

# Countering the Backlash (Reading Islam in Islamic Movies: From *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* to *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*)

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## ABSTRACT

The boom of Islamic films in Indonesia in the post-new order has the mission to construct Islam and its values. The 9/11 incidents and the threat of terrorism have affected the negative image of Islam. Islamic films in portraying Islam brought the spirit to challenge its stereotype. In the beginning periods of the emergence of Islamic cinema, represented by *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s phenomenal Islamic films, Islam was depicted as tolerant and respectful to others, especially from values identical to the West. This film successfully performs the harmony of Islamic and western values in its narration and visual aesthetic. The different image of Islam is represented in Islamic films produced recently. In *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*, which successfully attracts the audience, Islam has the ambition to conquer the West. This film attempts to position the greatness of Islam compared to the West. Instead of promoting the victory of Islam over the West, this movie depicts the inferiority of Islam towards the West's domination. This paper compares the construction of Islam in the face of the west in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*. This paper explores the difference in aesthetics between the two films by analysing the narrative and visual strategy in portraying Islam.

*Keywords— Islam, Representation, Politic of Aesthetic*

## I. INTRODUCTION

When we talk about culture in daily life, people often discuss its differences by categorising cultures into West versus East. The two cultures are described as opposite to each other, bringing them into essentialism. Samuel Huntington<sup>[1]</sup>, in his famous book *The Clash of Civilisation*, placed the two cultures in dualistic conflict by stating that the western becomes the most civilised culture than others. Eastern is considered as traditional and conventional, being identical to religiosity and spirituality. Islamic civilisation has become part of it.

Bernard Lewis<sup>[2]</sup>, in his writing entitled *The Roots of Muslim Rage*-the book which inspired Huntington in writing *The Clash of Civilization*-focused on the clash between Islam and the West. His opinion of the dichotomy of Islam and the West seems to confirm the essentialism perspective of Islam. He is considered to be degrading the characters of Arabs compared to Europeans. It explains why Islamic states in the Middle East are left behind the European states' improvement.

Some critics have been addressed to Huntington and Lewis's perspective, but the critics cannot change the dominant and essentialism discourse of West and East/Islam relations. Islam is depicted as backward, anti-modern,

intolerant, and monolithic. Moreover, the 9/11 terrorist attack in the US reinforces the stigma of Islam more than ever. After the tragedy, the US Government invoked the world to fight against terrorism. The war against terrorism brought to the negative image of Islam since Islam has been identical to terrorism. The mass media have also supported this condition.

The news covering the attack or London Bombing in 2005 mentioned Islamic fundamentalism groups as the perpetrators behind the terror. The illustration of the report was framed to describe the dreadful of the incident; the burning victims, the screaming people, or the frantic faces discrediting Islam. Television news, such as BBC or Fox News, often mentioned terminologists, like "Islamic terrorist" or "Islamic bomb" to describe the terror. Those labels identify Islam with violence.

Mainstream mass media from the West have covered Islam negatively. Bashy Quraishy<sup>[3]</sup>, a Muslim journalist from Denmark, conducted a survey of media coverage about religion in Denmark. He took a sampling of six national newspapers and two television channels. The results revealed that 75% of the coverage about Islam, 60% presented a negative perspective. The coverage of Islam in the media presented Islam as a threat to western people.

The negative image of Islam brought to the anti-Islam sentiments in western countries. The publication of Prophet Mohammed cartoons created by Kurt Westergaard in *Jylland-*

*Posten* (Denmark) in 2005, *France Soir* (France), *Die Welt* (Germany), *La Stampa* (Italy), and *El Periodico* (Spain) in 2006; and also, the controversial documentary film made by Geert Wilders were the examples.

