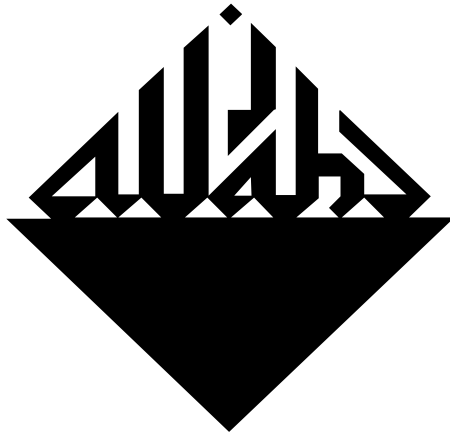


# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 27, Number 1, 2020



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WHEN ISLAMISM AND POP CULTURE MEET:  
A POLITICAL FRAMING OF THE MOVIE  
*212: THE POWER OF LOVE*

Wahyudi Akmaliah

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ISLAMIC IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY DISCOURSE:  
INDONESIA'S RESPONSES TO THE US WAR  
IN AFGHANISTAN (2001-2002)

Agus Salim

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A HADHRAMI SCHOLAR AND ISLAMIC COURT IN ACEH:  
THE POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF  
'ABD AL-RAḤMĀN AL-ZĀHIR (1864-1878)

Mehmet Özey

# **STUDIA ISLAMIKA**



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# Table of Contents

## Articles

- 1      *Wahyudi Akmaliah*  
When Islamism and Pop Culture Meet:  
A Political Framing of the Movie  
*212: The Power of Love*
- 35     *Agus Salim*  
Islamic Identity and Foreign Policy Discourse:  
Indonesia's Responses to the US War  
in Afghanistan (2001-2002)
- 73     *Mehmet Özay*  
A Hadhrami Scholar and Islamic Court in Aceh:  
The Political Biography of  
'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Zāhir (1864-1878)
- 103   *Zainal Arifin Madzkur*  
Al-Rasm al-'Uthmānī  
fī al-Muṣḥaf al-mi'yārī al-Indūnīsī  
'inda al-Dānī wa Abī Dāwud
- 145   *Muhammad Amin Nurdin, Herdi Sahrasad, & Smith Alhadar*  
Al-Tawatturāt bayn al-Sunnah wa al-Shī'ah  
fī Maluku al-Shamāliyah: Durūs min al-Māḍī

## **Book Review**

- 177 *Dadi Darmadi*  
Benang Merah dan Jalan Berbeda:  
Pendidikan Agama Islam di Indonesia dan Malaysia

## **Document**

- 195 *Endi Aulia Garadian*  
In the Foot Step of Consolidating *Ummah*:  
Highlights from the 7<sup>th</sup> Indonesian Muslim Congress

*Wahyudi Akmaliah*

When Islamism and Pop Culture Meet:  
A Political Framing of the Movie  
*212: The Power of Love*

**Abstract:** *This article examines the film 212: The Power of Love, which has been perceived as apolitical in political circumstances, and which was explicitly endorsed by new religious authorities. By critiquing the notion of Post-Islamism employed by scholars, this paper argues for the concept of Pop-Islamism, which emphasizes the contribution of political agents outside of political parties. I consider the following three questions: What is the primary reason behind creating a film in the context of the 212 movements? How does it deal with the event? What kind of Islam has been represented? This article argues that the medium of film is used to legitimize accusations of blasphemy made against Ahok through a singular interpretation of events, which represent Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion. Subsequently, the film obscures select facts and issues to conceal the connection between the 212 movement and electoral politics in Jakarta. It does so by framing those issues apolitically in the context of increased Islamization in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** Post Islamism, Pop-Islamism, The 212 Movement, Ahok, Islamisation.



**Abstrak:** Artikel ini membahas film 212: the Power of Love yang dianggap sebagai bukan bagian dari kondisi politik, khususnya dengan menggambarkan otoritas keagamaan baru dalam budaya pop Islam. Dengan mengkritisi ide Post-islamism yang digunakan oleh beberapa sarjana, artikel ini menegaskan konsep mengenai Pop-Islamism, khususnya dengan memperluas terma agensi yang keluar dari lingkaran partai politik. Ada tiga pertanyaan yang diajukan: Apa sebenarnya alasan untuk membuat film ini dalam konteks Gerakan 212? Bagaimana film ini memposisikan gerakan tersebut? Islam semacam apa yang direpresentasikan? Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa film itu merupakan dalih untuk melegitimasi intervensi terhadap Ahok atas tuduhan penodaan agama dengan satu penafsiran dengan menawarkan Islam sebagai agama yang dan damai dalam adegan-adegan film. Akibatnya, film itu telah menyeleksi pelbagai isu yang menjadi faktor utama untuk menyembunyikan pertautan antara Gerakan 212 dengan politik elektoral di Jakarta melalui kacamata non-politis di tengah gelombang Islamisasi.

**Kata kunci:** Post Islamisme, Pop-Islamisme, Gerakan 212, Ahok, Islamisasi.

**ملخص:** تناول هذا المقال فيلم 212: *the Power of Love*، الذي لا يعتبر جزءًا من الظروف السياسية، وخاصة عن طريق وصف السلطات الدينية الجديدة في الثقافة الشعبية الإسلامية. ومن خلال انتقاد فكرة ما بعد الإسلاموية التي يستخدمها بعض العلماء، يؤكد المقال مفهوم الإسلاموية الشعبية، وتحديدًا من خلال توسيع مصطلح الوكالة خارج دائرة الأحزاب السياسية. وهناك ثلاثة أسئلة مطروحة: أولاً، ما الأسباب الحقيقية لصناعة هذا الفيلم في سياق حركة 212؟ وثانياً، كيف يضع الفيلم هذه الحركة؟ وثالثاً، أي نوع من الإسلام تم تمثيله؟ يرى المقال أن هذا الفيلم تم استخدامه كوسيلة لإضفاء الشرعية على التدخل ضد Ahok بتهمة الإساءة للدين الإسلامي بتفسير واحد، وذلك من خلال تقديم الإسلام كدين سلمي في مشاهد الفيلم. ونتيجة لذلك، اختار قضايا مختلفة تعدّ عوامل رئيسة بهدف إخفاء العلاقة بين حركة 212 والسياسة الانتخابية بجاكرتا عبر وجهات نظر غير سياسية في خضم موجة الأسلمة في إندونيسيا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** ما بعد الإسلاموية، الإسلاموية الشعبية، حركة 212، Ahok، الأسلمة.

The statement “The film *212: The Power of Love* (POL) is not related to politics” was said not only by Justin Arimbi, the film’s director, but also those who work in the sector, such as Oki Setiana Dwi (the Indonesian Muslimah celebrity and Islamic pop preacher, who was the executive director), and Asma Nadia (the Islamic novelist, who was the associate producer). Instead of focusing primarily on the Islamic mobilization associated with the 212 movement, also known as *Aksi Bela Islam* (ABI/Islamic defence Action) and which called for the Indonesian government to imprison Ahok, the Governor of Jakarta, on blasphemy accusations, it depicts the strained family relationship between a father and his son. The ABI then becomes the backdrop for the healing of their relationship. The apolitical explanation of the film was announced publicly to allay any stereotyped perceptions it may bring for having a connection with the ABI, which coincided with the Jakarta election (*Insyah Allah tidak Ada Muatan Politik di Film 212 2018*; Pramana 2018).

