

## 4 Upgraded piety and pleasure

### The new middle class and Islam in Indonesian popular culture

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The conspicuous presence of what can be called “pop Islam” or “Islamic chic” in the last two or three decades has been a further blow to the already discredited modernist and liberalist theories. The onward march of modernization has not pushed religions to the margin of social life, or to near to extinction. Modernity does not necessarily imply or require secularization. Religions have done more than simply survived well in many parts of the modernized world (Turner 2006, 2007), as attested to by contemporary Islam. The world has witnessed the remarkable growth of the so-called new religious movements. “Unlike the established religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, which spread . . . in an ad hoc fashion, the founders of new religious movements . . . adopted a world focus from the outset” (Smith 2008: 3). Contemporary Muslims’ political activities are not restricted to selected segments of trans-national networks such as revived fundamentalism and violence-oriented militancy. Islam has presented itself in many parts of the globe of late as a new set of variants of contemporary lifestyles, especially among youth. A failure to take religions and religious movements seriously for critical analysis has not only marred modernists. Ironically, the same failure can be found among their most radical critics, namely post-modernists, post-structuralists, and those in cultural studies. Until very recently, there has been a general tendency among all of the latter to avoid or dismiss religious-based movements and discourses. This is the case despite the claims they have made to privilege and celebrate the West’s others as well as the disadvantaged, subaltern, or minorities (with special reference to Asian studies, see Clammer 2000 and Stange 1991).

Melanie Wright (2007:11) notes that a serious interest “in scholarship predicated on the religion-film interface” has not been observable until the last decade or so. And this scholarship has mainly looked at American films and Christianity. The rapid development of Islamic popular cultures and lifestyles has opened up new insights and debates among members of Muslim communities as well as secular analysts. Has religious piety succumbed to and been fundamentally corrupted by the global desire for consumerist indulgence and worldly pleasures that used to be avoided if not condemned by many monotheistic religions, including Islam? Or does the new phenomenon merely signal “Islamization,” and more particularly success in winning the hearts and minds of a significantly broader range of young people who are otherwise enticed by Western, and

especially American, pop cultures? As expected, there is a wide range of opposing answers to these questions. With specific reference to the case of Indonesia, which is the focus of this chapter, observers were initially critical of the trends towards commercialization of Muslim life and commodification of Muslim religious symbols (Henschkel 1994; Murray 1991). More than a few Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia have continued to express cynicism or concern (Ivvaty 2005; *Kompas* 2008b; Muzakki 2007; Nazaruddin 2008; Nu’ad 2008; Ramadhan 2003; Suryakusuma 2008; *Tempo* 2007; Widodo 2008). Of late, observers have tended to be more ambivalent about the issue, acknowledging the diverse motivations, meanings, and intentions involved in what may appear to be a common pattern of consumerist passion and the pleasure of displaying both wealth and piety among contemporary urban-based young and educated Muslims in Indonesia (see Fealy 2008; Jones 2007; Lukens-Bull 2007; Nilan 2006; Smith-Hefner 2007).

Building on my initial reaction to the phenomenon back in the late 1990s (Heryanto 1999), I tend to see the current and rapid growth of Islamic pop cultures largely as an extension of the success of Islamic politics in post-authoritarian Indonesia. To appreciate this proposed interpretation, one needs to consider the broader context. Bryan Turner articulates succinctly the general observation:

In sociological terms, 20th-century political Islam is a product of the social frustrations of those social strata (unpaid civil servants, overworked teachers, underemployed engineers and marginalized college teachers) whose interests have not been well served by either the secular nationalism of Nasser, Muhammad Reza Shah, Suharto or Saddam Hussein, or the neo-liberal ‘open-door’ policies of Anwar Saddat or Chadli Benjedid in Algeria . . . Islamism is a product of a religious crisis of authority, the failures of authoritarian nationalist governments, and the socio-economic divisions that have been exacerbated by neo-liberal globalization.

(Turner 2006: 441)

I contend that in Indonesia in the first decade of the twenty-first century, political Islam has enjoyed an unprecedented secure position of power, despite its continually being prone to internal frictions. In part this is attributable to the religion’s resilience over many decades of suffering from political repression, economic exclusion, and cultural humiliation. In part this happened by default, in the absence of Indonesia’s left (following the massacres in 1965–66 and State-sponsored terrorism in the ensuing decades) and as a result of the bankruptcy of the Western-backed, ultra-rightist military rule of the New Order (1966–98) in the wake of the ending of the Cold War. Admittedly, the contemporary success of political Islam has not been achieved without problems. The fruits of this triumph are not well distributed among fellow believers. Many Muslims have continued to suffer from marginalization and frustration, especially with the economic stagnation of the post-1997 crisis, which explains the growth of militia groups engaging in violent actions for an Islamic cause, or at least using Islam as a rallying cry (see Wilson 2008). However, a growing number of urban-based and well-educated Muslims

now enjoy secure political as well as economic positions. It is unsurprising that among these privileged segments of the Muslim community there should be both a greater need and a greater ability to explore new activities in the cultural and aesthetic as well as legal and intellectual realms to justify and celebrate their newly acquired privileges, express their identities and aspirations, and/or expand and further consolidate their politico-economic positions.

In this regard the new rich among Indonesian Muslims are not different from their non-Muslim counterparts (see Heryanto 1999; Tanter and Young 1990; Yoon 1991) or, most likely, from other Muslims elsewhere (Abdel-Mageed 2008; Wallerstein 1991). In the late 1980s, Aswab Mahasin described this major transformation of the Indonesian Muslims as the embourgeoisement of the *santri* (pious and learned Muslims) (Mahasin 1990: 140). However, in contradiction to common presumptions about their disposition towards economic rationality, many members of the new bourgeoisie are inclined towards self-aristocratization and have a preoccupation with the aestheticization of their lifestyle, the display of wealth, and exuberant consumption. Otherwise, what is the point of being very wealthy "if there is no personal reward?" (Wallerstein 1991: 146), or if there is no recognition of such distinction (Bourdieu 1984)? In what follows I will focus on a few very specific examples of an Islamic pop cultural product in contemporary Indonesia, its warm public reception, and its significance for broader issues of Islamic politics and morality in the face of a deepening of pressures on Indonesian youths to consume ever-new trends dictated by a global capitalist-driven lifestyle.

### The missing veil

From the 1980s onward I was intrigued as to why veiled women have been almost entirely absent from Indonesian film scenes at a time when Indonesia was swept by a "sea of jilbab" as one poet described it (Nadjib 1989). Given Indonesia's status as the world's largest Muslim nation, it is not surprising that the unprecedented scale of Islamization for the past two decades has included a dramatic increase in headscarfing among Muslim women. Far from expressing a massive compliance with any ruling or a submission to any systematic propaganda, this new trend has largely come voluntarily. In fact, the 1980s wave of veiling marked a break from its older practice, signifying in most cases an overt political statement of dissent against the official banning. More recently it has become a new and trendy fashion among the better-off female urbanites.

