

Reclaiming supremacy, negotiating modernity: Islamism and post-Islamism in post-Suharto Indonesian novels

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ABSTRACT

Suppressed during the New Order, Indonesian Islamic literature often used Sufi symbols. Explicit Islamic expression flourished post-1998, transforming Muslim life by merging religion and entertainment. Employing a qualitative method, this study analyses three post-New Order works—*Jilbab Traveler*, *Bumi Cinta*, and *Geni Jora*—selected for their gender-diverse authorship, commercial success, and representation of 2000–2019 Islamic-literary trends. Using close reading, the analysis identifies thematic patterns about trends in Islamic thought through textual examination of narratives/dialogue, theme codification, and critical synthesis to construct the research argument. Analysis reveals that Islamism can now be openly expressed with the emphasis on three issues: Islamic cosmopolitanism, moral agents, and individual freedom. *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta* advocate Islamist ideas, promoting sharia enforcement—especially for Muslim minorities in non-Muslim/secular settings—and seeking to restore Islamic supremacy through exemplary protagonists. Conversely, *Geni Jora* reflects post-Islamist thought, emphasizing *aqidah*, civil rights, equality, individual freedom, and the enjoyment of life. Overall, post-New Order Islamic literature shows a greater inclination toward Islamist ideas, stressing strict sharia adherence and rejection of Western lifestyles. These works assert that Muslims must follow Sharia rigorously and resist Western influence to reclaim supremacy. While advocating religious sovereignty, they do not explicitly demand a caliphate. Some works, however, exhibit post-Islamist elements by negotiating belief with modernity, as seen in their celebration of individual freedom.

Keywords: Islamism, Indonesian literature, post-Islamism, popular culture, post-New Order

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INTRODUCTION

Post-1980 Indonesian Islamic prose shows the persistence of resistance against state censorship by combining modern aesthetics with Islamic values to criticize religiously detrimental policies (Faisal 2023; Antriani and Islahuddin 2024). These are boundary-defying prose works that speak to the socio-political realities of the time and encapsulate the religious and cultural spirit of the Indonesian Muslims. Their prominence in the Indonesian national literary scene underscores the ability of literature to function simultaneously as an art form and as a medium of socio-political commentary.

At the intersection of governance and literature exists censorship, in this instance, the administrative policies controlling the Islamic perception within the public domain, allowing a limited literary freedom. Still, under the conditions, Islamic literature projecting thoughtful meaning of state power remains subversive (Newey 1993; Whetnall 2024). These works reframe the narrative of national identity to counter the unifying state enterprise (Wroldsen 2021), showcasing literature's ability to extend beyond authoritarian control to foster moral discussion.

Under the New Order regime (1966–1998), the narratives of Islamic power were formalized as a means of consolidating political power (Budijanto, 2003; Formichi, 2015). The 1998 Reformation Era, however, removed imposed ideological restraints by the state, which had fostered unrestrained

intellectual activity and creativity in the Islamic world. This, in turn, stimulated a booming production of Islamic literature, which was further augmented by the growing publishing industry and ideological pluralism. The explosion of Islamic literature produced competing interpretations of the religious thought, and, as a result, literature became a site of ideological struggle.

Andalas and Sugiarti (2024) point out that two years after the Reformation, in the early 2000s, the emergence of Islamic novels in Indonesia became a significant phenomenon. According to Graf (2007), the emergence of Islamic literature was accompanied by a significant wave of enthusiasm among the population of Indonesia. One of such novels is “*Ayat-Ayat Cinta*” that became a bestseller due to the sale of 700,000 copies (Arnez, 2009). Moreover, numerous such works have also been transformed into movies (Widodo, 2008). Between 2007 and 2008, during the “Golden Period” of Islamic Literature in Indonesia, the market was flooded with 50 Islamic-themed novels (Rakib, 2015).

Recent acts of scholarship highlight the Islamic literature in Indonesia as pedagogy and economic endeavor, primarily through stories targeted at young readers (Muzakki, 2017). Hakim (2023) has his political engagement tied to the 20th century, with the intertwining of Islamic criticism and works on ideologies such as communism and capitalism. Feminist analyses of *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004) perceive the text as a challenge to patriarchal norms and sexual stereotypes against Muslim women (Arimbi, 2009; Hellwig, 2011; Wiyatmi, 2010). Similarly, *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) reflects on the ability of Muslim women to practice faith in secular and non-Muslim contexts and reframes the hijab as an emblem of identity and defiance (Arnez and Nisa, 2016).

