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## **POST-ISLAMISM AND ART CINEMA IN INDONESIA: QUESTIONING THE FREEDOM AFTER REVOLUTION IN MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Post-Islamism is an ideology that fights against Islamic political upsurge, and if applied in a Muslim country or a majority Muslim country, it would be free to exercise true democracy that celebrates freedom from its previous extremist regime. The lack of freedom hinges upon creativity and success in the art world, including cinema, the most powerful media that reflects on the progression of humanity. Malaysian Cinema has received very little international recognition despite its early establishment in the 1930s. Film narratives that deal with human struggles revolving around inequalities, social and racial imbalance, poverty and religious reinterpretations, are often the basis for international acclaim. These types of narratives that deal with social realism are largely absent from Malaysian cinema. This scenario reflects largely on the competitive-authoritarian regime that the country went through for the past 61 years, up until recently, when she finally managed to topple the previous autocratic government. To prove that what is happening in Malaysia is a lack of freedom, and because Malaysia just recently beginning to experience its reform transition, this paper is going to reflect on Indonesia-*

*a country that shares a lot of similarities with Malaysia, predominantly its geography, language, religion and its multi-ethnicity background-, which has already received their reform from 1998, to investigate how a society during its height of reform experience freedom especially in its cinema industry. This paper draws a connection between the sudden success of the Indonesian Cinema has a direct connection with the elements of Post-Islamism that emerged during the post-New Order era. Using Asef Bayat's sociologist definition of Post-Islamism, this paper will aim to analyze the success of the Indonesian Cinema between 1998 to 2008. The paper hypothesizes that its revolutionary success is linked to the freedom of expression under Post-Islamism concept which was possible within the Islamic periphery for a 10-year-period until the introduction of the Anti-Pornography Bill. The controversial bill was signed into effect in 2008 and has since been used to curb freedom of expression and once again stifle narrative creativity in local films. This scenario reflects on the similar state of a control the Malaysian cinema undergo. The paper concludes that by adapting the Post-Islamism for the countries' nation building using cinema as one of the culture change agents, they could progress in shaping a more modern civic minded society.*

### **Keywords**

Post-Islamism, Indonesian Cinema, Freedom of Expression, Social Realism, Film as Social Catalyst

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## **1. Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam and Indonesian Cinema**

Post-Islamism is an ideology that was coined by Asef Bayat after seeing the impact of the societal response during the post-Khomeini political upsurge. In general, the idea is pertinent to the concept of modernity: civil society, reform, democracy, and plurality, in a Muslim world. In theory, these concepts belong to one another, but, until today, illustrating through the rise of Islamophobia on one hand and the stepping-up attempt to spread Islamization movement on the other, post-Islamism remains just as a theoretical construct. Having said that, however, the theory should be considered more seriously as a solution to bridging the gap in a Muslim world, for in it embedded the cultural transaction process.

Post-Islamism is an ideology that fights against Islamic political upsurge, and if applied in a Muslim country or a majority Muslim country, it would be free to exercise true democracy

that celebrates freedom from its previous extremist regime. The lack of freedom hinges upon creativity and success in the art world, including cinema, the most powerful media that reflects on the progression of humanity. It is also one of the most influential cultural ideological tools that could influence cultural transaction process. Cinema invites its observers to question their culture in depth, as this form of artwork embeds within it a sense of time warp and the 'possibility of closeness to life' (Armes, 1974). Filmmakers have been making films in their regions to not only entertain but most importantly, to bring in the local, cultural issues concerning humanistic struggles. Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population, reformed against Suharto autocratic regime and received their democracy in 1998. While the Reformists -in this context I mean specifically filmmakers- continue pushing Indonesia towards a modern mindset, the country, simultaneously, experienced an uprising in the Islamist movement. Although only at the fringe of the society, the radical far-right Islamist groups' strong political influence is predominantly taking a center position. From having a moderate censorship guideline in 1998, the parliament passed the ambiguous Anti-Pornography law in 2008 that curtailed freedom of expression-the part and parcel of democracy-in the country This essay examines the dynamics of post-Islamism in Indonesia through the study of reform cinema (1998-2008) in looking at their cultural, political and social conflicts. The essay will also look at the relationship between film as art, freedom of expression, and the state's social order.

Malaysian Cinema has received very little international recognition despite its early establishment in the 1930s. Film narratives that deal with human struggles revolving around inequalities, social and racial imbalance, poverty and religious reinterpretations, are often the basis for international acclaim. These types of narratives that deal with social realism are largely absent from Malaysian cinema. This scenario reflects largely on the competitive-authoritarian regime that the country went through for the past 61 years, up until recently, when she finally managed to topple the previous autocratic government.