But why this development should hardly have been represented in Indonesian films – in sharp contrast to its more common representation on television and in print media – intrigued me in the next two decades. To my knowledge there has been neither a formal restriction against nor an obvious disincentive for portrayal of something that has been conspicuous in the major cities where the stories are set. Then in early 2008, the film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* was released, breaking new records commercially and ideologically. The film resonated broadly and powerfully with dominant and naturalized ways of seeing things during the period of the film's release. Viewed by more than three million Indonesians in the first few weeks of its

release, the film surpassed any other titles previously screened in the country, regardless of country of origin, language, or genre, until it was superseded towards the end of the year by the newest domestic blockbuster, *Laskar Pelangi* (2008). *Ayat-ayat Cinta* was based on a best-selling novel with the same title by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, whose background and educational experience resemble those of the male protagonist. Popularly regarded as Indonesia's most Islamic film so far, the story is set in Egypt, with background music and scenes that are markedly Islamic throughout the film. It features Aisha, an almost fully covered-up woman, as one of the central characters. A series of questions follow. Why only at this moment and in this particular film did a strongly Islamic-looking cinematic character begin to appear so assertively, and with such a strong impact on the Indonesian public? What are the other aspects of this film, if any, that made it more successful commercially than any of the few previously produced titles with substantive Islamic content?

Preliminary observation has led me to believe that one answer to the above questions has to do with the changing configuration of and relations between social classes in Indonesia since the mid-1980s. Islam and Muslims have for a long time been very diverse. But Indonesian social transformation in the past two decades has added a new dimension or intensity to their diversity along class lines.

Until the mid-1980s Islam in Indonesia had not usually been associated with wealth, icons of modernity, urban lifestyles, or popular culture (see Heryanto 1999). This has changed remarkably since then, putting Islam at the forefront of the production and consumption of popular culture. The popularizing and stylization of headscarves among Muslim women is but one case in point. As several scholars have indicated, the new headscarfing trend marked a break from the practice of the older generation (usually rural folk), and it has been most noticeable among highly educated female urbanites (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007).<sup>1</sup> In a different but related development, analysts of *dangdut* music have come to a similar conclusion. Along with major gentrification *dangdut*, like headscarfing, has recently become widely popular among the better-off Indonesians who have also been casually referred to as the middle classes (David 2008; Frederick 1982; Murray 1991; Weintraub 2006).

One easy answer to the question regarding the long delayed appearance of veiled female characters in Indonesian films is the history of global tension between the United States and the Islamic world. While Islamist-based anti-American sentiments in Indonesia have not been particularly strong or widespread, more often than not Muslim leaders in Indonesia, as elsewhere, tend to have negative attitudes towards the cinema as a whole, and especially American domination in the world of cinema. While Iran has come to prominence in the contemporary world of film-making, in the 1970s the country was one of the strongest critics of cinema. In 1978 "[u]p to 180 cinemas nationwide (32 in Tehran alone) had been burned, demolished or shut down" (Naficy 2006: 30). Even during its currently glorious time, Iran film-making is subject to a series of state legislations that ensure that the ratified, if ambiguously defined, Islamic values be complied with.<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia not all Muslims agree that *Ayat-ayat Cinta* contains Islamic values or serves the interests of Muslims (Yumiyanti 2008b). Some even allege that the film is anti-Islam.



Editors of one Islamist journal consider *Ayat-ayat Cinta* as propagating pluralism that they condemned, and allege the novelist and film-makers of that film are "agents of zionism" (*Risalah Mujahidin* 2008).

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).

As found in several other former colonies, nearly all top actors and actresses in Indonesian films have some elements of Caucasian facial features, commonly associated with wealth, progress, and secular modernity. In Indonesian films more men wear Western business suits and ties than can be found in real life off-screen. Likewise, wine drinking is a lot more common in Indonesian films than off-screen in the world's largest Muslim nation. Until recently, a scene of a state official accepting a bribe could not be shown on screen. Going to the movies in Indonesia, as elsewhere, often means consuming a feast for the eyes, the ears, and the mind, allowing a momentary reflection on what life might look like in a different and better world than one's own day-to-day reality. This imagined world in Indonesian films often means a modern and prosperous Indonesia in the image of the liberal West. Until recently, in such cinematic utopias, veiled women were hardly represented, much less featured on center stage.

But there is something specific about the recent developments in the cinema industry in Indonesia that helps explain not only the long delayed appearance of Muslim women characters in veils, but also the overwhelmingly warm response to the first and major cinematic appearance of these missing figures in *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. I refer to the issue of class. There are at least two distinct but related areas of relevance for examining this issue, one intellectual, the other material.

First, to consider the intellectual question, critical investigations of popular cultures have by and large been the preoccupation of the urban middle-class intelligentsia, instead of the populace that constitutes the mass consumers of pop cultures. As hinted above, and as will be elaborated below, until very recently Islam had not usually been associated with prosperity, profit making, the entertainment industry and for that matter the largely intellectual discourses. There has been no compelling reason for the blatantly biased study of popular cultures to pay serious attention to Islam in popular culture. Conversely, there was no strong reason for Islamic communities to engage with the popular culture networks. This helps explain why the recent growth of studies on intra-Asian flows of pop culture have generally been East-Asia centered (Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan). The long history and wide-spread flow of both Middle Eastern and Indian influences in the making of contemporary pop cultures in Southeast Asia has been largely overlooked (Heryanto 2010).

Second, in terms of the material question, a major transformation has taken place in Indonesian cities and in access to cinemas. The spread of VCDs and

DVDs (both legal and more especially pirated copies) and the growth of the television industry since the mid 1990s have made many small cinema houses across the nation no longer economically viable. While television viewing audiences have expanded significantly in size and become more diversified in several ways, the range of cinema-goers has dramatically narrowed, and their demographic profiles have become narrowly concentrated among the better-off urban youth. The few refurbished surviving cinemas, and especially the few newly built ones, commonly occupy a space inside the up-scale shopping malls in capital cities, where only those with a fairly high level of purchasing power and cultural capital have reason to visit, linger and feel comfortable. Indonesia's respected film critic Eric Sasono has even gone so far as to suggest that cinema going is no longer a family leisure activity on the weekend as it was in the 1970s. Rather, it is part of a lifestyle of hanging out in large shopping areas for young urbanites aged between 15–35 with their friends, boy/girlfriends, or colleagues (see numerical data in Sasono 2007). The cinemas usually have several screening rooms for one title, each of which is small in size, and these cinemas-in-malls stand among fancy shops full of branded items and international restaurants for the middle and upper levels of the urban population. To maximize the level of security and comfort of their targeted patrons, the mall's security guards as well as shop attendants will make anyone from the underclass immediately feel unwelcome if they dare to enter this air-conditioned, carpeted and perfumed territory.

