## Popular Islamic Book a Trendsetter

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The Ayat Ayat cinta (The Verses of Love) film is attracting huge crowds.

The movie, produced following the popularity of an Islamic novel with the same title, has been long awaited by the people.

The book has sold more than 350,000 copies and by the beginning of this year, it had been published 29 times since its first appearance in 2005.

People now want to see the visualization of the story and a pop song has been produced as the movie's theme song.

What makes the song so attractive to the consumers is the popularity of the singer and songwriter.

The song is composed by a popular female musician and composer, Melly Goeslaw. And, the singer, Rossa, is one of the most favorable in the country.

People have responded to the song very positively and it is now a popular music album in Indonesia.

Popular Islamic books (broadly defined as print publication distributing nonacademic works, focusing on the concerns of ordinary people), as represented by the novel, are becoming a trend in Indonesia.

They have not only become popular with readers, but have generated other byproducts through the pop industries.

If the novel represents a trend, from movies to pop songs, a Sufistic book entitled La Tahzan (Don't be Said) written by a Saudi scholar Abdullah al-Qarni, should be added to the list of Islamic popular books that become trend setters.

La Tahzan has attracted other publishers to produce other print publications written by other authors, but with similar titles.

Examples include La Tahzan for Muslimah (first published in August 2007), La

Tahzan for Girls (first published in March 2007), La Tahzan for Teens (first published in August 2007), and La Tahzan for Kids (first published in July 2007).

The high demand for popular books on Islam indicates people are more interested with popular rather than serious books.

The implication is that popular Islamic books contribute much to the shaping of Islamic beliefs and practices among Indonesian Muslims.

The contribution appears stronger if we relate the issue of popular Islamic books to new, rising genres.

Characteristically, these new, growing genres include so-called "Islamic songlit" (a kind of popular Islamic printed book publication aimed at developing ideas or emotions emanating from a certain song), "Islamic teenlit" (a kind of popular Islamic printed book devoted and segmented to teenage consumers), Islamic comic books, Islamic cartoon storybooks, popular Sufistic literature, and Islamic novel literature.

Through its growing significant role as a trend setter, the popular Islamic book along with its varied new genres, contributes not only to the transmission of Islamic teachings but also to the shaping of Islamic beliefs and practices of ordinary Muslims.

The term "ordinary" refers to those Muslims who are not exposed specifically to the study of Islam in Islamic schools or education.

The personal story of Sukarno, an Indonesian Muslim with a combined Javanese-Balinese family background who then became the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, encapsulates the significant role of Islamic publications as a means for the transmission of Islamic teachings and the shaping of Islamic beliefs and practices.

Growing in a sociological milieu with a more nationalist than Islamic ideological inclination, Sukarno, as reported by his mouthpiece, a nationalist-based newspaper, Suluh Indonesia (Nov. 25, 1957), admittedly described himself as having for a long time become "Islam-islaman (a Muslim with a poor understanding of Islamic teachings)."

During the period of his being sent to exile in a number of places, from Flores to Bengkulu, he then more closely studied Islamic teachings by reading a range of Islamic books, written in both Indonesian and other languages.

This gave Sukarno an increasingly improved understanding of Islamic teachings, until he more importantly said: "Now ... I believe with all effort in the truth of Islamic teachings" (Suluh Indonesia, Jan.25, 1957).

One of the readers of the novel Ayat-ayat Cinta also told me this: "We really like

Ayat-ayat Cinta. I now know how to behave in an Islamic manner when I fall in love with someone. And, I want my boyfriend to follow the characteristics of being a good Muslim boy like Fahri, one of the characters in the novel Ayat-ayat Cinta."

Popular Islamic publications have an important role in constructing a certain Islamic intellectual tradition among ordinary Muslim communities.

This intellectual tradition of religious beliefs refers not only to the transmitting of the tradition of the sacred text itself, but also to the determining of variants within the interpretation and understanding of the text within communities.

Borrowing the terms of Edward Shils, popular Islamic books along with a process of transmission of Islamic teachings, reflect the so-called "recurrent reaffirmation" of certain traditions by means of artifacts and symbols (in writing and publication).

And, the extension of the popular Islamic book's role toward film and music more significantly justifies the increasing process of such a recurrent reaffirmation through not only print but also audio-visual media.

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