THE ANOMALOUS ISLAMIC MOVIES AND OTHER RECENT ISSUES AS REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WORLD IN POST-NEW ORDER INDONESIAN CINEMA

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Abstrak

Pasca Orde Baru, film-film bertemakan Islam menjadi trend an laris manis. Ayat-Ayat Cinta dan Ketika Cinta Bertasbih adalah contoh dari film Islami yang ditonton jutaan orang—keduanya hasil adaptasi novel karya Habiburrahman Syairazy. Keduanya punya persamaan: melodrama nan sedih, tokoh protagonis yang saleh dan pintar hingga dapat beasiswa ke Mesir, dan ia berusaha mencari teman hidup. Epigonnya menjamur,dan rata-rata tidak ada yang menonjol dari segi sinematografi,cerita,atau bahkan kelarisan. Apakah tema "Islam" membuat mutu kebanyakan dari "genre" ini tidak gemilang?Bagaimana dengan film yang merepresentasikan umat Islam dengan ekspresi dan cara bertutur yang berbeda? Misalnya Kantata Takwa, Laskar Pelangi, dan Rindu Kami PadaMu? Paper ini akan menganalisa bagaimana film-film bertema Islam selalu dihadapkan pada situasi negosiasi 3 pihak: sang ideolog yang dai, komersialis yang pedagang, dan idealis yang seniman. Ketiganya ada dalam film itu, dan siapa yang mendominasi akan menentukan mutu dan arah sebuah film. Ketiganya membentuk bervariasi kombinasi.

Kata Kunci: Film Islam, Arah Film, Genre

Introduction

Do Commercialism, Islamic Law (Shariah), and Virtues become potential factors to lower the quality of so-called Indonesian "Islamic Cinema?" Those factors seem to be embedded in most recent post-New Order Islamic films, and some film critics highlight that most of the movies in this "genre" are mediocre. In Salim Said's point-of-view, the battle between commercial films versus idealist films is eternal. However, how about the position of Islamic Law and virtues in this "battle", both in the content and (pre)production of idealist Islamic films: to endorse or to worsen the quality of the movie? And another interesting question rises in my mind is why do people not consider films like *Untuk Rena* ("For Rena", Riri Riza, 2005), *Rindu Kami Pada-Mu (*"On Love and Eggs"*,* Garin Nugroho, 2004), and even *Laskar Pelangi* ("Rainbow Troop", Riri Riza, 2008) as Islamic movie?

First of all, I will discuss recent issues on Islam and Film, the definition of "Islamic films" and the recent films that fit the definition. I call the selected films as anomalous movies which are *Kantata Takwa* ("Cantata of Devotion", Erros Djarot/Gatot Prakosa, 2008), *Sang Murabbi* ("The Mentor", Zul Ardhia, 2008), *Laskar Pelangi* , *Rindu Kami Pada-Mu,* and *3 Doa 3 Cinta* ("3 Wish, 3 Loves", Nurman Hakim, 2008).

Historical Overview on Post-New Order "Islamic" Movies

After the phenomenon of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* ("Verses of Love"), the term "Islamic Indonesian films" seems to be more "sexy". Nevertheless, as *Kompas* Daily noted in its coverage on November 14, 2008, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (AAC) sold 3.5 million and 4.5 million tickets. In fact, AAC is not the first film dealing with Muslim society or Islamic values. A digital film called *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* ("Doomsday is Approaching", Deddy Mizwar) was released in 2003. However, it failed at the box office. *Untuk Rena* and *Rindu Kami Pada-Mu* were also unsuccessful, but it does not deny the

fact that the content of both films are full with Islamic theme.

There are some films released right after AAC which is *Kun Fayakun* ("Be, and It Is" – the term God uses when He creates – Arabic) in April 2008, confirming the start of the new film trend. It is then followed two months later by *Mengaku Rasul* ("Claiming as Prophet"), in mid August *Syahadat Cinta* ("Testimony of Love") was then released. *Kun Fayakun* was released in April 17. As the initiator, the famous cleric Yusuf Mansur, claimed that the movie was planned before the entire craze about Islamic cinema. He aimed to get 1.2 million viewers, a seemly "rational" target compares to what *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* has achieved, but as proven later it was too difficult to be fulfilled.