Smartly dressed Muslims are among the expected regular patrons of these malls, the shoppers and film viewers (Nilan 2006: 103–4). But for many years these people did not find any respectable representations of Muslim characters in the films with whom they could quickly identify in religious terms. There is no doubt that these missing figures would be warmly welcomed as soon as they appeared on screen. They cannot be a representation of just any Muslims found in real life. And they surely cannot be the kind of Muslims who have dominated the public imagination for more than a century and in contemporary mass media: old, seriously pious, preachy and dogmatic. To appeal to the youths who frequent the shopping malls and regularly consume MTV Asia programs and the like, these cinematic figures must meet some of the familiar standards of globally defined attributes of being cool and trendy.

Most Indonesian film-makers in previous years appeared not to have the idea of presenting such figures in their films and/or the skill to do so. The few who tried to produce Islam-focused films in the past presented more serious types of characters and heavy didactic messages rather than a light-hearted or melodramatic story of "cool" Muslim protagonists as in *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. The great success of this film is attributable to the smooth blend of what in isolation may appear to be incompatible if not contradictory elements: indulgence in consuming a capitalist-dominated global lifestyle and a profound commitment to Islamic piety. Once *Ayat-ayat Cinta* had won the hearts and minds of the middle class who had always dominated urban space, national debates, and the mass media, it quickly attracted wider audiences, both downward and upward along class lines.<sup>3</sup>

I have neither the necessary specialist expertise in Islam to assess how "Islamic" the film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* actually is, nor any particular interest in doing so. My

interest is in raising questions about the significance of this film's success in relation to the concurrent debate on what has been conveniently described as the "Islamization" of Indonesian political life. More specifically, I am interested in looking at what message (intended or unintended) the film conveys to its immediate target audience in Indonesia on two controversial issues: sexuality and polygamy.

My close reading suggests that, more than has commonly been acknowledged, the film actually problematizes the general and largely conservative view of Islam that prevails in Indonesia. It does so subtly and moderately, and with carefully selected compromises that contradict the more liberal perspectives of Islam in Indonesia. Notwithstanding this qualification, the film clearly chooses not to simply play safe by reaffirming the status quo or by seeking to please the more conservative majority of its potential audience for political or commercial gain. Before I elaborate upon my interpretation, for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with contemporary Indonesia, we need to step back briefly and take a broader look at Islamization in Indonesia during the past two decades or so, and the series of controversies it has provoked, particularly concerning issues of sexuality.

### The broader context

The fall of the centralist state management under the militarist rule of the New Order in 1998 unleashed a plethora of formerly repressed social energies among Indonesia's profoundly diverse peoples. Rapidly transforming from a society under one of the world's longest-reigning dictators from 1966 to one of the world's most liberal democracies in the 2000s, Indonesia witnessed the euphoric and extreme centrifugal pursuit of various cultural and ideological aspirations, with the notable absence of communism.<sup>4</sup> After decades of being systematically repressed, political Islam grew as never before (see Hefner 2000) and offered virtually the only available alternative model of modernity. But Islamic politics is not, and never was, one single entity. Tension and competition among the diverse Islamic groups to gain moral leadership and authority in the nation are intense, with occasional outbursts and sporadic incidents of violence. In the meantime, a wide range of secular liberal forces have also exploded in earnest, and so have the old vernacular traditions – of which syncretic variants of Hinduized Javanese mysticism is the most prominent. For obvious reasons, mainstream international media dominated by the Western bloc in their obsession with the "war on terror" have failed to see this post-authoritarian diversity and dynamics when commenting on Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

It is not possible or necessary to capture the complex dynamics of Indonesian pluralism here (for more, see Ricklefs 2008). But for purposes of illustration, let me just suggest one small area as an example, namely developments in the mass media industry and the controversy over a legal proposal for regulating sexuality. Licensed presses have more than doubled in number since 1998, from fewer than 300 to more than 600. The number of commercial television networks has increased from five to more than ten in the same period. Over 200 new local networks have been established, starting from nil when the New Order rule came to an end. The media was the only industry that expanded its job market in the

wake of the 1998 crisis (Heryanto and Adi 2002), and some media businesses even doubled their revenue during this period (Hill 2007: 10) when millions of others were shedding jobs. For the first time in Indonesian history more than 100 million people now watch a wide variety of television programs on a daily basis. In personal communication with me, some top managers of the industry have suggested that this situation will not last long. Market competition will soon cut the number of national television networks by half, following the law of survival of the fittest. Recent trends vindicate such predictions, if not in full. In the meantime, in this fiercely competitive market, broadcasters and publishers have experimented and tested the boundaries of acceptable decency and newly acquired liberty, resulting in several being harshly criticized by members of the society and others being legally sued for allegedly going too far.

The recent growth in books and magazines with a special focus on Islam preceded the fall of the New Order (Hefner 1997; *Kompas* 2003). But it has gained momentum since then, acquiring the status of one of the largest categories of reading materials in the print industry, and occupying a major section in most commercial book shops (see Widodo 2008). Similar developments can be seen in television programs, with varying degrees of Islamic content. But the new market has also been supplied by at least two competing categories that do not sit well with some of the basic values of Islam, and some of them have actually provoked outrage from segments within the Muslim community.

The first is a wide range of publications that emphasize sexuality and eroticism. They range from hyper-sexualized stage performances and television shows to soft pornographic materials in men's magazines and explicit yet highly stylized detailed expositions of human sexual activity in a new genre of literary writings by a new generation of women authors. It was also during this period that the *dangdut* singer-dancer Inul Daratista made her debut and stirred up the greatest moral panic of 2003 (see Heryanto 2008b). This was followed by the launch of the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine in 2006.

The second trend includes those cultural products that are concerned with supernatural forces and mysticism. New magazines that specialize in this topic have mushroomed since the early 2000s. Horror films and television programs dominated the entertainment industry for more than a decade (see Arps and Heeren 2006; Heeren 2007). This genre is particularly popular in Java, home of Indonesia's largest ethnic group, where Indonesia's major industrialization has been concentrated since colonial times.<sup>6</sup> Javanese people have long been stereotypically regarded as being remarkably tolerant and syncretic, embracing Hinduism, Western secular modernity, and Islam without any obvious display of discomfort.<sup>7</sup> Apparently in an attempt to gloss over fundamentally conflicting interests and to maximize profit, the general trend in television programming has been to market mystical shows and call them "religious shows" (Imanjaya 2006; Wardhana 2006). This is justified with appearances by professional religious experts or leaders and citations of holy verses at the beginning and conclusion of the shows (Heeren 2007; Nazaruddin 2008).

