian Muslim men are foregrounded in a discourse on terrorism to distinguish Indonesian Islam from extremism and Arabian culture. The section will examine the struggles of recuperating Muslim masculinity in the post-9/11 world when the definition of Indonesian Islam and the nation is at stake.

Martyrdom mythologies?: the radical Muslim man versus the moderate Muslim in *3 Doa 3 Cinta*

The deliberate contrasting of corrupt 'bad' Muslim man against peaceful 'good' Muslim man occurs in a number of films throughout the New Order and post-New Order period. Rather than static, the constituents of the binary that separates the 'good' from the 'bad' Muslim man are dynamic in the genre. In Chapter 4, the Islamic hero is pitted against the morally wayward drunkard or the despotic non-Muslim antagonist. The antagonists in post-New Order Islamic cinema is frequently more ambiguous as they are men whose religious authority is rendered suspect when they abuse it to oppress other Muslims.

In the case of the final film discussed in this chapter, *3 Doa 3 Cinta* (*3 Wishes 3 Loves*, 2008, dir. Nurman Hakim), the young Muslim heroes must contend with antagonists in the form of the spectral figure of the extremist Arab man, the militant religious teacher, and the homosexual man. This section examines these contrasting images, and reveals the ways images of young Muslim masculinity in rural Indonesia are situated in the moral spaces of the *pesantren* and those beyond it, and in relation to the nation and the global Islamic community. This section seeks to determine how youthful Muslim masculinities in *3 Doa 3 Cinta* are constructed in a world dominated by a discourse on the 'war on terror', and how a critique of Islamophobia is visually mobilised in response.

3 Doa 3 Cinta resonates with contemporary national anxieties about the recruitment of young men into terrorism in Indonesia. The purpose behind making the film, according to the director of the film, Nurman Hakim, was to depict a more 'realistic' portrait of life in an Islamic boarding school by featuring characters with depth, humour, and poignancy.⁶² Nurman adapted his experiences as an alumnus of a *pesantren* to make a film that challenges negative stereotypes of rural male Islamic boarding school

⁶² In the DVD's Special Features section on the film's production.

students and assuages the growing concerns about the *pesantren* as the hotbed of extremism and terrorism.

The link between religious education in remote Indonesian villages and terrorism became established when police investigations traced the 2002 Bali bombers to a small *pesantren* in Lamongan, East Java. Later, in 2005, a second bombing in Bali prompted the Indonesian government to roll out a counter-terrorism procedure to fingerprint students in all rural *pesantren*. Although the fingerprinting procedure did not materialise it nonetheless upset many Muslim Indonesians who interpreted it as the demonisation of Islam by the Indonesian government (Hoesterey and Clark, 2012: 220).

Nurman states that the making of a film about the lives of young men in the *pesantren*, one of whom is seduced into radicalisation no less, was fraught with certain difficulties.⁶³ The film was in production before the boom years of Islamic cinema when Hakim was forced to change the original title of the film, *Pesantren*. The title and the titular subject matter were considered politically sensitive by local film investors who were also unconvinced by the commercial potential of the film. When the film screened in numerous film festivals outside Indonesia to rapturous reception, overseas audiences and festival organisers saw little problem with the title *Pesantren* used during its festival tours. However, when screened locally, the sensitive and potentially unprofitable title had to be replaced with a more industry-friendly name *3 Cinta 3 Doa* that was in keeping with the prevailing naming norms for films in Indonesia.

The Indonesian religious boarding school, the *pesantren*, is iconised as the traditional centre of Islamic learning and knowledge. The term, *pesantren*, is derived from the word *santri* to mean 'student' and *persantrian*, the place for students (Lukens-Bull, 2000: 48). All *pesantren* in Java are usually led by a group of teachers cum religious leaders known as *kyai*. The *kyai* also plays an important role in the community as a spiritual leader and in recent years, as a political figure (Iskandar, 2006:

⁶³ *3 Doa 3 Cinta* DVD's Special Features section on the film's production.

97). As the oldest existing system of learning in Indonesia, the *pesantren* has had an influential function in the spread of Islam and continues to represent the country's valuable spiritual and cultural repository.

Studying in a rural *pesantren* in Central Java are three male students and best friends, Huda, Rian, and Syahid. Each aspires to accomplish a particular mission when they leave the limiting confines of the *pesantren*. They surreptitiously write them down as graffiti on a decrepit wall within the school. Huda yearns to find his long-lost mother; Rian is given a handheld video camera as a gift and wants to start a photo studio business and a filmmaking career; while Syahid wants to be a 'martyr' of Islam. Their world appears sequestered from the rest of the country, particularly from the foreboding urban hubbub of Jakarta, to which Huda ventures in search of his mother.

The Islamic nature of their surroundings is emphasised in the mock Arabian musical soundtrack, marking their isolation from a secular world. Their visual access to the world beyond Indonesia is through television where they witness the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City in 2001 with awe and little comprehension of how the faraway images will eventually impact their lives. This scene would mark the beginning of their collision with the global geopolitical enterprise of the 'War on Terror.'

From the outset, the film establishes its stance on Islam and other faiths in a Qur'anic recitation lesson led by Kyai Wahab, the headmaster of their boarding school. Part lesson on scripture and part moral instruction, he urges his male students to advocate peace and tolerance toward what is sometimes perceived as Islam's greatest adversaries, Judaism and Christianity. Speaking in Javanese, their teacher Kyai Wahab asserts that Qur'anic verses do not, in essence, incite war against Jews and Christian but can be manipulated by extremists to promote war. So long as there is mutual respect between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people, there is no basis for animosity between the faith groups, he continues.

But the students of the *pesantren* are presented with a range of mixed messages about other religious groups and the condition of Muslims beyond their shores. They listen with intent about the war between occupied Palestine and Israel in an Indonesian radio news report. The news report and their Islamic lessons interweave with one another forging their view of fragile inter-faith relations abroad. These mixed messages influence the development of their sense of purpose as Muslims in the world.

The students later sit in a lesson led an unnamed hardline teacher who gives a fiery lecture promoting intolerance towards Jews and Christians. Thin and dishevelled, the hardline teacher links the Western influence of cinema with the murder of Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan and the humiliating global 'war' on Muslims. More chillingly, the religious teacher urges his students that it is their duty to murder Christians and Jews, and foster a war-like mentality of 'kill before one becomes killed'. The hardline teacher's murderous exhortation in Indonesian is partially muted in the censored version of the film but the subtitles articulating his words in English are retained.

The hardline teacher promotes the martyrdom mythology, a narrative shared by many militant extremists across the world (Hafez, 2007: 97). Would-be martyrs are said to be motivated by the interrelated objective and outcomes of the martyrdom mythology, namely to avenge the deaths of Muslims worldwide by Westerners and the Israeli military, the weakening and collusion of Muslim states with Western imperialist politics, and the inevitable victory of Islamic fighters. After the foreboding message is conveyed in class, Rian and Huda express their rejection of the hardline teacher's murderous exhortation. But Syahid is intrigued by it and undeterred by suggestions to stop taking lessons from him. Seduced by the martyrdom mythology, he argues with Huda and Rian that there may be a kernel of truth in the hardline teacher's vision of militant jihad.

In their private space behind the *pesantren*, each of the three men scribble on the walls the number of days before they graduate from the *pesantren*,

no different from prison inmates enumerating their days towards their freedom. On the walls, Syahid articulates a wish to die a martyr, a wish he sees appropriate to his namesake, which means 'martyr' in Arabic. Within this private space, they joke and make references to a make-believe world where they are Hollywood characters. Scenes such as these reveal a more vulnerable and affable side to these men and challenge stereotypes of solemn young Muslim men. The three best friends are not one-dimensional straight-laced Muslim male cut-outs without humanity. They, like most young men, are playful, defiant towards authority, and hopeful about their future and life beyond the *pesantren* rather than obsessed about the death of their religious adversaries and the afterlife. The other students of the *pesantren* are similarly light-hearted and good-natured, smiling, singing, and well-adjusted.

Of the three male protagonists, only Syahid is drawn to radicalism. The film demonstrates the reasons which explain his journey into it. His father's illness and mounting hospital fees forces him to sell off his paddy field at a low price to a white foreigner. Out of anger and hopelessness, Syahid hits back at the foreign buyer, calling him an 'American infidel' who is 'colonising' his country. To assert some control over his life and learning ways to protect his country from white neo-colonialists, Syahid uses Rian's video camera to record paramilitary training in the jungle. Having witnessed the paramilitary training, he later becomes inspired to participate in extremist military intrigue. He also creates a video recorded suicide note to convey that he is on a mission to be a martyr and end the oppression of Muslims by Americans and Israelis (see FIGURE 24).

In contrast to Rian and Huda's ease with the world outside the *pesantren*, filled with sensual and sensorial pleasure such as the presence of attractive female performers at the visiting village fairground, Syahid's brush with the outside world is less salubrious. Despondent from witnessing his father's decaying health, he wanders back to the *pesantren* on a different route than usual, through the urban underbelly where he walks past a woman gyrating publicly in front of a wild-haired man. The

world outside the *pesantren* that Syahid witnesses is full of vicious, pleasure-seeking and exploitative men.

Soon, however, the world that Syahid knows, one apparently divided between Western oppression and Islam, becomes more ambiguous when he learns that the American businessman who bought his father's paddy field had also paid his hospital bills. The American businessman's unexpected kindness causes Syahid to rethink his suicide mission and attack against American imperialist oppressors. Showing a change of heart, Syahid informs his disappointed mentor, the hardline teacher, that he has decided to abort his suicide mission.



FIGURE 24 Syahid experiments with the terrorist 'suicide note' on video in *3 Doa 3 Cinta* (3 Wishes 3 Loves, 2010, dir. Nurman Hakim).

Syahid's sudden decision to pull out of his mission coincides with the 2001 attack in New York City. In response to the growing fears of terrorism in the *pesantren*, a police crackdown in his school results in the arrest of Syahid, Rian, Huda, and Kyai Wahab for suspected Islamist militant activity. Through unexplained means, the police discover Rian's video recorder and in it suspicious recordings of guerilla training by Syahid. The unlawful arrest of the three young men and Kyai Wahab effectively ends the ambitions of the young men. During their imprisonment, Syahid's

father dies while Rian's dream to be a filmmaker is extinguished. Years later, their innocence is vindicated but it is a much delayed one as Kyai Wahab dies shortly after their release. However, Syahid is released much later than the others, as he alone had briefly dabbled with extremism.