The first section the paper examines the definition of post-Islamism in the Indonesian context, and by so doing will see how post-Islamism or the lack thereof has impacted the society. The second section will explore on the power of cinema as a tool for critically reflecting social struggles. When cinema as a medium is free from any political restriction, I argue it can promulgate truth beyond what it captures. Without restrictions, viewers have the possibility to dissect the medium-and by extension their society-more critically, people will its benefit in

producing and progressing towards a more civic, modern-minded society. The third section will focus on Indonesian cinema during the reformist era, looking specifically at the content of films that won international awards. I show that the freedom through moderate censorship in the post-reformist era allowed unhindered creativity to seep through the minds of the filmmakers who successfully produced quality films that received international recognition. The films have successfully uplifted Indonesian cinema industry, but the synergy of producing more quality films came to an abrupt end after the passing of the Anti-Pornography Law in 2008. This essay further suggests that the interdependence between freedom in cinema and society is a sine qua non or indispensable for a modern, versatile, critical mindset, and any prohibitions of expressing this relationship are only detrimental to the people it claims to protect. Indonesia was on the brink of cultivating progress, went through a cultural transaction process (Hasan, 2013, p. 177) which was promising for dissemination for the post-Islamism, but it was crushed, by government-backed Islamist parties suppressed civil liberties, through, for example, the passing of the ambiguous of Anti-Pornography law, which curtailed the country's freedom. The failure of progress due to the government's inability to break from the Islamist paradigm is the core component and problematic of Post-Islamism.

## **2. Post Islamism: A Reform concept for the Muslim World towards Modernity**

Asef Bayat coined the term 'Post-Islamism' during the post-Khomeini revolution when the country witnessed a rise of an Islamist movement. Bayat argues that the term comprises two entities: 'condition' and 'project' (Bayat, 2013, p. 8). The condition refers to the 'political and social condition', where even after a few phases of negotiations by the people, including the supporters, sees that the environment of Islamism does not assimilate well within the current society. It asks the policymakers to realize new solutions to come up with a more pragmatic framework to adapt to the changes. The pressure came from both internal and external force, from the national and the global demand. This condition forces the intellectuals, social and policy actors to reinvent the direction of the government, in what Bayat refers to as the 'project'. In this second entity, the process requires a negotiation for a more progressive mindset that adapts Islam to fit along with a secularized, liberalized, reformed, and modernized concepts. For

this transformation to happen, Bayat argues that the country needs to completely disassociate itself from the old regime:

Post-Islamism is expressed in acknowledging secular exigencies, in freedom from rigidity, in breaking down the monopoly of religious truth [that] emphasizes religiosity and rights... favors a civil nonreligious state, it accords an active role for religion in the public sphere (Bayat, 2013).

From the description above it can be understood that the concept carries a lot of weight in its, 'forms, depths and [...] experiences'(Bayat, 2013, p. 25) To move forward using this concept, the reformed government needs to respect and take sensitive measure to its 'roots, development, and relations of such ideas with Islamist politics' that has been disseminating the mindset of the society(Bayat, 2013, p. 27). Fully aware that this concept is inspired by the socio-political trends during the Post-Khomeini in Iran, and that each government requires a special care and adopt different approach to fit in with the needs of its society, Bayat, in his introduction, extends this concept to other Muslim countries or majority-Muslim countries, and poses the question of how adaptable this concept is in other settings and its applicability in the first place? (Bayat, 2013, p. 9).

## **2.1 Post-Islamism in Indonesia**

Indonesia went through a devastating political upheaval during the Suharto's authoritarian regime. During this period from 1921 to 2008, Suharto created a dangerous and antagonistic regime that provoked and created fractions between three different components: the nationalists, the communists, and the religious conservatives (Indonesia-investments, n.d.). The struggle from the religious conservatives always concerned imposing an Islamic State. During his early years as President, Suharto fought for nationalism, guided by *Pancasila* democracy of 5 principles of nationalism, that separate Islam from the State. Due to this, it creates frictions with the religious conservatives. The religious conservatives felt shut out from the political arena, and empowered themselves by having political Islamic sermons in mosques instead (Indonesia-investments, n.d.). The feeling of being shut out among these conservatives has been escalating for a long time, as the debate over turning Indonesia into an Islamic State, or at least implementing Sharia (Islamic Law) as the law for Indonesia, instead of *Pancasila*, has been a long struggle, from the formation of the State in 1945 (Nurdin, 2016). Perhaps this explains why Suharto was careful and sensitive towards this group during his early presidency. During Suharto's reign, he also weakened the military's power so as to only function as a tool for his

autocratic policies. In the 1990s, due to tensions between these components and to the uprising of the Islamist revival, finding that he was losing his grip on power, Suharto changed his political strategy adopting an Islamized agenda to garner political support from the religious conservatives' parties to maintain his power. However, this collaboration is still under the arm of the dictatorship regime. The people were still experiencing the lack of freedom at a political level. During the transition from Suharto's regime to the new Reformed era, society celebrated their freedoms from the authoritarian regime by adopting democracy. Through the nascent democracy, the country began to witness the formations of organizations that stood up to voice and fight for their rights, and this includes the force from the religious conservatives in fighting for an Islamic State.