Due to the film’s controversial subject matter, two communities in Indonesian cities have prevented it from being run in commercial cinemas, primarily the XXI and CGV Cinemas. For Avis Metriko Sumilat, the coordinator of Makatana Minahasa, this ban is related to the content of the trailer, which depicted the ABI in 2016. It undoubtedly would have negatively influenced Manado city, North Sulawesi, a city which one survey ranked as having the highest level of tolerance in Indonesia. Avis Metriko Sumilat noted that the film was marketed suitably, however the context of 212 may disturb society’s harmony. With the union of Adat organizations in Manado, he came to the offices of the commercial cinemas and asked them to cancel screenings of the film. The same objection was delivered by the Youth Dayak Forum (*Forum Pemuda Dayak*), North Kalimantan, especially in Palangkaraya city, who sent a letter to the XXI cinema in XXI Palangkaraya Mall. The letter objected to the screening of the movie, and argued that it would trigger conflict and tensions among religious people. Moreover, political pressure in North Kalimantan was increasing in the midst of the local election. As Kurniawan (2018) argues, the film would incite class tensions in society if it was allowed to screen.

The accusations of blasphemy levelled at Ahok attracted much public attention in Indonesia. The incident began in Kepulauan Seribu, with Ahok speaking for the fish industry who was empowered by the Jakarta

government in 2016. The statement was uploaded on YouTube, with a total length of one hour and 46 minutes. Edits and the cutting of 33 seconds led to misinterpretation around his statements relating to the surah of *Al-Mā'idah* in the Quran. Ahok's statement "please do not lie by the letter of *Al-Mā'idah*" were edited by Buni Yani to become "please do not be lied to by the letter of *Al-Mā'idah*". The first words mean that the people of Kepulauan Seribu have to be careful of people who use the letter of *Al-Mā'idah* to lie them. The second meaning is they have been lied to by the letter of *Al-Mā'idah*, with the implication that Ahok had desecrated the holy Quran. The edited video became viral through social media, dividing Indonesians into two groups: those who agree with the accusation of blasphemy and those who disagree with it. These political tensions were exploited by religious conservative groups as well as predatory politicians in order to undermine Ahok's authority as the governor and his popularity as the most popular incumbent for the Jakarta election. A series of Islamist protests were subsequently mobilized, also known as the 212 and 411 movements.

Many scholars have discussed these mobilizations from different perspectives. Both Burhani (2018) and Arifianto (2017) address the emergence of new religious authorities during Mass Muslim organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, that could not adequately represent the *Ummah* in relation to this issue. In one interview, Mietzner (2016) argues that anti-Tionghoa propaganda was massively exploited, primarily by the 'nine dragon' group, who played on the fear and marginalization that Indonesia experienced during the economic downturn. Ahok's identity as both Chinese and Christian was used in images and propaganda. Employing political oligarchy theory, Hadiz (2018) argued that the rise of Islamic populism in politics is related to the growing dissatisfaction with the political establishment. The dissatisfaction itself was caused by various factors, including economic issues, dysfunctional formal political channels, and the historical backgrounds of Indonesian Muslim organizations that were been marginalized during the Suharto regime. Mietzner and Muhtadi (2018), argue that these events may have been structurally precipitated by the exclusion of conservative Islamic groups during the Jokowi presidency; in contrast, during the Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono periods their political voices were embraced. The demonstrations were used to express their anger and disappointment.

In comparison, studies that examine POL as an Islamic pop culture product that legitimizes and strengthens the ABI movement are rare. Akmaliah and Nadzir (2018) examined the film by exploring the history of Islamic pop culture during and after the Suharto regime. However, they do not critique POL as part of a chain of events that strengthened the Islamic political movement, because it represented the demonstrations as a cultural experience, not separate from their daily life experiences, especially between their fantasies, imaginaries as well as political interests (Ida 2006). The content and narrative of film can persuade audiences, stir various moods and incite a motivation to act (Lyden 2003, 44). Nevertheless, audiences have relative autonomy in how they interpret the film, in accordance with their backgrounds and experiences. This article critiques POL to understand not only its content and its methods of representation, which consists of symbols, images, and words, but also its political backdrop, particularly the representations of those who endorsed the film, such as the producers and audiences who supported the ABI movement.

This article interrogates POL, a film that has been perceived as an apolitical drama-documentary in political circumstances, in which new religious authorities of Islamic pop culture have emerged. It also examines the idea of Post-Islamism used by Heryanto (2014), who explored the notion of Islamic pop culture as the embodiment of piety. Although I draw upon Muller's (2013) idea of Pop-Islamism, I adopt a different perspective by emphasising the agency of 'new' religious authorities. Muller examines the Islamism that is practised by the wing party of the PAS, which is used as a way of attracting the support of voters, as well changing their image as a conservative Islamic party. In contrast, I examine POL as a pop culture product that is endorsed by the newest generation of religious authorities in the post-Suharto regime, amid the failure of Islamic parties to win the general election for many years, the growth of Indonesian Muslim population and their increased use of digital platforms, a new and increasingly popular form of communication.

To guide this analysis, I propose three questions: What is the primary intention of the film's director using the ABI movement as a backdrop? How does the film depict the event? What kind of Islam has been represented? This article argues the film is used as a pretext to legitimize accusations of blasphemy against Ahok through a singular

interpretation, as well as strengthen their actions amid resistance from many of Ahok's followers as well the Indonesian public, who perceived it to be an intervention into political discourse. Furthermore, the film portrayed the mobilization as peaceful and tolerant by focusing on the relationship between a father and his son, as well as the friendship between a Chinese-Indonesian and a religious leader. In other words, the film is a conscious political act; the drama is represented as apolitical to conceal Islamist motives, given that the struggles of "syari'a-ization by stealth" are failing due to the co-option of Islamic political forces "into the system of patronage-based democracy" (See Aspinall 2010, 31–32). The representations of the film dull the appearance of its Islamic agenda and bypass the state's regulations around religious propaganda that are produced by the movie.

This article also examines social media to contextualize the issue within the 'big picture' of political Islam in Indonesia. In order to structure the discussion, this article is divided into three sections. Firstly, it explains the theoretical differences between Islamization and commercialization. By exploring the current debate relating to Islamic pop culture, I reinforce my argument made in previously published work (See Akmaliah 2014). Secondly, the article explores how Pop-Islamism is represented in film. I discuss the adaptation of the Islamic novel created by the Forum Lingkar Pena and also trace the history of Islamic film in Indonesia to better understand POL. Thirdly, I discuss the political dimensions of a film that positions itself as apolitical. I not only analyze the content of the movie, but I also explain the public social media response to understand the political Islamic agenda as it relates to the Indonesian election.

### **Between Islamization and Commercialization**

The rise of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia followed the Suharto regime, which created a power vacuum. As a result, previously inhibited religious forms of expression were able to be freely voiced. Capitalist interests attempted to co-opt the emergence of greater religious expression and the growth of Islamization in the public sphere. This could be seen in the significant contribution made by the capitalist industries, such as private television channels, which screened the Islamic TV Series (*Sinetron Islami*), privately owned print media and radio, and India's decline as the primary producer of films in Indonesian cinema.

New religious authorities also tried to influence Indonesian Muslims through Islamic magazines, such as *Annida*, *Ummi*, *Noor*, *Hidayatullah*, and *Sabili*. For many years, these magazines strongly influenced Islamic discourse before the rise of digital platforms, which forced them to stop publishing.