Huda takes over the role of *kyai* of their *pesantren*, succeeding Kyai Wahab after his death, and marries the late *kyai*'s daughter. As the new *kyai*, Huda preaches the same brand of tolerant Islam as his predecessor. The film ends in Huda's living room as he witnesses on television another news report of a terrorist bombing in Bali reminiscent of the one that occurred earlier in 2002. The film's ambivalent ending indicates the continuing struggles with home-grown terrorism and radicalised Muslim men in Indonesia. Huda, his peers, and students of his *pesantren* may not be immune to future arrests, unlawful or otherwise.

Nurman Hakim's depiction of the three young men is refreshing in light of hegemonic media discourses that demonise Muslim masculinity and Islam. The parallel narratives of the three men function as a device to add nuance and to neutralise the often toxic portrayal of the male *santri* by the Indonesian mass media and government. Although their movement is mostly restricted to the confines of the *pesantren*, the young men engage thoughtfully with external media influences from outside the *pesantren*. The young men also negotiate the infiltration of terrorism and extremist interpretations of Islam promoted within the *pesantren* with agency rather than passivity. Through depictions of their negotiation with extremism, marked by both fascination and apathy, the young men depart from the reductive caricatures of the angry terrorist Muslim or Taliban man.

The depiction of Syahid's brief dalliance with extremist ideology and its outward associations, such as wearing an Arabian-style turban during prayer, momentarily constructs his masculinity as 'Other' to the masculinity of Huda and Rian's. Rian chastises Syahid for wearing the turban not because it is un-Islamic but because it is excessive beyond the acceptable idea of moderate Islam and Indonesian-ness (see FIGURE 25).

This brief scene on the Other-ness of the turban reveals the multiplicities and historically contextualised meanings of the turban. 'To the untrained eye', the turban signals 'the most pernicious components of oppressive patriarchal backward cultures and traditions, those that have failed at modernity' (Puar, 2007: 181). But actually the turban is 'multiple' in its incarnations in size, shape, and colour, tied with connotations that designate gender, caste, region, militancy, age, and marital status (Puar, 2007: 181). By wearing the turban, Syahid does not actually become an Arab. Instead, his sartorial choice invokes the spectral figure of the Arab and extremist.

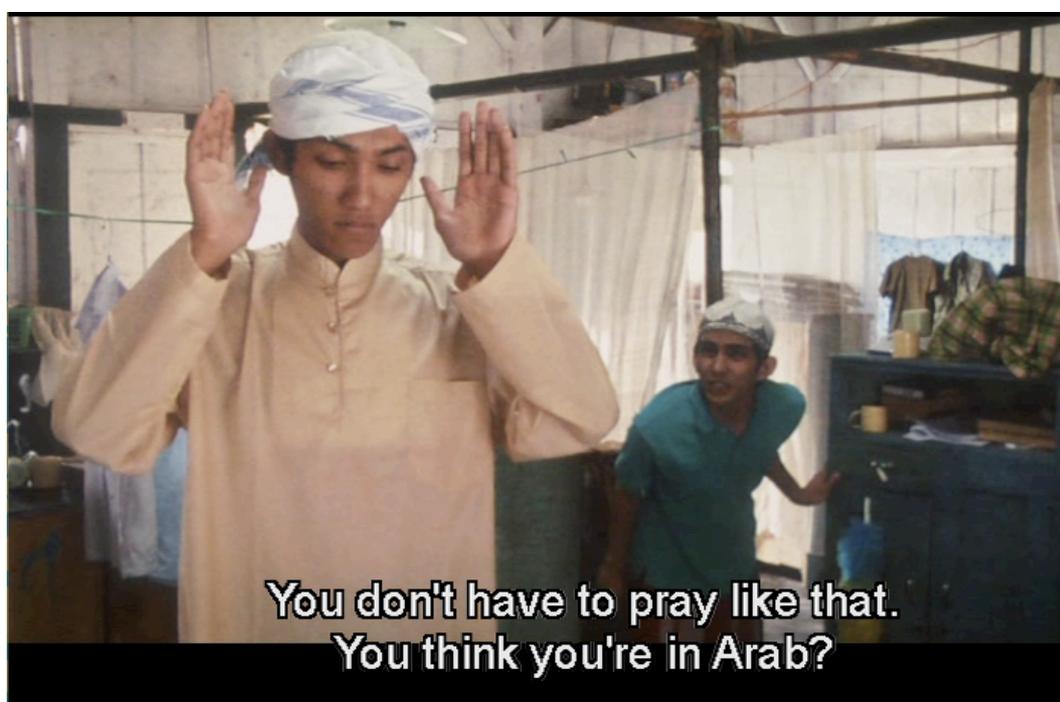


FIGURE 25 In a scene from *3 Doa 3 Cinta*, Rian (in the background) chastises Syahid for wearing the turban, 'You don't have to pray like that. You think you're an Arab?'

The masculinity of Otherness that Syahid briefly embraces is also desexualised. Syahid's rejection of women in contrast to the voyeuristic pleasure embraced by Huda and Rian suggests the failure of Syahid at performing his heterosexual masculinity. Syahid's masculinity can be compared with the Orientalist stereotypes of terrorist whose masculinity has 'failed at modernity' (Puar, 2007: 181). Orientalist stereotypes of the terrorist, who is almost always male, indicate the backwardness of the culture and religious traditions from which he emerges. In his desexualised

Otherness, the terrorist lives and operates in strict exclusion from women, thereby making him a sexual deviant who is contemptuous of women (Puar, 2007: 181).

But it bears mentioning here that Syahid's masculinity of Otherness is not the same as the non-normative sexuality displayed by a minor male character in *3 Doa 3 Cinta*. Early in the film, the cook of the *pesantren* is seen sneaking into a student dormitory and molesting a sleeping boy. Distressed by the attack, the boy reports to the three heroes who in turn instigate a revolt to expel the cook. Hoesterey and Clark (2012) compares this condemnation of non-normative sexuality with the 'homoerotic play' between Rian, Huda, and Syahid. In a scene that evokes playfulness in the *pesantren*, Rian finds the sleeping Huda and Syahid with erect penises under their sarongs and proceeds to flick the protruding members. This playful scene marks the boundary between 'normative' homoerotic play and punishable non-normative homoeroticism.

Hoesterey and Clark (2012: 220-221) conclude that *3 Doa 3 Cinta* reinforces heteronormativity and a homophobic view of male same-sex sexual relations despite its depiction of 'homoerotic play' between the three main protagonists. They add that the film reinforces 'political homophobia' (Boellstorff, 2004) in Indonesia, the violent reaction to male homosexuality condoned in the name of Islamic values and Indonesian culture. Through the demonisation of the cook's non-normative male sexuality, the film promotes a 'heterosexist masculinity'. My focus on the character of Syahid, however, highlights the desexualisation of masculinity and failure in modernity through his avoidance of sensuality and aspirations for glory in martyrdom. Rian and Huda's pleasure in looking at women confirms their heterosexist masculinity while Syahid's ascetic piety, rejection of women, and uneasiness about pleasure suggest otherwise.

Although the film's intention is to construct an image of a peaceful *pesantren* and diligent students, it reiterates the misconceptions and concerns about the *pesantren* as a place where hardline beliefs may flourish. The hardline teacher who incites and instructs impressionable

young men into joining the warfare against Western imperialism and Israel, often conflated with Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, appears and disappears from the film's narrative. Unlike Syahid, the hardline teacher does not retract his extremist views nor is he condemned for them.

The men who are outside the film's central narrative, the hardline teacher and the American businessman, are marginalised figures who lack character development and even names. They are but stock characters or foils to the three young men and Kyai Wahab. The hardline teacher is credited with no name while Mr. Smith is the name given to the American businessman, as generic as a Western John Doe. And yet they are the notional antagonists of the most conflicted of the young men of all, Syahid, who must negotiate his way back to an acceptable Muslim masculinity and be part of his society.

By bringing together in discussion images of Syahid's 'failed masculinity', the spectral Arab, the hardline teacher, and Mr. Smith, one sees a tableau of men and masculinities that constitute the discourse about the Indonesian nation in the world after 9/11. The nation is reconfigured in post-New Order Islamic film into a relational idea with a global outlook. The reconfigured Indonesian nation is engaged, and at times forced to confront, with a post-9/11 world, where Muslims in Indonesia are mapped onto a bigger picture of global Islam. Muslim masculinity in post-New Order Islamic films can be said to be more informed by the impact of transnational geopolitics than previous representations of Muslim masculinity of the New Order period.

Summary

Through events such as the attacks on 9/11 and its global reverberations, the fear of global Islamist terrorism and the continued intellectual links with the seat of Islamic learning in the Middle East, the Muslim man in post-New Order cinema needs to be worldly and aware of his place in the world. However, this awareness comes equipped with the Othering of

masculinities that do not fit the standard of Indonesian Islam and Indonesian Muslim masculinity. As a result of Western media perpetuating stereotypical images of Muslim men, Muslims with power to self-representation end up '[reinforcing] the limited images imposed on them by the West through which a finite, bounded notion of Muslimness can be delineated' (Morey and Yaqin, 2011: 179).

This chapter has shown that although there have been attempts by post-New Order filmmakers to recoup the image of the Muslim man, the results are more ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. Fear of terrorism, economic disparity, and anxieties about Islamic practice all contribute to an ambivalent cinematic narrative of what it means to be a Muslim man in contemporary Indonesia. This ambivalence has meant that the divide between 'good' and 'bad' Muslim man in Indonesian Islamic cinema is sometimes less clear than it used to be in the New Order period.

The extensive focus on the villainous Guru Samir in *Mengaku Rasul* as a figure to fear and defeat is unusual for an Islamic film. But because he looks like a traditional Islamic male leader, the film's emphasis functions to delineate the contours of his Other-ness through his propagation of heresy and un-Islamic sexual excesses. The demonisation of Guru Samir's heretical teachings is also a direct attack on the Ahmadis in Indonesia and thinly veiled critique of polygamy as an indulgence of men with messianic pretensions.

The ways in which the traditional masculine roles of father, breadwinner, and leader of a community are implicated in class disparity and poverty are refracted through an Islamic lens in *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* and *Kun Fayakun*. *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* is a parody of the affluent Muslim middle class whose social status is enhanced and constituted through conspicuous Islamic consumption, and in this case multiple pilgrimages. But the film is also less sympathetic towards the working class male character whose poverty threatens to impair his moral compass.