Noorhaidi Hassan mentions, the main and known militant Islamist groups that immediately raise to power during the Reform Post-Suharto were:-'the Front Pembela Islam (Defenders of Islam Front), the Laskar Jihad (Holy War Force), the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesian Holy Warriors Council), the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI; Islamic Community), and the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI, Indonesian Islamic Party of Liberation)'(Nurdin, 2016, p. 161) As mentioned previously, these groups have one main goal-to force an Islamic State to be supported in Indonesia, which goes against the country's nationalistic, foundational, and philosophical approach of the *Pancasila*. According to Oxford dictionary, *Pancasila* "means '5 principles' which are democracy, humanitarianism, justice, monotheism, and unity" (Brown, McLean, & McMillan, 2018). The militant Islamist groups are against nearly everything that is deemed "westernized," but in the context of the *Pancasila*, they against democracy and humanitarianism. Moreover, they are against western concepts such as secularism, liberalism, modernization, nationalism, to name a few. From the advent of the Post-Suharto era and for the first ten years, the militant Islamist groups have called for *jihad* and used violence to threaten the State to conform to their political ideology, however, their fight remains at the fringes of society.

The scenario above explains in a glance the impact of the Islamism movement that Indonesia endured before and after the reform in 1998. This scenario is important in mentioning as it relates to the post-Islamism that is taking place in response to the rise of Islamism. Realizing that their violence did not help mobilize their cause, these militant Islamists adopted a different strategy. Hasan explains that the moderate Muslim activists used the post-Islamism movement to their advantage to inculcate a liberalist ideology to empower the people, but so too did their

counterpart(Hasan, 2013, p. 166). The militant Islamist groups have taken advantage of the post-Islamism movement by implementing their new proselytizing approach to ‘uphold the supremacy of the Sharia’(Hasan, 2013, p. 165) and disseminate the Islamic State concept to the public by applying “Sharia from below”(2013, p. 163). One such example of deploying “Sharia from below” was the successful passing of the Anti-Pornography law in 2008. In the latter part of this paper, I discuss this law in relation to freedom (or the lack of it) in Indonesian cinema. But what is pertinent to be mentioned here is that these groups began to propagate their ideas to the public through public sermons to disseminate ideas against western concepts. They claimed that these concepts were contrary to Islam, and would apostatize society, if Sharia was not implemented(Hasan, 2013, p. 162).

The Muslim moderates, however, are taking a different approach in this post-Islamism wave. They believe that democracy and Islam are compatible(2013, p. 170). Due to the available public sphere during the Post-Suharto, and the realization that the violent jihadist militant Islamists posed, moderate Muslims began to ‘campaign for civic freedom’(p. 168), advocating against the implementation of Sharia and jihad, which they viewed contradictory to ‘the principles of human rights, as guaranteed by the Indonesian constitution’(Hasan, 2013). In other words, these groups support liberal Islam, where democracy and Islam could be negotiated to ensure not only the country’s social, political and economic stability, but most importantly, the people’s ability and potential development for a progressive mindset. Some of the key organizations that were established to fight for such cause ‘include Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL, Liberal Islamic Network), the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), the Wahid Institute (TWI), and the Ma’arif Institute for Culture and Harmony’(2013).

Hasan concludes that Indonesia after the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime has and still going through Bayat’s concept of post-Islamism. Through the reform that the country experiences, it opens a channel for political openness, both for the radical as well as the moderate Muslims to renegotiate Islam as part of the society’s socio-political climate. One of the Islamist political parties, Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) shifted its ideological direction, moving from a strict doctrine of establishing Islamic State before the reform, to focusing on finding the real meaning of Islam by championing for ‘justice, good governance and human rights’(Bayat, 2013, p. 15) during the post-Suharto’s era. Even though Hasan mentions on the success of the PKS in earning significant votes during the 2004 and 2009