Mengaku Rasul was produced by Starvision, an old film company that is led by another Pakistani producer (he refused to be mentioned as Indian), Chand Parvez. He chose Helfi CH Kardif, a filmmaker with experience in making thrillers and mysteries, to helm the movie. The narrative is pretty much closer to the mystery genre than drama; but, to make the movie has more Islamic look, two different clerics opened and closed the film by preaching which each about the dangerous of people claiming as new prophets. The movie survived in cinema for several weeks with perfect timing which was at the peak of controversy of *Ahmadiyah* community, a Muslim organization with members believing that their spiritual leader is a new prophet.

The next was *Syahadat Cinta* in August 2008. This film is adapted from another Islamic novel with the same title. Unlike *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the pre-production process was not long enough. It was probably because the decision to produce the film was taken just after the success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Surely, this suspiciously speedy process took effect on the quality and the adaptation process from the thick novel to the film did not prepare the movie to easily convey the book messages. The story ends with the main character exits the traditional Islamic education system to criticize the traditional institution of Islamic education. In this film, the love story part takes over and dominates the narrative. The characters are too many and the sub plots do not support each other. The converting scenes are done not in sensitive way, strengthening the impression that Islam is above other religions. Undermining the love triangle parts and I see the movie tells the story of a personal quest for spirituality in Islam.

On the other hand, there are some groups that react strongly toward AAC. As reported in *Madina* magazine (no. 04/Th 1/April 2008), one of them is Lukman Hakim who writes regularly on his blog http://ruanghakim. wordpress.com. He wrote that buying ticket to watch the movie is just like buying ticket to hell. He also mentioned that cinema is a place to *ikhtilat*, to mingle between boys and girls (non-*mahram*, no direct blood relation) without borders (*hijab*), that watching movies is a useless and pointless activity, and, and the basic of cinema is painting (thus, forbidden in Islam).

The need to fit everything in daily life with Islamic laws occurs in film industry. There are some movements who made manifesto on fiqh and cinema. Shariah and fiqh are the first priorities. Thus, they try to find the way out of the problem when there is one; for example a scene about husband and wife hugging, but in the real life they are not the real couple (thus, they are not allowed to do so). Every little thing should be fitted with Islamic laws. However, other Muslim directors have different opinion; for instance, Deddy Mizwar who says that it is the filmmaker's duty to find out other new film language. Similar to Iranian directors, in a personal interview, Mizwar underlines that "Shariah and Fiqh create a room of creativity to seek alternative new idioms and the art of storytelling". Mizwar gives example that it is a cliché and old-fashioned way for an unmarried couple to hug for showing their feelings. "But I did not do it! So, I create a scene where the main male character speaks out his mind with: "If Shariah allows me, I will take ablution water with your tears…". Another example, in his TV serial, he and Zaskia Mecca (acted as father and daughter) should hug each other for logical reasons. "But I went to mosque, and when Zaskia found me, I was there remembering God. So, she can not hug me", he added.

Ustadz Abu Ridho, one of Islamic leader from *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS, Welfare Prosperity Party) and an advisor of *Fatahillah* (Chaerul Umam/Imam Tantowi, 1997), just smiled when I

told him about the manifesto. "That's fiqh approach. If we use Tauhid approach, everything will be clear. In short "virtues are the limit", he said. He just finished becoming one of the advisors for *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (KCB, "When Love is Glorifying God"), the so-called "Mega Film" which is another adaptation of Habiburrahman "AAC" Syairazi's book and directed by prominent Muslim director Chairul Umam.

KCB is another interesting case. In my opinion the filmmakers want to show the audience that "it is the real Islamic film". They created a TV show for audition; which was a casting for actors/actresses to be fitted with Islamic values embodied in the fiction's characters. It was held for three and a half months in 9 cities, and the grand final was screened live in 14 September 2008. The juries were prominent Islamic figures in art and entertainment, such as Neno Warisman and the novel writer himself. The actors-wanna-be should be able to read the holy Quran fluently and apply Islamic values in daily life.