The stigma also affects Muslims in Indonesia as the country with the most significant Muslim population globally. The spirit of correcting the negative image of Islam is often carried out. After the fall of the New Order period in Indonesia in 1998, the trend of Islamic consumption began with the growth of the Islamic economy<sup>[4]</sup>. The development of the Islamic economy encourages the emergence of industries that use Islamic religious principles in practice. For example, in the education sector, schools labelled Islam or the fashion industry put forward the hijab trend or hijab style as one of the phenomenal Islamic industries. Also, in the film industry, there is a boom in Islamic films.

Some Islamic films produced have been successful in becoming box offices. The films pursue economic achievement, but they also have a mission to counter the stigma about Islam. For example, the two phenomenal films in my research entitled *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* or *The Islamic Verses* (2007) and *99 Cahaya Di Langit Eropa* or *99 Lights in the Sky of Europe 1 and 2* (2013 and 2014). The press conference and the filmmaker's interview in the *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*'s launch stated how this film tries to give different perspectives of Islam covered by global mass media. This statement was also supported by the government officials invited to see the premier. They stated that Islamic films have to share the proper understanding of Islam. Islamic films should build an image of Islam as tolerant, peaceful, and respectful to diversity. Since Islamic films should bring the mission to create a positive image of Islam, they indeed represent what and how Islam is, Muslim identity, or how to be a good Muslim. As an example, Dien Syamsuddin, Chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, who also acted as an advisor to the production of this film, stated as follows:

“Film ini bisa kita harapkan menjadi sarana dakwah Islamiyah. Inilah film yang selama ini bisa didambakan. Bernafaskan Islami kita berbicara tentang cinta yang merupakan bahasa universal yang sangat dibutuhkan oleh Indonesia dan dunia pada umumnya.”<sup>[5]</sup>

[We hope this film will become a means of Islamic da'wah. It is a film that has always been coveted. With an Islamic spirit, we talk about love, which is a universal language that Indonesia and the world in general need]

Understanding the boom in Islamic films after the New Order phenomenon is interesting and crucial. There are many studies to discuss this issue. Heryanto<sup>[6]</sup> argued that the booming of Islamic films in Indonesia is one indication of the ongoing post-Islamism in Indonesia. Heryanto used post-Islamism to refer to Asep Bayat's writings about post-Islamism in Egypt, Turkey, and Islamic countries in the Middle East. Although Bayat explained that post-Islamism was only relevant to describe the conditions in these countries, Heryanto saw the relevance of the term post-

Islamism put forward by Bayat to the phenomena in Indonesia after the New Order.

Kusuma<sup>[7]</sup> compared religious films in the New Order and post-New Order eras. Religious films in the previous period were considered more successful in promoting Islamic values and being a medium of *da'wah* (Islamic teaching). Meanwhile, today's religious films are regarded as potential commodities. As a result, religious films are often accused of only using Islamic values as their marketing strategy. Religious films are like romance films in general. The Islamic values are just the packaging, whereas the romantic story becomes the narrative of the film.

Imanda<sup>[8]</sup> discussed the correlation and struggle between the two motives behind Islamic film production. On one side is the propagation of religion to the broadest possible audience, and on the other side is the desire to make as much profit as possible. Different from Imanda focusing on the motive behind film production, Sasono<sup>[9]</sup> explained that Islamic-themed films in Indonesia involve religious commodification and Islamization.

This paper enlivens the discussion of Islamic film production, which has not been discussed in previous writings. In contrast to Imanda and Kusuma, who stated that Islamic films are a film industry strategy making Islamic values a commodity, I do not pay attention to the problem of commodification. As well as Sasono's argument that Islamic films involve more than merely religious commodification, I still see the efforts of Islamic films to carry an Islamic mission, in this case, to counter the strong stigma about Islam in the West. Using the post-colonial approach, I reveal how this counter strategy appears in the texts of Islamic films. In this case, I focus on the two films mentioned above. This article tries to describe and analyze how Islamic films construct Islam related to its mission in countering the backlash of Islam.