The period of post New Order Islamic literature reveals the existence of two contrasting streams, Islamism, the intense devotion to Islam with the rejection of the West and all it stands for (Pipes, 2000) and post-Islamism, the ideological preference of the Islam’s ambiguity and the religion’s intertwining with appreciate of human rights, independence, and pluralism (Yilmas, 2014). While Islamism understands faith as an ideological necessity, devotion in post-Islamism is an act of choice, in which the gap between doctrinal conservatism and modernity is undoubtedly present.

This study analyzes the progression of Islamic discourse within Indonesian literature between the years 2000 and 2019 through the lens of three notable texts: *Geni Jora* (2004) by Abidah El Khaleiqy, *Jilbab Traveler* (2012) by Asma Nadia, and *Bumi Cinta* (2019) by Habiburrahman El Sirazy. These texts were chosen due to their popularity, their differently gendered authors, and what they collectively depict as twenty years of post-New Order Islamic thought. These texts epitomize the ability of literature to respond to governmental secularization policies and reclaim Islamic identity within modernism (Lukens-Bull 2016; Connley 2016; Thippimol 2019). By tackling issues of injustice, immorality, and oppression, the novels demonstrate the ability of Islamic literature to conduct sociopolitical criticism and initiate cultural discourse.

In Indonesia, the regulation of Islamic Thought and literary perception is not novel. Among the Aceh population in the 16th and 17th centuries, restrictive policies had ships of texts burned in order to disseminate selected teachings of Islam (Christomy 2008; Khan 2012; Wormser 2012). In the pre-independence era, the government, through the Commissie voor de Volkslectuur, exerted control over published texts and placed a complete ban on the expression of any religious ambitions, as well as imposing a set of moral and political undertakings (Fitzpatrick 2000, 2008; Maier 1991; Teeuw 1972; Watson 1973).

Diverse Islamic works published during Soekarno’s era (1945–1967) were largely unregulated by the state and focused on the themes of nation-building. Some works, though, have faced opposition from the Muslim community (Chisaan, 2012). An example of this was Ki Panji Kusmin’s novel “*Langit Makin Mendung*” (1968), which drew ire from the public because of its unflattering depiction of religion and religious leaders, even prompting demands to have the author jailed. H.B. Jassin defended Kusmin, saving him from prison but later suffering incarceration himself (Arimbi, 2009; Roskies, 1990).

At first, Islamic activists were supportive of the New Order to gain better recognition. They believed Soeharto’s administration would be more lenient. Right away, though, that regime tightened controls (Budijanto, 2003; Formichi, 2015). The New Order’s firm grip on historiography generated unpublished historical critiques of literature that highlighted social injustices (Formichi, 2015; Hadiz, 2019). Such works of literature have begun to appear that use prophetic symbols to portray social ills (Kuntowijoyo, 2019). In “*Wasripin & Satinah*,” Kuntowijoyo (2003) critiques state oppression by focusing on the marginalization of Muslims.

In the 1990s, the New Order regime relaxed several policies, which, as observed by Formichi in 2015, included the acceptance of the hijab, the founding of Islamic banks, the inclusion of Islam in educational systems, support for ICMI, and the promotion of Muslim generals. Regardless of these relaxations, these Islamic writers have continuously partaken in what is known as symbolic writing.

The period post the New Order, after the 1998 Reform Era, provided a greater scope for the exercise of freedom of thought and creativity. This led to an increase in Islamic literature and the surrounding discourse. As a result, two principal trends were identified. The first, termed Islamism, which Pipes (2000) said was an unwavering support of the Islamic law known as Sharia, a dismissal of Western political and cultural hegemony, and the casting of Islamic belief as an ideology, claiming that it was the slackening of Islamic practices that led Muslims to fall from grace. The second phase was post-Islamism, which embraced the ambiguity, plurality, and compromise of Sharia. This was the crucial integration of Islamic values with individual liberties, embracing human rights and democratic freedoms as identified by Yilmas (2014). In post-authoritarian Indonesia, this conflict of ideas illustrates the tension that exists between doctrinal revivalism and adaptive modernity.

Reproduced and often termed Islamic Fundamentalism, political Islam, or revivalism, Islamism is positioned as a response to the modernity of the West. As described by Bayat (2005), it is regarded as an anti-democratic and regressive position to hold by the more traditional elements of society, intellectuals, and the urban lower class. The advocates of Islamism or Islamism as described by Yilmas (2014) as the proponents of this ideology, are described as aggressive, exclusionary, and lacking a pluralistic disposition.