The above phenomenon reminds me of one element in Neorealism. When discussing on *Paisa*, Bazin writes that in neorealist films, the use of nonprofessional actors is naturally chosen for their suitability for the part, either because they fit physically or because there is some parallelism between the roles and their lives (Bazin 1972). Bazin also emphasizes that, besides the faithfulness to everyday life in the scenario, the truth to his part in an actor is simply the basic materials of the aesthetic of neorealist films (Bazin 1972: 25). And the using of both professional and amateur actors who have the same job in their real life is an attempt to be closer to realism. As Bazin underlines:

The technical inexperience of the amateurs is helped out by the experience of the professionals while the professionals themselves benefit from the general atmosphere of authenticity (Bazin 1972: 24).

The different is, in KCB, the producers and director try to find some parallelism between the roles and their Islamic attitude. Amrih Widodo highlights this as an attempt to negotiate between Islamic values and film industry, and the pre-production process is as important (or perhaps more important than) as the production

and the content of the film itself. The term "negotiation" will be further discussed later.

Commercialism vs. Idealism

This part will discuss the term of "commercialism", "Idealism" and also "ideological approach" stated in the first paragraph. Salim Said writes that there are two groups of filmmakers in Indonesian cinema, adopted from Andrew Tudor's theory of genre and movement. The first group is the commercial filmmakers who make movies for commercial gain. The second group is the idealistic filmmakers who make films based on desire for self expression and want to portray the actual face of Indonesian on screen (Said 1991: 6). According to Said, commercial filmmakers produce films as "merchants of dreams" (Said 1991: 3). They use the formula which is bind the films with sex, wealth, violence and exaggerated sadness. Pioneers in this group were the Chinese traders. Their film productions focus on quantity, not quality. As Said writes: When movies are treated as merchandise the determining power in the production process is in the hands of capital owners. Directors, who as artists should be the decisive element, are generally subject to the impulses of the financial backers... how can we expect quality movies from such subordinated directors?" (Said 1991: 10-11).

Most films only show dreams, wishes or obsessions, instead of representing what the filmmakers think and feel of the reality (Said 1991: 121). In short, most of the films are unrealistic and failed to picture the social problems of Indonesian people. Some film critics, scholars, and journalists like Karl Heider and Krishna Sen agree with Said.

In Rumahfilm.org, I wrote historical overview in order to show some clear and distinct differences that can be seen between the commercial and idealistic groups of filmmaking. The commercial group makes films for pure entertainment and commercial purpose only. The idealistic group believes that films are media of expression to voice their mind and thought. The commercial group concerns with the quantity whereas the idealistic group focuses on quality. The commercial group follows and feeds the need of the market, while the idealistic group tries to educate and enlighten the spectators. In many cases, both

groups use Hollywood's style and genre formula. In fact, still, the commercial group is market-driven and the idealistic group is idealism-driven.

Teguh Karya also has dichotomies similar to Said's two groups of filmmaking. There are those, like Usmair Ismail, who wanted to follow serious works (Karya mentions Pudovkin's and Eisenstein's as the ones followed by the idealistic group); and those who made films based on the patterns that were practised in commercially succesful India and Hong Kong industries (Sen (ed) 1988: 6).

In short, I already discussed the eternal battle between commercial group and idealistic filmmakers. In Rumahfilm.org, I also underline that there are some trials from post-New Order filmmakers who want to combine the two groups, such as *Laskar Pelangi* and *Naga Bonar Jadi Dua* (Deddy Mizwar, 2007). Another question occurs on where is the position of Islamic values/laws?