Many scholars argue that Muslim life and Islam are increasingly commercialized and commodified. In this sense, Islam is perceived as an object of marketing and consumerist culture. Amrih Widodo's (2008) study of Islamic print media questions the rise of popular Islamic literature, and whether it propagates Islam or is focused on making money within Islamic cultural markets. The Islamic speech programs broadcast by private television channels present many *ustādh* and *ustādhah* (Islamic religious teacher). Muzakki (2007, 207–10) criticizes the performance of their teachings. Instead of coming from the Islamic tradition, such as using *Pesantren* as their cultural basis, the *ustādh* or *ustādhah* from the urban middle class use their “high mass communication skills to become rising preachers”, and to attract audiences. The desire to entertain audiences and obtain high ratings appears to supersede the quality of Islamic teaching itself. As Rakhmani (2016) argues, the commercialization of Islam is the result of the “marrying between Islamic content and popular television format”, particularly those that employ Islamic themes within television dramas, reality shows, music shows, talent shows, and *da'wah*tainment, which are adjusting to the formula of global television formats (Rakhmani 2016, 61–62)

The commercialization of Islam is occurring at an increased pace because the control of media is less centralized and less regulated than it was during the Suharto regime (Weintraub 2011, 5–6). Consequently, the exploitation of Islam and its practices within global media industries has become more visible. However, it has also incentivized new religious authorities to both self-produce and self-distribute videos of Islamic preaching due to technological developments that allow low-budget videos to be created. The rise of Aa Gym is one of the primary examples of how religious authority was established through entrepreneurial preaching. His brand was very popular among urban middle-class Muslims (Watson 2005). Daniels (2013, 6–7) used ethnographic methods to focus on local perspectives, allowing for the influence of religion and pop culture to be seen more broadly in both Malaysia

and Indonesia. He examined the significance of local interpretation by dealing with various level of meaning, concepts, and discourse on “the aesthetic texts” that consists of dance, music, song, ritual theater, television series, and films (Daniels 2013, 4).

Other scholars argue that the commercialization of Islam can also be seen as a form of Islamization. In contrast with the aforementioned perspective, these scholars argue that the process of Islamization shapes the public sphere by expanding Islamist values and politics in Indonesia. Unlike Bruinessen’s (2013) argument about the emergence of the conservative Islamic turn following the Suharto regime, this process of Islamization is strongly related to Suharto’s policy in the 1990s, which repressed Islam during the fragmentation of the nepotism that favored Suharto’s family and cronies. Within this period, Islamic symbolism was employed by the Suharto presidency, with Suharto adding ‘Muhammad’ to his name and embarking on a pilgrimage to Mecca for hajj, and his daughter facetiously wearing the veil in everyday life. In the public domain, this was represented by the emergence of Indonesian products as well as organizations that are related to Islam, such as Bank Muallamat, Fashionable Muslim Clothing Boutiques, and the establishment of ICMi (Hefner 2000, 128). Prior to this, during Suharto’s presidency in the 1980s, Islam was repressed (Akmaliah 2016).

Smith-Hefner (2007) conducted a survey in Yogyakarta in 1999, 2001, and 2002, which found that Islamization had grown, particularly though the uptake of veiling among urban educated women. The veil previously represented an old Islamic tradition. However, attitudes have been changing, with many of them now feeling more comfortable with wearing the veil. These are generational changes that differ greatly to how the parents of these women chose to dress. It can also be attributed to the rise of Islamic activity at the Gadjah Mada University campus, which influenced many middle-class female students with disciplinary backgrounds in medicine and the hard sciences. Expanding global capitalist industries and the increased agency of many Islamic groups has Islamified the lifestyles of many Indonesians, allowing them to enjoy the consumption of products without feeling that they are subject to Western secularization. Jones’ (2007, 214–17) study on the growth of busana Muslim fashion that has consumed many Indonesian Muslim women highlights the strong relationship between the rise of Islamic

piety and consumerism within the context of “national debates about modernity and piety”. The rise of Islamic magazines, such as *Noor* and *Ummi*, as the primary sources of information (in addition to secular magazines), has also strengthened the process of Islamization (Jones 2007, 225).

Indeed, the cover of *Ummi* magazine was adjusted to depict a beautiful woman wearing a jilbab. Furthermore, in the 1993 edition, there were no pictures of women on the cover at all, only “a plain photograph of a bunch of flowers” (Pamungkas 2015, 89). For Pamungkas (2015, 104–6), this transformation was facilitated by the larger audience. While the Suharto period was represented by the Tarbiyah Movement’s voices, in the earlier Reform era it was directly supported by the Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS), which acted as a political vehicle for female Tarbiyah activists to support notions of public morality, especially those that underpin the Pornography Act. Currently, it aims to commodify Islamic feminine identity in Indonesia, without the Indonesian public losing their *dakwah* identity. Nilan’s (2006) research on the commodification of Islam also found that consumption among young Muslims in South Sulawesi aligns with popular global cultural trends. By creating hybrid youth products, they constitute “a ready market for a parallel world of Muslim youth culture”. On one hand, it aims to protect youth from the ‘hedonistic influence’ of western culture, while on the other, young people can also readily adjust to pop culture through modern media, such as magazines targeted at *muslimahs* and musical forms of *nashīd*s (Nilan 2006).

The categorization of Islamic pop culture within the aforementioned two perspectives is disputed by some scholars, who argue that they cannot be in binary opposition because Islamization can work through commercialization to develop an entrepreneurial ethos. Fealy and White (2008) note that, compared to previous decades, Islamization within pop culture has greatly impacted the Indonesian public sphere, both culturally and spiritually. However, it is difficult to maintain this influence in politics as many secular parties are capable of successfully adopting an Islamic agenda (37, 28). In relation to this, Heryanto (2014, 24) puts forward another way of interpreting these two forces. For Heryanto, it is part of “the dialectics between how religious piety has found manifestations in the specific history of Indonesia’s industrial capitalism, and how capitalist logic responds to the growing market



for Islamic revitalization and lifestyle” (2014, 24). In the process of meeting, the dynamic between them is unavoidable. To some extent, both Islamic and capitalist forces have adjusted to one another, while also trying to dominate. However, in many cases, both of them can reconcile with and try to strengthen each other. In other words, citing Daromir Rudnyckij (2009) on the Islamic piety, Heryanto (2014, 24) concludes that they can both provide “a new commitment to hard work, self-discipline, productivity in the workplace, and cosmopolitan respect for others on the globe.”

Prior to accusations of Ahok’s blasphemy, this argument was not deemed to be problematic. However, the case is a primary example of how Islamic power can be driven to mobilize the *ummah* towards political pragmatism, given the alliance between conservative Islamic groups and predatory politicians in the local elections (Akmaliah and Nadzir 2018). Ironically, Indonesian Muslims coming from these conservative Islamic groups are from the middle class, including many Indonesian celebrities, who usually represent moderate and progressive perspectives (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018). These changing trends give credence to Heryanto’s (2014) argument regarding the rise of Fathin Sidqiah as the new idol of Indonesian Muslims, which reflects the negotiation between Islamization and commercialization in pop culture discourse and within Muslim identity (Akmaliah 2014).

Reflecting on the Ahok case and in observing Islamic pop culture in Indonesia, I clarify my argument by adopting the second perspective, which sees the process of Islamization as an expression of Islamist politics. I adopt this perspective for two reasons. First, due to the growth of the Indonesian Muslim population. It is not only the world’s largest Muslim community, amounting to 205 million people, but Muslims also constitute roughly 88% of the entire country’s population. According to Pew Research (2010), Indonesia is “home to about 13% of the world’s Muslims”. The numbers are undoubtedly significant when compared to other Muslim majority countries, such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco. The influence of globalization in the Middle East and on Islamic perspectives, particularly in Saudi Arabia and political Islam in Egypt (such as the Islamic brotherhood, known as the Ikhwanul Muslimin), has altered the audience patterns of Indonesian Muslims during crucial transitions in Indonesian democracy (See Hefner 2017).

Subsequently, references to Indonesian Islam are not only referring to both Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), but also Islamic organizations that emerged in the post-Suharto period. In fact, many of these Islamic organizations are new, while others had previously been oppressed during the Suharto regime, such as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Forum Umat Islam (FUI), Front Pembela Islam (FPI), and other small Muslim organizations across Indonesia's provinces.