parliamentary elections, and thereby paints a positive outlook of the future of Indonesia, which is in “the throes of starting along a post-Islamist path”(Hasan, 2013, p. 177) in promoting a democratization process that includes pluralism, liberalism, multiculturalism, secularism (i.e anything progressive). He, however, fails to reveal the political strength that the militant jihadist Islamist groups hold over Indonesian high-ranking military, polices and politicians (Heeren, 2012, p. 158). This strength includes their relationship with the Islamic parties, especially the PKS, but also the United Development Party (PPP, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*) and Crescent Star Party (PBB, *Partai Bulan Bintang*), which supported the controversial draft of the Anti-Pornography bill<sup>1</sup> from 1999 to its passing in 2008. The passing of the Anti-Pornography Law is a yardstick of how flawed the Indonesian parliamentary system is in its understanding of true democracy. A detailed report on this claim has been carried out in 2008 by Stephen Sherlock and supported by Friedrich Naumann Stiftung: Für die Freiheit organization<sup>2</sup>. The report concludes that the Indonesian parliament (DPR) ‘with this contentious bill raises serious questions about the practice of wholesale adoption of leftover legislation from preceding parliaments’(Sherlock, 2008, p. 15). As stated earlier, the main feature of Bayat’s post-Islamism is the ‘complex process’ to completely break free from an Islamist ideology from the previous regimes(Bayat, 2013, p. 25), and to experience it as ‘the birth, out of a critical departure from Islamist experience, of a qualitatively different discourse and politics’(Bayat, 2013, p. 29). Sherlock defines the DPR’s decision making as something that took place in ‘closed-door lobbying meetings’ that fails to account for a ‘more comprehensive spectrum of community opinion’(Sherlock, 2008, p. 16). The controversy surrounding the passing of the Anti-Pornography Law is seen as a direct obstacle to freedom for its people, that robs the diversity of Indonesian’s voices. At the beginning of this paper, I suggested we investigate Indonesian cinema as a medium to show the real voice of the society., as cinema has the capacity to cope with the contradictory demands of reality, fiction and modernist ideals’(Armes, 1974). By looking closely at the country’s impactful cinema, the policymakers might begin to appreciate the beauty and benefit that ‘freedom’ can bring to society, and by so doing, subconsciously break free from the Draconian measures, namely the Anti-Pornography Law.

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<sup>1</sup> also known as RUU APP that stands for 'Rencana Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi' which means 'Bill on Anti-Pornography and Pornographic Acts'

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Naumann Stiftung: Für die Freiheit is a German nonprofit organization that supports liberal politics that relates itself with the Free Democratic Party. It supports strongly the idea on individual freedom and liberalism. 'Freiheit', a german word means 'Freedom'. See detailed report written by (Sherlock, 2008)



### 3. Power of Cinema: A New Cultural Agent Against Extremism

Cinema has been used by the authoritative regime as a propaganda tool to control its public. As quoted by Armes and Tapper on Khomeini's<sup>3</sup> use of cinema as, '[...] *one of the manifestations of culture and it must be put to the service of man and his education*' during the process of making Iran as an Islamic republic to '*reinvent culture, society, intellectual life, education and learning, 'Islamicized' and cleanse of the pollution of Western and Pahlavi elements*' (Armes, 1987, p. 189; Tapper, 2002), illustrates further cinema as an ideological tool for an authoritative state. The first recollection on cinema as a propagandistic mechanism was spotted during the First World War (WWI) that linked up 'the relation between war and cinema' that opened the possibility to question film's 'paradoxes and controversies' (Stojanova, 2017, p. 1). The oxymoronic, but equally important connection between propagandistic and realistic in such realist cinema is what brought the idea of paradoxes and controversies together. Stojanova uses an example of German expressionism and Soviet Avant-Garde film movements to showcase the 'paradoxes and controversies', the warring positions, these filmmakers have on a similar topic: -the ruins on humanity after the birth of technology. German expressionism pulls in 'a dystopian and deeply pessimistic' films, whereby the latter 'an optimistic and utopian one'. However different their perspectives are, if an observer looks at it through a cultural, philosophical and ideological perspective, then the jocular truth will appear, as how Andre Bazin describes, '[...] realism in art can only be achieved in one way- through artifice, and through this contradiction comes the "art" of cinema' (Bazin, 1967, p. 26). He notices also that in this equation that the truth can "work either to the advantage or to the detriment of realism". However Stojanova further explain and quoted Bazin, "in [the] name of truth [art] can only magnify or neutralize the effectiveness of the elements of reality that the camera captures" (Bazin, 1967, p. 27; Stojanova, 2017, p. 139). Therefore, through cinema observers may see at the very minimal at its subtext level the reality of the community it is portraying, regardless how far "artifice[d]" the cinema or the narrative has been reconstructed, or whether it is in a form of documentary or feature film (Stern, 2000, p. 66).

