

Constructed Islamic Identities in Veiled Woman Represented in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* Film (2008)

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Abstract

This study discusses the construction of Islamic identities in the figure of veiled woman in Ayat-Ayat Cinta film. The method in this research applies textual analysis method and cultural studies approach in analyzing the film scenes and dialogues based on the theories proposed by Castells on identity formation, Asma Barlas's feminist hermeneutics of al-Qur'an, gender, and patriarchy. This film shows that Islamic identities as represented by veiled woman is related to the values of man's power, patriarchal ideology, and social construction. The results of this research proves that the main character as in veiled women is tried side by side with the ideology of patriarchy in struggling for her freedom, justice, and equality with men, so that the veiled woman represents current Islamic values that are harmonious, dynamic, and modern (Pluralist Islam). This study is important to understand variants Islam through Islamic dress, religious practice, and the interpretation of al-Qur'an verse that exist in Indonesia as religious discourse in cultural studies.

Keywords: Islamic Film, Identity Construction, Veiled Women

Abstraks

Studi ini membahas konstruksi identitas Islam dalam sosok perempuan berjilbab pada film Ayat-Ayat Cinta. Metode dalam penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis tekstual dan pendekatan kajian budaya dalam menganalisis adegan film dan dialog berdasarkan konsep yang dikemukakan oleh Castells tentang pembentukan identitas, konsep hermeneutik feminis Asma Barlas tentang al-Qur'an, konsep gender, dan patriarki. Dalam film ini menunjukkan bahwa identitas Islam yang diwakili oleh wanita berjilbab terkait dengan nilai-nilai kekuatan laki-laki, ideologi patriarkal, dan konstruksi sosial. Hasil penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa tokoh utama perempuan berjilbab berdampingan dengan ideologi patriarki dalam memperjuangkan kebebasan, keadilan, dan kesetaraannya dengan laki-laki, sehingga perempuan berjilbab mewakili nilai-nilai Islam saat ini, yang harmonis, dinamis, dan modern (Pluralist Islam). Penelitian ini penting untuk memahami variasi Islam melalui busana Islami, praktik keagamaan, dan interpretasi ayat al-Qur'an yang ada di Indonesia sebagai wacana keagamaan dalam kajian budaya.

Kata Kunci : Film Islami, Konstruksi Identitas, Wanita Berjilbab

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A. Introduction

Movie is one of the media that is used to provide information, provoke, motivate, negotiate, and educate the people by teaching its moral values. As said Bordwell and Thompson (2008:2), "Films communicate information and ideas and they show us places and ways of life we might not otherwise know... Film offer us ways of seeing and feeling that we find deeply gratifying. They take us through experiences. The experiences are often driven by stories, with characters we come to care about".

In connection with the function of the film as a means of education as well as shown in *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, this film teaches Islamic values through clothes, recitation of the al-Qur'an, Islamic attitudes, ritual or practices, worship, Islamic language, and others. Those facts are supported by the research of CSRC UIN Syarif Hidayatullah (2011:43) "*Film-film islami adalah media yang digunakan untuk menyebarkan nilai-nilai Islam*" (Islamic films are the media that is used to spread the Islamic values). In this case, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* film communicates the ideas of human's life in Islamic way which is experienced and played by its characters. Besides, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* film is interesting to be analyzed seeing from its intrinsic and extrinsic elements such as the plot of the story, worldwide, and the background of the film. All aspects of the film are interrelated in shaping the message. In its message conveys either about a certain value or a form of persuasion, criticism, and other to the audience and it also carries certain ideologies.

The film itself is adapted from the famous novel by Habiburrahman El Shirazy and has been watched by a majority of Indonesian Muslim in theaters as much

as 3.8 million people recorded by Antara News (www.antaranews.com accessed on 21 September 2012). In addition, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film represents the peaceful face of Indonesian Islam through the image of veiled women. The image of the veiled woman named Aisha as the main character represents Islam in peace, harmony, tolerance, and modern through the Islamic practice or ritual, lifestyle, understanding of religion, and her attitude.

The theme in the *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film is synonymous with religious romance and its main issue is about polygamy in the household and daily life of Islamic way. In general, there are women's issues in Islam. The most issue concerns on the position and role of women in Islam which deals with the ideology of patriarchy, domination, and power. The issue also reveals a common bias about women. Women in Islam differentiate from good and bad according to patriarchal view. It is proven by some of the responses that emphasize on female main character and the issue in the film, such as Hakim (2010:103) in his research "*Conservative Islam Turn or Popular Islam? An Analysis of the Film Ayat-Ayat Cinta*", its film show a stereotypical picture of women who are passive, resigned, and dependent on men. In addition, Riana Afiardi's in Hakim, (2010:103) states that this film shows the practice of polygamy which is committed by conservative Muslims. Iswarini in Hakim (2010:103) adds that the domestication of women's role through the labeling and differentiation of good and bad character of women.