Finding definition

It is not easy to formulate the fixed and official definition of "Islamic film". Eric Sasono put a condition that an "Islamic cinema" must bring positive sentiments to Islam. He suggested that these sentiments can be delivered through two means. The first is through propagation the teachings of Islam, which is assumed to be able to modify the viewer's attitudes by giving a better understanding of the religion. The second is through audiences' emotional connection to Islamic values represented in character development. The prominent Indonesian literature critic Goenawan Mohammad provides a way when he splits two main tendencies in the Indonesian Islamic literature context; one is to put religious life as setting (parallel with the common definitions of religious cinema), and the other is to put religion as the solution. This "religious solution" hints the existence of problems in each plot. Thus, to detect development in characters' religious values, righteousness, attitude, evilness avoidance, or faith within these film narratives, I attempt to identify problems and (whenever available) solutions in each movie's plot.

Personally, there are two kinds of definition. First, I made an adaptation from Kuntowijo's *Ilmu Sosial Profetik* (Prophetic Social Sciences) and *Sastra Profetik* (Prophetic Literature), and I call it as "prophetic film". Elaborating one verse of holy Quran on the best ummah (*Khairu Ummah*), Kuntowijoyo mentions three elements that should be embodied as one package in prophetic film which is *Ya'muruna bil ma'ruf* (enjoining what is right; brings viewers to righteousness), *yanhauna 'anil munkar* (forbidding what is wrong; avoids evilness) and *tu'minuna billah* (to develops the viewer's faith of God in Islamic way). In Kuntowijoyo's term, respectively is liberation-humanization-transcendence. In *Maklumat Sastra Profetik*, he writes "Prophetic Literature is Literature which follows the tradition of the prophet, and has tendency to imitate The Prophet's manner, and have courage to deal face to face with human being and social realism, and criticize them". In *Selamat Tinggal Mitos, Selamat Datang Realitas*, Kuntowijoyo strongly states that "literature and popular art should be 'loyal to realities' and has social function (p 16-17).

"Early at this century, didactical literature are used to spread work ethics, to erase drugs, to depict the criminal forced-marriages, to destroy usurers (rentenir), etc. today literature has lost that kind of social function, and they do not want to be prisoned by realities and refuse to become agent of culturalization (p 16)". But, in this context, we will apply one of the "subgenre" of Prophetic Film theory which is the representation of Muslim world, depicting Muslim community with their own symbol, culture, traditions, and discourses.

Three typologies

As mentioned earlier, Said highlights two groups in Indonesia's filmmaking. First is the Idealist group and Second is the Commercial group. I try to apply this theory related to Islamic film.

The idealist filmmakers make films as art and social media to express share their feelings and thought. However, it does not particularly or automatically deal with Islamic issues, but once it relates with Islamic issues, they will try to find the best way in best quality. Here, the director functions as an artist. In Islamic term, this group is close to "Islam Kultural" group.

Kantata Takwa: Manifesto: 15.51 - 19.30

Commercial filmmakers, at glance, seem to care with the audience, but they prefer to follow audience's tastes, thus no idealistic purposes to strengthen the quality. Therefore, in such films, the spectators can see and feel banal stories, verbalism, and some of my friends call those kinds of movies as "very sinetronic" (*Sinetron* is Indonesian soap opera). In *Sinetron*, most of the directors treat their film as an economical commodity, and the producers take control on everything. Usually the films are three-act scriptwriting, easy to guess, follow the market's taste, banal stories, and verbalism. Commercially success is the main purpose. The filmmakers are the sellers, merchants, and vendors.

Hence, where is the position of Islamic laws and values? In a way, those are the keywords and the main to build "Islamic movies". But in this paper, Islamic movement in filmmaking world is those who hold Islam as the ideology. Shariah, fiqh and *dakwah* (preaching) are the main purposes. Thus, in these kinds of films, there are so many verbalisms and Islamic preaching (evangelism). The filmmakers are the preachers (*da'i*), the *mujahid*, and the *faqih*.