Kun Fayakun, however, is more optimistic about the power of prayer to lift the poorest of men out of abject poverty. Its optimism feels forced as the film's narrative requires the chance meeting with a wealthy man generous enough to turn the life of the main male character, Ardan, around. *Kun Fayakun* portrays an image of masculinity in crisis with high drama but unlike *Emak Ingin Naik Haji*, poverty does little to diminish Ardan and his family's faith in God's will.

In contrast to the impeccable piety of Ardan and his family in *Kun Fayakun* are the three protagonists of *3 Doa 3 Cinta*. The film's director Nurman Hakim is at pains to portray a humanistic portrayal of young men who attend the *pesantren* to dispel demonising stereotypes of militant Muslim men who foster extremist views in such an institution. The young men in *3 Doa 3 Cinta* are therefore constructions of youthful masculinities situated in the discourse of 'war on terror' and visually articulate a critique of Islamophobia through their thoughtful negotiation with extremism.

Conclusions

Gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema: beyond the veil and turban?

In this concluding chapter, I will pull together the key threads of the arguments outlined in this thesis and their theoretical implications. Following that, I will close with a modest proposal on future directions in the study of gender in Islamic cinema.

This thesis set out to investigate what makes certain Indonesian films 'Islamic' and identify how images of gender in the genre are constructed. The two threads of inquiry are intertwined because representations of Muslim women and men constitute the Islamic film genre in Indonesia. This thesis also sought to answer the following questions:

1. How, when, and where do Indonesian femininity and masculinity in film become 'Muslim'?
2. Why, and to what effect, are distinctions between representations of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims made?
3. How can representations of gender and Islam be better understood through feminist approaches to textual and contextual analysis?

To address the research questions and fulfill the objectives of the thesis, feminist post-structuralist approaches to film, cultural analysis, and ethnography were deployed. The three different approaches to research have helped to produce a contextualised analysis of the Islamic film genre

and images of gender through interviews with individuals in the Indonesian film industry and close readings of selected film and media texts.

The mixed methodology of the thesis was chosen in order to ask questions about representations of gender in a more specific way. Rather than ask 'what is Muslim femininity and masculinity in Indonesian cinema', I ask 'when, how, and where' images of gender are constructed. This method ensures that any examination of images of gender focuses on the occasion, purpose, and agency pertaining to the articulation of gender by filmmakers. Or to re-iterate Krishna Sen on studying women in Indonesian cinema, we must question 'to what effect and in whose interest' particular images of women are mobilised (1994: 135).

The research was motivated by a gap in the present literature on gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema. In reviewing the literature in Chapter 2, it was highlighted that the scholarly focus on gender in Indonesian cinema had by default been about images of women in 'secular' film. I found, however, that the way images of women in Indonesian cinema have been studied has evolved; from comparing them to women in ethnographic 'reality' and those idealised in government ideology to a more theoretical and contextualised outlook. Although studies on women in Indonesian cinema have grown in sophistication over the years many conclude with the Freudian binary of femininity comprising of the virgin/mother and whore as the dominant model of femininity.

As a feminist study on representations of gender in Islamic cinema, it is pertinent to critique the binary logic femininity and unlock its limitations. Categorising female characters into either virgin and whore limits one's framework of analysis into easy tropes and perpetuates the moral judgement of female sexuality. Analysts often impress such categories on characters even though they do not always fit neat binaries. At worst, the continued and uncritical employment of the Madonna/Whore complex in the analysis of representations of women reproduces a masculinist framework of understanding female sexuality. First introduced as a psychoanalytic concept, Sigmund Freud argued that the Madonna/Whore

complex is a conflicted expression of heterosexual male desire precipitated by the fear of oedipal castration during childhood.

Studies that identify transformations in the images of Muslim men dominating Indonesian cinema note the shift towards those that signify sensitivity and even disempoweredness. These studies, though often focused on youthful masculinities, have found that they reflect the rise of hegemonic Muslim masculinity personified by popular Islamic preachers of the post-New Order period. The extant literature, however, does not have a commentary on New Order Muslim masculinities. This is perhaps due to the dearth of new studies on heterosexual masculinity in New Order cinema and the absence of highly visible markers of piety presented by men that are analogous to the veiled woman.

In Chapter 3, I sought to develop a definition of the Islamic film genre that transcended its apparent function to teach audiences about the Islamic faith through empathy with pious characters. These definitions are recently developed, mainly as a reaction to the rise of Islamophobia post-9/11, and are therefore retrospective particularly when they are also used to describe Islamic films of the New Order period. They are also functionalist and suggest a one-way model of media consumption. In my formulation, the Islamic film genre may be made for *dakwah*, but it mainly exhibits diagetic and extra-diagetic audio-visual patterns and commercial imperatives that are identified as 'Islamic' by filmmakers, critics, and audiences.

The generic category of the Islamic film is unstable because filmmakers do not always prioritise the Islamic status of their films. Hence, Islamic cinema is as much a religious enterprise as it is a commercial one. In the end, a shrewd balance between the filmmaker's artistic and religious vision must be struck with recouping the costs of making a film. This is because a film's financial success often impacts profoundly on a filmmaker's career and facilitates the production of future films. In its focus on developing a definition of the Islamic film genre, Chapter 3 does not focus on the specific role images of gender play in the genre. Instead, the

discussion on how gender helps constitute the genre begins in earnest in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how nationalist rhetoric in New Order Islamic cinema aligns the leadership of Muslim men with order and progress while Muslim women are consigned to domesticity. The films discussed in Chapter 4 are preoccupied with grand statements about the Indonesian nation, although most are set before its independence, and told through heroic figures from legends and history. The chapter also discusses contemporary male characters who uphold the nationalist rhetoric of modernity. They are avant-garde in relation to other Muslims who need their guidance through their use of agricultural skills and *dangdut*. The heroes of New Order Islamic cinema are portrayed, often in visual terms, in opposition to their antagonists in a moral conflict over 'true' Islam and in defense of the nation. They are distinguished from their moral antagonists through their clothing and relative restraint from resorting to violence.

The images of Muslim women in New Order Islamic cinema present an intriguing commentary about popular representations of gender in anti-colonial narratives for a few reasons. First, they are overlooked in the literature on representations of women in New Order cinema. Second, as leaders of an anti-Dutch rebellion in Sumatra, they subvert representations of femininity prevalent in films of the period. I argue that their subversion goes only so far as their domestic roles as mothers and wives are emphasised as the impetus of their rebellion. Their femininity, and to some extent, their piety as religious anti-colonial leaders, are marked as morally superior to colonial femininity, the latter identified as meek, prim, and un-enlightened.

In Chapter 5, I found that post-New Order films with Islamic content have contributed significantly to the screen representations of Muslim women. Changes in Indonesian society during the period and particularly changes in the position of women often correspond with the shift in women's images in cinema and audience expectations of them. As discussed in Chapter 5, there have been onscreen female spiritual leaders and

heroines with great resolve in the face of patriarchal obstacles. They have, to a certain extent, moved away from the women in Sen's (1982) pioneering study of gender in New Order cinema who were primarily 'dependent and sinful' (Sen cited in Heider, 1991: 166).

However, one must not assume that a few 'empowered' characters will automatically transform the logic of representing women in Indonesian film. Even in the women-friendly atmosphere of the post-New Order film industry, independent female characters continue to be viewed with suspicion and criticised as unrealistic just as they were in New Order cinema. The independent Muslim female character demonstrates characteristics viewed from a Muslim man's vision of ideal femininity: honest, demure, modest while displaying an impressive knowledge about Islam (Paramaditha, 2010: 78). Visually, the ideal Muslim woman is young, fair-skinned, conventionally beautiful, dressed in a light pastel coloured headscarf and modest but nonetheless stylish Islamic fashion (*busana Muslim*). These are but limited representations of commercially marketable Muslim femininity.

Other strands of masculinities can be illuminated beyond the binary of morally upstanding Muslim man and his oppressive counterpart prevalent in New Order Islamic cinema. Chapter 6 explored the diverse representations of Muslim men along the lines of socioeconomic class, degree of spirituality, and sexuality. The chapter has focused mostly on images of masculine failure and disempoweredness as a commentary on the way Islam intersects with public concerns about poverty, polygamy, religious freedom, and terrorism. The emergence of films on these issues are consistent to some extent with Hoesterey and Clark's assertion that Islamic films during the post-New Order 'increasingly set the terms of moral debate in the public sphere' (2012: 221).

The shift from an emphasis on the nation in Islamic New Order cinema to the individual in Islamic films after 2008 has been noted by Eric Sasono (2010). While this is substantiated in films such as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo) and *Ketika Cinta*

Bertasbih (When Love Glorifies God, 2009, dir. Chaerul Umam), I have found in Chapter 6 that concerns about the nation still persists in post-New Order Islamic cinema albeit more implicitly. One film in particular, *3 Doa 3 Cinta*, depicts anxieties about the porosity of the nation's boundaries raised in the discourse on terrorism and its apparent un-Indonesianness. These concerns conjure the spectre of the Arab terrorist from which Indonesian Muslim masculinity must distance. The Muslim man in post-New Order cinema is no longer simply situated in the nation, but is placed in relation to the outside world and the global Islamic community.

Based on the textual analysis of the films, I have found that the Indonesian Islamic film genre reproduces various mechanisms to distinguish Muslim characters from non-Muslim ones and also those marked 'good' and 'bad' Muslims. These binaries would occur throughout the genre in different ways, but as discussed in Chapter 6, sometimes those binaries are not emphasised. Images that signify the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim appear to mobilise particular ideas about Islam and being Muslims in Indonesia, the global Islamic community, and in relation to the rest of the world. They are reproduced through narrative structure, audio-visual tropes, and informed by political discourse and certain cultural and economic imperatives. More significantly, the gendered dimension of these images are essential to how one may understand the 'look' of the Islamic film genre itself.

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which gender constitutes the Islamic film genre in Indonesia. There are differences in the construction of gender in New Order *film Islami* and those in their post-New Order counterpart. Images of gender in New Order *film Islami* are conceived through the state-aligned discourse of modernity and progress. Legitimised by nationalism as an Islamic project, the representations of gender roles in New Order *film Islami* are rigid but egalitarian in their approach to men and women's differentiated roles in the nationalist cause. In other words, gender in these films 'cite' the authority or signature of New Order nationalism and its prescribed gender relations. By contrast, gender in post-New Order Islamic films is constructed by the overlapping discourse of globalisation, religious commodification, and the race to

Islamic modernity. The formation of Muslim publics in post-authoritarian Indonesia is concurrent with the decline of state authority over public Islamic discourse and state expectations of gender and its attendant codes of morality. Post-New Order Islamic films are informed by global geopolitical events such as the aftermath of 9/11 and the particular concerns of Islamic modernity, such as the 'woman question' in Islam. However, the films also invoke a masculine counterpart to the 'woman question' in Islam: Muslim men's diminishing social and religious status in relation to Muslim women's increased participation in the public and religious sphere.