## II. METHOD

I used textual analysis as the research method. According to Frey, Botan, and Kreps<sup>[10]</sup>, textual analysis is the research method focusing on the description and interpretation of the text containing visual messages. The textual analysis has an interpretive function. It pays attention to denotative meanings and tries to examine the implicit social meanings or the connotative meaning. Therefore, I analysed the text's content, structure, and functions to reveal the ideological message behind the text.

My research focuses on the two Indonesian Islamic films, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* or *The Verses of Love* (2007) and *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa 1&2* or *99 Lights in the Sky of Europe 1 and 2* (2013 and 2014). There are two reasons for selecting the films as my object of analysis. First, the films have succeeded in attracting the audience. Second, I have been motivated by the story and visualisation of the films supporting my argumentation. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Islamic films have a mission in countering the stigma of

Islam. Despite countering the stigma, Islamic films show the inferiority of Muslims over the West. Thus, the two films become the best locus for analysing my point of interest.

The analysis began with identifying the elements of films, shots, and scenes. I explored the elements by relating the films' images, dialogues, and aesthetic strategies. Next, I applied intertextuality and interdiscursivity to understand and reveal the hidden message or ideological meaning. The analysis also included the relation between text, social, and political context.

### III. DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Modern Islam in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*

*Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (AAC) has become history in the Indonesian film industry. It succeeded in achieving spectacular viewers, three million viewers in three weeks when it was first premiered. It also succeeded in inviting viewers from any class of Indonesian society, from early teenagers to older adults or from the religious community to government officials.

The filmmakers, such as the director, producer, or influential persons, like the president, chief of Indonesia House of Representative, and other state officials, claimed AAC as a religious film. The president even mentioned that AAC reflects Islam and demonstrates how to appreciate Islamic values more than just a symbol to live in differences peacefully. AAC can be a medium to provide a proper understanding of Islam and to circulate Islamic values.

The centre of the story is about the love of a pious man from Indonesia who studies in Egypt (Fahri) with four women: Nurul, Fahri's college friend from Indonesia; Noura, an ungrateful Egyptian girl (Fahri saves her life, but she betrays him later by accusing him that he rapes her, and it brings him to jail); Maria, a Coptic Christian living next door to Fahri, who inexplicably converts to Islam at the end of the film; and Aisha, a girl from a wealthy German-Arab family. Finally, Fahri gets married to Aisha after facing a lot of troubles and Maria (but, in the end, Maria passes away).

Islamic values package love stories between them portrayed in some elements, such as the setting. AAC shows the living condition in Cairo, Egypt, as the background of the story. Having the setting in Cairo, some dialogues are in the Arabic language. The actors also wear Islamic fashion styles, such as the veil or *hijab* with long *kurtas* or *abayas* for women, and *Khamis* suit with *shalwar*. Islamic nuance is also strengthened in how the quotation of verses from *Al-Qur'an* is used in some scenes.

There is a scene in the metro when Fahri defends an American woman from the violence of an Egyptian man. Fahri and the Egyptian man are involved in argumentation about the law to give protection to the guest. Fahri quotes *hadith* as a reference to his attitude. Additionally, in the scene, Fahri explains to Alicia, an American woman, about a man's

obligation to protect women. He mentions some verses from *Qur'an* to correct people's opinions about Islam. Through love stories, AAC constructs Islam and Muslims' identity.

AAC describes modern Islam. Modern Islam means meeting Islamic values with modernity, the two concepts that contradict each other. On the one side, Islam as a religion has fundamental values as a way of life derived from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. Meanwhile, modernity is considered the result of Western thinking, of which the majority is Christian. Modernity is a social condition that contrasts with all past human experiences, so it is often opposed to traditional or conservative. The West's view as the centre of civilisation brings it to change communities in other parts of the world. Through colonisation, and now globalisation, they want to change people considered backward and primitive, to become more advanced and modern. It is known as modernisation, which refers to transforming traditional, backward, or primitive to modern society. On the other hand, the term modernisation also means developing countries to become a modern society, constructing an advanced and civilised society<sup>[11]</sup>.