Jim Jarmusch, the famous American filmmaker in his interview said that "everything is political", and "...the only films [...] that are politically effective are those that ask questions and

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<sup>3</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) also known as Ayatollah Khomeini is the Iranian religious and political leader who changed Iran to become an Islamic republic, stripping away the 'Westernized' elements from the previous Pahlavi regime, at the same time overthrow the country's last emperor, locally named as Shah.

that cause the audience to ask question”(Jarmusch & Özgül, 2001, p. 97) Jarmusch’s statement, along with many other film critics and researchers believe what cinema does to the society, both consciously and subconsciously. As this chapter begins by quoting Khomeini as a dictator and just like any other world dictators, including; Indonesia under Sukarno and Suharto’s regime (Sen, 2003, p. 384), who have used cinema and received a substantial amount of success to control the public, the society that is also “influenced by the very similar artistic expression over political intervention”(Stern, 2000, p. 66) realized this power and used it against the regime. There have been many studies done on public intervention in cinema against the regimented government. Through the intervention of cinema with the political questions and concerns at the core of the movement lies the intervention of the mind of society through public attitudes and the interconnectedness between art and political power. Stern uses an example as early as in 1925 a film by Sergei Eisenstein *Battleship Potemkin* where this film was used as an intervention from the society to fight for the Russian Revolution. The film was not just intended for the local community, but it branched out to the Western European, including Germany, and was banned by the German government in fear of “its revolutionary message” (2000, p. 68). Having the urge to retort to the impact of ‘cinema intervention’, the German government through “the semi-documentary” *Olympia* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1938), was made “to prove that Nazi Germany was a democratic and open society”(Stern, 2000). This attempt, however, backfired as when the film reached America the same year, “the world had learned of the pogrom against the Jews”(p. 68) done by that regime. It is in these opposite examples lie the notion of Jarmusch’s aforementioned statement:- the responsibility of the observers, filmgoers, film critics, and society at large to weight, both subconsciously and consciously, not only at the visual representative in cinema itself, but also the holistic process of cinema which includes the film production and those in control of its production, to find true meaning of ‘reality’ that particular film is portraying.

As this paper deals with Post-Islamism derived from the Iranian social political upsurge, it is also pertinent to see how Iranian filmmakers use cinema to fight for the true meaning of ‘reality’ before, during and after the revolution. The general impression on the success of Iranian cinema has always revolved around the discourse of identity(Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009, p. 159). Recognizing the power of cinema, there is a quite prominent difference in how the government reacted to the cinema before and after the revolution to upkeep the ‘identity’. Before the revolution, art cinema that was competing at the international film festivals was not being

monitored by the government as closely as after the revolution (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009, p. 160). The Iranian Cinema received its glory days in the 1990s and since then had been on the world scene before it got into its plateau mode beginning 2000 (2009, p. 141). Zeybadi wrote that this is the case because Iranian culture and psyche were always conscious with trying to shape and appear modern, and that majority of them, mostly the conservatives and the Iranian nationalists, who held much of the public voice, argued that they would not share their homeland problem with the outside world (p. 155). Although the reformist filmmakers received a lot of pressure from the government as well as the public, they continued to bring out films that questioned Iranian social realities, and at a point, a bit too radical for the Iranian to accept as these films to them were like documenting “backwardness of Iran” (p. 153). This phenomenon situates the filmmakers as part of the “national space” that continues through their films to making cinema as a platform that negotiates boundaries of cultural identity (p. 160). Harris confirms this in his writings that post-revolution artists have become the voice of the public in shaping the “country’s state of mind” (Harris, 2014). Harris wrote that the fighting voice usually comes from the diasporic Iranians who have been trained outside Iran, who work and live in a different condition than those who live inside Iran. Some diasporic Iranians have actively promoted its cinema to the West that endures the phenomenon of fighting for freedom, specifically in the identity discourse between three groups: “Islam, [pre-Islamic] Iran, and modernity” (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009, p. 155). These artists firmly reject the notion that “Iranian-ness is a single, fixed identity [that] remains the same throughout history and that “the work [on show] calls for a complete rethinking of modern Iranian art history” (Harris, 2014, p. 1). Through cinema the state could revisit its history to reflect and push the boundaries for the future. In the next chapter I will be analyzing the situation in Indonesia in terms of its appreciation on art cinema during its revolution (*Reformasi*), in its introduction of Anti-Pornography law and how it has impacted the freedom and their identity.

#### **4. Anti-Pornography law, freedom in cinema and the future of Indonesian’s democracy**

In October 2008, the Indonesian government had passed the controversial anti-pornography law despite public outcry since the first bill was firstly introduced in 1999. What seemed to be the grave concern of the public is the symbolic gesture behind this law due to the