On the other hand, the emergence of *Ayat Ayat Cinta* film production is motivated by several things such as in Hakim statement that the most basic thing is that *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film cannot

be separated from the context of the government situation after the downfall of Soeharto's era or called Reform era which gives space to conservative Islam or fundamentalist Islam and Liberal Islam (2010:105). Moreover, according to Hariyadi, the phenomenon of Islamic film production on a large scale after the fall of Soeharto is a form of resistance using Islamic film. In this case Islamic film is used as a propaganda tool to counter the western values (Hariyadi (2013:53).

Hence, the presence of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is to dismiss the negative image of Islam. Islam has been considered as negative because it is identical with terror and not harmonious after the event of September 11th, 2001 attacks on Pentagon. Even the incident has occurred and *Ayat-ayat Cinta* film is published in few years later, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* film is also regarded as the result of one of Islam phenomena in the public space. As Hariyadi states that the phenomenon of Islam in Indonesia comes with the development of Islamic genre films in the mass media and in the Reform era. In the Reform era, the expression of freedom is increasingly widespread in several Islamic films both on television and theaters (Hariyadi (2013:53). The expression of freedom seeks to show Muslim identity which resides in everyday life through the characters that are displayed in the costume, narration, music, Islamic symbols, and others that supports it.

Both event and phenomena affect identity as a crucial thing, especially for Islam as a religion to be elevated, recognized, and studied using its aspects, views, and characteristics. Since Islam in Indonesia is separated into many streams, its identity is the crucial thing to differ and define. In this case, Rosida and Molalita (2016:41) state, "Identity

becomes an issue only when it is in crisis or conflict". In this case, the conflict between Islam and other religion often occurs in many regions in Indonesia.² It also can add a negative image to Islam and bring new discourse. So, all aspects of Islamic identity can be religious discourse. Religious discourse emerged as a new study in cultural analysis or studies.

Therefore, from the combination of identity, religion particularly Islamic values, women issue, and the complexity of all aspects are related to the construction of Islamic face represented by the image of a character named Aisha in film. Then the focus of this research is on the construction of Islamic identity in the figure of veiled women and the purpose of this study is to explain how the identity of Islam in Indonesia is constructed, so with that investigation can be seen the kinds of Islam which is built in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008) film. There are some steps in making a compiled research. The first step is to classify dominant Islamic sign and pattern in the veiled woman figure such as dress, veil, and other attributes and divide them into many topics as Islamic Values in Aisha's Attitude, Piety in Dressing, Islamic Ritual, Modern Woman, The Pious Women of Patriarchal Version, and Patriarchal Understanding in the Interpretation of al-Qur'an Verse. Those points are used to explain the form and the characteristic of Islamic identity through veiled woman. The concept of identity, patriarchy, and gender are applied to discuss some issues emerged in the relation of women.

²The conflicts between Muslim and Christian in Maluku, Poso, and Ambon, bombings in Bali, and the development of Islamic groups in Soeharto's era led to the development of religious discourse in Indonesia (Feally and White, 2012:2).

While, the concept of hermeneutic is used to show the interpretation of patriarchal understanding of the content of al-Qur'an verse, so that patriarchal interpretation on women's issues can show the face of Islam. It is also used to put argument in women's equality to describe women's position in Islam and to get the context of the film using women's voice and their experiences in family relationship. Eventually, this research uses textual analysis using images and dialogue in the movie scene.

1. Literature Review

The theory applied in analyzing *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film is taken from some theories that are proposed by some experts:

1. The identity concept of Manuel Castells. According to Castells (2010:6-12) identity is a form of power relation. Its concept is named as identity building. In the relation of identity with power, it is divided into three forms of identity and that identity is characterized by its purpose.
First, Legitimizing Identity; the identity is formed by dominant institutions in order to rationalize their goals. Second, Resistance Identity; the identity which is developed by those is dominated as a form of resistance or resistance against the dominating party. Third, Project Identity; when a group of people with a particular cause or background forms a new identity that redefines their position in society. The three categories of identity can be related each other. Resistant identity can be project identity and so on.
2. Gender is a social construction regarding the different roles between men and women in many factors and has been entrenched socially and culturally. According to Fakhri in Rosida and Rejeki (2017:131), "Gender is identical characteristics of women and men that are constructed socially and culturally so what it is to be a man or a woman is governed by cultural assumption that include men and women relationship especially their role, behavior, characteristic in society". Then, the role of women is in the domestic area as housewives, taking care of their children and husbands. Those rules are social construction based on the community's understanding of the biological functions of women who can bear children (have a uterus) and breastfeed. While, men's roles are in public domain as breadwinners. It has come up based on their strong physical and biological form. In this case, the differences in the role of women attached to their biological nature are based on a patriarchal point of view. Thus, it causes gender inequality and there is subordination between women and men. Men become superior to women and this inequality creates gender inequality.
3. The third concept is the concept of patriarchy. This concept is used to support the relation of women and men in gender roles. According to Josh Tosh in Kurniawati (2009:10), "Patriarchy is a variety of ways men expand their power to repress women, both psychically and at the social level". In line with that, Abbott (1992:19) says that "the ability of men to control the laws and institutions of society, combined with men's superior status, is known as patriarchy". Moreover, Wiyatmi in Rosida and Soraya (2017:13) state, "In patriarchal society, gender relation