The rise of new religious authorities as the new representatives of the *Ummah* has influenced the public sphere and Indonesian Muslim audiences. Indonesian Muslim organizations, such as the Muhammadiyah dan Nahdlatul Ulama, bring in new and different perspectives by proposing that their ideological approach encapsulates the 'truth' of being a full Muslim (*muslim kaffah*). However, this could be part of a national phenomenon. The emergence and accessibility of digital platforms, such social media and its diverse forms, have helped galvanize the voices of ordinary Indonesians, particularly among the Muslim middle class. Although both Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have a history of intolerance towards Muslim minorities, such as Shia and Ahmadiyah, and were the subject of violence between 1965-1966, they propound a moderate Muslim perspective through their large member base and infrastructure. These resources position them as the biggest representatives of the *ummah*, allowing them to influence policies and the Indonesian government, including greater connection with more moderate Indonesians, who follow Pancasila as the basis of their Islamic values. However, these new religious authorities have attracted other Muslim audiences, providing them with the opportunity to represent other voices within the *ummah*, facilitated by the growth of digital platforms in Indonesia.

Given the rise of these two different narratives of Islam in Indonesia (Islamization versus Indonesianess), Islamic political parties have failed to reach a majority vote in elections in the post-Suharto period (Buehler 2016; Tanuwidjaja 2010). Political Islam and its aspirations have become a tool for many Indonesian political parties, whether it be secular, nationalist, or Islamic parties, and has been used to gain Indonesian Muslim voters. As a result, new religious authorities have forged alliances with predatory political parties, who seek the same goals but with different motives. As I have asserted earlier, accusations about

Ahok's blasphemy fit within this argument. However, political parties are not the only vehicle that can be used to advance the struggles of the Islamic agenda. Pop culture, such as film, provides another medium for delivering political messages. I argue that POL, which uses Ahok's case as a backdrop, is a covert example of the process of Islamization and the rise of political Islam in the Indonesian public sphere. I use POL as a case study of this process because it is a product of agentive Muslim figures, co-producers, donors, and Islamic groups, who sought to advance Islamic messages through commercial cinema in a manner that goes beyond national politics. In addition to that, the film also speaks to new ideas about the type of Islamic society that it aspires to, which in reality cannot be realized due to a number of factors.

### **Pop-Islamism within Islamic Films**

Pop-Islamism is a concept coined by Dominik M. Muller (2013, 262) to describe the Post-Islamist turn in majority Muslim countries. It has been discussed by prominent social scientists and scholars such as Asef Bayat (2007), Husnul Amin (2010), and Roy (1999). The post-Islamist turn refers to a change in the political orientation of Islamism, including the focus on the Islamic state that has gained ground since the 1990s. This shift has been steeped in a form of individualization that concentrates on the shaping of "modern Muslim lifestyles," which signifies the transformation of Islamism from a political ideology into its use the embodiment of personal piety. Bayat (2007) compares Iran and Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries in the early 2000s to argue that the shift of political orientation can be traced to the rise of new religious authorities and the renewed focus on personal piety. One of these new authorities is the televangelist Amr Khalid, who has gained increased stardom in his claims of active piety. These changes do not transform ideas dramatically, but work through a "gradual change in the nature of Islamist" (Bayat 2007, 146).

In an ethnographic study of the Islamic party of PAS (Partai Islam Se-Malaysia/Malaysian Islamic party), Muller (2013, 270) found that the youth wing of the PAS party used popular culture to gain the support of young voters. With the exception of the Islamic music of Capella, the youth wing of PAS previously resisted pop culture as the representation of western culture, such as music concerts since the 1970s. Pop culture was perceived as a 'danger to morality'. Because of

this, the PAS Youth often demonstrated against foreign singers, such as Rihanna, Avril Lavigne, Inul Daratista, Pitbull, and other international musicians. However, PAS gradually altered its policies by opening itself to local popular music. Moreover, popular culture has become part of its official policy in the broader Islamic struggle. Its strategy in Malaysia involves mobilizing youth voters, however in line with Islamic regulations, its mission is still primarily driven by its role and vision as an Islamic political party (Müller 2013, 280).

The concept of Pop-Islamism can also be applied to examine Islamic films, such as *Ketika Mas Gagah Pergi* (KMGP/When Brother Handsome Departed) and the focus of this paper, *212: The Power of Love* (POL). Compared to other Islamic films, such as those supported by the biggest cinema industries from the Indian family descendants, these two films are different in three ways. Firstly, they are supported entirely by independent financing. While KMGP was supported by crowdfunding, particularly by the novel's readers, POL was supported by the filmmaker's internal community, who shared the financial burden for the film. Their independence is related to the interpretation of Islamic teachings, which both the author and filmmakers follow. If the films were financed by large production companies, the filmmakers would also have to accede to the demands of the production company, who are primarily interested in maximizing the commercial potential of the film. This would risk eroding the Islamic messages they wish to convey. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (the Verses of Love/AAC) is one example of how Habiburrahman El Shirazy was disappointed by (Kang Abik) the negotiations they had to make, making the film 'un-Islamic' in the hands of Hanung Bramantyo as the producer of the film (Heryanto 2014, 55–59).

Although Habiburrahman felt that the film was un-Islamic, Hanung perceived it as Islamic, and acknowledged that it had changed his perspective about Islam, leading to a shift in his life in the areas of religion, loyalty, hard work, commitment, and love. The comments below were expressed by Hanung Bramantyo on his blog, and were reproduced on the Elinkuswoyo blog (6 January 2008).

This film not only changed my perspective on films generally, but it also transformed my life in the areas of religion, loyalty, hard work, commitment, and love. I thank God that this film has given me the opportunity to move forward and mature as a man. I give many thanks to Kang Abik who believed in me to produce it, renewing my relationship

with Islam and its beauty, its homeliness and tolerance. Lastly, I thank my mom for asking me to create a religious film. I now understand why she requested that I produce it: to finally bring me closer to Islam.

However, due to their diverging perspectives about the extent to which the film represented the truth of Islam, both Kang Abik and Hanung ended their working relationship with the sequel of AAC, which was released at the end of December 2017. It was unclear why Kang Abik did not ask Hanung Bramantyo to produce the sequel, which he handed over to Guntur Soeharjanto to take over as filmmaker. MD Picture had given Kang Abik and his team production rights to choose any filmmaker that he liked. The Islamic films created by Hanung are the antithesis of the protagonist, Fahri, in AAC 1. I strongly believe that both Kang Abik and Hanung could not work together without disagreement over key decisions, such as choosing actors and actresses, due to their divergent ideologies. For Kang Abik, choosing actors and actresses who are Muslim and establishing a dialogue with the Islamic way is important. Kang Abik is much more concerned with encapsulating the essence of Islamic humanity within the film compared to Hanung, who is interested in technical film-making rather than its Islamic messaging. Within these two perspectives, they also face the capitalist demands of the film industries, whose primary agenda is profit-making (Akmaliah, 2018). These disparate interests cannot be reconciled; however, it reflects the Indonesian film sector as a whole, particularly the struggle between political and economic interests on one hand, and political Islam on the other hand.