inconsistency and broadly defined articles describing the parameters and its punishments. Pornography is defined in that article as ‘man-made sexual materials in the form of drawings, sketches, illustrations, photographs, text, voice, sound, moving pictures, animation, cartoons, poetry, conversations, and gestures’(Belford, 2010; Olivia Rondonuwu, 2008; Walden, 2017). The ambiguous description of the article, that frames everything that is deemed immoral, can be abused by those in power as a control regulator or by the public themselves as a retort mechanism. The ambiguity described by many, including Renaldi, a local journalist as, “[a] clause [that] opened the door to the prosecution of anything deemed indecent by officials, including, but not limited to, strip clubs, miniskirts, and traditional dances”(Renaldi, 2017). Due to this ambiguity, the abuse of the law happened through several numbers of cases that have been reported since then, especially when it reached its peak in 2016 (Platt, Davies, & Bennett, 2018) due to moral panic against LGBT culture, where high-ranking politicians and Islamic moral polices detained “anyone suspected of engaging in “immoral” practices [to be] taken to a police station”(Katjasungkana, 2009; Platt et al., 2018, p. 6). On the other end of the spectrum of the ‘abusiveness’ of the law, Rizieq Habieb, founder of the most active militant jihadist group in Indonesia (Islamic Defenders Front, FPI), also instrumental behind the passing of the law, had been detained by the police under the very law. He was charged under this broadly termed law because he was caught having nude photos of a woman that is not his wife in his mobile phones(Harvey, 2017; Walden, 2017). This further exemplifies the ambiguity and by extension the instability of the function of the law. With this level of ambiguity, it reflects on the erratic of Indonesian religious, social and political stance largely in its understanding on equality, tolerance, and justice. The instability, that is inherited through the past regimes, from the Dutch colonialism to the Indonesian authoritarian regimes<sup>4</sup> in defining and dictating the appropriate standard for its society ‘moral’ and ‘decent’ is further amplified with the concerted effort of passing this law. This instability has shifted further the blurred line between the public and the sense of art(Lindsay, 2011) in the public and personal sphere. Lindsay noted that this blurry movement, which she defines as the “Baudrillardian mediatized reality”, is further promoted by the Islamic religious right (Lindsay, 2011), that, as if repeating the role of the autocratic power from the previous authoritarian regime.

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<sup>4</sup> Before the passing of Anti-Pornography Law, Indonesia had curbed ‘indecent behavior’ through its Criminal Code that was adopted from the Dutch criminal code, originally dated in 1886. See (Lindsay, 2011, pp. 173-174)

## 5. Discussing Post-Islamism in Indonesian Cinema

The transition period, that took place during the shifting periods from one ‘mediatized reality’ to another, was when Indonesia actually perhaps witnessed the ostensibly advent Post-Islamism movement, that could also be what Hassan claimed as “Indonesia today is in the throes of starting along a post-Islamist path”(Hasan, 2013, p. 177), was during its height of reform from 1998 to 2008. During this period, not only other art forms, such as dance, music and visual arts expressed their freedom of artmaking through exhibitions, workshops, seminars, and protests but they were also was celebrated through its cinema industry(Heeren, 2012, p. 157). With the liberty of exercising freedom of expression, the Indonesian film industry also witnessed a rising slope. The industry has produced more than 20 films and received positive recognition from international film critics, and either screened or won international film awards from festivals such as Cannes, Deauville, Locarno, Rotterdam, Seattle, Brisbane, and Singapore. The standard aesthetics that most film festival stakeholders look for as their film criterion are those that showcase ‘national’ cinema which pushes the boundaries by offering within its narrative the ‘dogmas of discoveries’(Chan, 2011) Here it is worth to mention Siegfried Kracauer’s socio-psychological approach of reading a film with the ‘dogma of discoveries’, that film critics are convinced that ‘films must not be separated from their political, social and cultural habit’(Kaes, 1995, p. 49). As Kaes points out Kracauer’s theory, films should ‘offer responses to burning questions that meant to resonate and leave impact’(p. 49).

The few salient international award-winner-filmmakers such as Garin Nugroho, Nia Dinata, Riri Riza, Nan Achnas, and Joko Anwar relegated Indonesian cinema to the international level because they essentialized Indonesian dogma and aesthetics. In other words, they shaped their culture as for how Geertz defined it, that it is ‘not cults and customs but the structures of meaning which men give shape to their experience’(Geertz, 1973, p. 312). Garin Nugroho’s *Daun di Atas Bantal* (Leaf on A Pillow, 1998) centers upon three under poverty street children in Yogyakarta who live out of a mercy and support from a middle age saleswoman. It is from her point of view that we as the audience get to experience the dilapidating life of these urchins, struggling in the austere adult world. Nan Achnas’s *Pasir Berbisik* (Whispering Sands, 2001) poetically invites the audience into the journey of a willful teenage girl with her overprotective mother showcasing their complex mother-daughter relationship, while at the same time forced to flee away from their village, as political violence strikes between the Indonesian military and the