For Islam, modernity is a western perspective developed after the Protestant Reformation, which firmly adheres to secularism and religious marginalisation<sup>[12]</sup>. For the West, Islam is often regarded as an obstacle to modernisation due to the increasing number of movements carried out by groups known as fundamentalist Islamic movements, labelled as terrorists by some western circles<sup>[13]</sup>.

The point is that there is a contradiction between Islam and modernity. Modernity is considered contrary to Islamic values. Islamic values often become a threat to modernity. However, in this film, the two perspectives are negotiated.

Modern Islam in this film is performed in such ways:

##### 3.1.1. The Pious Person Talks About Democracy: Human Rights and Women Equality

The main idea of democracy originated from Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and is claimed as the system which emerged from the West. According to Larry Diamond<sup>[14]</sup>, democracy is a government system that has four key elements: (1) a system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; (2) active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; (3) protection of the human rights of all citizens; and (4) a rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. Democracy emphasises the freedom and equality of all citizens, discussed in several scenes at AAC.

These scenes show the discussion between the pious, Fahri and Alicia, and a journalist from America. Alicia is impressed by Fahri when he protects her and Aisha from an Egyptian man who attacks her and Aisha in a metro. While defending her and Aisha, Fahri says he must respect guests, especially women, as Muslims. After the incident, Aisha interviews Fahri about Islam. On that occasion, Fahri explains

to Alicia that Muslims must respect others, especially guests from different nations or religions.

They also talk about the relationship between men and women according to Islamic values. Fahri corrects the misleading understanding of westerners who think that Islam allows men to do violence to women. He clarifies that Islam promotes equality between men and women; for example, men and women have equal opportunities to make decisions.

The scenes try to perform Fahri as a Muslim who respects people of different religions and nationalities. He also emphasises the importance of a Muslim to respect women. The performance of Fahri as a Muslim is very different from the depiction of Muslims according to westerners, especially portrayed in media.

I see the scenes are an attempt to counter the western view of Islam. According to Ahmed<sup>[15]</sup>, there are two western perspectives of Islam regarding the Islamic civilisation, the positive and negative views. The positive view is observed from the West's response to the contribution of Islamic civilisation to science. For example, the Arabic notation and decimal system, the work of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in medicine, or the success of Muslim scientists in preserving Roman-Persian (Greco Hellenistic) scientific thought and transition when Europe was in the dark ages. At the same time, the opposing view is a western criticism of Islam as a source of violence that threatens the establishment and prosperity of the West. There is a belief in the western world that Muslims mistreat women and Islamic leaders become tyrants in Muslim society. This view then creates Islamophobia.

AAC shows a characteristic of a Muslim who supports western values. Human rights and women's equality as the essential elements of democracy are believed as the principles that originated from the West. Fahri represents the modern Muslim, a devout Muslim who believes in western values. It opposes the Muslim depicted by the West.

### 3.1.2. *The Construction of Muslim Identity*

Fahri represents the Muslim identity: pious, good-looking, kind-hearted, well-educated, respectful and care to others, especially to women. As a devout and religious person, Fahri regularly does the five-time prayers, recites the Qur'an, and attends religious gatherings. Nilan<sup>[16]</sup> stated Fahri's personality as a person with personal/moral self-regulation. Borrowing Foucault's theory on 'Technology of the self', Nilan explained that *personal/moral self-regulation* refers to the power of the self, in which the (male) person puts forward his logic than emotion. As discussed in the previous part, AAC constructs the Muslim identity differently from the West's understanding.

### 3.1.3. *The Display of Modern Product*

The fashion style and the appearance of global products and brands perform the image of modernity. Mercedes Benz and Apple, for example, are showed blatantly. It is a relevant

image of Islam: modern Islam. Modernity has become an essential aspect of Islam. More presently, AAC attempts to represent modern Islam as the form of compromise between Islamism and modernity.