Through feminist approaches to gender in Indonesian Islamic cinema, images of Muslim women are not taken for granted and those of Muslim men are rendered visible when 'marked' and 'unmasked'. Images of gender are not meant to represent 'real' women and men, but rather ideas about the nation, 'true' Islam, modernity, and a range of public concerns raised in the films discussed in this thesis. Although they are not meant to mirror 'reality', the images are nonetheless ideological and reproduce unequal power relations across gender, class, sexuality, and religious groups in society.

What are the theoretical implications of this thesis?

Indonesia may be known for its diversity of cultures, languages, and religions. However, neither its complex religious landscape nor dynamic gender relations is captured in its Islamic film genre. It is a small wonder how religious diversity and complexity of gender relations within Islamic contexts are flattened, neutralised, and at times distorted in the genre. Rather than an accurate portrait of social reality, many images of gender and Islam in the Islamic film genre are 'archetypes, a representation of cultural concerns which, if given a specific historical setting, would become less forceful, less black and white, and thus less communicative' (Chakravarty, 2011: 201).

For the reasons above, the Islamic film genre is replete with binaries of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, or rather 'good' Muslim man/woman pitted against their 'bad' Muslim counterparts. The construction of gender in Islamic Indonesian cinema tends to follow a separatist binary model of analysis which divides gender into cis-gendered femininities and masculinities. Such a model of analysis assumes that representations of femininities are somehow autonomous from masculinities and as a result we rarely see discussions of how images of women and men relate to the other and influence their construction. Susan Brenner's analysis of New Order gender relations is one such rare example in which she finds that representations of mothers and wives who are discouraged from prioritising their careers reinforce the traditional roles of men as primary breadwinners of the family. Women who overstep their circumscribed gender roles are threatening to men and risk losing their male partners to other women (Brenner, 1998: 28).

Feminist approaches to cinema and culture used in this thesis do not just identify the unequal power dynamics at work in the construction of the image. Instead, such approaches also caution against 'considering women exclusively in terms of gender' and recognise the 'complex interrelations of difference' between women (Dittmar, Welsch, and Carson, 1994: 2-3). And although the images of women have traditionally been the focus of feminist film criticism, those of men are scrutinised through a feminist lens just as rigorously (Cook, 1982; Cohan, 1997). A feminist consciousness in filmmaking and criticism in Indonesia, however, has focused mainly on films by and about women (Michalik, 2013). Images of masculinity in Indonesia are rarely studied as a feminist project. This is perhaps due to the tenacity of the (mis)conception that feminism and gender are about women and 'women's issues'.

This thesis makes an attempt to link feminist film criticism with conceptual debates about Islamic popular visual culture and modernity. I argue that images of gender in the Islamic film genre, especially those produced during the post-New Order period, belong to the 'Islamic spectacle' in Indonesia created visually, temporally, and spatially by the drive towards

Islamic modernity (Schmidt, 2012: 386). Even images of gender produced during the New Order before Islam was 'more commodified' (Schmidt, 2012: 396) and 'everywhere' (Fealy, 2008: 16) are sometimes revived on television and percolating online today - they do not simply disappear. Islamic modernity has profound implications for the visibility and voices of Muslim women and their influences on Muslim men because of their increased participation in public life and culture. I would be the first to admit, however, that the link between feminist film criticism and Islamic modernity in this thesis is not an exhaustive one for reasons I will explain below.

There is an emergence, since the post-New Order era, of Islamic or Muslim feminism in Indonesia (Robinson, 2007; Rinaldo, 2008) but its influence on film and media have yet to be considered more extensively by scholars. Moreover, the medium of both fiction and documentary film have been adopted by Muslim organisations to articulate new visions of Islam in Indonesia. As part of a transnational movement, their engagement on feminist issues transcend national borders. There are Muslim female filmmakers producing documentary films on feminism in Indonesia and engaging in a global dialogue with other feminists in the Muslim world. How are they represented in Islamic modernity and the emerging Muslim public? What is the politics of looking in the era of 'new visibilities' in Muslim societies in Indonesia?

The definition of the Islamic film genre may also be further developed and change in the future, partly because 'correct' Islamic practice in Indonesia is perpetually contested and re-imagined. It bears mentioning here that there is no single 'Indonesian Islam' that Indonesians follow. Many follow a combination of local expressions of piety and *adat* or traditional customs. Others are influenced by smaller branches of Islam with roots in the Arab world. Future definitions of Islamic cinema and other forms of popular visual media may one day reflect the varieties of Islam in Indonesia.

The concept of 'transcoding' has been used in this thesis as an explanation for cinema's ability to reflect and refract public debates. But

the concept raises other questions that are not covered in this thesis, such as what lies beyond major Islamic issues in public debates that have so captured filmmakers? What gets left out from the purview of Islamic cinema and why? Why do audiences watch films about issues that are widely debated in the media? I acknowledge that the textual analysis in this thesis does not represent a privileged interpretation of the films. This thesis proposes that every image is polysemic or has multiple meanings, often overflowing and cannot be neatly captured by a single reading or reader. To respond to these questions and challenges, one needs to look elsewhere in the study of gender, religion and filmmaking.

Possible future directions for the study of gender and Islam in Indonesian film

In this closing section, I will briefly outline my thoughts on possible future directions for the study of gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema. I will demonstrate that the directions I propose are broadly defined in character but are nevertheless interlinked.

Efforts to better understand the definition of 'religion' and 'Islam' in Indonesian cinema can be best served by a turn to audience studies. Scholars of religion and popular culture (see Lynch, 2007) argue that further insight into the uses of popular media by religious communities are lagging behind research on religious content in popular culture. Such a lopsided emphasis risks 'unsubstantiated claims about the significance of these cultural resources and practices for particular individuals and groups' (Lynch, 2007: 159). Further insights into the practices of film audiences and consumers of Islamic popular culture can throw light on the purpose, effects, and meaning-making of cultural products such as Islamic cinema.

What of feminist insights into the Islamic film genre itself? In Chapter 5, I argue that melodramatic Islamic films focused on the domestic sphere and the struggles of motherhood constitute part of the 'women's film', a

subclass of melodrama. Scholarship on melodrama in Indonesian cinema has reached an impasse since Krishna Sen's pioneering exploration of the genre (1993). The study of melodrama in Islamic cinema has a potential to unlock further discussions about gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema, especially pertaining to images of Muslim women and domesticity. It can draw insight from the growing literature on representations of women in Indonesian Islamic television melodrama (Ida, 2003, 2009; Subijanto, 2011) similar to the development of feminist studies on melodrama in Anglo-American cinema and television soap operas. Feminist studies on melodrama in Anglo-American cinema and television soap opera have sought to examine the appeal of the genre amongst female audiences and the construction of the female spectator. Perhaps in a way similar way audience research on melodramatic Islamic cinema can also reveal its uses by the Indonesian female spectator and how its uses construct identities.

The objectives and research questions I have raised for the writing of this thesis required a critical engagement with the present literature on gender and Islam in Indonesian cinema while at the same demanded some thinking against the grain. There are endless permutations of interesting questions about why, how, and when images of gender are made in Indonesian Islamic films not covered herein and I hope this thesis will encourage them in future scholarship.

Filmography of main Islamic films

- 3 Doa 3 Cinta* (3 Wishes 3 Loves, 2008, dir. Nurman Hakim)
- Al-Kautsar* (Abundance, 1977, dir. Chaerul Umam)
- Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Qur'anic Verses of Love, 2008, dir. Hanung Bramantyo)
- Emak Ingin Naik Haji* (Mother Wants to go on the Hajj, 2009, dir. Aditya Gumay)
- Khalifah* (2011, dir. Nurman Hakim)
- Kun Fayakun* (God Wills It, And So It Is, 2008, dir. H. Guntur Novaris)
- Mengaku Rasul* (Self-Proclaiming Prophet, 2008, dir. Helfi Kardit)
- Pahlawan Goa Selarong* (Warrior of Selarong Cave, 1972, dir. Lilik Sudjio)
- Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, 1980, dir. Asrul Sani)
- Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman in the Turban, 2009, dir. Hanung Bramantyo)
- Perjuangan dan Doa* (Struggle and Prayer, 1977, dir. Maman Firmansyah)
- Sembilan Wali* (The Nine Holy Men, 1985, dir. Djun Saptohadi)
- Syahadat Cinta* (Vow of Love, 2008, dir. Gunawan Panggaru)
- Tjoet Nha Dhien* (1988, dir. Eros Djarot)
- Ummi Aminah* (Mother Aminah, 2011, dir. Aditya Gumay)

Other cited films

- 7 Wanita Dalam Tugas Rahasia* (Seven Women on a Secret Mission, 1983, dir. Mardali Syarief)
- 9 Naga* (Nine Dragons, 2006, dir. Rudy Soedjarwo)
- Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (What's Up With Love, 2002, dir. Rudy Soedjarwo)
- Ben Hur* (1959, dir. William Wyler)
- Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share, 2006, dir. Nia Dinata)
- Bombay* (1995, dir. Mani Ratnam)
- Catatan Si Boy* (Boy's Diary, 1987, dir. Nasry Cheppy)
- Cin(T)a* (2004, dir. Sammaria Simantunjak)
- Cinta Suci Zahrana* (The Pure Love of Zahrana, 2012, dir. Chaerul Umam)
- Closer* (2004, dir. Mike Nichols)
- Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Inside the Mihrab of Love, 2011, dir. Habiburrahman Al Shirazy)
- Di Bawah Langit* (Underneath the Skies, 2010, dir. Opick)
- Di Bawah Lindungan Kaabah* (Under the Protection of the Kaabah, 2011, dir. Hanny Saputra)
- Eiffel I'm in Love* (2003, dir. Nasry Cheppy)
- Eliana Eliana* (2002, dir. Riri Riza)
- Fitna* (2004, dir. Theo van Gogh)
- Gie* (2005, dir. Riri Riza)
- Henna* (1991, dir. Randhir Kapoor)
- Karunamayudu* (Ocean of Mercy, 1978, dir. A Bhimsingh)
- Kisah Anak-anak Adam* (The Story of Adam's Children, 1988, dir. Ali Shahib)
- Kuldesak* (Cul-de-sac, 1998, dir. Mira Lesmana, Nan T. Achnas, Riri Riza, and Rizal Mantovani)
- La Tahzan, Jangan Bersedih* (Do Not be Sad, 2013, dir.)