According to Heryanto (2015) and Rahmat (2018), the failures of capitalism and socialism give rise to Islamism on sociohistorical grounds, embedding the politically motivating virtue of Islam as a response. It then incorporates the religious, nationalist, and socialist frameworks to mobilize the disgruntled and politically marginal middle classes in a struggle against Western domination. Nonetheless, its stagnation—more specifically, the stagnation due to the unrealized goals of Islamization of the state—has engendered the slides of post-Islamism. This phenomenon, in turn, re-envision Islam by pluralism and flexibility (Bayat, 2007).

In a departure from the expectation of the Islamization of post-colonial societies, post-Islamism touches on the contemporary reconfiguration of Islam by focusing on the rights of individuals rather than the obligations they owe and the socio-religious pluralism rather than monolithic dogmatism (Bayat, 1996, 2007). Post-Islamism, in contrast to Islamism's equation of faith with political obligations, Post-Islamism revels in uncertainty and embraces choice, tolerance, and compromise, and signifies a social movement that pivots from radical politics to softer cultural politics (Gole, 2002). There is a marked transformation in the attitude of Muslims, as they take on a more active and interventional stance towards the globalized middle areas, exercising digital as well as professional activism, and advocating for pluralism as opposed to the rigid construction of the Islamic state (Boubekeur and Roy, via Müller 2013).

Yilmas (2014) contends for the post-Islamism viewpoint, which eliminates the supposed incompatibility of Islam and Democracy. He postulates that passive secularism, which fosters freedom of religion with the attendant human rights, permits observant Muslims to live in democratic secular societies without the intrusion of the state. It is further argued that Islam is capable of self-sustaining on the condition that the individual religious practice is free from institutional interference.

Islamism and post-Islamism serve as a framework for analyzing socio-political change and adaptation in Muslim societies. Post-Islamism has developed as a new paradigm, which means that both are simultaneously engaged with. As noted by Bayat (2005), Islamization and post-Islamization are coexistent in to show the plurality of Islam as an idea.

METHOD

This study draws on three selected post-New Order novels—*Geni Jora* (2004) by El Khaliqy, *Jilbab Traveler* (2012) by Nadia, and *Bumi Cinta* (2019) by El-Shirazy—that exemplify significant literary works from Indonesia and showcase commercial success and critical acclaim. These works were selected based on the gender diversity of the authors, their popularity (including the film adaptations), and their alignment with prominent literary Islamic movements between the years 2000 and 2019. These texts were the primary data, and secondary data consisted of scholarly works on post-1998 Indonesian Islamism and post-Islamism. Within these texts, close reading identified narratives and discourses

relevant to the ideologies. These ideologies were later thematically coded to organize them by the constructs of individual freedom, Islamic cosmopolitanism, and moral agency. The analysis incorporated detailed reading of the texts, identifying and exploring the use of narrative techniques, and synthesizing the themes and their socio-religious framework.

Creswell and Creswell (2014) have described three elements of the validation process that were useful in achieving methodological rigor and validity: iterative researcher reflexivity to minimize bias, interdisciplinary peer debriefing to challenge interpretations, and expert consultation with specialists in Indonesian literature. This three-fold validation approach augmented the theoretical coherence of the study, methodological rigor, and the conclusions derived from the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This article uses close reading methods on speech, character development, and the narrative techniques used in *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004), *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012), and *Bumi Cinta* (Shirazy, 2009) in order to extricate critical representations of Islamism and post-Islamism. These representations are synthesized in the analysis around five thematic pillars: compliance with sharia law, religious dominance, personal liberty, cosmopolitanism, and ethical autonomy, which are thematically structured in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic framework of Islamism and post-Islamism in the three novels

| Theme | <i>Geni Jora</i> (Post-Islamist) | <i>Jilbab Traveler</i> (Islamist) | <i>Bumi Cinta</i> (Islamist) |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Islamic Cosmopolitanism | Celebrating hybrid identities | Muslim minorities asserting orthodoxy abroad | Diaspora communities as moral vanguards |
| Moral Agency | Characters as ethical actors negotiating modernity | Protagonist as “exemplary Muslim” enforcing norms | Hero embodying dakwah (proselytization) ideals |
| Individual Freedom | Protagonist’s critique of patriarchal norms | Freedom is framed as adherence to religious boundaries | Personal choice subordinated to communal piety |

As presented in Table 1, the results are divided into three sections: principal Islamist narratives of Sharia, supremacy, and moral example as shown in *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta*; the modernity of negotiation in the voice of post-Islamists in *Geni Jora*; and a critical analysis of the question of why Islamism is prevalent in post-New Order Indonesia.