The contradictive combination between Islam and modernity is supported by the characteristics of the Muslim market in Indonesia open and permissive to global culture<sup>[17]</sup>. Nilan<sup>[18]</sup> also argued that devout Muslim youth identifies themselves as modern Muslim youth. Not just regulating Islamic religious values in everyday life, but they also use western and modern symbols, such as wearing jeans or consuming the products of technology, at the same time. The hybrid practice becomes the compromise for young people to secure themselves from orthodox Islamic values and the popular globalisation cultures.

## 3.2. *Glorious Islam in 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*

*99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa* (99CLE) was produced in two series in 2013 and 2014. The shooting process was conducted in cities in Europe: Vienna, Paris, Cordoba and Istanbul. The story is about a couple of Indonesian Muslims who live in Europe to study. The story focuses on how they adapt to living in Europe and overcome the difference related to their Muslim identity that often causes problems.

The two central figures in this film: Hanum and Rangga, are real characters. Hanum Salsabiela Rais is a daughter of a well-known Indonesian Muslim intellectual figure, Amien Rais, and Rangga Almahendra is Hanum's husband. Hanum said that the story in this film is based on their experience while studying in Europe. Hanum, as a former journalist, for three years has accompanied Rangga studying for a doctorate. She then begins to know the history and influence of Islam brought by the Turks in the Ottoman Empire in Europe, from Vienna, Paris to Istanbul. Like AAC, this film is also praised by many figures, including the president, because it provides many examples and applications of peace, brotherhood and tolerance<sup>[19]</sup>.

99CLE portrays glorious Islam that Islamic civilisation is as great as western's. West is depicted as a great civilisation. The camera movement focusing on the landmarks of Europe shows the western's great civilisation. The camera represents Hanum and Rangga's gaze in awe at the landscapes and landmarks of Europe displayed. Nevertheless, the film tries to show the glorious Islam during the progress of European civilisation.

The portrait of Islam as great as the West is performed in such ways:

### 3.2.1. *The Romanticism of The Glory of Islam in the Past*

99CLE constructs the history of Islam in Europe to raise the pride of Islam among Muslims. The film narrates that Muslims and Islam had almost conquered Europe through war. There is a historical figure in the film, a general from

Turkey named Kara Mustapha Pasha. He almost succeeded in occupying the centre of Europe in Vienna several centuries ago but failed and was sentenced to death.

This story takes Hanum to travel to several places in Europe to see the signs of the struggle of Islam to conquer Europe. For example, the setting of Vienna in this film is dominated by large spaces and main streets, or Paris (Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, Louvre Museum), Cordoba in Spain, and Istanbul in Turkey. The locations visited are landmarks or areas that tourists usually visit. The way Hanum looks at Europe, represented by the camera movement exploring the tourists' spot, is just like the stereotypical gaze of world tourists.

The visit to these places romanticises the past. In one scene, Hanum states that their trip to Europe has made her proud of Islam. She is amazed when seeing the sumptuousness of a cathedral in Cordoba, formerly the Mezquita mosque. Hanum's admiration is motivated by her logic that the conquest of Islam in Cordoba and Granada is the milestone of Islamic progressiveness. She even states that Cordoba is the real city of lights.

Before Islam came, Spain was ruled by the Romans. Islamic forces conquered Spain during the Caliph Al-Walid (705-715 AD). Tariq Ibn Ziyad is known as the one who conquered Spain. In a battle in an area called Bakkah, Islamic troops succeeded in defeating King Roderick. Tariq and his troops dominated expansion into essential cities such as Cordova, Granada, and Toledo<sup>[20]</sup>. The Islamic conquest of Roman rule in Spain was colonialism. However, Hanum does not see it as Islamic colonisation in Europe but as the glory of Islam in Europe.