is based on a law of father". So, males have dominance over women in deciding on good judgments, laws, rules, etc. Those are based on the status of men who are superior to women. Men become superior to women and it is considered natural by the convention.

4. The Hermeneutics theory of Asma Barlas is used to obtain a gender equitable interpretation. It is also used to place the position of woman in Islam and show the context of women's issue the film. Analyzing religious arguments based on a hermeneutic approach is conducted through three stages. First, Theological aspects include attributes that are attached to God, such as Infinite Justice, Wise, loving, and others. God's Self Disclosure is used as a basis for interpreting the texts of the al-Qur'an, Barlas (2002:23). The approach of God's Self Disclosure is used because it is believed that God always wants to give the best for his entire human. Second, methodological aspects include how to read holistically or in a unified way either using reading behind the text or in front of the text and give priority to the verses of *Muhkamat*. *Muhkamat* verses (verses that have clarity of meaning) are used to answer social reality. Holistic reading means finding the best meaning and using analytical reasoning in interpretation, according to the divine nature that puts down it. The reading of the al-Qur'an involves reading behind the text including reading what is not spoken by the al-Qur'an and reading in front of the text is including the way of contextualizing the al-Qur'an in accordance with the needs of the times. Third, ethical aspect involves

searching for the best meaning because the nature of the al-Qur'an is polysemy or open to more than one meaning. Fourth, the aspect of authority includes authority in interpreting the al-Qur'an that resides on every believer or Muslim, and both men and women are responsible for the interpretation of the al-Qur'an.³

B. Result and Discussion

1. Islamic Values in Aisha's Attitude

America is seen by the Arabian as a non-Muslim majority country. On the contrary with American, Arab is the central state of Islamic civilization, where the religion of Islam itself is revealed. America as West and Arab as East are described as two states of the central point of Christian and Islamic teachings, so that the two countries are the center for its adherents. Behind the positive view about the two religions, Islam is often viewed as negative stream in the media. However, since the events of World Trade Center and Pentagon, Islam has been regarded as a religion that commits crimes against humanity in the form of terror as shown in America, so that the image of Islam has been viewed as inharmonious, terror, and contrary to western values. The incident has created a bad face of Islam in the eyes of the world. Islam is considered a religion that brings terror to other religions.⁴

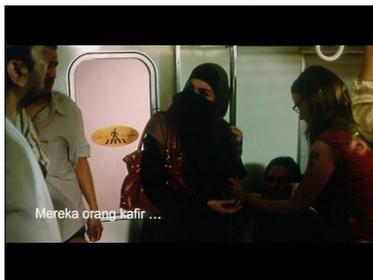
In this film, the negative stigma against

³This explanation is cited in seminar "Hermeneutika Pembacaan Teks al-Qur'an" in 2008 written by Wahid Institute. Taken from (www.wahidinstitute.org accessed on September 2013).

⁴Said's book, *Covering Islam*, (1997: xxi) says that Islam, especially in the media is always reported in a negative way, "that her or his faith, culture, and people have been determined as a source of threat, and that she has been deterministically associated with terrorism, violence and 'fundamentalism'."

Islam is reinterpreted through Aisha's figure. In one of the film scenes, Aisha gives her seat to American and her attitude is regarded by the Arabian man as an attitude that is incompatible with the attitude of a Muslim. In the Arabian man's view, Americans have accused Islam of being a terrorist, so it is inappropriate to give good treatment to them. In this case, Aisha rejects Arabian man's assumption by telling him that Islam teaches people to do a good thing to others, including non-Muslims. In Aisha's view as a Muslim, Muslims should demonstrate mutual respect, help, and honor to other Muslims and non-Muslims without any slightest difference.

Aisha's portrayal and her attitudes represent more open and tolerant Islam to racial, ethnic, religious, and national differences. Aisha shows her identity as a 'tolerant and harmonious' Muslim. In the film, Aisha seeks to present herself as a Muslim who has trait of her peaceful religion.⁵ Aisha's attitude toward Americans comes from the attitude of a true Muslim. This is shown in the dialogues and the picture below.



Picture 1.1

Aisha gives seats to non-Muslims

⁵Kamus Ensiklopedi Islam Indonesia states that Islam is a religion that brings salvation. The definition is also related to the Muslim word for people who follow the religion of Islam. The root of 'Muslim' comes from the word of Islam itself, which means survivors, peace, obedience, surrender, prosperity, etc. (Harum Nasution, 1992:701).