Mengejar Matahari (Chasing the Sun, 2004, dir. Rudy Soedjarwo)

Mereka Kembali (They Have Returned, 1974, dir. Nawi Ismail)

Nada dan Dakwah (Tone and Commune, 1991, dir. Chaerul Umam)

Pak Sekerah (1982, B.Z. Kadaryono)

Panggilan Nabi Ibrahim (Ibrahim's Calling, 1964, dir. Misbach Yusa Biran)

Pasir Berbisik (Whispering Sands, 2001, dir. Nan T. Achnas)

Pasukan Berani Mati (The Brave Ones, 1982, dir. Imam Tantowi)

Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (Treachery G30S/The Indonesian Communist Party, 1984, dir. Ariffin C. Noer)

Sang Kyai (The Kyai, 2013, dir. Rako Prijanto)

Sauh Sepuh Satria Madangkara (Saur Sepuh the Warrior of Madangkara, 1988, dir. Imam Tantowi)

Submission (2008, dir. Geert Wilders)

Sunan Gunung Jati (1985, Bay Isbahi)

Sunan Kalijaga (1985, dir. Sofyan Sharma)

Sunan Kalijaga & Syech Siti Jenar (1985, dir. Sofyan Sharma)

Tanda Tanya (The Question Mark, 2011, dir. Hanung Bramantyo)

Tauhid (The Oneness of God, 1964, dir. Asrul Sani)

The Passion of Christ (2004, dir. Mel Gibson)

Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh (The Narrow Bridge, 1959, dir. Asrul Sani)

Veer Zaara (2004, dir. Yash Chopra)

Virgin (2005, dir. Hanny Saputra)

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Appendix

Transcript of an interview with Eric Sasono, at Wisma UAB, Jakarta Pusat.

Length: 30 minutes

Alicia Izharuddin: How is commodification of Islam related to the trend in Islamic films in Indonesia?

Eris Sasono: I'm not a scholar so I cannot explain it in an academic way how to link between consumption to film-making. But as a Muslim, you have a criteria of goods that you can consume.. We have this halal limitation that can be broaded to halal and tayyibah. Halal and good. And films, as a thing to consume is attributed to that quality. It seems that for some Muslims, it is important to select what to watch at the cinema or on DVD based on that halal and tayyibah criteria. This is where the consumption meets certain Islamic values. It can even be broadened to not just the content but how you consume it. Because there have been people who have written emails to Rumah Film complaining about the screening of film at the cinema where men and women are mixed together in one room when they should be separated. The cinema must have separate entrance, divided into two sections for men and women. If it's mixed [gender], then it has to be light and not in the dark to avoid bercampur.

AI: Who are these people who making these kinds of complaints?

ES: I think there are some people who want to be purists. They try to get everything to be shar'ie, or halal.

AI: But they have to objections to film as a medium per se.

ES: They have to objection to film per se. But because it's technology for me. Technology is [seen as] something neutral for them. It's the intention and the people behind the technology that matter. Not the technology itself. Especially with *Ayat-ayat cinta*, it expressed certain issues and agendas, like finding a life partner. So the film gave a way to express their concerns and I believe that this is somehow a new concern in comparison to what is presented in older films in the 1980s. In the 80s, there were concerns about society, about political life. Nowadays, it's more about personal agendas.

AI: Yes, I agree. I have been watching films that were made in the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s of New Order cinema. A lot of them tend to link the spread of Islam (dakwah) as a nationalistic agenda. Sometimes these films connect Islam with the anti-colonial struggle. So there's a lot that as well. Just yesterday, I was at Sinematek and watched *Sembilan Wali*. It was like, Islam versus the Majapahit kingdom. There was no mention of an anticolonial struggle, but at the end of the film, the closing which was like a three minute epilogue that had nothing to do with the film. The closing came with a voiceover that says that Islam has been accepted in

Indonesia very willingly and peacefully. This shows that Islam is very friendly and easily accepted, and then to end it all there was a scene with an Indonesian flag [Laughs]

ES: [Laughs] That happens in Indonesian films because ... I can explain that as part of the Orde Baru agenda; to use film as a tool for nationalism.

AI: Because I have been reading mostly a lot of the director's intentions. I've spoken to Putut Widjanarko, about what the main intentions behind the making of these films. What's interesting is that their idea of making [Islamic-themed] films tends to be more broad, that the films are for everybody, because it's about good values. It's not so much about making something that very Islamic, something that is certified halal.

ES: I have an explanation for that. [With regards to] Putut Widjanarko, I put him in a certain context because he was involved in a movement back in the early 1990s called ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia). People pinned their hopes on ICMI at the time, this is the era when Muslims become 'civilised'. This was shortly before Suharto was 'dethroned' from his chair of power. ICMI was established by some scholars with a reform agenda with the help of B.J. Habibie who was then one of the ministers at the time. Putut Widjanarko was also involved, because he was an activist at the time. He was close with the people who were active in ICMI, but mostly it was people like Prof. Grawang Rahardjo, Prof Iman Abdurrahim, those big names who started this new way of looking at Islam. It's not institutional to the nation state. On the contrary, they wanted a new approach to Islam that was more substantial rather than formalistic. Rather than pushing people into wearing the jilbab, it's better to keep their hearts clean. Two of the best discussions about ICMI is by Robert Hefner, an anthropologist from Harvard. His book, *Civil Islam*, portrays ICMI as the new wave of Indonesian Muslim activism. They are civil, as in [part of] civil society and have a civic agenda as opposed to having an Islamic agenda. For they're Muslims at the same time who bring in the Islamic aspiration to the state. They just don't want the state to be more Islamic. It's not pure dakwah, they're also work in the economic and cultural side of things. One important feature is cultural Islam. Another explanation for ICMI, by Bakhtiar Affendi, he wrote his dissertation at Ohio state university explaining ICMI as cultural Islam as opposed to structural Islam. Structural Islam is about changing in the terms of structure, in the public office, very top to bottom. Cultural Islam is about changing behaviour, little by little. In order to do that, Islam cannot be formalistic. One must find a common denominator between for Muslims and secular people alike. The question I posed to Putut Widjanarko was this; 'Are you part of cultural Islam, the way Bakhtiar affendi described?' And he agreed. So there must be a criteria of the films made by Mizan and how they produced them. That's what I take as a conclusion from [Putut Widjanarko's] statement. They cannot make escapist films. Their films must carry a message about people, the public, society. It's okay to work with Christians, so long as money doesn't come from corruption. But I doubt it now.

AI: These are issues that have been discussed decades ago and until today. Even today, we have films funded by people who are not Muslims.

Like the Manoj productions that have made several Islamic films. And that's another thing, do we call them 'Islamic' films?

ES: Looking from the 'inside', we are struggling to find the definition of the films. People who are more cynical say that you put on a jilbab and it's an Islamic. For others, it's about the quality of the message, it's not about the dress. It's more inclusive. If it's inclusive what's the difference [from other films]? Little by little, I started to shape by my own definition of this genre. I haven't written anything on that, but I will somehow. Maybe I will do a presentation two weeks from now in Thailand. And I have to present a report about these kinds of films and I'm going to make a definition [of these films] based on my study.

AI: I have been talking with people here, and when I say I study 'Islamic' films, they ask me 'what is that'? They ask me if I mean Ayat-ayat cinta. But many other films have come out since, and but it's fair to consider the fact that Ayat-ayat cinta started the trend and was very popular at the time. People are watching films less and probably as a result, films similar to Ayat-ayat cinta may not get as much media attention. It's not that people would define Ayat-ayat cinta as THE Islamic film, the only film but there are also other factors. People don't watch as much, whereas scholars like us watch everything!

ES: Have you seen the 1977 film Para perintis kemerdekaan?

AI: Yes.

ES: How do you find it?

AI: I find it very interesting. Mainly because I also watched the remake Di bawah perlindungan kaabah. Let me just tell you why I find it interesting, because now that I've watched both films and I've done some comparisons. To be fair, Para perintis kemerdekaan, was based on Hamka's two books, Ayahku and Di bawah perlindungan kaabah. Even then, in the remake, which was based only on one novel, Di bawah perlindungan kaabah is very different. Because. In the older film, it was very much about anticolonial struggle, there are two narratives in parallel. One is about a woman who wants to divorce because she's been going to anticolonial lectures and she's 'disobedient' because of that. She is dihukum nusyuz. But at the same time there is the story of Hamid who is also very anticolonial. He's finished school and is looking for work, but he is offered work with the Dutch. He refuses that, he says, 'I don't want to work with the Dutch so I will continue my studies and learn more about Islam with Haji Walid, who happens to be played by Asrul Sani himself. In the remake, it was all about Hamid, he's finishing school, he wants to naik haji, along the way he falls in love with Zainab and it was all about that. The female character in the remake was so pathetic. But in Para perintis kemerdekaan, it was a lot about Halimah. There was quite a lot of feminist messages, even from Haji Walid. There was moment where Haji Walid's disciples were arguing that we shouldn't care about Halimah because she's just one person and we have more important things to worry about. But Haji Walid says no, 'This may be one woman, but one person is just as important as the whole society'.

ES: The film is very progressive. If you put it in a context where a woman doesn't want to be a Muslim, and even when you put it in the context now, people still cannot accept that so easily.

AI: Interestingly, when I spoke to Ekky Imanjaya about the banning of the film *Tanda Tanya*, there were any smaller controversial bits. But the most controversial was the female character who wanted to renounce Islam to become Christian. That was thought to be the most controversial, even when there was a male character who took on the role of Jesus in a play in the film.