	Main purpose	The filmmakers	Priority
Commercialism	To sell and market economical commodities	Merchant of dreams	Profit
Ideological Islam	To spread *dakwah* (preaching), to obey *shariah* and *fiqh*	*Da'i, Faqih*	*Dakwah*, the virtues/values of Islam
Cultural Islam	To express the feeling and thought	Artist	Aesthetic and (Substantial idea-sharing

From here we can see why movies by Garin Nugroho or Riri Riza are not considered as "Islamic films" by Muslim society or even common people in Indonesia, even though films like *Rindu Kami pada-Mu, Untuk Rena*, and *Laskar Pelangi* are full with Islamic values and representing Muslim society. In the term of Abdurrahman Wahid or Bachtiar Effendy, this third party is closer to "*Islam Ideologi*" (Ideological of Islam), and the idealist filmmakers are similar with "*Islam Kultural*" (Cultural of Islam)--the ones that choose substantive matters than surface forms, meaning than symbol, and inclusivism than sectarianism.

Of course Idealist-Commercial-Ideologist groups can negotiate each other in some variations. The three elements can unite in one film, in extreme way we could imagine if Garin Nugroho (the most uncompromising director) sits with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (the leader of "*Islam Ideologi*") and Manoj Punjabi (one of the producers that belong to commercial group), as the result what kind of film will they make? Therefore, there is a negotiation process. Who will dominate? Who does play the most important roles?

There are some derivations:

1. Idealist-Commercial; there are some films achieved this level: *Laskar Pelangi*. In a way, *Rindu Kami* tried to do the same, since this is the most communicative film that Garin Nugroho ever made. *3 Doa 3 Cinta* (3D3C) also fits with this group. 3D3C is probably the first films that picture pesantren world after 9/11 events, and directed by the real *santri* (person graduated from *Pesantren*). Thus from the first time, "the insider" (*santri*) made a film about his own world (comparing with Chairul Umam/Asrul Sani's films--*Al-Kautsar* ("The Great Comfort", 1977), *Titian Serambut di Belah Tujuh* ("A Bridge As Wide As a Hair Divided Into Seven", 1982) and *Nada dan Dakwah* ("Tone and Commune", 1991), who

always depict outsider's point-of-view (usually from other island or from big city) on Pesantren.

2. Idealist-Ideologist: *Sang Murabbi*. It is not a three-act story (thus, against commercialism), distributed in DVD and VCD and for the time being avoiding cinema screening. Released in October 2008, it is a long feature biopic about the late charismatic cleric Rahmat Abdullah, *Sang Murabbi*. Right now Ardhia, the director, is thinking to make an extended and "non *PKS* viewers friendly" version as well as preparing a proposal for special male and female separated seating arrangement in conventional theatres.

   In some level, *Kun Fayakun* belongs to this group.

3. Commercial-Ideologist:

   AAC belongs to this group, but commercial group dominates the percentage, since the film stays away from the main idea (the quest for spirituality) and gives more portions to melodrama (including excessive scenes on polygamous life, which are not the main plot of the novel).

4. Idealist-Commercial-Ideologist:

I believe it is a "mission impossible" to do such film. Or probably it isn't? Perhaps KCB, the "Mega Film"? In some level, *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* tends to fit the group but it failed commercially.

5. Pure Commercialist: *Syahadat Cinta, Mengaku Rasul*

6. Idealist: *Kantata Takwa* excludes all of the variations; it is a pure idealist film.

Anomalous films

There are some films I call "anomalous":

1. *Laskar Pelangi* is both commercially and critically success; one of very rare cases.
2. *Rindu Kami:* the most communicative film by art-movie director Garin Nugroho. It is also rare that Garin chose Jakarta as background setting.
3. *3 Doa 3 Cinta*: the world of pesantren from the perspective of internal's eyes (*santri*).
4. *Sang Murabbi*: ideologist: no compromise.
5. *Kantata Takwa:* idealist, no compromise.

Conclusion

	Main purposes	The filmmakers	Priority
Commercialism	To sell and market economical commodities	Merchant of dreams	Profit
Ideological Islam	To spread *dakwah*, to obey shariah and fiqih	*Da'i, Faqih*	*Dakwah*, the virtues/values of Islam
Cultural Islam	To express the feeling and thought	Artist	Aesthetic and (Substantial idea-sharing

Negotiation process may occur and still happens among Idealist, Commercial, and Ideologist filmmakers. It depends on which one is the dominant or plays the most important role to make great Islamic movies.

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