The rise of popular cultural products with three distinct strands of content (Islamic, liberal Western consumerist-indulgent, and mystical) is not surprising.



Along with Communism until its demise in 1965, these cultural and ideological orientations have been the major forces that shaped Indonesia from its inception. They have made some alliances along the way, but also find themselves entangled in serious conflicts (see Heryanto 2008a). Having eliminated the Communists in the mid 1960s, the New Order government suppressed these three forces that had helped the regime come to power. But the New Order did not simply repress these forces. It incorporated selected elements of each force (cultural signs of Islamic piety, Western modernity and technology, and the resources of imagined "indigenous" tradition) to build its own legitimacy for three decades.

Since the fall of the New Order the major forces of Islam, Western-styled secular liberalism, and indigenous mysticism have resurfaced and resumed their battles for dominance in post-authoritarian Indonesia. It is worth noting that before *Ayat-ayat Cinta* was produced, the two most commercially successful films shown in Indonesia were *Jelangkung* (2001) and *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002). The first is a horror film. It was not simply a continuation of the genre from previous decades, or of the longer history of mystical practices among the more devoted followers of Javanese tradition. Instead *Jelangkung* represented a new generation of horror films that are distinctively urban middle-class-based. The film tells the story of a group of very critical and competent university students who try to find out about the possible existence of ghosts, out of curiosity. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is a shamelessly Americanized melodramatic love story between middle-class Jakartan youths. Both titles attracted slightly over one million viewers, outdoing the major Hollywood blockbusters that had dominated the nation's cinema for nearly half a century. The arrival and success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* not only brought contemporary Islam on a par with the more Western-oriented and indigenized-oriented popular cultures on the nation's cinematic screen in terms of box office sale figures, but well surpassed them.

In 2003 the sensual performances of Inul Daratista stirred up a nation-wide controversy. Elsewhere I have argued that to a significant extent Inul's debut represented a new cultural icon of an old tradition of non-aristocratic Javanese practice that celebrates bodily pleasure and sexuality (Heryanto 2008b). Being the single largest ethnic and cultural group, the Javanese with their resilient mysticism have for centuries been the main buffer that prevents Indonesia from becoming an Islamic state. Although Inul's critics came from a wide variety of backgrounds, in this Muslim-majority nation at a time of an unprecedented level of Islamization, the staunchest and loudest critics have been those with an Islamic institutional basis or background. She was banned from performing in several cities (and in Malaysia), while being much lauded in others.

Partly in response to Inulmania, but partly also to the broader expansion of other related erotic-focused elements in the entertainment industry, a proposal for a new anti-pornography law was tabled before parliament in 2006.<sup>8</sup> If ratified, this new law would severely restrict people's behavior, speech and clothing. Kissing in a public place or wearing a bikini was to be liable to a heavy fine or imprisonment. The proposal galvanized the more liberal segments of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. The issue constituted one of the hottest and most

decisive debates in the nation for two years. After a series of suspensions, revisions that moderated or omitted the most disputed sections in the original version, and resubmission to the parliament, it was ratified on 30 October 2008, despite the fact that a significant number of law-makers walked out of the session in protest. Its formal ratification did not deter those opposed to it. Emotional debates continued, complementing legal actions filed at the Constitutional Court by several institutions and groups who sought its annulment. Because sexuality and pornography are not the exclusive discourse of experts, nearly all segments of the nation's population took a part in the debate. For those opposing the Bill, at stake were not simply issues of morality, but the foundations of the nation-state itself. For them the Bill did not simply represent some legally flawed moral proposal for a crusade against pornography, as well as being redundant given the existing criminal law that regulates indecent behavior. More seriously, these people suspected that this was a dangerous ploy to transform Indonesia into an Islamic state.

As if this controversy was not divisive enough, the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine was launched around the same period. The timing could not have been any worse, as anti-American sentiment was running high following the American-led war in Iraq. Being aware of the potential risks, the publishers of *Playboy* chose to tone down its contents with very timid images and texts, so much so that the outcome pleased no one. Readers found it disappointingly bland, while the Islamic militant group, the Islam Defender Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) attacked and destroyed the magazine's office.<sup>9</sup> To continue its operations, the magazine moved its office to the Hindu-majority island of Bali (see Kitley 2008).

The above shows that even among the proponents of Islamism, there is no unified front or common strategy. Some, including the political party PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, Justice and Prosperity Party), work through constitutional means in the top political arena with sophisticated diplomacy and a willingness to make strategic compromises. Others, like the militant FPI, mobilize the masses from the underprivileged groups to engage more in physical measures of intimidation and physical confrontation. While these various Islamist groups share some ultimate goals (a more thoroughly Islamic Indonesia in spirit if not the formal establishment of an Islamic state under *sharia* law), and are more than willing to lend occasional endorsements to each other, tensions and gaps are imminent among them. Despite the admitted fuzziness of the concept of class, it is useful to use the term guardedly and to recognize the PKS and FPI as two distinct entities in class terms.

Not all Islamist groups work by negating and attacking those they consider to be un-Islamic or anti-Islamic. Some have launched actions to assert Islamic identity in a more positive or creative fashion. The universal call for the veiling of women is one of the most successful examples. Dress codes for men are generally more lax. But for several years in the 2000s there was sporadic propagation of the notion of men marrying more than one wife. One successful businessman, Puspito Wardoyo, went on a tour in 2003 with a large entourage (including several women) across the country to propagate polygamy. He did this in preparation for the "Polygamy Award" ceremony in one of Jakarta's five-star hotels. Wardoyo made

a contribution of US\$110,000 in sponsoring the ceremony, where 37 men were given awards for their successful polygamous marriages (Nurmila 2005).

Polygamy is legal, although Indonesian law makes it extremely difficult to practice.<sup>10</sup> The number of polygamous marriages may not be large, but they cut across class divisions. In the past polygamy raised eyebrows, but it has not prompted controversy until recently. When Indonesia's first president Sukarno took four wives, observers had mixed reactions, but most forgave him by attributing his behavior to his strongly Javanese background and cultural upbringing. Many of the male protagonists in the Hindu *Mahabharata* epic (the most fundamental cultural frame of reference for most Javanese, but also Balinese and Sundanese) have several wives, and some of these wives are married to several men.