Discussion

Dominant Islamist Narratives: Sharia, Supremacy, and Moral Exemplar in Jilbab Traveler and Bumi Cinta

Jilbab Traveler (Nadia, 2012) was co-written by different female writers linked to Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP). The authors wish to convey their individual stories pertaining to different parts of the world. The book appears to be primarily aimed at Muslim women to show that going abroad while staying true to one’s Muslim roots, by adorning Muslim garments with the headscarf, is not only possible but also significantly contributes to one’s sense of safety, comfort, and security. Wearing headscarves is part and parcel of the Muslim women’s culture and way of life that is prescribed for them (Arnez & Nisa, 2016).

In the story “Savoring Pangandaran in the Caribbean,” the central character is indifferent to the reactions of the Dominican people to what they regard as an apparition of Mother Teresa. Ever since people have started to compare her to Mother Teresa, she has not paid any attention to those remarks. When she is asked what she is wearing, she is quick to say that she is wearing the traditional clothes of a Muslim woman (Nadia, 2012: 18-19). The author vividly describes the characters as agents of self-assertion. In this case, her argument goes against the bias that suggests Muslims are, more often than not, irrational and violent (Nadia, 2012: 18-19). Moreover, Muslim women are depicted as active and mobile transnational citizens, which refutes the argument that the majority of Muslim women are passive, imprisoned behind domestic walls, and oppressed by the controlling gaze of their husbands.

The sixth and ninth narratives in the book examine the significance of incorporating prayer in virtually every undertaking. In the sixth narrative, the ability to pray in the city, as illustrated in a park,

in a lobby of a building, and even on the sidewalk, 'There are several places that I usually use to pray in the middle of my busy life. In city parks, lobby of a building, in a fitting room, even on the sidewalk, or in the parking lot' (Nadia, 2012:107). A continuum, prayer is not confined to the mosque either, so there is no justification for a traveller to skip prayer. The author is trying to show that Muslims are faithful and committed in carrying out their responsibilities. This is a zero-sum obligation that must be respected under all conditions. The author tries to dispel the widespread negative assumption that Muslims do not exhibit self-control, which is not the case.

On the other hand, the narrator practices self-criticism, saying the obligation to worship should not disturb the ease and privacy of other people. Since worship is a very personal activity, Muslims need to understand the etiquette that pertains to certain public places like airports. Outward displays of worship could lead to the erroneous conclusion that Muslims have some fragmented and eccentric, barely concealed anarchist, exclusivist sentiments.

"Despite being reminded many times, my father still wanted to pray right then and there. He proudly took off his shoes and socks and walked barefoot to the toilet.... The Caucasian girl at the next table, who was eating, immediately covered her mouth and wanted to vomit! Meanwhile, the other Caucasians looked at her with bewilderment and perhaps sadness. The Caucasians came out one by one. Fleeing. The pedestrian was cursed at by the restaurant owner for harming the customer." (Nadia, 2012:137-138)

The narrator of *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) pays special attention to the food offered in the destination country, the focus of the fifth story. It is fascinating that not every food prepared using ingredients allowed by the Islamic Religion is halal. The entire preparation may not observe all the tenets of the faith, while other ingredients may not be appropriate for Islamic customs and practices for other women, especially for those who are pregnant. Hence, "Unless in an emergency, travellers are advised to seek halal food or to carry durable halal provisions from their homeland before setting out on a journey" (Nadia, 2012: 75-76). Travellers who are unsure whether the food in question is halal are advised to use the dietary restriction approach to refusing food offered. It should be noted, however, that certain factors may limit the effectiveness of this strategy, since dieting, in and of itself, is predicated on certain circumstances. For example, a person with a slender build may not convincingly claim to be on a diet of foods that promote growth (Nadia, 2012:132-133).

Even in secular nations or those that have historically aligned themselves with a specific religious path, *Jilbab Traveller* encourages the incorporation and application of Islamic principles in different public domains. The central character boldly confronts the clichés and stereotypes Muslims are associated with, as well as the global cultural hegemony over Muslim societies. Furthermore, it underscores the value of modernity. Such modernity, which, in the context of the Muslim world, is counterproductive and is most of the time attributed to the West, is tackled through different means of reconciliation with the Islamic identity. Hence, the narrative illustrates the negotiation of Islamic identity with different aspects of modernity.