Secondly, these films were adaptations of Helvi Tiana Rosa's novel. As a well-known writer, she founded the Pen Circle Forum (*Forum Lingkar Pena/FLP*), an organization focused on writing to propagate Islam, as reflected in the famous slogan '*Dakwah Melalui Pena*' (Islamic propagation by pen). She was also the author and Editor-In-Chief of *Annida* for ten years (1991-2001) and pressured Muslim youth magazines to challenge un-Islamic magazines such as *Hai*, *Aneka*, *Gadis*, and *Kawanku* by propagating Islamic messages through pop culture. The writers of FLP across many Indonesian provinces worked with *Annida* to publish Islamic fiction, appealing to young Indonesian Muslim to move closer to Islamic values. Instead of appealing to the Islamic values of Muhammadiyah and NU, as the most significant and largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, the writers favored those of

the Tarbiyah movement because many members of the FLP are former Rohis (*Rohani Islam*/Islamic Spiritual), and the organization itself is part of an extra high school curriculum. Because of this, Helvi Tiana Rosa and the members of FLP are closely aligned to *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party/PKS). Many of the FPL activities have been announced on the website of the PKS, and some of the FLP's books have also explained the mission and vision of the PKS. As such, they are products of the FLP's appeal to notions of personal piety, such as a hard-work, being a good Muslim, self-discipline, respecting one's parents, and loving God (Arnez 2009, 51; Kailani 2012, 45). Nonetheless, they are also motivated by Islamism; specifically, the novel that POL is based on. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, POL successfully conveys the will of political Islam by visualizing Islamic messages in covert ways.

In expounding the relationship between Islamic literature and *da'wah*, Mushthafa (2009) differentiates between the FLP and the writers who come from Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) backgrounds. Although both of them represent sastra islami (Islamic literature), they use different techniques in order to mediate Islam into their writing. While the FLP is concerned with Islam more formally, *Sastra Pesantren* covers the universe of Islam through humanities subjects without explaining the use of Islamic symbolism in their writing. Specifically, in order to contest the representations made in *sastra islami*, the publisher of LKiS (the Institute for Islamic and Social Studies), a non-government organization that has strong cultural links to NU, established a branch of Islamic books that is concerned with the life of people who live in *pesantren*, mainly Matapena (The Pen Eyes). Interestingly, most of the writers from Pesantren consist of two cohorts: young people and adult women. They incorporate various themes in their work, explore gender issues, and embody the same spirit of their characters to empower the women of *pesantren* (Ismah 2011, 2012).

Thirdly, the backdrop of these films played a fundamental role in shaping the Islamization of the public sphere. Compared to previous decades, the popularity of Indonesian Islamic cinema has recently increased, particularly during 2008-2012 (Izharuddin 2016, 6). Following the success of Islamic films, a trend followed whereby the same genre was produced, encouraging audiences for watching. The relationship between pop culture icons and political visions had a strong

impact on this genre of Islamic cinema. Compared to Helvi Tiana Rosa's works, the KMPGP is a short story that depicts the ideal type of young Muslim, and this influenced Annida's other stories. The popularity of this genre was made apparent by the warm response of readers in a letter that was sent to Helvi Tiana Rosa. The popularity of the genre is also reflected in the amount of printed copies sold: in 1997, 10,000 copies published by *Annida* were sold, leading to its fifteenth reprint under Syaamil Publishing House (Kailani 2012, 38–39). On the other hand, Islamic mobilization in the name of ABI was the most significant demonstration after Suharto stepped down, with approximately 823,200 to 1,029,000 people attending the protest in Jakarta's city center (Ahmad 2016). Many scholars have different perspectives about this event, as explained earlier in the article. However, there are two facts that cannot be denied: its united Indonesian Muslims and their Islamic aspirations, creating momentum for political Islam to defeat Ahok as the Governor and bring in a new candidate for the Jakarta election in 2017.

Nevertheless, applying the concept of Pop-Islamism to Islamic film is difficult in the context of the Suharto regime, which repressed its critics by imprisoning or even killing them. During this period, Islamic films, as Eric Sasono notes (2010, 52) were portrayed as being “supportive of modernization and development consonant with the New Order's dominant discourse.” In fact, many Indonesian producers of Islamic films tried to incorporate diverse social and political issues, such as fighting Dutch colonialists, helping poor people, supporting and strengthening nationalism, and exploring notions of rationality and modernity (Sasono 2010, 50). These themes can be found in films such as *Mereka Kembali* (They have returned, Dir. Nawi Ismail, 1974), *Tjoet Njak Dien* (Dir. Eros Djarot, 1988), *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence, Dir. Asrul Sani, 1982), *Al-Kausar* (Dir. Asrul Sani and Chaerul Umam, 72), and *Catatan Si Boy* (Boy's Diary, Dir. Nasri Cheepy, 1989).

### **The Apolitical Framing of a Political Event In 212: *The Power of Love* (POL)**

Since the Indonesian presidential election in 2014, Indonesian people have fragmented into the two groups: either supporting Jokowi or opposing him by becoming followers of Prabowo, who lost the election and only gained 8% of the vote, compared to the Jokowi-

Kalla coalition's win of 53.15% (www.bbc.com, 22 July 2014). When Jokowi-Kalla won the presidential election, many of the political parties that were allied with Prabowo-Hatta moved to support them, primarily Golkar and PPP, who represented the Islamic parties. However, instead of reconciling with their followers, these divisions and tensions continued into the 2017 Jakarta election, causing a rift in solidarity among Indonesian people, particularly with the divisionary politics of SARA (ethnic, religion, and race). Social media, as a new digital platform among both producers and consumers, galvanized these tensions in real-time (Lim 2017). The emergence of POL on YouTube was suspicious for many of Jokowi and Ahok's followers, arguably becoming part of the political representation. Because of this, some communities have rejected the film, opting to not watch in cinemas. These communities are primarily from Manado, North Sulawesi, and Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan.

Avis Metriko Sumilat, the coordinator of Makatana Minahasa in Menado, North Sulawesi, provided specific reasons as to why his community resisted the film:

At the beginning, we resisted the movie because of the title, 212: The Power of Love. We then saw the movie trailer, which uses the 212 movement. In other words, the film has taken the movement of 212. Manado is a city of tolerance and is ranked as the most tolerant in one survey. We refuse the ideas that the film conveys. It surely has been repackaged in a good way in order to avoid any mistakes, however the message itself is about the 212 movement (Kurniawan 2018).

The Youth Dayak Forum (*Forum Pemuda Dayak*) in Central Kalimantan also objected to the film, especially those in Palangkaraya city, who sent a letter to the XXI cinema in Palangkaraya Mall, on May 13, 2018. This letter was circulated through social media by the Twitter account of @Pakatdayak on May 15, 2018:

The movie contains political messages that could provoke SARA and damage religious harmony, especially in the North of Kalimantan. In fact, the movie comes from FPI and HTI, groups of intolerance that the Dayak people reject, as a community who follow local wisdom and the philosophy of Huma Betang. In addition, the rise of the cinema during the local election (*Pilkada*) in many regions may potentially escalate a conflict that we do not want.

The above explanation was denied by the creators of POL, who announced in public that the film is not related to the current political



situation. One of them was Justin Arimbi, the film director, who explained:

This movie is not related to politics. It means that as a Muslim, I am concerned with the 212 movements. This motivated me to create the film. (Moreover), I also thought it was important to record the event as a part of (Indonesian Muslim) history, while also telling many inspirational and emotional stories through the movie for the Indonesian public. As such, to those who argue that the film contains political messages, I strongly suggest to them that this is not the case (Front TV, May 2, 2018).

The two different opinions about whether or not the film conveys political messages is indicative of the social tensions surrounding how Indonesians view the 212 movements. This has impacted opinion on a national level, with the two groups having divergent views. Although many of them have not watched the film, those that are opposed to the film have presumptions about the way in which the 212 movement is depicted in the film. Those who support the film believe that it is not related to the political situation, but that it is more about the spirit of Islam and, as the biggest event that the *ummah* has experienced, it should be remembered in this way. The political parties who were behind the 212 movements also support the film. In order to examine these opposing claims, the following section discusses the film by examining the content and representation of various scenes and how audiences responded to the film.