What appears to set the current polygamous practices apart from their predecessors and makes them intensely controversial is their religious overtone, as best illustrated by Puspo Wardoyo. Far from being taken as a private affair (as in the case of Sukarno in the past), polygamy since 2000 has become a public affair, an explicitly political statement, and a source of controversy because it has been promoted by some as advocating Islamic codes of conduct, values and lifestyle. A set of holy verses are repeatedly cited to justify its recent promotion, to the extent that polygamy is occasionally presented not simply as a case where Islam conditionally endorses Muslim men (and only men) having more than one spouse, but as part of a religious call for a fuller devotion to Islam.<sup>11</sup> Not even all pious and learned Muslims agree with such a reading of the holy texts, let alone non-Muslims, women activists, and their supporters (see Brenner, Chapter 13 in this volume).

In contrast to the success of women's veiling, and similar to the fate of the Anti-Pornography Bill, the propagation of polygamy has not been smooth. While it may not be any more or less difficult for a married man to take a second wife now than in the past, it is certainly more difficult for him than for his predecessors to gain public support and respect. Even when he has taken the second wife purely for personal reasons and considered it a private family affair, the public would tend to scorn and impose serious censure against him, as attested to by the case of Aa Gym, the most admired Islamic preacher and television celebrity in Indonesia until the media disclosed that he had taken a second wife (see Hoesterey 2007, 2008).

It was against this background that two Indonesian films with a focus on polygamy were released. *Ayat-ayat Cinta* was one, and the other was Nia Dinata's *Berbagi Suami* (Sharing a Husband) (2006). The remainder of this chapter will look closely at the former, and will briefly discuss the latter as a point of comparison to highlight the former's significance to the ongoing debate on the merits of polygamy and the place of religion in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

### Islamic Sleeping Beauty

In the dazzlingly disorienting moment of liberalization, with the protracted impact of the 1997 economic crisis and occasional misgivings about the prospects of the Reform movement, the appearance of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* was very timely. At least for several months it seemed a beacon for the millions of young and impressionable

Muslims at a historical moment marked by the promises of neo-liberalism and the possibilities opened up by new media (Hosen 2008; Turner 2007) as well as the fluidity and uncertainty of their consequences (Bauman 2000). The film's male protagonist (Fahri) offers an attractive and much needed middle ground or alternative between the persona of the contemporary militant Muslim and that of the traditionally pious Muslim. It displays the most attractive blend imaginable (and so far visible on the screen) of the attributes of a pious Muslim, a member of the young middle-class intelligentsia, and a post-colonial Indonesian citizen who is at ease with the world of classical Islamic texts as well as a Western-dominated global lifestyle and consumption. All these struck a chord with the identities and aspirations of many who frequented the shopping malls that house the contemporary cinemas.

Put differently, these young Muslims were drawn to *Ayat-ayat Cinta* because of the pleasure of discovering their imagined and desired selves for the first time on the big cinema screen, free from the standard portrayals of explicit sex scenes, gruesome violence, and what critics see as superstition.<sup>12</sup> Now for the first time, their existence was publicly recognized with respect, and authoritatively legitimized by such a powerful institution as the film industry in the grand and glittering shopping mall. This is the kind of sensation that over a million other youths felt in 2002 when the film *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* was released, the first Indonesian film where characters (in this case urban youths, the single largest demographic segment of film viewers) spoke in a trendy mix of variants of non-formal Indonesian, just as in real life. Even for non-Muslims and the older generation, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* offered a breath of fresh air after years of watching cinema and television consisting primarily of gross violence, vulgar sexual allusions, hyper-sentimental dramas, horror-cum-superstition suspense, and talk shows with bad jokes.

What is interesting about the public response to *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is not only the size of the viewing audience. Rather, it is the *extent* to which the film has been seen and commended by several politicians as if it was primarily intended to propagate Islam as a peace-loving and tolerant religion. It was also seen as a due and apt response to the misrepresentation of Islam in international media in the wake of 9/11. These were the points that President Yudhoyono emphasized in his speech upon viewing the film during a special screening on 28 March 2008 (*Kompas* 2008a). The same point was reiterated by Junus Effendi Habibie, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands, in anticipation of the screening of the film in The Hague on 26 October 2008 (Antara 2008). In mailing-list groups many viewers expressed sympathy for the film for the same reasons. Some list members took offence when others made critical remarks about the film.

Film critics were more lukewarm in their reviews of the film's aesthetic achievements. They also questioned the film's supposedly Islamic attributes and intended messages (see Sasono 2008b; Yazid 2008). The film did not do well at the Indonesian Film Festival at the year's end. While novelist Habiburrahman El Shirazy claimed to have written the story with "a purpose—the propagation of Islam" (Hermawan 2008), nearly all those behind the work of turning the novel into a film have track records in the mainstream, non-religious film industry. None has special credentials in Islamic institutions or activities. Fans of the film



expressed disappointment when one of the leading actresses was caught smoking by a tabloid reporter who published a report with a series of images.

"Despite backdrops, costumes and certain lines in *Ayat* undoubtedly rooted in a particular religion, the film moves its story forward from being a purely love story," writes journalist Nauval Yazid (2008). But more significantly from my perspective, it is a love story where the crises, resolutions and happy ending are depicted in scenes that are not necessarily Islamic. Rather, they are reminiscent of Hollywood and Bollywood movies as well as Indonesian television dramas (*sinetron* as locals call them).<sup>13</sup> Instead of following the new trend among Indonesian Muslims of wearing typical Middle Eastern dress, the male protagonist Fahri wears Western-style casual clothes and a trendy haircut. Neither does he grow a beard. His physical appearance would allow him to be almost anything in one of the mainstream films from Asia or the West. In his wedding ceremony Fahri wears a Western suit and tie. The scenes of the wedding itself are highly reminiscent of those in Bollywood movies. Near the end of the film there is a critical scene of Maria being in a coma for months because of a broken heart. A hospital nurse who attends Maria tells Maria's mother that there is little hope for the patient's recovery except the immediate arrival of the man she loves (Fahri), who has married someone else (Aisha) and is now in jail because of a false allegation of rape made by another secret admirer (Noura). By a special arrangement made by politically well-connected people, Fahri is temporarily released from prison in order to see poor Maria in the hospital. In one long scene, he gives Maria an unfailingly magic "kiss-for-the Sleeping Beauty" on the forehead. Maria regains consciousness!

The early part of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is full of didactic scenes and dialogues. They include a message about how Muslims of the opposite sex cannot touch each other (such as shaking hands with a new acquaintance) apart from their own *muhrim* (legal spouse, children or immediate kin). In another scene there is advice about how Islam does not approve of dating. There is also a lengthy lesson about how husbands should discipline their wives when the latter make mistakes.<sup>14</sup> But the most important message about living as Muslims that the film brought to the screen was one pertaining to polygamy.