ES: I've been planning to write a long essay on this film, because I found it very interesting in comparison to today's ideas about reform and the anticolonial attitude and the film also mentions Tan Malaka that's been banned for a long time in Indonesia. Tan Malaka has been named as a dissident in the old regime because he was a communist. In his own community he was also a dissident because he was a Trotskyist. So nobody wanted to talk about Tan Malaka then. But everybody knew that if Tan Malaka was given a [political] chance, he could've been as big as Sukarno. And Tan Malaka is here [in this film] and it gives me a chill. Even though he's portrayed on the losing side of the anticolonial struggle, but still. He's not shown a lot in the film, but the presence is strong, showing how strong the charisma of Tan Malaka is at a time when people are anxious because a communist person can have a powerful influence over the people. Only Sukarno had that. It's interesting for Indonesians to see that. I'm about to watch another film there [at Sinematek] – *Tauhid*. A newer film that is historical, *Sang Pencerah*, I think is too simplistic, especially when the portrayal of the protagonist's adversary in the film. Hanung portrayed the public, the society as the adversary, the enemy against the protagonist. He borrows it from Syech Siti Djengar, which I think is historically wrong because Syech Siti Jenar's teaching never became mainstream [unlike the Muhammadiyah movement]. I have a paper on the portrayal of the Dutch that has Islamic elements, it is part of the Occidentalism, how you portray the west and how they use Islam as the departure point to see the west.

AI: It's important to see how the Dutch are named. I recently re-watched *Tjoet Nha Dhien*. The Dutch are called *kaphe-kaphe Belanda*. It is instrumental in making her struggle as an Islamic, nationalist, anticolonial struggle. That's something quite important to consider.

ES: In *Tjoet Nha Dhien*, it's more like a metaphor for the New Order. Because the Acehnese were suppressed under the New Order, so it was important for them to draw a line between themselves and the rest of Indonesia, people from Java, who come from outside.

AI: One of the things I wonder about is how do films with overtly Islamic messages like the wali film manage to get past the censors. I'm just wondering during the New Order, there was a lot of suppression of public piety. Is it really important for them to align the Islamic messages with anticolonialism to get past the censors?

ES: Yes, that's one thing. If you portray public piety in film it's going to be a problem. I discussed this in my paper on Dutch representations. Before Sunan Kalijaga became a sunan, he was a bandit, he robbed from the rich to give to the poor. That is quite subversive if you put that in the context of the state, so you have to put in the context of the old kingdom of Mataram, it's something mythical, it's fairy tale and not real. So that can pass the censors. But it is still extraordinary considering that the Islamic hero comes from that background and how the Javanese accepted it as part of their beliefs about Sunan Kalijaga. But when it's placed in the context of the nation-state, then it's a different story.

AI: have there been films with Islamic content that were banned or had barriers to its screening?

ES: Para perintis kemerdekaan. You know why? The original title was Di bawah lindungan kaabah, the film was finished in 1977, same year as the General Election (Pemilu) and the kaabah was the symbol of PPP. And if you have [the symbol of] the kaabah in a public space, it's going to be seen as a promotion of PPP.

AI: Yes, but the film is not critical of the government nor was it sympathetic to opposition parties that were Islamic.

ES: Yes, but the government was paranoid. Because they [the government] use the same tools in the media to spread their messages. If you've seen *Serangan Fajar*, it's a propaganda film made by Ariffin C. Noer. It's a very smart film though. It makes the censor and the New Order happy, but it had a strong criticism against the New Order. It didn't have a linear storyline, it was actually surreal, and you can't really follow what belongs to which. Sometimes it's very documentary-like, sometimes it's very strange. But still very interesting.

Transcript of an interview with Aditya Gumay at Saraminda Films, Jakarta on 3 February 2012.

Interview length (21 minutes).

Alicia Izharuddin: Pertama sekali, bisa kita berbicara tentang latar belakang nya mas Aditya sebagai sutradara film-film yang ada kalanya bernafaskan Islam? Apakah motivasinya mas Aditya di sebalik pembikinan film *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* dan *Umami Aminah*? Apakah itu film religi?

Alicia Izharuddin: First of all, can we talk about your work as a film director of 'Islamic' films? What were your motivations behind the making of *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* (Mother Wants To Go On the Pilgrimage) and *Umami Aminah*? What is film religi (the genre)?

Aditya Gumay: Sebelum *Umami Aminah* dan *Emak Ingin Naik Haji* saya membuat film, tajuknya rumah tanpa jendela (House without a window), iaitu film anak-anak musikal. Tapi kalau dibandingkan antara *Emak Ingin*

Naik Haji dan Ummi Aminah, sebenarnya dua-duanya ini berbicara tentang keluarga. Kebetulan saja mereka ada dasar-dasar Islam. Kalau saya, saya lebih suka film berisi keluarga. Kerna film religi itu juga saya secara pribadi menilai semua film-film baik, semua film memberi pesan. Semua film memberi pencerahan. Itu boleh disebut film religi. Tinggalnya apa film religi itu Islami atau Nasrani. Tapi kesemua film yang mengajarkan kita kepada kebaikan ada pesan-pesan moral memberi renungan-renungan tentang hidup boleh disebut film religi. Khusus untuk film Ummi Aminah dan Emak Ingin Naik Haji - saya menyebut film keluarga. Emak ingin naik haji bercerita tentang cinta dan kasih antara ibu dan anak. Bagaimana anak ingin mewujudkan mimpi sang ibu, dan bagaimana ibu memberi perhatian kepada anak itu, pada cucunya yang sakit sehingga ia mengorbankan tabungannya. Sementara di Ummi Aminah juga keluarga, bagaimana sosok seorang ibu, seorang ummi, yang harus menghadapi persoalan anak-anaknya. Latar belakang Islami nya itu kerna mereka beragama Islam. Tapi kalau itu dihilangkan, itu tetap menjadi film keluarga. Kalau tak ada ummi mengaji atau solat, cerita tidak terganggu. Tidak mesti ada bumbu Islami di situ dia tetap menjadi film keluarga gitu. Misalnya, kalau naik haji buat orang Indonesia tidak cukup mudah kan? Banyak yang kesulitan kewangan. Sama seperti misalnya orang pengen pergi ke Paris tapi tak punya uang. Cumanya ia pergi ke Mekah saja. Jadi kalau saya melihat film nya itu film keluarga, universal.

Aditya Gumay: Before Ummi Aminah and Emak Ingin Naik Haji, I made a film called *A House Without a Window*, a musical for children.

Alicia Izharuddin: Tapi bagi saya, yang menarik tentang Emak Ingin Naik Haji, yang paparkan unsur-unsur Islami nya itu subplot anak yang ingin merealisasikan impian ibunya. Tapi adanya juga tokoh-tokoh yang lain yang pergi haji itu ...

AG: ... pergi haji itu bukan sesuatu yang dari hati.

Al: Ya, tapi menggunakan sebab-sebab yang lain. Tapi itu sudah saya kira ada satu pesan tentang keimanan seorang Muslim. Bagi mas Aditya, mengapa penting menyelitkan subplot yang sebegitu?

AG: Kalau saya yang melihatnya mungkin lebih kepada perbandingan; antara orang yang memiliki niat suci, niat yang memang pengen naik haji sehingga tagline dari film kita kan 'Ketika Rumah Sudah Di Hati'. Sementara di Indonesia, ada banyak orang yang bolak-balik naik haji itu seperti picnic, seperti temasya, seperti keluarga Haji Sa'un tadi. Ada juga orang yang naik haji di Indonesia masih ada orang yang menggelar haji merupakan satu kebanggaan seperti Pak Joko yang naik haji kerna ada unsur politik di situ. Nah, jadi ini lebih kepada niat apa yang kamu punya untuk pergi ke rumah Allah gitu. Juga itu kritik sosial. Ada orang yang susah payah menabung, lima tahun baru dapat lima juta, tapi pergi ke tanah suci masih sebuah mimpi. Ada orang yang kaya-raya yang tiap-tiap bulan bisa bolak-balik ke tanah suci. Ada yang memaparkan nama 'haji' hanya untuk kepentingan politik. Itu kritik sosial. Jadi, kritik sosialnya bisa tidak dipanah disisi agama Islam, misalnya sebagai contoh ada orang yang ingin pergi belajar ke luar negeri. Ada yang memangnya kerna ingin

belajar, tapi ada anak-anak orang kaya di Indonesia pergi ke luar negeri belajar [tetapi] di sana mereka senang-senang. Mereka enggak memampukan orang tuanya untuk hal-hal yang tidak berguna, berfoya-foya. Sama aja itu. Cuma bedanya ini lebih kepada agama, niat hati – bicara soal niat. Tapi memang kalau dikaitkan kepada ... kerna begini, film saya yang ketiga, Rumah tanpa jendela, saya bekerja dengan seorang Nasrani yang sangat suka dengan film Emak Ingin Naik Haji. Ia mengajak teman-temannya satu gereja nonton Emak Ingin Naik Haji. Nah, teman-teman gerejanya bertanya, 'Mengapa kalian diajak nonton film religi Islami?' Ia bilang, 'Oh, tidak. Ini bukan film tentang Islam. Ini film tentang cinta kasih keluarga, ini film tentang niat, tentang bagaimana mewujudkan mimpi'. Film ini, menurut ia, sangat universal. Begitunya ia suka sama film Emak ingin naik Haji sampai ia mencari saya, menelfon Mizan meminta nomor telepon saya. Kemudian ia bilang, 'saya Nasrani, tapi saya sangat suka dengan film anda dan saya ingin buat film dengan anda'. Walaupun dia bukan produser film. Saya pikir, ok, dia tinggal di Bandung. Kami bertelfonan sampai ia bilang, 'ok, film apa yang anda buat selanjutnya?' 'Film anak-anak. Musikal,' saya bilang. 'Boleh saya baca dulu sinopsisnya dulu, dan proposalnya?' Saya kirimkan by email, lalu kemudian ia [balas], 'ok, saya mau ikut jalan film ini. Boleh minta nomor kening anda? Nomor kening bank?' Apa orang ini bercanda atau gurau-gurau aja. Saya coba, saya kasi, saya mau tahu betul [atau] enggak ia. Dia kirim besok satu milyar dulu, khusus untuk tanda bahu kerjasama ini serius. Lalu saya panggil ia, kita bikin ke notari. Nah, dari kondisi itu, saya melihat bahu film Emak ingin naik haji tidak bicara soal bagaimana seorang ingin bertemu tuhan, pergi ke rumah tuhan. Itu aja. Di situ dia bicara sesuatu yang lebih universal, tentang bagaimana kepasrahan dan bagaimana berserah diri dan usaha untuk mendapatkan mimpi, mewujudkan mimpi. Bagaimana satu kebaikan dibalaskan dengan kebaikan. Jadi, mungkin ada film Hollywood, Pay it forward. Si tokoh emak itu menyisipkan sedikit uang buat tetangganya yang cuma makan bangkai burung. Seketika dia dibalas – mendapat karma kebaikan – dia mendapat pertolongan lagi daripada orang yang lebih kaya daripada dia. Jadi, ini 'pay it forward'. Film tentang 'pay it forward'.