Aisha:

No Please take my seat...It's ok. I apologize for they behavior. They don't understand.

The Arabian man:

Hai muslimah! Kenapa anda memberikan tempat duduk kepada mereka, **mereka orang kafir (Hi muslimah! Why do you give them seats? They are Kafirs).**

Aisha:

Islam mengajarkan kita untuk berbuat baik pada orang lain (Islam teaches us to do a good thing to others).

The Arabian man:

Tapi tidak untuk kafir Amerika! Apa kamu tau, apa yang dilakukan orang kafir Amerika di Afganistan, Palestina, Irak? Mereka menuduh Islam sebagai teroris (But not to the infidels of American! Do you know what the infidels of US do in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq? They accuse Islam as a terrorist).

Aisha:

Saya tidak peduli dengan semua itu (I do not care about all of that).

The dialogues indicate that Aisha wants to elevate her religion, defend her faith, and erase negative stigma on Islam. She teaches and exemplifies the people not to take revenge, irritate, and envy even with non-Muslim. In this scene, Aisha shows that her action in treating others not only represents her religious identity which is adhered and internalized in daily life but also performs the true

self of human. Every human is required to do good deed and makes a good example. So that this Islamic value can be maintained by every Muslim.

2. Piety in Dressing

On the other hand, the image of Arab woman remains to be featured in the figure of Aisha through the clothes that she wears. Aisha's figure is featured in the film with a dressing Muslim, like Egyptian women. Aisha wears veil and Muslim dress, a kind of robe for women. The outfit such as '*burqa* or *niqab*' only shows the eyes and the palm of her hand. The image of Arab women is closely related to the religious identity of the concept of *aurat*. In dressing, *aurat* is part of the body that must be covered because it is considered can invite male lust. The religious practice through veil and clothing is a practice with respect to conservative ideology. Therefore, Aisha is shown in the film wearing a veil (*burqa*) that only shows her eyes and palms. The description of Aisha's attitude and appearance relates to the conservative idea of the concept of veil, touching hands, gazing, *ta'aruf*, and *Muhrim*. It is described as the pictures and dialogues below,



Picture 2.2
Religious Practice

Syeikh Ustman's wife:

Now open your veil, Aisha. Your husband to be has the right to see your real face.

Syeikh Ustman:

How is it Fahri?

Fahri:

Pronouncing *subhanallah* in a whispery voice then pausing and bowing his head.

In the text above, it appears that beauty is an identity that is inherent in women. It is based on the nature of women's femininity which is constructed by society. The identical woman is said to be beautiful because her body is tender and beautiful and the man is said to be handsome because of his manliness and physical strength. In reading the text above, the beauty of woman must be covered because it can make the man fascinated and seduced to her. Therefore in the above scenes, there is the practice of patriarchal ideology as it shows that Aisha consciously and intentionally participates in patriarchal practice. Aisha opens her face and her *burqa* in front of Fahri to show female beauty. According to patriarchy, face is something that appeals to man, so woman constructs herself as interesting object that can be seen by man. This is shown when Fahri looks at Aisha and says the word "*subhanallah*" (Glory to God) while bowing his head, and not to say "*Masya Allah* or *Astagfirullah*". Fahri's behavior identifies that Fahri is tempted and attracted by Aisha's beauty. Fahri's words also show that he does not deny Aisha's beauty which is a mirror of the beauty that is created by God.

In the above dialogue shows a conservative view on the eye or male gaze which is based on the word staring and looking. Staring is to look with a deep gaze and a long distance time, while looking at is just a moment or to look spontaneously for a while, so staring at women with a very deep gaze can cause temptation for men because

staring at women will arouse sexual desire. As in the film, it is shown that Fahri always avoids a direct gaze with Asiha and lowered his face down. Fahri always says “*Astagfirullah*” when staring at female for long. In this case, it means that female body is a body which is attached to beauty and attractive to men. Therefore, in the patriarchal view, the female body must be covered with a veil so it will not tempt the men. The views that can arouse sexual desire are considered immoral (prohibited deeds).