### *Representation of the Event*

The film describes the emotionally strained relationship of a father and his son. The father is Ki Zainal, an influential local religious leader in his village, and the son is Rahmat (Fauzi Baadila), a bright young man who graduated from Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) and is on scholarship undertaking undergraduate study in journalism at Harvard University. Both of them are divided about the ideal type of education, and this affects their relationship with one another. This conflict and the figure of his father as a religious leader has imprinted onto the son's memory in a negative way. Following his graduation, Rahmat became a Journalist for the *Republick*, a reputable Indonesian magazine that is based in the capital city of Jakarta. Rahmat never returns to his hometown or sees his family, especially his father Ki Zainal. Rahmat's work with the magazine elevates his career, and he becomes a journalist

of great national repute. He is represented as cynical and critical of Islam because of his Western education background. This is portrayed in his investigation of a series of demonstrations insisting that Ahok be imprisoned (411 dan 212). Rahmat is depicted as having a negative image of Islam; in particular he reports that the movement has been hijacked by someone with a hidden agenda.

This report enrages his close friend, Adhi (Adhilin Abdul Hakim), who believes that his analysis of the movement is biased. For Adhi, it is better for Rahmat to not write about religious events, and argues that it is part of a radical movement. Adhi is not alone in problematizing Rahmat's report; other staff and the chief editor also did not like his writing. In an editorial meeting, they ask Rahmat to not criticize Islam. Moreover, the notion of Islam under attack was circulated in both offline and online media, leading many Indonesian Muslim to support it. This narrative of the oppression of Islam is also part of a collective memory that is preserved in the minds of many Indonesian Muslims who lived through Suharto's regime. Consequently, the stereotyped depiction of Islam in the report activated their memories. However, Rahmat as a brilliant journalist with a background in Western and Islamic education denied allegations that his report was critical of Islam. Rahmat was unwilling to forgo his journalistic integrity and so pushes himself to resign from the magazine, although some staff and the chief editor told him not to.

After the incident, a family member calls Rahmat and asks him to return home as his mother has passed away. Adhi accompanies Rahmat to Ciamis, West Java. In an encounter between Rahmat and Ki Zainal (Humaidi Abbas) in the family home, we are privy to the reasons why Rahmat had not returned home for ten years, as well as why he is critical of Islam. When he was a boy, he was mischievous and indirectly caused the deaths of his two older brothers. The incident angered his father, who sent Rahmat to Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*). For Rahmat, being sent to *pesantren* meant that his father had thrown him away from his family. For Ki Zainal, it was about educating Rahmat to help him form an ethical sensibility (*akhlak*), which Indonesian Muslim parents aim to do in sending their children to *pesantren*. Nonetheless, Rahmat resisted his father's reasoning. Rahmat doubted Ki Zainal's concerns for two main reasons: because of his refusal to visit Rahmat while he was away at boarding school, and how he discouraged his academic

achievements. Rahmat's anger culminates when he finds out that Ki Zainal initiated and organized the 212 demonstrations for the people of Ciamis, who marched to Jakarta. The more that Rahmat tries to denounce Ki Zainal's views, the more ardent Ki Zainal becomes in the need to go to Jakarta to advocate Islam.

The figure of Rahmat, as a moral antagonist, appears in other Indonesian films and drama series (*sinetron*). The moral antagonist is represented by someone who cannot control their anger, and this is visualized with emotive facial expressions. Moreover, the conservative Muslim figure is represented as the hero who refines *akhlak*, particularly in Islamic cinema. This figure originated in and has historically featured in classic Indonesian literature. In classic novels, the moral antagonist is represented by the figure of Hanafi in *Salah Asuhan* (Abdul Moeis 1928) and Zaenuddin in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* (Hamka 1938). These figures are seduced by the ways of the West. In POL, Rahmat follows this archetype of the antagonist established in Indonesian literature. In addition, the use of Ciamis as the site of the long march of the 212 movement represents the symbolic power of Islam and its locus point. Historically, West Java is the home base of DII/TII and is strengthened by Islamism (Formichi 2012). Despite changes in the national government, their influence remains powerful, particularly after the Suharto regime and the transition to democracy. Terrorism and notions of an Islamic state have been linked to the history of DII/TII, as well as the Islamic regulations (*Perda Syariah*) in place in many areas of West Java (Buehler 2016; Temby 2010). Many Muslims marched from Ciamis to Jakarta because buses did not want to appear to support the demonstrations, which accused the Governor of Jakarta of blasphemy. The long march resonated among many Indonesian Muslims because of its coverage in mass media and online publications. The forms of social media consumed by many Indonesian Muslims, especially those circulated via WhatsApp groups, Twitter, and Facebook, appealed to their Islamic moral standing, and strengthened their convictions in the truth of Islam.

Throughout the film, Islamic values are advocated for through the depiction of negative stereotypes about other religions and ethnicities. In the context of the Ahok's case, verbal violence was rife on social media and offline through preaching, which involved people associated with the demonstration yelling offensive words, such as *kafir* (infidel),

China (Chinese), *munāfiq* (hypocrite), kill Ahok, and other negative remarks. These comments were aimed at people who supported Ahok, and who came from various ethnic, religious and class backgrounds. This is represented in the scene where Rahmat, accompanying his father, told members of the movement that they were supporting radicalism and conservatism. His provocative words led them to collectively hit Rahmat. Yasna (Meyda Sefira), a young woman that often helped Rahmat's family in the home, tried to stop the negativity of the demonstrations by appealing to the holiness of Islamic values. Speaking to the public openly, Yana argued that the Muslim people are not permitted to accuse other Muslims of being *munafiq* or *kafir* as only Allah has the authority to declare this. She elaborated that Muslims must spread the truth of Islam and guide others to enlighten them with knowledge.

In one scene, the crowd of demonstrators made way for a couple walking to church for their wedding to prove that Islam is peaceful, not brutal or violent. The 212 movement took place in Monas (National Monument). Geographically, it is close to the Church of Katedral and at that time, there was a couple that was getting married. Although the conditions were crowded, many of the 212 demonstrators tried to give the couple space so that they could walk freely. The Indonesian media, both offline and online, have covered this event as evidence of the tolerance of Islam and the 212 movement, although many of those who joined the rallies were very vocal about imprisoning Ahok. The careful selection of the scenes in POL attempts to hide the political agenda of the filmmakers, who outwardly framed the event as apolitical.

Similarly, another scene is framed apolitically, depicting the movement as consisting of pious people who are tolerant and peaceful. Rahmat's colleague takes over coverage of the 212 Movement. In the beginning, she is worried about being discriminated against because of her background as a double minority, as both a woman and a Christian. It also emerges that radical groups intervened in the event. In one scene, the journalist appears frightened in the crowd, and one of the demonstrators tries to relieve her anxieties by telling her, "Please do not be worried, we just offer you food." Because of this, she concludes that the Islamic mobilization is peaceful. As a Christian, she felt safe in reporting the event. This scene depicts the factual events of journalists from Metro TV (Shinta Novita, Aftian Siswoyo, Rifai Pamone), who

faced verbal abuse, intimidation and mockery as well as being expelled from the yard of Istiqlal Mosque. The video of this incident became viral through social media and led AJI (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen/Alliance of Independent Journalists) to issue a public statement about the incident encroaching on the right to freedom of expression (Agung DH 2016). A similar incident occurred during the reunion of the 212 Movement, known as Munajat 212. A journalist from Detik.com faced both violence and persecution from the demonstrators (Detik Laporkan Penganiayaan Wartawan di Munajat 212 ke Polisi 2019). In the film, the scene highlighted the fact that Ahok was Christian, and that this was the primary reason behind the demonstrations. The events unraveled peacefully, despite the mobilizations being viewed as a big threat to minority groups, who lack the capacity to voice their concerns in the way that Indonesian Muslims can.