The film-makers devoted substantial attention to issues of polygamy towards the end of the film, and added an extended sub-story that does not exist in the novel. This is one area that makes the film appear to be markedly "Islamic," involving a general tendency for simplification of the film's more complex message and an exaggeration of its mixed treatment of polygamy. My reading, however, suggests precisely the reverse. This is one area where the film departs from its initial didactic tendency. The film makes more arguments, albeit subtly, against rather than for polygamy. It is possible that these anti-polygamy messages were lost when viewers came to the cinema with strong presumptions about the film, molded by the publicity, and watched the film purely for entertainment.

The way Fahri enters into a polygamous marriage may please the pro-polygamy male audience. It is only at his wife Aisha's insistence that Fahri finally decides to take Maria as his second wife, as Maria is in a critically ill condition. Maria's recovery is, in turn, critical to her giving a testimony in court that will be

instrumental in Fahri's acquittal. The novel concludes with this polygamous marriage, which is short-lived as it is immediately followed by Maria's death. At variance with the novel, the film-makers decided to extend the story by depicting what it is like for Fahri, Aisha and Maria to live in a polygamous marriage. This turns out to be so difficult for all three that Aisha decides to go away alone for a break and self-reflection.

In exasperation at the difficult triangular relationship, Fahri consults with his close friend Shaiful: "I am confused . . . I am tired" and asks for advice. In response, Shaiful who has previously appeared as one of the most intelligent Muslims in the film, speaks with an air of authority (the camera faces him front on, making him speak to the audience in a confrontational mode): "it is nearly impossible to be just to one wife, let alone two wives." Aisha returns home and is re-united with Maria and Fahri. The film could have ended here, on a happy-ever-after note. Instead, it continues with the death of Maria, thus giving no clue as to how a polygamous marriage can be a long-lasting, happy one.

It is thus surprising to see how the film has often been regarded as pro-polygamy and therefore pro-Islam simply because its hero enters into a polygamous marriage. Andi Mallarangeng (a spokesperson for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) told reporters that despite his strong desire to see the film, he had not done so and could not do so because his wife did not approve of it. According to this news report, her reason was the fact that the film portrays polygamy (Damayanti 2008). Could it be that viewers only found in the film what they wanted to see? Does this have something to do with questions of class?

In an interesting interview with Putu Wijaya who has "directed and written more than 50 *sinetron* [Indonesian television dramas] titles," Amrih Widodo discussed the well-noted categories into which television managers and entertainment producers classify television audiences. I take the liberty of quoting an excerpt at length below, as it gives important details.

When an order for a *sinetron* series specifies that it is for Class B audiences, Putu Wijaya will have in mind an audience of maids, housewives, drivers, food vendors, low-level civil servants, and other blue-collar workers. Class A audiences, meanwhile, would include professionals, university students, high-ranking bureaucrats, upper-scaled entrepreneurs, and journalists. Class B viewers are considered uninterested in long dialogues or discussions of difficult concepts. Instead, they are stimulated by action, more susceptible to manipulation of emotions, and keen for black-and-white morality. According to Putu Wijaya, *sinetron* for a Class B audience often rely on straightforwardness at the expense of narrative and reflective aspects. In practice, this means linear plotting (very few flash-backs, no multiple framing); stereotypical characterizations visually demonstrated through body parts, mimics, gestures and outfits; exaggeration of events or characters to demonstrate extreme emotional expressions, and conflicts on very concrete domestic issues between family members or among individuals within a given social setting. A Class A audience, on the other hand, is imagined as more educated and receptive to longer discussions on conceptual matters, more critical of logical representation of reality, able to understand complex plotting, tolerant

of less clear-cut solutions to problems, and appreciative of artistic creations. When he receives an order for a Class A audience, Putu Wijaya feels freer to express his aesthetic creativity (Widodo 2002).

Neither Putu nor Amrih takes these categories too seriously, or takes their merits at face value. Nonetheless I share their guarded acknowledgement that these categories do have some value. Regardless of the accuracy of the categorization of Indonesian television audiences as illustrated above, such categories are an overt expression of class-based perception on the part of the producers of television programs. Such a perception may be flawed, but it is not entirely baseless.

A class-based contrast exists between the didactic scenes in the earlier section of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and the more ambiguous scenes of polygamy towards the end that do not exist in the novel. Perhaps this distinction is so subtle that it has been lost in many people's view. A sharper distinction can be seen in the mode of narration and level of sophistication between *Ayat-ayat Cinta* and its contemporary *Berbagi Suami*.

Both films begin with Islamic-focused background sounds and scenes. Both foregrounded polygamy at a time when it was being hotly debated in public. Unlike the sinetron-styled *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, however, *Berbagi Suami* presents an example of heteroglossia. It has no heroes. While unequivocally critical towards polygamy in its overall presentation, *Berbagi Suami* contains no didactic message. Instead, it is full of ironies and understatements. Its story line is more complex than that of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, comprising three sets of polygamy cases that find their converging point towards the end. *Ayat-ayat Cinta* ends with the death of Maria and the restoration of order in the happy monogamous marriage of Fahri and Aisha. *Berbagi Suami* tells several stories of polygamy involving people from a wide variety of ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds (of which a wealthy family of pious Muslims is only one), with no one ultimately being happy, except for a couple of co-wives of a lower-class man. These women love each other and engage in sexual activity together secretly before they run away from the polygamous family.<sup>15</sup>

*Berbagi Suami*'s subversive message appears to have escaped both state officials and the many members of the society who are obsessed with the disciplining of citizens, particularly in matters pertaining to sexual activity and clothing. Perhaps such a message is considered, or perceived to be, too subtle to excite and stir the mass audience. As should be clear, I am biased in favor of *Berbagi Suami*. However, for the purpose of this chapter, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is more relevant for analysis and is therefore discussed more extensively here, due to its sheer commercial and ideological success. I wish to conclude with a brief note on how the Islamic message conveyed in *Ayat-ayat Cinta* relates to the broader off-screen debate in the nation about rebuilding a post-authoritarian Indonesia.

### Polygamy versus pluralism

In light of Indonesia's complex diversity and the political tensions that threaten to disintegrate the nation, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* has several benefits from having its story entirely set overseas. Set in Egypt, the film avoids the extremely sensitive reference

to or depictions of domestic conflicts which have been partly triggered by strident Islamization in Indonesia during the past decade or so. This is not to suggest that Egypt has a completely different history of Islamic politics, or that the recent fashion for veiling is any less controversial there than in Indonesia (see Abdel-Mageed 2008). Rather, for the general audience in Indonesia, the various inter-religious conflicts in their homeland remain, while those unabated in the foreign land remain little or not known.