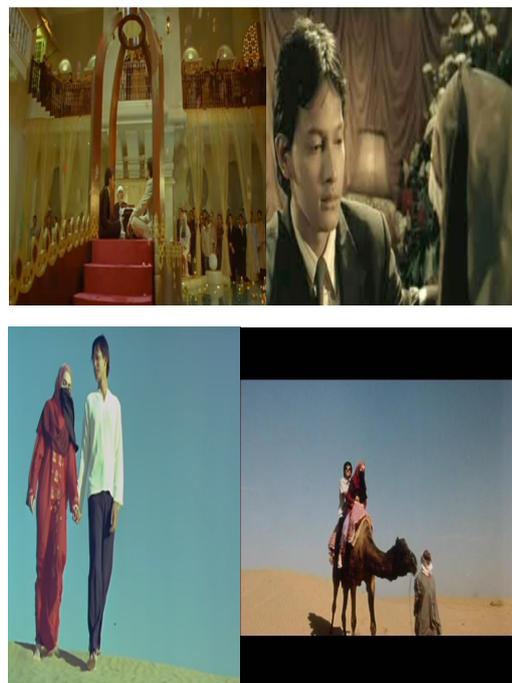
3. Islamic Ritual

At the same time, other conservative understanding is also shown in the film through the concept of touching hands, *ta'aruf*, and *Muhrim*. The picture below shows that Islam is described as a law or guidance between women and men before the marriage bond. Its practice refers to sharia law that women and men should not make any physical contact or sexual intercourse until there is a marriage bond. This is shown in marital procedure. In the film explains the difference between the marriage and courtship relationship. The following picture shows that women may be united or close to men when they have got married. The image marks the division of spatial relationships between women and men. The space of women and men in Islam is explained through marital bond. So that the male can be called as *muhrim* after the marriage, while before the marriage is *nonmuhrim*.

In the concept of *muhrim*, a man should not touch woman including touching hands. Touching hand with *nonmuhrim* is thought to lead to sexual desire. It's based on conservative view on the concept of *aurat* that hands can be categorized as *aurat*. Aisha practices greetings with *nonmuhrim* without

shaking her hands or touching hands is respect to its ideology.

Furthermore, man is allowed and deemed to have the right to see a potential companion in the process of *taaruf*, so that appearance indicates that a woman's body is occupied or positioned by man, and woman have no right to show her identity through her face. The scene is shown when Asiha is opened her veil by her guardian in front of Fahri, and when Aisha and Fahri flirt on the wedding night. It shows that the female body is based on the conservative viewpoint of the concept of *aurat*. Female's face and her body are categorized as *aurat*, so that it is cannot necessarily to be displayed in public, particularly in front of *nonmuhrim*. Below are the pictures of those rituals.



Picture 3.3

Aisha's Marriage

Basically, the concept of touching hands, *ta'aruf*, and *Muhrim* are related to the concept of *aurat*. Those actions are based on religious beliefs and bring out some values and purposes as to

control lust between men and women. A wedding ritual performed by Aisha in the process of *taaruf* is a description of the value that is relied in conservative Islam regarding on the relationship of men and women in the context of marriage. This habit is already existed in conservative and inherited down to their community and descendants. So with that ritual reflects Aisha's identity which belongs to conservative view.

4. Modern Woman

In the scene shows that Aisha uses make-up in her eyes called eye-liner or black eye-liners, *Heena* on her hand, a patterned and colored veil, and bright and fashionable robe. Aisha always drives a car and lives in a luxurious flat. From those descriptions, Aisha is featured as a modern woman, open to western thought and culture such as consumerism. Aisha's description indicates her religious identity as a religion that can open to women for any expressions as it has been described in her body. *Henna* and Eyeliner⁶ that are worn by Aisha can have the meaning of showing women's self-beauty that is attached to the feminine nature. Eyeliner is categorized as decorations that can cause women's beauty to be seen in public as some scholars or conservatives say this. In this case, Aisha does not embrace that idea, so Aisha's attitude indicates that Aisha has decided on her choice of things that she likes in. In the picture of Aisha's figure, it indicates that Islam is open to modern lifestyle.

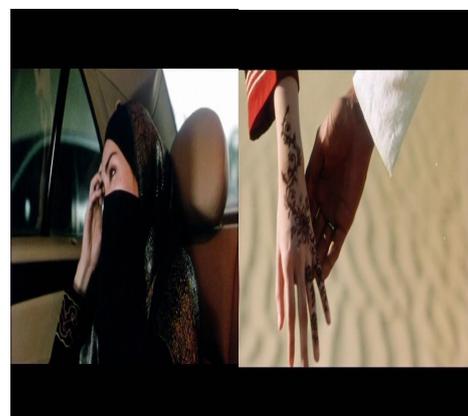
⁶Mehndi design or *Henna* is a colorful decoration obtained from the foliage of binomial *Lawsonia inermis* and has been used for a long time as well as eyeliner.