Captions were also used to persuade audiences, with many scenes indirectly depicting the protests as a battlefield about the interpretation of Islamic ideology: between the Tarbiyah movement's trans-Islamic ideology and 'spirit of Islamism', and the so-called moderate position of Muhammadiyah and NU, who support the indigenization of Indonesian Islam. In the film, these ideological tensions are portrayed by Rahmat and his mixed educational background of East (Islamic Boarding School) and West (Harvard University). Rahmat genuinely understands the Islamic tradition, but he uses his knowledge to criticize the 212 movement and Islamic extremism. While criticizing the movement, he repeatedly tells people that he graduated from Harvard University. The film's subtext criticizes the infusion of Islamic thought and liberalism, including ideas about human rights and equity, such as that endorsed by Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL/Liberal Islamic Network), Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah (JIMM/Intellectual Network of Youth Muhammadiyah), the Young of Nahdlatul Ulama Generations with Gus Dur's aspirations, *Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial* (LKIS/Institute for Islamic and Social Studies) and Lakspesdam NU. These groups are supported by well-known Indonesian Muslim scholars, many of whom graduated from overseas universities. They include Azyumardi Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat, Muhammad Sahal, Lutfie Assyauckanie, Sukidi, Sumanto Al-Qurtuby, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Boy Ahmad Pradana, and others.

Subsequently, the complex reasons behind the Islamic mobilization are not explored in the film. For instance, the film neglected to

mention that the video of Ahok's speech about the Kepulauan Seribu had been edited by Buni Yani. The edited version galvanized the anger of Indonesian Muslims and incited them to join the rallies. Ahok's Christian and Chinese background also makes him a minority in Indonesia. His election campaign for governor of Jakarta gained negative attention during the electoral period, with many Indonesian Muslims becoming emotionally involved in the process. Indonesian Muslims were inspired to act in solidarity by mobilizing and expressing their love of Islam. In the film, the only explanation given about the reasons behind the mobilization is a single sentence: "there is a Jakarta official who has humiliated Islam." Furthermore, the intentions of the demonstrators are never explained in the entire film. Instead, the film presents different narratives that do not reflect the actual political issue. This is exemplified by the conversation between Ki Zainal and one of the *bakso* (meatball) food stall owners, whose ethnic background is Chinese. He laments to Ki Zainal that his food stall has been quiet since the uproar related to Ahok, with many of his regular customers not buying his bakso. Ki Zainal attributes it to the usual fluctuations that businesses experience, rather than any underlying racism.

### *Understanding the Audience*

When POL ran at commercial Indonesian cinemas, the filmmakers invited audiences to watch with the tagline *Putihkan Bioskop*, which means creating Indonesian cinema in entirely white (the color of Islam). Oki Setiana Dewi, the executive producer of POL, expected this tagline to increase the film's audience to one million people. These expectations were supported by the ongoing Islamic mobilization and its large numbers. Nevertheless, it is difficult to attract audiences on opening day in Indonesia, where there are only 135 screens across 40 cities. The film also faced competition with other blockbuster films, such as *Avengers: Infinity War* (Priherdityo 2018). Although both Syahrini, an Indonesian celebrity, and Ria Ricis, a famous Indonesian Youtuber, have promoted the film, it was difficult for it to compete with blockbuster movies. As such, appealing to Islamic solidarity in such a way as to strengthen the *ummah* was fundamental to the mobilization of the 212 demonstrators.

By appealing to the 212 demonstrators, many people who saw themselves as being part of Indonesian Islam, and as attending the biggest

'Islamic Event', watched the film in cinemas across Indonesia. Rather than just being an activity for pleasure, they also considered watching the film as a mandatory part of advocating for the 'truth of Islam'. For many, viewing the film in cinemas was also likened to attending an Islamic gathering, wherein audiences can learn Islamic values. Wearing white cloth, calling the name of Allah, and coming to the cinema in groups added to this notion of an Islamic gathering. Videos and images of these gatherings were shared via Twitter by Helvi Tiana Rosa (@helvy) and Asma Nadia (@Asmanadia) during the running the movie. Religious meals (*sedekah*) were also organized for people who went to watch the film. Through her fan page on the Facebook, Asma Nadia invited the public on March 27, 2018 to purchase one million pre-sale tickets to POL (Gerakan 1 Juta Ticket Pre-Sale). The campaign asked people to become donors and pay the ticket price to fund the distribution of *sedekah* to poor people.



(Asma Nadia, 2018)

Asma Nadia also appealed to a sense of Islamic solidarity through her Twitter account on May 21, 2018, asking Indonesian Muslims to watch the film and then narrate it to people who cannot watch it due to any struggles in their lives. Asma Nadia is part of a new generation of female authority figures in Islam, who established her influence through her writings, which explore issues relevant to Muslim women and their empowerment. Asma Nadia's appeals influenced her followers and fans of her writing, who are predominantly women.

"...screenings of the film (in Indonesian cinema) are decreasing, however we can achieve 35,000 audiences in small screens, provided by the owner

of a commercial cinema. All of this is happening due to *ukhuwah* (Islamic brotherhood). Many Indonesian muslims support the movie but they have to walk far to watch it because commercial cinemas close to their homes are not screening it. There are many people, even older people, women in late stages of their pregnancy and with babies, who are watching the film. Hopefully, we can achieve up to 400,000? (or) 50,000 in audience numbers. *Inshā Allāh*, if all of us can mobilize without any hesitation, we can extend the screening period of the film so that its good values will touch more Indonesian people. Please, go and watch the film together and invite your families and friends.”

The systematic mobilization of audiences is similar to PKS’ clandestine efforts to develop their movement during the Suharto regime. Potential members are approached and recruited using a technique that is prevalent in multi-level marketing (MLM). This technique is also used during political elections to actively influence voters to support PKS’ candidacy. In the local elections in Jakarta, Center of Java, West Java, North Sumatera (2017-2018), many PKS candidates defied poll survey predictions by gaining significant votes, although they still lost. An exception is the local election in Jakarta where Anies-Sandi was elected as both governor and vice governor, defeating the strong incumbent Ahok-Djarot.

The politics of Indonesia are clearly embedded within POL. Political elites from Gerindra watched the premiere of the film, including Fadli Zon, Sandiaga Uno, and Prabowo. Fadli remarked that the film is important because it clarifies misunderstandings about the 212 movement (Fadli Zon *Ajak Jokowi Tonton Film 212 the Power of Love* 2018). Sandi argued that the film shows the peaceful aspects of Islam, and that it also encompasses its ‘noble values’ that are important for education in Indonesia (Sandi *Nobar Film 212 the Power of Love* 2018). For Prabowo, the film represents Islam as a peaceful religion that is against violence.

“I enjoyed the movie. Honestly, it is very moving. It describes Islam as peaceful and anti-violent, with a humanizing story. The conflict between parent and children is a normal relationship, although at the end of the film it reaches a good conclusion; the father must love his boy and vice versa. The team of filmmakers, directors and actors successfully create a simple story with concise and touching narration. The 212 movement is a touching event, representing the unity of the people and the *ummah*, primarily through the long-march of demonstrators to advocate the truth. In my opinion, this successful film must be valued. Specifically, I ask



members of the Gerindra party to watch it together as mandatory viewing because it is valuable, educational and touching.” (Komentar Pak Prabowo Setelah Nonton 212 The Power of Love 2018).

The political elite of PKS also support the film, primarily Anies Matta and Mohamad Sohibul Imam, the President of PKS. Through his Twitter account, Anies Matta argued that “in crisis situations, this film awakens our trust in the power of love... the power of religion, love for the nation, and love for democracy” (May 16, 2018). For Sohibul Imam, it is their true love of Islam that is facing trial and criticism.