Communist party. The film highlights, and raises awareness on the marginalized community, and in this instance, on powerless women who are silenced and treated as peripheral objects, during the 1965 political turmoil led by Suharto authoritarian and military regime. Riri Riza's *Gie* (2005) is a biopic of a born Christian Chinese journalist, Soe Hok Gie, that centers on his struggle as an unconventional free thinker and political activist living under the [mis] guided-democracy Sukarno and authoritarian Suharto's. The film represents Indonesian historical political turmoil that questions humanistic issues on equality, justice, and righteousness during the life of Soe Hok Gie from 1942-1969, but most importantly triggers question on today's Indonesia, a country that still struggles to break free from the corrupt years of the old regime and 'now facing the increasing influence of fundamentalist Muslims on cultural life'(IFFR, 2006). Nia Dinata's *Berbagi Suami* (Love For Share, 2006), a satirical film that dwells upon polygamy issue, builds its narrative on three women separately, showcasing how these women deal on polygamy from different social strata and ethnic backgrounds. This film reflects the current Indonesian standing on polygamy. Polygamy has always been highly debated issue in Indonesia, but it was a more so the case during the Post-New Order when the pressure from the Islamic organizations and support from the high-profile figures increased due to the lax legal restrictions in this matter(Hoesterey & Clark, 2012, p. 212; Izharuddin, 2016, p. 157). This issue takes its peak in May 2003, when Indonesia witnessed its first 'Polygamy Awards' event to promote and denounce any negative sentiment towards polygamy to the public(Izharuddin, 2016). Due to many oppositions who stood up against the event, - as recorded by one source, there were about 850 protestors (Hoesterey & Clark, 2012) - the award never took place again after that night. Dinata, through her film however never intended to create a propaganda for or against polygamy, instead; as quoted in Imanjaya's article, 'she just wanted to "communicate with an audience, with people, and give them a slice of life"(2012), a sentiment shared just as heavily by all the aforementioned filmmakers.

Other than feature films, documentaries on human rights also saw emergence following the ratified moderate censorship guidelines. A documentary directed by Joshua Oppenheimer called *The Act of Killing* (2012), centered on the Indonesian former ruler 1965-66 mass killings, was released for cinema exhibition in Indonesia on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012. The feedback from the domestic Indonesian audience was remarkable, ranging from 'anger at its 'celebration of killing' to hope that it will help Indonesia address its past', which was reported after the screening of this

Oscar-nominated documentary in Yogyakarta (Bjerregaard, 2014) The Indonesian government gave a mixed response towards the content of the documentary, but the fact that it was released for a public screening showed a progress towards greater freedom of expression.

Being its feature or documentary, their films question the reality of life, projecting what Armes as a film critic defined realism in cinematic approaches, as simply “show[ing] the world as it is”, while heightens the power of film by “imitate life” and eventually “explore an inner reality beneath the surface”(Armes, 1974, p. 10; Imanjaya, 2009). The creativity of expressing and exploring the inner reality of life is supported very much by having the freedom to investigate the truth. Herein lies the connection between having the rights to freedom and creativity. Only when one possesses the freedom to investigate the truth can one achieve the connection with the essence of humanity which boils down to the spirit of humanity. In this very essence is what democracy and the concept of freedom of expression are being lauded for and celebrated at by these filmmakers. From the example of films that have been discussed in this chapter, it can be concluded that, the meaning and reasons of the existence of these films are to honor the freedom of expression given by the government to the filmmakers for revealing the truth on its social realism on human rights issues (*Daun Di Atas Bantal*, 1998 and *The Act of Killing*, 2012), on questioning the corrupted governments (*Pasir Berbisik*, 2001), on rising in religious intolerance (Gie, 2005), and a mixture of these three themes in *Berbagi Suami*, 2006).

However, after 20 years, the country has not experienced democracy as how true democracy should be. This is not to say that the scholars, policy makers, researchers and those who care about democracy are oblivious of today’s challenge towards implementing true democracy as it is globally under threat, but as of today, denoted by The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, there are about 19 countries in the world that are reportedly still practicing true democracy. The annual Democracy Index examined government’s ‘electoral process and pluralism, [the] functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture, and civil liberties’, and found that Indonesia made the biggest drop in practicing democracy, from 48<sup>th</sup> to 68<sup>th</sup> position this year (Team, 2018). There are four main important aspects that were highlighted by Varagur in her report concerning Indonesian’s failure in keeping its electoral promise. The main failure was freedom of expression, followed by the struggle in leveling down corruption, rising in religious intolerance and curbing human rights issue, which

unsurprisingly are the same main issues that were advocated by these Indonesian salient award-winning filmmakers.

Relating to the early discussion on Bayat's 'project', the above-mentioned failures could be use as the catalyst for Indonesian's 'project'. This project whereby gathers intellectuals, social and policy actors to respond differently to the function of reform cinema. By revisiting and dissecting these films through the Post-Islamism lens, the government and its people can perhaps negotiate the issues mentioned previously, of which also that stutter Indonesian's democracy, in a more liberating manner What the above-mentioned filmmakers put out in their films bring about pertinent questions on the current state of its society, that require immediate actions. In the same way cinema negotiates cultural transition through its images for the sense of identity, Post-Islamism negotiates an identity that position Islam and secularism on the same pedestal to be able to bridge the gap within the Muslim world. If, and when Indonesia keeps repeating the same cycle towards progression, the faster it is in grasping modernity.

