# Movie Critique in the Name of Islam

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Over the past three years, the revival of Islamic movies has become an increasingly interesting phenomenon. This recent development of Islamic movies became the first in the history of Indonesian cinema. However, many of the highly marketable Islamic movies exploit an established, non-critical understanding of Islamic teachings.

One of the remarkable issues presented in the highly marketable Islamic movies concerns polygamy. The successful Ayat Ayat Cinta (The Verses of Love), which attracted no less than three million moviegoers within less than two months since its release in the end of February 2007, exploits, among others, the plot and material of polygamy. The love triangle between the male character, Fahri, and the two female characters, Aisha and Maria, is illustrative of this theme.

Following the huge success of Ayat Ayat Cinta, the high-rating TV miniseries called Munajat Cinta (The Prayer of Love) starring Baim Wong, Zaskia Adya Mecca and Rianti Cartwright, was broadcast on RCTI channel in the prime time slot of 8 p.m. The miniseries explored polygamy in great detail.

The success of Ayat Ayat Cinta and Munajat Cinta as representatives of Islamic movies about polygamy did not coincide with a large negative response from Muslim scholars and leaders. Rather, the criticism came from Muslim feminists, who garnered less media coverage.

Many Muslim scholars and leaders responded positively toward the Islamic movies above. But when the film Perempuan Berkalung Surban (A Woman with a Turban) starring Revalina S. Temat which promoted a critical understanding of Islam was released, there was sharp criticism and staunch resistance from Muslim scholars and leaders such as Ali Mustofa Yakub (the Imam of the great Istiqlal mosque) and Tiffatul Sembiring (the President of the Prosperous Justice Party, PKS).

The two Muslim figures agreed that Perempuan Berkalung Surban deserved staunch opposition. In the name of Islam, they called for the film to be boycotted. They accused the film of defaming Islam and pesantren (Islamic boarding school) for its promotion of material and plot leading to a sharp criticism of the existing strongly held Islamic understanding about male-female relations.

The film is itself concerned the struggle of a female santri (pesantren student) named Anissa, played by Revalina, for freedom within the pesantren. The movie is set

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against the backdrop of the social condition of the past three decades.

Anissa appears to show that women receive unfair treatment in Islam. The supporting evidence can be taken from discriminative practices against women conducted by Muslim scholars and leaders in the name of Islam. Some examples of these discriminative practices include the prohibition against woman becoming president and/or to going out of the house without a mahram (a guardian relative).

Indeed, the strong opposition from the two Muslim figures does not represent the gamut of responses from Indonesian Muslims, including scholars and leaders.

It might be the case that the Perempuan Berkalung Surban film takes some benefits from the con-troversy over its production for its own marketing. What I would like to suggest here, however, is that criticism toward an established understanding of Islam has opened up rooms for public debate about Islam. The controversy over the presentation of Perempuan Berkalung

Surban, for the most part, signifies the dynamics of Islamic debates from formal education to media and pop culture. Moreover, it witnesses the importance of visual media as a vector for the promotion of Islamic ideologies to the wider consumer.

The change of public images through cinema has contributed to the strengthening of such a dual modality and function of the Islamic movies as both a business for financial capital accumulation and a vector for producing and transmitting Islamic ideologies. The growing marketability of Islamic movies and the increasing number of Muslim moviegoers watching them have affected the public images of cinema. Both contribute to the reconstruction of the public images of cinema which for Muslims have been identical to negative impressions.

Pro and cons are just natural. However, we always need to look at the bigger picture on the benefits of such films, and not look at it from a narrow-minded perspective.

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