Picture 4.4

Aisha wears eyeliner

Moreover, the film shows the depiction of multicultural Muslim women because the identity of Aisha is actually a German citizen but she lives and studies in Arab. In this case, Islam is represented by Aisha as a mirror of present-day Islam that represents a mixture of modern and conservative Islam. This *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film features a female Muslim figure between modern and conservative Islamic projections through depictions in Aisha's figure. In the film, modern Islamic images are represented by Aisha's lifestyle in consuming expensive bags, eyeliner, *henna*, luxury vehicles and flats. Those properties indicate Aisha as woman who comes from upper class and lives in modernity and prosperous life. While conservative Islamic images are shown by her understanding on religious practices, as well as the clothing and coverings which are worn by her such as *burqa* and a robe for women. Those depictions can be shown in pictures below,





Picture 4.5

Aisha's Appearance

Modernity is a life that demonstrates material stability and sometimes shows full of worldly desires for any consumption. In this case, Aisha consumes the existing commodities based on the need to live and support her business in the city through her need for clothing, shelter, and food. At the same time, she keeps her spiritual life through religious rituals or religious practices which she undergoes in daily life. Her behavior shows the balance of worldly life and the hereafter.

5. The Pious Women of Patriarchal Version

Aisha is featured in the film as a female figure and a pious wife according to the image of Muslim women in Islam. Women who work in the public domain as well as serve as wives in the household are considered as the ideal women that have been portrayed in the Islamic way and it is based on the patriarchal view.

In one of the movie scenes, since Aisha gives Fahri a living, it has been regarded by a patriarchal culture that act is incompatible with the concept of leadership in the family. Such understanding can be explained through the picture of Fahri's figure. As a male as well as a head of the family, Fahri must give material livelihood to Aisha, even though they live well. In Fahri's view, he is the head of the family, so he

has the obligation of giving material to Aisha. It means husband has a different role with wife. In this case, the name of family companion is given to wife and the head of the family is given to man. The duty and place of companion or wife are staying at home, caring the children, serving and cleaning the house, so man who dwells at home and does nothing is not called the head of the family. Therefore, earning a living is a men's work space, so men are said to have a role as a breadwinner for the family. This is happened because it is based on the community's construction of gender roles. Gender roles show the different roles of men and women based on social construction. In this case, the understanding of household leadership is differentiated from the roles, functions, and the obligations of breadwinners in the domestic and public areas as in the house and offices or workplaces.

The patriarchal leadership in this film is criticized by Aisha. In the film, Aisha's figure places her position to be equal with Fahri in the public domain. Aisha's figure is positioned as a woman who works in the public area as well as a wife who must obey her husband. Aisha tells Fahri that her responsibility is not only to provide a living and give each other the same responsibility. Although Aisha recognizes Fahri as a priest in the family, it does not mean that they cannot share the same burden of seeking and providing for a living. Aisha has a sincere nature in giving her wealth. This act can be shown in dialogues below.

Fahri:

Aisha, aku kefikiran untuk kerja sampingan (*I think for a side job*).

Aisha:

Untuk apa? Uang kita kan sudah cukup. Kamu konsentrasi sama S2

kamu saja (*What's for? Our money is enough. You just concentrate on your Master degree*).

Fahri:

Tapi aku kepala keluarga sekarang. Aku gak bisa diam begitu saja (*But I am a head of the family now. I cannot just sit here*).

Aisha:

Fahri tanggung jawab kamu bukan hanya materi. Kita sudah menikah, gak ada batasan materi. Uang aku, uang kamu juga sayang...ya tapi kalau kamu keberatan aku gak masalah tinggal di flat murah, nggak pake mobil juga gak masalah. Kamu kan imam aku, aku ikut kamu (*Fahri, your responsibility is not just about the material. We have married, there is no material limitation. My money is yours... but if you mind, I'm not a problem staying in a cheap flat and not using a car. You're my priest, I'm coming with you*).

In this case, Aisha is presented as an independent, successful, and reformist woman who is brave to equalize her role in the public domain, as well as a wife who must follow her husband. Although Aisha is an independent and successful figure, she also seeks to embrace a patriarchal culture by accepting the practices of polygamy and respecting to her priest. This is shown in the scene when Aisha advises Fahri to marry Maria and when Aisha is jealous of seeing them, so she leaves Fahri and at last, Aisha is persuaded by Fahri to return home.

Fahri:

Aisha, poligami itu tidak muda.

Kamu itu jodohku (*Aisha, polygamy is not easy. You're my soul mate*).

Aisha:

Jodoh itu rahasia Allah Fahri, ada diri muslimah dalam Maria, dia butuh kamu, dan bayi dalam kandunganku butuh ayahnya. Nikahi Maria! (*Fahri, mate is the secret of Allah, there is a Muslim-self in Maria. She needs you and the baby in my wombs needs her father. Marry Maria!*)

In the text above alludes to the issue of polygamy. Polygamy is a practice concerning the power of men, so men can do that practice to women as they like. The above explanation confirms that Aisha positions herself in the practice of polygamy. In the scene shows that Aisha could not do anything except accept for polygamy. In this case, men power relations as husbands show their dominance over women in deciding something particularly the will of women. Women are in a position under the husband's control.