Hanum makes double standards because she interprets different things from two same events. She makes a comparison between Mesquita in Cordoba with Hagia Sofia in Istanbul. Mesquita in Cordoba is a mosque before switching its function as a church and Hagia Sofia is a reverse. Initially, the Hagia Sophia was built as a Church of the Holy Spirit by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I in the sixth century. During the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the Hagia Sophia turned into a mosque. The building is beautified with architecture that displays the typical elements of the Ottoman Empire<sup>[21]</sup>. Hanum responds to Cordoba as foolish, while Hagia Sofia is great wisdom. It is problematic because this film uses the logic of reverse colonialism, which will explore in the next section.

### 3.2.2. The Pride of Islam

99CLE displays the pride in Islam which had experienced a golden age in Cordoba in the past. Even though Islam is no longer victorious in Cordoba today, we can still see some of its histories. The camera exploits these relics to represent Hanum's pride in Islam. The pride in Islam is highlighted as compensation for the historical defeat of Islam in Europe.

I argue that at least two parameters become the pride of Islam portrayed in this film. The first parameter is the way Islam follows the western lifestyle. For example, the hijab style in 99CLE is inspired by the European style. There have been many studies of hijab in Indonesia oriented to European dress styles. Annisa and Muktaf<sup>[22]</sup>, as an example, have emphasised that the ideal modern Muslim women identities refer to the western-style feminine. Western-style feminine Muslim women then became a new identity formed in the context of global Muslim women. Their research on *Wardah Cosmetics* TVC (the main sponsor of this film) shows that the trend of Islamic civilisation refers to an advanced and modern western image. The same styles are also performed in this film through the hijab style of the main characters, such as Fatma Pasha, a mother of a child from Turkey and a descended from Kara Mustapha Pasha; and Marion Latimer, a historian from France Fig 1. and Fig. 2).



Fig 1. Fatma Pasha's hijab style



Fig 2. Marion Latimer's hijab style

Making the West as a reference is also seen through the ballroom dance scene. The ballroom dance party in the film is the party for the Viennese elite. The invitation of a Muslim to the event is an honour and an achievement. Rangga, as a Muslim, wearing a tuxedo and dancing with Maarja, a European girl, is a recognition among the European elite for a Muslim. It is the success of a Muslim to align his position with the Europeans.

Surpassing the success of western people or success in conquering the West are the second parameter. Take a look at the following two shots.



Fig 3. Rangga echoes the call for prayer at the Eiffel Tower



Fig 4. Rangga is delivering a speech on the stage

The first shot is when Rangga echoes *azan* or the call to prayer at the top of the Eiffel Tower with the panorama of Paris below. Rangga's position is above the city, while the camera moves to the Paris cityscape below. The volume of *azan* is also getting louder with the echo effect. Being above Paris as one of the centres of European civilisation can be interpreted as the conquest of Europe.

The second shot also means the same thing. It is Rangga's graduation day. Rangga has managed to graduate with an excellent predicate, thus having the opportunity to give a speech on the podium. When standing on the stage, Rangga's position is higher than the audience, which westerners dominated. This shot depicts Rangga's success beyond westerners.

It is a way of the Islamic conquest of the West, as described in the previous section as reversed colonialism. Reversed colonialism is a term which, according to Barnhizer<sup>[23]</sup>, refers to the efforts of people from areas of the world occupied by European colonial powers to become "new colonisers" who demand rights, respect, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in the Western system. Ashcroff, Griffith and Tiffin<sup>[24]</sup> mentioned the danger for anti-colonial resistance when the binary opposition is simply reversed.

99CLE performs the reversed colonialism when the film attempts to show resistance to Western domination over Islam. The purpose is to change the stigma caused by European misunderstandings about Islam. The reversed colonialism chosen in this film is not against blatantly, but through compromise to portray themselves as good Muslim agents. To be a good Muslim agent is to correct the misconceptions of Europeans against Muslims and pay Europeans for food.