AI: Yang tentang Ummi Aminahnya pula, saya juga tertarik kerna ini kali keduanya film tentang...

AG: sosok seorang ibu.

AI: Sosok seorang ibu! Dan sekali lagi, unsur Islaminya sangat terang sekali. Mengapa mas tertarik dengan sosok-sosok seorang ibu dalam film sebegini?

AG: Kalau mau dikaitkan dengan unsur Islami, secara pasar, secara hitungan komersial dan bisnis – Indonesia 80 persen Muslim. Film-film Muslim mestinya mendapat dukungan luas. Penonton nya banyak.

AI: Kiranya, film yang adanya unsur-unsur Islami itu bisa dikirakan film yang mainstream dan bukan film yang disempitkan dalam kategori film Islami yang bisa dikatakan lebih spesifik?

AG: Ini film religi ya? Saya sepakat dengan kawan-kawan film religi ... film bisa luas, film yang mengajarkan kebaikan. Bukan cuma film yang hantu-hantuan. Kenapa soalan mengapa saya tertarik itu; semua orang yang memiliki ibu pasti akan cinta pada ibunya. Dan jika dikaitkan dengan keagamaan, maka secara komersial film ini mesti diterima oleh masyarakat Indonesia. Tapi intinya saya cuma mau berbicara... film-film saya lebih berbicara tentang hal-hal sederhana yang bisa menjadi refleksi jika kita menontonnya. Jadi refleksi jika kita menontonnya. Film Rumah tanpa jendela itu tentang seorang anak yang hanya pengen jendela di rumahnya. Begitu miskinnya dia, tinggal di perkampungan di antara kumpulan sampah, dibikin rumah seadanya. Dia punya mimpi cuma pengen jendela di rumahnya. Bagi seorang emak yang ingin naik haji, buat seorang yang kaya sesuatu yang sederhana. Umami Aminah kisah tentang berbagai macam problem keluarga yang dialami terutamanya orang-orang di Asia tenggara seperti kita serumpun mungkin ada satu kepercayaan kalau kami yang Islamnya banyak anak banyak rezeki. Itu ada kan?

AI: Iya, sama.

AG: Banyak anak, banyak rezeki. Tapi saya mau bilang banyak anak juga bisa banyak problem. Banyak masalah. Dan problem itu sebenarnya hal-hal yang antara mertua dan menantu, antara anak yang belum bernikah dan akhirnya jatuh cinta dengan bawahannya. Ada anak yang ... sepasang suami isteri yang menumpang duduk di rumah orang tua dan sudah berkeluarga, itu terjadi di sekitar kita.

AI: Jadi apa pula tentang peran Umami Aminah sebagai pemimpin agama? Pentingkah peran keagamaan tokoh Umami Aminah?

AG: Ya. Saya mau menampakkan posisi Umami Aminah itu sebagai satu ironi. Sebagai pimpinan agama, dia berbicara tentang kebaikan, [memberi] nasihat-nasihat kepada jemaahnya. Tapi di sisi lain, di keluarga dia merasa gagal, dia rasa tidak bisa menasihati anak-anaknya, dia tidak bisa memberi petua baik kepada anaknya sehingga anaknya yang berselingkuh dengan suami orang, ada anaknya yang dia kira bernakoba. Jadi, mengapa bahkan ada seorang sosok ummi pimpinan agama yang mestinya anaknya ideal dan semua patuh pada ajaran agama, mengapa dia rasa seperti ini? Dan bahkan dia terus tabah dalam persoalan, dia bilang di minbar-minbar agama kita harus tabah terhadap cobaan, sabar. Tapi di saat cobaan, dia mengundurkan diri dari dunia, [dari] penceramahan, tak mau lagi menjaji pemimpin agama. Artinya, dia juga bisa merasa terpuruk, rasa sangat malu, merasa tidak sanggup dengan cobaan ini, sehingga dia mengundurkan diri. Seorang pimpinan agama pun manusia biasa. Jadi, saya mau bilang adalah manusia pada dasarnya – di film-film saya – abu-abu.

AI: Abu-abu? Maksudnya?

AG: Grey area. Maksudnya begini: saya tidak percaya orang akan menjadi sangat jahat, sehingga hitam hatinya. Tapi saya juga tidak percaya orang akan menjadi seperti malaikat, putih hatinya tak pernah bersalah dan

berdosa. Manusia sesungguhnya memiliki dua sifat yang bercampur hitam dan putih yakni menjadi abu-abu. Jadi, ada di sisi setiap manusia. Di satu sisi, begitu jahat sekalipun mungkin akan jatuh kasihan pada pengemis. Jadi, tokoh ibu sekalipun dia akan bisa pimpinan agama tapi dia bisa juga terpuruk dan malu, tidak tabah dalam menghadapi cobaan. Tokoh Zainal di Emak ingin naik haji anak yang baik berbakti kepada orang tua masih tergoda untuk mencuri. Ada tokoh Haji Sa'un bolak-balik pergi haji seperti tidak peduli dengan Tuhannya masih tersentuh untuk memberikan bantuan dalam menunaikan haji emak. Ada tokoh Pak Joko yang ingin jawatan politik ketika kejadian [buruk di akhir film] dia datang meminta maaf. Semua orang memiliki sisi baik tapi ada juga sisi yang kurang baik di hatinya masing-masing. Maka saya menyebutnya tokoh-tokoh dalam film-film saya bisa jadi abu-abu, tidak ada tokoh yang antagonis yang antagonis sekali. Ada tokoh yang tidak protagonis sekali di film saya. Saya mau memotret manusia apa adanya.

AI: Untuk bikin film mas, pernahkah dibuat market research untuk mengetahui audience nya siapa, di kalangan mana resepsi nya baik atau buruk?

AG: Kalau riset, saya belum pernah lakukan. Tapi saya melihat bahawa saat ini film horror sedang sangat. Banyak produser lari kepada film horror. Saya melihat celah pasar. Jadi, di antara pasar yang ramai ini, kami masih ada orang-orang yang tak suka dengan horror.

AI: Niche market.

AG: Ya! Itu bahasa ekonominya. Dan sebenarnya niche market nya besar. Penduduk Indonesia 80 persen umat Islam. Dan pengajian, banyak majlis taklim dan jutaan bilangan penduduk Indonesia jumlahnya besar. Cuma pada majlis taklim ini tidak biasa menonton di bioskop. Oleh itu, perlu diberitahu ini ada film yang cocok buat ibu-ibu. Bagaimana caranya strategi pasarnya kami harus datang ke sana, kemudian mengajak pimpinan-pimpinan agama untuk datang ke bioskop. Jadi, [itu] pekerjaan baru buat kita.

AI: setakat ini sukses?

AG: Alhamdulillah. Saat ini Ummi Aminah akan diputar di satu daerah namanya Sukabumi. Kebetulanannya di sana ada pembinaan masjid agung dan Ummi Aminah akan mengajak seluruh masyarakat [sekelilingnya] menonton film ini, lalu mereka membeli tiket sekaligus menyumbang untuk membangun masjid. Film-film semacam ini bisa diperdayakan seperti itu. Emak ingin naik haji yang sudah diputar di bioskop dibiayai oleh Bank Syariah Mandiri. Bank Syariah Mandiri itu kemudian mensponsori untuk memutar film Emak ingin naik haji di halaman-halaman masjid. Waktu itu bulan Ramadhan, selesai jemaah tarawih, mereka pulang ke halaman masjid di mana kita pasang layar tancep [supaya] mereka nonton. Dan masjid yang mau. Nah, itu berarti niche market nya itu sangat besar.

AI: Tapi targetnya golongan yang ibu-ibuan yang lebih tertarik kepada tokoh utama seperti yang emak dalam Emak ingin naik haji dan Ummi Aminah dalam film nya Ummi Aminah? Rasanya begitu?

AG: Saya mau ke sana, tapi saya juga bikin film anak-anak. Kalau anak pergi ke pawagam, ia tidak bisa pergi sendiri kan? Harus ada orang tua kan? Jadi, secara hitungan bisnisnya, film anak dan film religi yang di sini sebut film religi Islami sangat besar. Laskar pelangi bisa sampai 4 juta setengah. Ayat-ayat cinta 3 juta setengah. Ini membuktikan film anak dan film religi punya peluang yang sangat besar untuk berhasil. Film horror tidak ada lebih dari 1 juta penonton. Tapi film anak Laskar pelangi bisa sampai 4 setengah juta.

AI: Saya sudah membaca statistik bilangan penonton yang masuki bioskop jumlahnya sudah berkurangan. Rasanya mengapa ya?

AG: Buat tahun lepas, saya tak tahu apa penyebabnya. Mungkin juga sudah ada penonton merasa pesimis dengan film-film horror yang banyak diputar sehingga mereka malas pergi ke pawagam. Tugas kami untuk mengembalikan. Tugas saya untuk membuat film yang bukan horror, untuk mengembalikan penonton yang tidak suka horror.

AI: Saya rasa itu saja. Tidak banyak soalan-soalannya. Terima kasih ya.
AG: Sama-sama.

Transcript of an interview with Debra Yatim at Kafe Tjikini, Menteng.

Length of interview: 55 minutes.

Alicia Izharuddin: Please tell us who you are and what your role is in the film industry?

Debra Yatim: I'm chair of an NGO called Visi Anak Bangsa. It was founded, I'm one of the founders, there were five of us. One of us is Garin Nugroho, Indonesia's film maker par excellence. And Rika Sukmay, a very close friend with whom I get to see a lot of Indonesian films. Secondly, I am very close with Olin [Monteiro] who works with Jurnal Perempuan. She founded the V Film Festival. I think it was four years ago. You can verify with her. But twenty-five years ago, I was involved with a group that tried to get a woman's film festival going. We managed to get off the ground once, and never again! [Laughs] So it took a whole gap of time before somebody did another effort, just the effort. Now, why I think Olin is such a powerhouse is because she just got a lot of people together and it wasn't so much [to do] as long as it was done. The other group of older women [from] twenty-fives years ago, of which I am one of them, wanted everything to be perfect. And I think it showed a different zeitgeist, a different feel in the air. And I think that sort of feeling also can be shown in how women now dare to look at themselves in Indonesian films. I am astonished of the rate of films that now show Islamic content in Indonesia – you know, [for a country that was] 85 percent of the population are Muslim, it took all this while. Before that majority [population] was [not] articulated[?]. Secondly, film-makers are mostly men.