“This film is bringing millions of people together to voice one pursuit, a scarce occurrence in history... It is organized by their loving religion. Absolutely, the thing that they prosecute is not related to the enemy but it is the love of their religion facing the trial. Proof of their loving religion can be seen in the peaceful event organized by members, who ensure that they do not damage the environment, particularly the plethora of flowers and plants. We hope that the film can be used to inform many people about what exactly happened during this event. We hope that Indonesian society will be guided by God (*hidayah*) to better understand Islam” (PKS TV 2018).

The above explanations strongly indicate that the film is linked to politics in Indonesia, especially the Jakarta election. Both the Gerindra and PKS, in their capacity as political parties, support the candidacy of Anies-Sandi in the Jakarta election to defeat the strong incumbent, Ahok-Djarot. It remains a question for the Indonesian public as to why these parties are only watching the election, not participating in it. Although Jokowi as the current Indonesian president did not attend a screening of the film, he does watch other films of Indonesian cinema, such as *Dilan 1990*. Without a critical eye, it is difficult to establish a connection between politics and cinema, as many of the film’s scenes are not factual and seem to obscure the subject of the demonstrations. The systematic mobilization of the demonstrators, similar to the tactics used by the PKS (such as the style of *da’wa*) is one method used to persuade the Indonesian public to watch the film. The support of political elites, particularly those linked to the Jakarta election, also strengthened the mobilization of the public. Suspicions about the film were confined to two Indonesian cities as explained earlier in the introduction (city of Manado and Palangkaraya), as well as for the most of social media users. In other words, the film obfuscates its political motives but also strengthens the appeal of political Islam through pop culture.

The intertwining of politics and film can also be observed in another film, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Scholars have adopted various perspectives, such as gender, masculinity and sexuality studies, (Brenner 2011; Hoesterey and Clark 2012; Izharuddin 2016), and Islamic pop culture to critique this film (Heryanto 2011, 2014). Due to the large number of Muslim audiences this film attracted, it also became a popular medium for many political parties, particularly those who cast themselves as “the faithful Muslims” in front of Indonesian people (Heryanto 2014, 52–53). I strongly argue that the film has a strong material connection to politics, although it is framed apolitically to represent Islam as a peaceful religion. It contrasts with the realities of the Jakarta election, which divided Indonesians. In particular, groups such as SARA that express political hatred and strong sensitivity towards religion campaigned during these periods. The film was used to culturally legitimize both the 212 and 414 demonstrations as representing the voices of the *ummah*, and the power of their mobilization in defeating political opponents in the name of Islam. This circumstance is more visible when the electability of Islamic political parties is unstable and uncertain, with many of those parties seeking to gain the lowest voter compared to the tactics used by secular and national parties.

## Conclusion

The article demonstrates that despite claims to the contrary, 212: The Power of Love is a political cultural product used to legitimize a series of Islamic mobilizations. Throughout this analysis, I argue that the film attempts to divert and normalize the backdrop of the political events in two ways. Firstly, by falsely portraying some events as factual and obfuscating actual factual events. In doing so, the film mystifies the event and democratizes a hierarchical movement that is linked to the rise of new religious authorities, the political elite, and their followers. The film obscures its political intentions by appealing to the sensibilities of the *ummah*. Secondly, the intended audiences of the film are central to understanding its political motives. Its audiences consist of political elites who supported Ahok’s competitors in the Jakarta elections, such as PKS and Gerindra and their followers. The deployment of Islamic symbolism and appeals to the sensibilities of the *ummah* through social media sought to re-mobilize the 212 demonstrators. The systematic mobilization of demonstrators, who were asked to watch the film in

cinemas, was achieved through techniques similar to those employed by PKS to recruit members and endorse their candidates in local elections, particularly post-Suharto. The actions of Helvi Tiana Rosa, a founder of the FLP with strong connections to elite members of the PKS, support the argument that the film did have political motives.

Given the film's political Islamist intentions, I critique the term and lens of 'Post-Islamism' to examine Indonesian Muslims and their embodiment of piety through Islamic pop culture. The alliance of political elites strongly advocated their agenda for political Islam, but this is only gently represented in the film. I adopt Muller's notion of Pop-Islamism to conceptualize the film. Pop culture is not just an encounter between Islamism and capitalism, but as Heryanto (2014) argues, they also converge and have tensions between them. The film is a medium used to deliver an Islamist message. It aims to normalize the Indonesian public to the notion that Islamic mobilization is peaceful, despite many Indonesians criticizing the demonstrations during the Jakarta election. Acts of violence and persecution were also rife during the 212 movement, with the 'double minority' background of Ahok becoming a focus of the blasphemy accusations made against him.

Although I endorse Muller's notion of Pop-Islamism, I adopt a different perspective by emphasizing the influence and agency of political elites. In the Malaysian context, pop-Islamism is practiced by the wing of the PAS party to attract large audiences and alter the image of conservative Islamic parties. In the case of the POL, this type of advocacy did not come from political parties. Rather, it came from the new generation of religious authorities, who emerged in the post-Suharto regime. This includes Helvi Tiana Rosa and Asma Nadia, who have a background in Islamic literature and connections with the FLP, and Oki Setiana Dewi, a Muslim actress who fashioned herself as a religious teacher on cable television. These new authorities prospered in the wake of the failure of Islamic parties to attract the support of Indonesian Muslim voters, and through their use of digital technology they upheld a sense of Islamic transnationalism and created alliances with political groups such as Gerindra and PKS.

The growth of the Indonesian Muslim population and the greater accessibility of digital technology, including social media, gave new micro-celebrities the power to influence the public and expand their followers. These changes problematize the argument that Islamism can

be neutralized by capitalism and capitalist interests. I believe that the apolitical framing of both Islamic and non-Islamic political events will be occurring more often through pop culture. As such, it is essential to interrogate the context and historical background of the events that these cultural products depict, particularly when groups or individuals who are not strongly connected to established political parties are making politically-charged statements.

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Articles should be written in American English between approximately 10,000-15,000 words including text, all tables and figures, notes, references, and appendices intended for publication. All submission must include 150 words abstract and 5 keywords. Quotations, passages, and words in local or foreign languages should

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2. Booth, Anne. 1988. "Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19(2): 310–34.
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5. Utriza, Ayang. 2008. "Mencari Model Kerukunan Antaragama." *Kompas*. March 19: 59.
6. Ms. *Undhang-Undhang Banten*, L.Or.5598, Leiden University.
7. Interview with K.H. Sahal Mahfudz, Kajen, Pati, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

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دانيل فتريون

موسى بتول

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س. برنكا

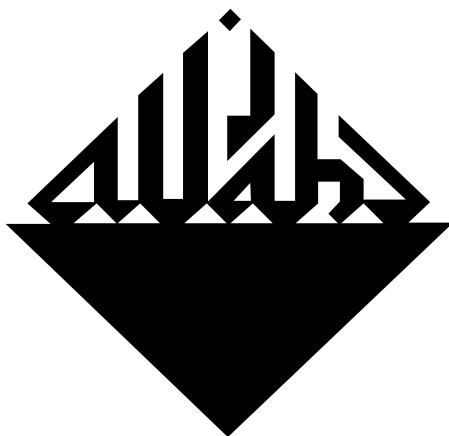


# ستوديا اسلاميا

# سثوديا اسراميا

مجلة إنءونيسية للءراساء الإسلامية

السنة السابعة والعشرون، العءء ١، ٢٠٢٠



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الرسم العثماني  
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مءءءءانى وأبى ءاوء  
زىن العارفىن مءءور

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التوءراءء بىن السنة والشىعة  
ففى مالوكو الشمالىة: ءروس من الماضى  
مءء أمىن نور الءىن وهىرءى شاه رشاء وسمىءء الحضر

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