Two scenes depict Muslims treating Europeans who just stigmatise them. First, when Fatma is paying for food, three tourists from England mocking her at a restaurant. The second is when Hanum treats Cordoba church officials who shout at her when she prostrates at the church. Paying Europeans for food does not only aim to build the image of the good Muslim agents, but it is a sign of submission to Europeans. It is the reversed colonialism, the desire of the colonised to subdue the coloniser.

### 3.2.3. *Re-interpretation of The European History*

As mentioned previously, 99CLE describes European history to raise the pride of Islam. Therefore, the film has reinterpreted the history of Europe. Fatma and Marion become the figure telling the story of Europe.

Fatma tells Hanum that, in Europe, there are remnants of the glory of Islam. Marion takes Hanum to the Louvre Museum and shows her the Arabic letter that means "there is no God but Allah" in the painting of The Virgin Mary by Ugolino de Nerio. In addition, there is also a story about imaginary lines that pass through historical landmarks in Paris to Mecca. This story has never been confirmed as a historical fact. However, the film needs to explore alternative stories to glorify Islam's greatness in Europe in the past. It is the effort to generate pride in Islam.

### 3.3. *Islamic Films in Countering The Backlash: Displaying The Irony*

The two films have a little bit different in constructing Islam based on the spirit to counter the backlash of Islam. Nevertheless, I found there is ambivalence in doing that, described as follows:

#### 3.3.1. *Presenting Plurality in Standardised Visual Aesthetic*

Both films try to show the different images of Islam to correct the western perspective of Islam. However, the problem is that the films use the Hollywood style in producing movies. The actors and actresses involved in the two films are attractive. According to Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini<sup>[25]</sup>, Hollywood filmmakers portray physically attractive individuals. The attractiveness of the actor/actress is more favourably than their less attractive moral goodness, romantic activity, and life outcomes.

The other Hollywood style adopted is the story's focus on the central, ideal and heroic figures, Fahri and Rangga. They have the responsibility to change the stigma of Islam. Most Hollywood films depict a hero that matches the concept of heteronormative masculinity. In Hollywood, we often see the male hero as young, white, good-looking, and aesthetic. He is also performed to have a romantic relationship with a woman. Although in AAC, Fahri has two wives, in the end, he is back to the monogamous relationship. A hero also has an ideal or

a standard body shape. Goethals and Allison<sup>[26]</sup> stated that there are 24 characteristics to identify a hero: active, beautiful, brainy, brave, brilliant, caring, confident, well-dressed, famous, friendly, funny, gentle, reasonable, good-looking, helpful, honest, important, kind, loving, loyal, rich, skilful, strong, and warrior. Rangga and Fahri's characters match most of the characters mentioned by Goethals and Allison.

American films represented by Hollywood films have influenced film production worldwide, especially in under-developed countries. Blakley<sup>[27]</sup> said, "modernising developing countries, rather than creating self-sufficiency, merely fosters dependency within an exploitative system of global economic relations. This dependency is aided by a one-way flow of technology and media hardware coupled with the continuous flow of Western cultural products into developing countries." The film industry in Indonesia also adopts the mainstream ways of visual aesthetic in commercialised cinema to follow the modernisation and the global film industry.

Hollywood or American films represent Islam dan Muslim negatively. Shaheen<sup>[28]</sup> explained that the American film industry over decades has vilified and presented Muslims, especially Arabs, ranging from *uneducated bedouins and bandits to oil-rich and lavish spending sheikhs, and from harem sitting girls to submissive but sensual females*. Oumlil<sup>[29]</sup>, based on his analysis of the film *The Siege* (1998), argued that the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood is negative and limited. In the film, Muslims are shown as a terrorist. Aguayo<sup>[30]</sup> also stated that Hollywood is depicting Muslims as dangerous and uncivilised. Until today, Hollywood keeps following its negative representation of Islam and Muslims in most of its films<sup>[31]</sup>.