The description of polygamy in the text above shows the face of conservative Islam. Conservative Islam is more accepting of patriarchal practices than modernist Islam. Modernist Islam is very critical on patriarchal practices in contrast to conservative Islam. In addition, the practice of polygamy in Indonesia is still continuously implemented by conservatives, so polygamy in Indonesia tends to be constructed by society as part of Islam.⁷

⁷The issue of polygamy in Indonesia has been discussed using ethnographic researchs, one of them in a book written by Nina Nurmila, *Islam Women and Everyday life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia*. Similarly, in the post-

So Islam really honour women?

6. Patriarchal Understanding in al-Qur'an Verse

In one of the scene shows some conversations between American reporter and Fahri after the conflict occurred between Arabian man and Aisha on the train. A female reporter admits Fahri's act to speak up for Aisha. She also asks the explanation of women position in Islam. In their discussion, Fahri honors and respects women who have higher position as mother. Furthermore, their speech alludes women issue such as violence in domestic area. The violence against women is the crucial thing because it has occurred for a long time and has become unresolved problem. Women have always been victims of violence that is often committed by men, especially husbands in the household, either in the form of beatings or harsh words. Such violence leads to discrimination on women. The root of discrimination in the form of beating can be traced from one of the patriarchal understandings of the content of al-Qur'an verses.⁸ The following dialogues show patriarchal understanding on the meaning of al-Qur'an Verse,

Alicia:

Suharto era and Megawati's government, polygamy became a very controversial issue, because in that era the government seemed to legalize the practice of polygamy (Nurmila, 2009: 84-149)

⁸In this case, Qu'ran's interpretation is heavily influenced by the bias of the patriarchal view and its interpretation affects gender inequality (Ismail, 2003). In addition, Nurmila states that the understanding of al-Qur'an content in Indonesia is divided into three types; Textualist, Semi-Textualist, and Contextualist. See Nurmila in *Islam Women and Everyday life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia* (Nurmila, 2009:42-43).

Fahri:

Islam teaches us that heaven lies on the mother's feet. Which is the basic principal, which is eith them in the Hadist...It's also expalin that Islam really honours women.

Alicia:

What about the domestic violence? Doesn't the al-Qur'an stage that a husband is allowed to hit his wife?

Fahri:

Many Muslim's men who are coward to use Suroh an-Nisa...In fact that the Suroh explain 3 steps on how to deal with his wife. Which mean that a wife who doesn't respect the marriage comitment. First is to give an advice. The second is to warn. The third...then you can hit her, but not on the face and without the intentions of hurting them. It's all in here, Alicia.

Fahri's statement above is contained in the content of al-Qur'an verse (Q.S. An-Nisa [4] : 34)

وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ
فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاصْرَبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْتِكُمْ فَلَا
تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا



The meaning of the verse in Indonesia:

Perempuan-perempuan yang kamu khawatirkan akan nusyuz,⁹ hendaklah

⁹Nusyuz yaitu meninggalkan kewajiban selaku istri, seperti meninggalkan rumah tanpa izin suaminya (Nusyuz is leaving the obligation as a wife, such as leaving the house without permission of her husband) (Hatta in *Tafsir Qur'an Per Kata; Dilengkapi dengan Asbabun*

*kamu beri nasihat kepada mereka, tinggalkanlah mereka di tempat tidur (pisah ranjang), dan (kalau perlu) pukullah mereka. Tetapi jika mereka menaatimu, maka janganlah kamu mencari-cari alasan untuk menyusahkannya. Sungguh, Allah Mahatinggi, Mahabesar (Q.S. An-Nisa [4] : 34).*¹⁰

Fahri's interpretation as a man in treating of *nusyuz* woman is based on three understandings that refer to verse of the al-Qur'an as in Q.S. An-Nisa [4] : 34. Fahri's statement on the content of the verse is that a man may punish his wife who has been *nushuz* with three ways: First, to be advised. Second, be warned. Third, may hit her but should not on the wife's face with the intention not to hurt her.

Although Fahri agrees that women are highly respected in Islam and argues that the verse is often used by Muslim men to condemn women. In Fahri's explanation still shows patriarchal ideology. This is shown in his statement about the beating. The beating is allowed for men to women, except on women's face with the intention not to hurt her. This shows that Fahri still holds a patriarchal tradition of understanding religion postulate.

The hermeneutic reading uses the behind the text method in the context of this film is found in the word *daraba* and *nusyuz*. The writer does not agree with Fahri's understanding and interpretation. The writer critical argument relies on the word 'daraba'. Fahri's opinion is that Nujul dan Terjemah, 2009:83)

10 Indonesian translation is used in this research because it can show the context of Indonesia in the movie and alludes the issue between husband and wife in domestic life.

husband can beat a wife on the limb except face is tantamount to practicing crime. Although the reason for beating is based on the intention not to hurt women, violence in the form of beating is an eye-catching practice and its violence can be categorized as an indicator of gender inequality. In this case, women are in a subordinate position compared to men and as objects that must be punished for having done a *nusyuz*.