In *Ayat-ayat Cinta* not all Muslims are portrayed as good Muslims. Following the simplistic *sinetron* formula, the division between good and bad characters is clear-cut. Significantly, all Indonesians in the film are the "good guys." The male protagonist Fahri, an Indonesian post-graduate student, appears almost super-human. The series of conflicts in this film are mainly between good Muslims and bad Muslims, and one conflict arises from a difficult situation affecting equally good Muslims. Surely, this is by far a safer and easier story to narrate than would have been the case if the story had been set realistically in Indonesia, where conflicts involving Muslims cannot be entirely separated from, or purged of, imminent tensions with non-Muslims. By containing the story within an all-Islamic world, questions about Indonesian Muslims' privileges as a majority, or questions about their loyalty to the secular nation-state vis-à-vis the faith can be ignored.

Ultimately, it is hard to resist seeing *Ayat-ayat Cinta* as a political allegory, whether or not this is authorially intended. At the center of the whole drama is the male protagonist Fahri, representing post-1998 Indonesia. Being the son of a fermented-cassava seller, Fahri has a very modest family background (Indonesia has barely survived the 1997 economic crisis). As a quasi super-human, he is a capable and conscientious student, with heart-throb charm and a certain naivete (official propaganda consistently circulates a self-delusion about Indonesia's magnificent potential and natural resources that has attracted the world's super-powers over many centuries to an overwhelming extent that goes beyond Indonesia's capability to respond and manage). Fahri is a pious Muslim who welcomes pluralism, and globalism with a moderate stance and a Western life style. He speaks Arabic, English and a little German in addition to Indonesian. He is neither a militant *jihadi* nor a syncretic-cum-traditionalist mystic follower; neither is he Arabized in his appearance or cultural orientation. He remembers his origins, stays true to his Indonesian identity, and remains in contact with his mother in the motherland (Indonesia is proud to be seen as the world's largest Muslim country, striving to be a respectable player in contemporary world politics, but preferring to maintain its own "authentic" identity rather than to ape the West or become Arabized. It is committed to retaining its status as a secular state.)

Fahri chooses to be friends with the American journalist Alicia at a time when fellow Muslims are showing hostility towards her (Indonesia has enjoyed long-term diplomatic relations with the US and never wishes to change this, even at a time when the American persona turns ugly and its cultural hegemony is at a low ebb). Fahri chooses to marry the nearly fully covered half-Turkish Aisha (Indonesia embraces Islamization, but in a way comparable to Turkey's management of the Islamic agenda). Even after his marriage, Fahri cannot be fully free



from a difficult position in his relations with the Coptic Catholic neighbor Maria who is secretly in love with him (Indonesia is bound to protect minority groups as part of its commitment to pluralism, but this has proven increasingly difficult under the mounting pressures of the Islamists).

Such a reading is but one of many equally plausible interpretations of the reasons for the film's popularity. The above reading may not be accurate and highly contentious in its details, but I hope it is not entirely out of place, and is able to suggest what may have struck a chord in the minds and hearts of millions of Indonesians in this unusually fluid time of post-economic crisis, post-authoritarian euphoria of liberal democracy, and a new global cold war against religious militancy.

## Conclusion

In post-Cold War Indonesia, Islam enjoys unprecedented political power. But there is no singular political Islam. It is far too simplistic to distinguish Islam (even in Java alone) as comprising mainly "liberals and moderates on the one hand and radicals and extremists on the other" (Ricklefs 2008: 123). Islamist groups have taken major steps forward, but have fallen short of turning Indonesia into a formally Islamic state, precisely because of the challenge from other segments of the Muslim community in the country. The sustained growth of the Indonesian new rich in the past three decades has included a substantial number of pious Muslims. Despite the latter's ascendancy in the political and economic spheres, only recently have they begun to have both the urge and the power to thread their way into the cultural sphere, where Western and predominantly American pop culture have held sway for nearly a century.

*Ayat-ayat Cinta* was successful commercially because of its ingenious combination of the various elements that appeal most to contemporary Indonesians, especially urban youth. However, as the discussion above suggests, the film's success cannot be seen in any reductionist fashion as simply a sign of Islamization of Indonesia or even of Indonesian cinema. Neither can one dismiss the religious aspect of the phenomenon and describe the film's success as the victory of capitalism over Islam. At best, what we can see in the case of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is one moment in the long and complex history of cultural, aesthetic, ideological and intellectual contestations and compromises between forces of capital and moral outrage—sometimes with religious overtones, sometimes without—against the inequality upon which capitalism rests.

During much of the New Order rule, "Islamic themes of justice and equality were mobilized against those regimes that were corrupt, bankrupt and authoritarian, and often supported by the West in the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet empire" (Turner 2006: 442). The memory and legacies of such moral crusades still strongly overshadow contemporary Indonesia. But Muslims and non-Muslims now find themselves in a new kind of Indonesia, where state power is shared largely among old political enemies: politicians of the New Order and newcomers with Islamic credentials. The successful but difficult ratification of the strongly Islamist Pornography Law in 2008, and the continued legal challenge

that it has provoked, is one testimony to the absence of any one hegemonic group in Indonesia at the moment. Another testimony is the commercial defeat of the record breaking *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (with 3.7 million viewers) by the secular and artistically-oriented *Laskar Pelangi* (with 4.4 million viewers) near the end of the year (Ivvaty and Suwarna 2008). To complicate matters, in December 2008 *Ayat-ayat Cinta* did not do very well at the Indonesian Film Festival, while the people behind the production of *Laskar Pelangi* boycotted the festival.

Religions are not receding or fading away just because capitalism has triumphed in the Cold War. But neither do religions survive unchanged. They survive well when they have the willingness and ability to make a series of dangerous liaisons with the logic of the capitalist market. Reflecting on the history of Islam and other religions, Bryan Turner argues that "[s]yncretism has been historically the norm" (Turner 2006: 440). The statement may hold true beyond his immediate concerns, and beyond inter-religious interactions. The phenomenon has come under different labels in social and cultural analyses, of which "diversity" and "hybridity" are some of the most common ones. While many things appear to be increasingly fluid, flexible, mixed, or hybrid in the contemporary world, certain things, such as inequality and class division, appear to remain permanent and destabilizing as ever.

