

Negotiating Islam with cinema

A theoretical discussion on Indonesian Islamic films

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring certain negotiations that justify Muslim's cinematic texts and practices. It focuses on the questions about what is Islamic and un-Islamic about film, who and what decides certain films as Islamic, and what are the meanings of cinematic practices of Islam for Muslim society. Furthermore, this paper tries to investigate these questions from a theoretical basis using concepts of Islamic modernity, Islamic Ummah and Public, in order to shed some light on the idea of how a production of an Islamic film may trigger the creation of a political and religious identity.

KEYWORDS

Indonesian Islamic film, Islamic modernity, Islamic Ummah and Public.

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the last five years, we have witnessed Islam's increasing omnipresence in the realm of Indonesian cinema. At present, in Indonesia, Islamic films with a large variety of themes abound using many ways of mediations and practices. Films picturing Islamic symbols, rituals and values, whether in a propagative (*dakwah*) manner or not, are not only screened in theatres, but also broadcast on TV, available on disks, and may be downloaded from the Internet. As a result, new cinematic practices have emerged in the country. If in the early 1960s many good Indonesian Muslims avoided going to the movies because it was associated with improper *behaviour*, now a days, even devout Muslims living in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding house) may attend films screened in theatres and produce films of their own. However, at times, certain Muslim groups become aggressively opposed to certain films to such an extent that they ask the authorities to ban them from public viewing.

As Islam does not have film technology of its own (see Weintraub 2011:

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