However, adopting Hollywood visual aesthetic in countering the western negative perspective of Islam is an ambiguity. On the one hand, AAC and 99CLE try to represent the alternative discourse of Muslims and Islam. On the other hand, the two films adopt the western standard of the aesthetic visual image. It is problematic. Performing plurality in a standardised and commercial way seems something in vain. A good mission is performed less than the commercial consideration.

### 3.3.2. *Inversing the Binary*

The films construct Muslim identity or good Muslim agents based on European standards. It has been discussed in the previous section, especially in 99CLE. The pride of Islam is narrated when Muslims are placed equal to westerners. The mission of the two films is to build the image of Islam as tolerance to counter the image of Islam according to the western perspective. Nevertheless, the way the films portray Islam still refer to western standard.

The two films use inversion as the strategy to resist the western domination discourse of Islam. Inversion is the discursive strategy to resist or oppose the dominant discourse

by turning around its categories. The concept of inversion derives from subaltern studies as the modalities of resistance. For example, Ranajit Guha's studies of the peasant revolt in colonial India oppose the landlord<sup>[32]</sup>. Strong binaries define the idea of inversion. For example, the relationship of master and slave, the coloniser and colonised, the peasant and landlord, the dominant and submissive. A reversal of the coloniser's domination on violence is taken to break out binary relationship and the cultural inferiority and feeling of helplessness of the colonised. The strategy of inversion does not always in the context of violence but also in literature. Some post-colonial scholars, like Edward Said and Homi Bhaba, have widely criticised the inversion strategy. Instead of overcoming the binary, it is just preserving it.

The inversion strategy is also applied in the two films. While Westerners see Islam as backward and intolerant, contrary to western culture, Islam tries to reverse it in these films. Islam is not backward but modern, as modern as the West. Those intolerant Westerners mentioned in the films, especially in 99CLE, do not understand Islam. Moreover, how to make them understand Islam is by conquering them. As a result, what is shown in the film looks like something imposed and fabricated. Preserving the binary through inversion indicates the inferiority complex of the colonised that will explore more in the following section.

### 3.3.3. *Underscoring Inferiority*

The assimilation between Islam and western culture seems to indicate a desire for Muslims to be like Westerners or, if possible, Westerners. The quest for assimilation is rooted in an inferiority complex. Inferiority complex is the feeling that one feels insecure and dependent since considering others are superior.

Quoted by Frantz Fanon<sup>[33]</sup>, the inferiority complex is an effect of colonialism. In his book *Black Skin White Mask*, Fanon described that colonialism forms a structure that shapes the colonised experiences, behaviour, and hatred. The coloniser rules the feeling and belief of the colonised's inferiority and has been internalised within the colonised. The colonised accept their inferiority and coloniser's superiority as the fact. They believe that the coloniser's superiority can raise their position to civilisation.

It is what happened in both films analysed. The inferior mentality over western superiority has been internalised so that it unconsciously places the West as a reference when Islamic films are intended to fight western domination. The historical experience of the Indonesian being colonised by European countries for hundreds of years has preserved this inferior mentality to this day. Likewise, the historical background of the oppressed Islam, both in the context of Islamic history in Europe and the socio-political history of Indonesia.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The mission of Islamic films in countering the western perspective of Islam has become problematic. The analysis shows that Islamic films produced by the Indonesian film industry attempt to counter the dominant discourse created by the West about Islam. Unfortunately, when running its mission to struggle (to correct the image), the two films are driven by flawed reasoning as the loser or the oppressed by the West. Building a modern Islamic discourse or the victory of Islam is the implication of the feeling of inferiority. As a result, rather than doing resistance, Islamic films reinforce the dominance of the West.

Therefore, there needs to be another effort from Islam or the producers or makers of Islamic films. If the film is intended to fight domination, a strategy is required to get out of binary opposition.

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