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## Notes

- 1 To emphasize the novelty of post-1980s veiling in Indonesia, observers often draw a clear-cut distinction with the practice both among the older generation and that in the Middle East. Actually a similar change is taking place in the Middle East, where veiling as a new fashion is common, specifically among the younger generation and middle-class urbanites. Like the situation in Indonesia, this has also stirred some controversy. Asef Bayat, a professor of sociology and Middle Eastern studies, argues that even in Egypt, the *hijab* is an "invented tradition" and not an inherent part of Egyptian culture, while a Cairo-based academic observes that "[i]n the past, fewer women wore *hijab*, but people were definitely more religious than today. Ethics are the core of religion, not appearance" (Abdel-Mageed 2008). More veiling does not necessarily mean further Islamization.
- 2 What has generally been less noted is the fact that the same negative attitudes can be easily found among Christians in Indonesia, as elsewhere. "In the mid-twentieth century, American Christians figured among the harshest critics of the cinema. The morality code that regulated Hollywood film content from the 1930s to the 1960s was drafted by a Catholic priest, and first implemented by a Presbyterian Church elder" (Wright 2007: 3).
- 3 The film attracted a large number of pious and traditional Muslims who had not usually been seen in cinemas (Sasono 2008a; Yuniyanti 2008a). Just as had previously happened with the Muslim veil (Heryanto 1999) and *dangdut* (Weintraub 2006), the film's unprecedented popularity also lured top politicians to try to enhance their own credibility in the months leading up to the 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections. To watch the film, on March 28, 2008 President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono created the well-crafted spectacle of arriving at one of the busiest cinemas in the capital city, bringing with him

a large entourage of 107 high-ranking politicians, 53 foreign diplomats, artists, and journalists. The film-makers in their turn took advantage of this unusual reception and incorporated it into their further marketing activities.

- 4 Established at the height of the Cold War in 1966, the New Order government came to power after the mass killing of approximately one million people for their real or suspected membership of the Communist Party or its affiliate organizations, or for their perceived sympathy for the communist cause. Despite their claims of reforming the New Order legacy, successive governments continued the ban on the Communist Party and any propagation of communist tenets. Ironically, euphoric celebrations of Indonesia's diversity took place at a time when multi-party politics had increasingly shunned any extreme position or agenda. All major political parties have become very opportunistic, moving towards the middle ground and seeking possible coalition (for details, see Mietzner 2008).
- 5 For instance, large images of Abu Bakar Baasyir and Bali bomber Amrozi appeared on the front page of the Australian media more frequently than in their Indonesian counterparts. Their names are much more widely known in Australia than in the province of Central Java where they come from. This is comparable to Southeast Asian media coverage of Australian politician Pauline Hanson and her anti-Asian politics.
- 6 Javanese make up the single largest ethnic group (45 percent) of Indonesia's total population (approximately 240 million). The second largest ethnic group, Sundanese, is only one third of its size (15 percent). Java is not the largest island in this archipelagic country, but it is the most important one politically and economically. Although Java covers only 7 percent of the country's total land area, more than 60 percent of Indonesia's people reside on this island.
- 7 Many Javanese claim to profess Islam, but in blatant defiance of the first article of faith in Islam (there is no God but God) they worship and make offerings to supernatural forces and spirits of their ancestors (see also Quinn 2008). They are not necessarily committed to praying five times a day or refraining from the consumption of alcohol. These facts render the statistical claim of Indonesia being the world's largest Muslim country highly problematic, if not misleading.
- 8 The bill may have a longer history in its antecedents. It was already seriously discussed in parliament in 1997, but it was not formally drafted and submitted for ratification in parliament until February 14, 2006. Since then it has provoked an unabated nation-wide controversy.
- 9 Clad in Middle Eastern clothing, this militant group has a long and notorious record of periodically assaulting people and destroying property associated with activities that they consider morally offensive to Islamic values (prostitution, gambling, the drinking of alcohol, or the sex-focused entertainment industry). With a few exceptions, they have enjoyed impunity from the law, due in part to the nearly total dysfunction of law enforcement, in part to a presumably sustained protection from factions within the top political elite. *Playboy* provoked the most serious reaction from groups such as the FPI, while many local men's magazines with more vulgar content have been left alone, most likely because of the former's status as an icon of American decadence. For more discussion on this group, see Allen (2007) and Wilson (2008).
- 10 This is a result of a compromise in the late 1970s between the New Order state that attempted to ban polygamous practice and the mounting pressures from Islamic groups demanding more authority and autonomy for the Islamic court (see Butt 2008; Cammack, Young and Heaton 2008).
- 11 In late November 2008 a commissioner from the local Commission of Human Rights in West Sumatra happened to discover that four women were being jailed in the province's capital city of Padang because each of them had a polyandrous marriage. Although he disapproved of this penalty, the officer admitted there was legally nothing he could do to address the issue, because the Marriage Law of 1974 permits polygamy but not polyandry (see Febrianti 2008).

- 12 A recent survey by a group of well-respected institutions found a negative correlation between what audiences considered to be good television programs and the ratings levels periodically reported by the dominant AGB-Nielsen Media Research. According to the former, 45.8 percent of respondents considered entertainment programs in Indonesian television very poor; 36.3 percent regarded them as moderate; and only 15.6 percent approved of them. The dissatisfied viewers made their judgments on the following grounds: too much violence (63 percent), obscene or pornographic (46.2 percent), losing touch with reality (61.3 percent), unfriendly or inappropriate for children (69.3 percent), gender-biased (57.1 percent), not in favor of the public interest (57.8 percent), and lacking good models for good behavior (61.8 percent) (*Koran Tempo* 2008).
- 13 Manoj Punjabi, producer of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, reportedly acknowledges that converting the novel into the film involved a deliberate infusing of a significant dose of Hollywoodization and Bollywoodization (Yumiyanti 2008a).
- 14 Observers have attributed the success of the film to a significant extent to these Islamic tips and guidelines on managing everyday life, social interaction and behavior. This is an extension of the already successful book publishing industry with similar messages (see Dhume 2008, Khoiri 2008, Widodo 2008). This down-to-earth approach to Islamic life, especially pertaining to youth, and in a 'pop' style and genre, is akin to the recent popularity of television preachers such as Aa Gym, distinguishing them and *Ayat-ayat Cinta* from most other Islam-focused films in the preceding years.
- 15 In her previous and no less successful film *Arisan* (2003), director Nia Dinata tells the story of a series of sexually liberal yuppies in Jakarta. No one in this film is ultimately happy, except for a couple of male homosexuals. The film was also Indonesia's first commercial and full feature film in which two adult men are seen in close-up kissing for several seconds. Given the largely conservative character of Islamization in Indonesia during the past two decades, it is amazing that the works of Dinata could have passed the Board of Censors and public censure.

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## Part II

# Social processes of media production, circulation, and reception