The meaning of *Nusyuz* in Fahri's view is the woman who has broken the commitment of marriage. The commitment of marriage in Islam is not mentioned with any details in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* film. Fahri only shows the meaning of *nusyuz* which is reflected by Aisha and it is based on his view. It is shown when Aisha goes to leave Fahri without Fahri's permission, Fahri gives a warning as an advice for her to be willing to accept polygamy. The word *Nusyuz* itself is defined by the patriarchal Indonesian society as the wife's attitude against the husband, but it often refers to the understanding that women always disobey their husbands (the wife exalts herself in front of her husband and she behaves to be arrogant). Quoting Barlas's opinion, the concept of *nusyuz* does not exist in the teachings of the al-Qur'an. Barlas explains that the al-Qur'an does not tell women to obey husbands but to keep family lovingly in harmony based on the concept of love in the home, Barlas (2003:325).

Therefore, in analyzing the concept of *nusyuz*, the researcher refers to God's Self Disclosure, that is fair and does not do '*dhulm*' or any oppression to anyone. God is unlikely to be unfair in treating his creatures, because God Himself clearly states in His name that He is the Infinite Justice. The concept of God shows that God as the Infinite Justice

wants to teach His justice through the meaning of the verse. It means men and women must behave to be fair or equitable as God teaches justice through His words in the al-Qur'an. In this case, it appears that Fahri's interpretation as a man still shows patriarchal ideology. His interpretation is inconsistent with the spirit of God's teachings.

The hermeneutic reading is reinforced by the argument in the movie of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* which is reflected in the figure of Aisha. Aisha warns Fahri to be fair to her and Maria. Aisha's critical attitude is used as an illustration of Q.S. An-Nisa [4] : 34. Why only woman who is identified as having *nushuz* (violating the marriage commitments)? In this case, Fahri is also considered to have violated his marriage commitments because Fahri has unconsciously hurts Aisha with his unfair attitude in the form of polygamy practice. As shown in the film, when Fahri has married Maria and lived together in Aisha's flat. Then, the conflict comes to Aisha. Aisha feels jealous and has less attention from Fahri. The attention that should be devoted to her must be shared with Maria. In addition, Aisha is in pregnant condition and she is jealous of seeing other women who go for shopping to get their baby clothes and who are accompanied by their husband in a mall, meanwhile Aisha is going for shopping by herself. Every time she needs Fahri, He is making love or being together with Maria. Aisha realizes that she could not share her love with another woman until she feels there is an injustice in the practice of polygamy, so Aisha dares to go out of the house leaving Fahri and Maria to make her calm, although eventually Aisha returns home and follows Fahri's advice. That condition shows in the pictures below.



Picture 6.6

Aisha in polygamy practice

Regardless of that condition, this film criticizes the patriarchal practice by displaying the figure of Maria who is shown at the end of the story. In the last story, Maria must die, although Aisha has accepted Maria's existence and accepted the practice of polygamy. The death of Maria is a reality that can be acceptable to women. Polygamous woman is a victim of patriarchal practice. Therefore, the death of Maria is the solution to explain that monogamy is more acceptable to women.

In the context of the film above, it is clear that polygamy practice is a difficult practice, so the intent of the verse is a justice attitude which is intended for men and women. More precisely, the writer uses the verse as a doctrine of the concept of association of wives and husbands in the household in a good way such as to be fair, honest, harmonious, loving, and affectionate, rather than to interpret the concept of *nushyuz* as being arrogant. How to treat or interact with two people in a family context is directed not only to women but also to men as husbands, so that men and women should have the

same right and fairness in order to make tranquility in family.

D. Conclusion

Ayat-Ayat Cinta films shows that the film is neutral against patriarchal practices. In addition, Aisha's Islamic identity can be categorized into the project identity because her Islamic identity is an identity associated with a mixture of modern and conservative ideas. It can be seen from the way of wearing Islamic dress, decoration in Aisha's hand, understanding the al-Qur'an, ritual and religious practice. In this case, the practice of polygamy is a practice that is permitted by conservative schools in Indonesia based on Islamic jurisprudence and *shari'a* law, and prioritizing the reading of religion's literalism. In addition, modern elements are also found in the figure of Aisha, so the figure of Aisha is a reflection of the group who is formed a new identity called as Pluralist Islam with dynamic and harmonious face in accepting the existing differences. Moreover, the representation of Islam that is displayed by Aisha can show the image of the plurality of religions. Here is the result based on the discussion session.



The schema above shows that the construction of Islamic identity which is portrayed in veiled woman is shaped by relations of power, patriarchy, and social construction. It is shown that Aisha tries side by side with the ideology of patriarchy in struggling for her freedom, justice, and equality with men. Aisha as a veiled woman shows good and pious woman depictions based on the construction of those relations.

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