AI: Film-makers as in the directors and producers?

DY: Yes, film-makers, people who make the art form. [The industry] is male-dominated. It is a male-dominated field. Most of them think they're forward-thinking and modern. But I think, no, I'm so sorry to say that they're still stuck in their mode of looking at women which goes back to the 50s and 60s. So those two things are very relevant. It took a long time for Indonesians to articulate the Islamic-ness of Indonesia. And secondly, I think there are only three very prominent film-makers in Indonesia who are women; producer Nia Dinata, Nan Achnas has been around for a long time, there's Mira Lesmana. And then there's the other ones who make the little things who write theses. But a voice is emerging. There's one genre that I am really enamoured by, which is the horror genre. This wonderful woman is actually doing her PhD in horror movies. Now, if only that if only that energy could be put into analysing Islamic films!

AI: That's what I'm doing.

DY: Then that would be ... that would show us where we're going or not going. Whether we're going anywhere or not going anywhere. The discrepancy is that, here we are a society that is suddenly has been enlightened enough to want to articulate the 85 percent Muslim majority of what Indonesia is all about. And maybe we are more laid back than Malaysia in our Islam-ness, but we take it very seriously! It's more laid back but it's serious. But not as serious as Iran, Iraq, on those on the Islamic belt. I'm borrowing a term coined by Dr Rifat Hassan, a Pakistani who teaches that School of Divinity at Harvard, and I believe she's either in London now or she's in Kansas I think but ... anyway, she came here three times she said, 'You guys, you're so right at the end of the Islamic belt, you're not looked at by Saudi Arabia, the heart of Islam. It doesn't even realise you exist. In fact, you're a majority, 87% 210 million [with the biggest population of Muslims in the world is a whole lot of people]'.

AI: They always say that Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world.

DY: But because we're so far removed from the Islamic belt, the brand of Islam that's practised here is not harsh, it's not as cut and dry, and there are many permutations and manifestations. Now, that's the first part of my argument. So, hence, all these permutations and manifestations, and the way of looking at women in Islam and society should also be reflected in film. It isn't. Because it is the male eye that looks at Islam here. And if you get one of the females – eg Nan produced a film that her husband directed.

AI: It's called Khalifah.

DY: Yes, Khalifah. Now, a lot of people had a problem with that film. I didn't have too much a problem with that film. My problem was the poster looked as if it was one of those run-of-the-mill Islamic films about Muslim women in Indonesia. I think it had another viewpoint, but that was a pity. I think a lot of Indonesians, the majority of Indonesians, are informed by made-for-

TV films -FTV. Now, I can't give you the specific titles because they all get blurred [into one]. They're so many and all of the same ilk. And of the same way of narrating. And almost the same sutradara. In fact, there are very many different writers. The writers are fabulous people. So here we have this hodge-podge of writing and it is funnelled into a channel and then it comes out the same cupcake. But in different colours. With different icing on it. Now that's where the pity lies I think. When a mirror is held, the society looks at themselves in the mirror, or is it the tilt of the mirror that informs us? My argument is the way the mirror is tilted. We think that's what we look like. But when we're out in the community, we don't act like that. In a nutshell, here's the mirror, we look at it and we agree, 'this is what I look like'. When we're away from the cinema and the tv sets, we act in a way that we'd wished to. Then we go back to the mirror and we agree [again], [thinking] that's what I look like and this is how I should act. So, that's discrepancy number two. All these writers with their weird and wonderful ideas, they're funnelled through this cake-maker, come up with the same cake, maybe [with a] different icing, one is bluberry, one is strawberry, one is just plain sugar. But the cake is eaten by everybody and we agree that that's us, even when we don't like the cupcakes! We want nasi goreng!

AI: It's that because there's the problem with people in the film production side, they are constrained by what they think what they audiences want?

DY: That's what I mean by the mirror and tilt. There is this huge media problem in Indonesia, it's called ratings. Like all over the world. The huge problem is this: you get this weird and wonderful country made up of 440 different ethnic groups and as many languages and as many brands of Islam. In my kampung, there are probably three or four different brands of Islam. But on a Friday, on Thursday evening when they go to their women's ngaji, they all come out the house looking the same. And then they come back from their ngaji on Friday morning, they go back to doing the nasi, selling their ayam goreng, or go to the market, they look like themselves again. Why do they look the same last night and look like yourself this morning? So my very vulgar explanation is, they're all informed by television. And the films they watch everytime there's a wedding. Everytime there's a wedding in Indonesia, somebody hires a film set and [everybody would] watch [the film]. Don't you have this in Malaysia?

AI: ... no.

DY: Okay, weddings are [about] this. The whole community comes and gives either money or a bunch of bananas or rice. The whole community comes and puts these in a bowl. You give bananas, rice, or you give cash. And you can give cash to the bride who puts it in her bra. You give it the groom and he puts it in his kopiah. So, that is how a wedding is funded. Now, if the parents have forked out enough money, then that evening there will be one of three or all three. There'll be music, dangdut music, there'll be sexy women wearing short skirts. After the dangdut, there'll be a single organ player where everybody is allowed to have a sing-song. And

number three, when everybody has settled down, somebody drags out a sheet. Always a sheet, a white sheet. What's it called?

AI: Layar tancep.

DY: Ya, layar tancep. And then you watch films. Sometimes there'll be James Bond or Twilight, but in the end there are always Indonesian films because that's what everybody wants to watch. Indonesian films by default, these are what inform the community. So what has happened is that the community does not look at itself, they look at films which is what media does. You want the media to tell you how to act and behave instead of looking into themselves. Now I would really like it if more women took the camera.

AI: What do you think are the problems that are hindering women from taking that role, as directors and producers? I find that maybe women think it is easier to be a producer than a director. Why is that do you think?

DY: The two female producers that I know come from upper, middle-class backgrounds. Mira isn't rich on her own, but she has got the network. Maybe it is a little difficult for her but as not difficult as my neighbour for instance. So that is one of the biggest hurdles – the access to money. Nia is very rich. She comes from a very rich family. So she has no problems. All she has to do is call a couple of uncles and somebody will fund [the film]. That would be the biggest hurdle. But I would also think that before you even become a producer you have to go through the fact that you're a director first. I think it is seldom that people who would set out to want to be a producer. Like Mira, Mira used to work at an advertising agency/production house. That's how she found that she was a very good producer. So you have to go through that. Now by default, that is a very middle-class experience. So, hurdle number three is; I don't think many parents like the fact that their girl children want to be a film-maker. Indonesian parents today do not want their children to go into the arts. So, the arts any arts; music, dance, gamelan. Maybe formal Javanese dance but that's also a class thing. I think film is outside the radar. So if you go down to IKJ (Institut Kesenian Jakarta) and have a chat there, I think there would one girl for every few boys who would even register. I think you have to verify that. My feeling is that very, very female even consider entering film. It is a vicious circle; we don't have enough role models and there's nobody. Nan was outstanding. She, in a very barren landscape, suddenly she appeared and she had a voice and she had a vision and she's still in ... has she come back?

AI: She's still in UC (Berkeley)

DY: Ya, in UC, doing her PhD. So she's very powerful in the fact that she influenced a new generation of young girls who wanted to attend film school and out of nowhere came Nia Dinata who was really good because she ... Nan was more poetry, something very, very subtle, not mainstream. But Nia came out 'bang, bang, bang' [making films] about polygamy, HIV, and prostitutes and women trafficking. And [all] in a mainstream manner. So she was very good, while Nan was too non-accessible to the majority

of the people. Nia took that role of being very accessible. Mira was also good but she's not in your in face feminist. A lot of her stuff was very mainstream. Very popular, populist, mainstream family situations and always very glossy – which goes down well in Indonesia. You have very glossy people, in nice hairstyles and nice clothes. Of course Mira is not Muslim. She had no problems with trying to portray Islam. In their own ways, the three of them at separate times. Very specific separate times. Nan first, then Mira. Mira grabbed everyone's attention because she was the sutradara, she was the producer. She managed vast amounts of money and could come from all sorts of resources. And then suddenly came Nia, who had the money and the vision. Sometimes she fell flat on her face with her arguments, but it didn't really matter because she was doing it. They were all out there, while the men were struggling doing their own narratives figuring out what women actually want. And women don't want they see! [laughs]. So that is the situation, the way I look at it.

AI: I also wonder about the culture in film-making, is it more macho to be a film director?

DY: This is not a scholarly opinion, but very much my bias; I think Indonesian men are locked in a 50s and 60s sensibility of what women are and should be. So they're fixated on this outdated mode of thinking and that is put in the narrative. So here you get on TV, you get these very obedient women wearing the hijab, being very Muslim according to what Muslim women should be in the 1960s. And there are women out the streets who don't act like that! And they get mad that women don't act like that. The argument that Nia Dinata makes is that 'This is who I really am and not what you say what I should be'. If there were more that, then a discourse can happen. I think a discourse has really happened. What I find is a real pity is when everytime Nia and Nan's films come out, they tend to be 'chick' events. It's not like all the men have to come and watch a Hanung Bramantyo film. You should speak to Jajang C. Noer. She's my favourite actress. When she acts, even though it's matronly, she shows what a Muslim woman is. There is a lot of conservatism in it, but at least the way it is portrayed is the way it actually is. Not from the male gaze.

AI: Here's what I've been noticing as well; what are your thoughts about a male-directed film like *Perempuan berkalung sorban*. That is quite provocative in terms of a representation of a Muslim woman. And here you have a male film director who's actually doing it. What are your thoughts about that?

DY: Yes, that [the film, representation of Muslim women] should be out there in the forefront. But then we have the other problem. Problem number four is that cinemas do not play enough Indonesian films. So even though they're successful, there is this 'set point' that they have to reach; by week 2 of screening a film they have to reach around 35,000 ticket buyers. And if they don't reach that, the films are taken off the screen. Because Tom Cruise in *Mission Impossible 4* is waiting, Meryl Streep is there in *Iron Lady*. Those who make up the 35,000 viewers all work, they go through the traffic jams, the rain, the floods. It's not like when a film like *Perempuan berkalung sorban* comes out, I would go out that very evening.

No, you have to schedule it out. And so that's a problem. A lot of times films that can inform the discourse they're taken off the screens too quickly. You have to wait a while for the DVDs to come out, but by then the discussion has been snowed under by Mission Impossible 4. And I find that really, really sad.