## **6. Concluding Remarks: Post-Islamism concept as the savior for cinema and its democracy**

Taken together, the contribution in this article, bridging the gap between post-Islamism concept with the power of cinema and the current social state of its public, demonstrates the stumbling block that Indonesia is currently facing which is the extremist power from its Islamic moral police. The concept of Post-Islamism is a complex process to be implemented because it requires a comprehensive understanding of freedom. Although there are many progressive scholars, locally and internationally who defended the idea of freedom from the Islamic perspective, the voice of the majority tyrant from the extremist groups prevail. However, looking at the progression and positive recognition the Indonesian cinema industry has received internationally during the *Reformasi*, there is a glimpse of hope for post-Islamism to be implemented in this country. It is possible through the continuation of a struggle from the intervention of the mind off the progressive group, both locally and internationally to further push away extremism and nurture civic mindset. Freedom is never given freely, and it requires a long time to be implemented, even by and as was experienced by the West before they gained 'true' freedom through democracy, which is also in itself, as Almagor explains, still at large dealing with its pitfall, as it is a young phenomenon to any civilizations (Cohen-Almagor, 1991).



Therefore, to gain freedom requires struggle and resistance from the civic community. The level of civic resistance in a country that used to be ruled by an authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian/ democracy, like Indonesia and Malaysia, is currently still very sporadic. It is as such because by default civil resistance means “people power” through non-violent protest, that is defined by Gene Sharp as, “acts of commission, whereby people do what they are not supposed to do, not expected to do, or forbidden by law from doing; acts of omission, whereby people do not do what they are supposed to do, are expected to do, or are required by law to do; or a combination of acts of commission and omission”(Sharp, 1973). In other words, the civil resisters, in this context, the Muslim moderates need to adopt a non-traditional institutionalized system to fix the broken democracy. To do so, Muslim moderates need to fight “collectively, systematically and strategically”(Sharp, 1973) through popular campaigns, such as mobilizing all these sporadic groups, that entails all kinds of people who come with no special rights or privileges that are oppressed through the usage of popular mass media such as cinema. It is in this group of oppressed that helped Bayat to study the great power that lies behind the adaptation of post-Islamism in Iran (Bayat, 2013, pp. 59-60). What happened in Iran, which is what Indonesia and Malaysia have little strength in, was the realization that Islamic state that was introduced by Khomeini “failed to respond to the demands of complex modern life”, that paradoxically the Islamic state itself has helped facilitated “the growing secularization of Sharia”(Bayat, 2013). This realization had brought the Iranians to the second factor which is, the massive impact in social changes that is explained by Bayat as “increasing literacy, urbanization and economic shift that generated actors such as educated middle classes, the young, increasingly literate women and a collective urban consciousness who pushed for social and political transformation”(2013). These new emerging social and political makers used a sort of a reverse effect of Islam into their struggle, by using Islam to “[undo] Islamism as politics”. It is not to say that Iran did not go through a bleak time, receiving a strong comeback from the extremist political leaders, where they had their intellectuals and many liberals movements incarcerated. However, the spirit of fighting marched on through the political Green movement, also known by the western media as the Persian Spring, protesting for the removal of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the 6th Iranian conservative president. In 2013, the movement managed to win a new president, Hassan Rouhani who vouched for a reform and more progressive idea to be implemented in the country(Nasr, 2017). Hitherto, although Iran is still considered a hybrid authoritarian regime (a combination of

democracy and theocracy), it is believed with the elected presidency of Rouhani, this is the best form of democracy Iran has ever experienced. What Iran has is strong politics in a very confusing state of “undemocratic democracy”, as how Max Fisher described further this term on politics of Iran as, “[when]viewed over time, reveal something unusual: Iran has fluctuated significantly, sometimes ranking among troubled democracies, other times alongside the world’s fiercest dictatorships (Fisher, 2017), which is what neither Indonesia nor Malaysia has experienced, at least in that sense of trajectory. Perhaps due to this reasoning, despite weak democracy, the people keep on fighting, as described by Erfani as “needy times”(Erfani, 2012, p. 192) for the idea of tolerance, pluralism, and modernism in its political realm to be implemented. One of the strongest political voices that Iranian has is its art cinema. Erfani in his conclusion wrote, “Iranian cinema has been unmaking the government’s narratives for years (p. 191). He further explains that politics and cinema do not have “purely causal relationship” but they are not separated totally either (p. 192). In other words, the filmmakers have pushed the political boundaries from being univocal that in the long run relinquish itself from the domineering autocratic regime. For Indonesia and Malaysia, being in and about the same situation, -albeit different trajectory in its socio-political level, and as with Iran, all being Muslim-majority countries that are facing the conundrum of assimilating liberty and Islam in a modern context, should consider using cinema consciously with the post-Islamism concept to fight for a more progressive civic mindset community.

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