This analysis indicates that the primary text is replete with the tenets of Islamism, as it tries to explain the sovereignty of Islam to its believers, or Islam that is *Kafah*, in which the abandonment of Islamic principles, even in the so-called free lands, is forbidden. Islam and cosmopolitanism, constituting the primary character of the primary text, facilitate the exchange between the two extremes. The work attempts to connect the two extremes or the different ends of the spectrum that the readers are occupied with, traditional and modern, so that they think and deliberate about the position they occupy in society and the social processes that are unfolding. Through this work, the author conveys moral messages and provides space for interpretation by modern youth.

The novel *Hijab Traveler* articulates the complex importance of the hijab and the evolution of thought and identity, and captures the integration of identity into literature. This helps illuminate the issues of modernization and tradition. This matters especially because many authors in the Muslim world struggle with the need to offer new insights about Islam while maintaining their roots and beliefs (Kasmawati et al, 2023).

Bumi Cinta is a novel written by Shirazy (2009) in which an Indonesian research student, Ayyas, who studies in a prestigious university in Medina, seeks the help of his philology and history teacher, Professor Abramov Tomskii, in Moscow, Russia. Towards the beginning, Ayyas is reconnected with

David, who was his classmate back in junior high school in Indonesia. In their meeting, David tells Ayyas that he is now a different person and that he now considers himself a modern person. David acknowledges that he has long since abandoned the principles of Islam (Shirazy, 2009:20-25).

Thanks to David, Ayyas managed to find a place to stay, but he failed to realize that two women already inhabited the apartment. One of them, Yelena, was Russian, and the other, Linor, had a surreptitious origin. Unbeknownst to Ayyas, these women were neither reputable characters nor university students. Yelena was a sophisticated escort, and Linor, a journalist with a covert role as a Mossad agent, was also embroiled in dubious undertakings. Linor had the habit of inviting various men to her apartment. Ayyas spoke to David about his problem, but David himself was unable to provide further support as he was also in the process of finding new accommodation in Moscow. As a result, Ayyas had no choice but to share accommodation with two women who were not related to him. (Shirazy, 2009: 32-42).

Within most accounts, Ayyas is depicted as an 'apostle' or prophet, drowning in ignorance. Yelena and Linor combine to represent 'the Dark Side,' always ready to pounce to attack Ayya's faith. These two females and their cohorts take turns to see how far they can go to destabilise Ayya's conviction. Yelena and Linor use different methods to try to 'win' Ayyas. Regardless of how strong, Ayyas refuses their offers. He has a unique strategy for defending his faith. The moment his faith seems to waver, he goes to a prayer room, performs wudu, prays, and begins reciting the Quran (Shirazy, 2009: 91-93).

Despite facing persistent teasing, bullying, and even threats to his safety from Yelena, Linor, and their associates, Ayyas chooses not to harbour any resentment towards them. As a moral agent, he willingly aids Yelena by taking her to the hospital after she is left on the roadside, critically injured by her male companion (Shirazy, 2009:173). He visits Yelena several times until she recovers and returns to her home. Eventually, Yelena re-embraces Islam, the faith she practiced during her marriage to a Muslim man. Subsequently, she marries David, who is inspired by Ayya's kindness and returns to Islam. Ayyas introduces her to the imam of a mosque in Moscow, who successfully rekindles David's faith from apostasy (Shirazy, 2009: 482-485).

Ayya's reaction to Linor mirrors his earlier response to her. Despite Linor's alleged orchestration of a Mossad intelligence operation to frame him and broadly target Muslims, Ayyas did not harbour any animosity towards her. He reconciles with Linor's reappearance after her escape, despite his initial repulsion. Ayya's feelings softened further when Linor, having embraced Islam and expressed remorse and a commitment to repentance, proposed marriage to him (Shirazy, 2009: 534-535). Although Ayyas did not immediately accept, he assured Linor that he would consider the proposal after consulting his family and performing istikhara prayers in Indonesia. Tragically, Linor, who had reverted to her original Muslim name, Sofia, was unable to witness Ayyas's decision, as she was fatally shot by an unidentified assailant shortly after leaving Ayyas's residence. Ayyas can only mourn Linor's death, believing she has attained martyrdom. In his prayers, Ayyas expressed hope for their reunion in the Land of Love, a paradise designated for devout and pious believers (Shirazy, 2009: 534-536).

Through the character Ayyas, the narrator clarifies that Muslims worship only God; they are allowed to prostrate solely before God, placing their foreheads on the ground in reverence to Him and no other entity. Muslims are depicted as servants of God, showing submission exclusively to Him and not to others. As a result, Muslims are portrayed as the freest people on Earth because they do not worship fellow humans or individuals considered deities. The act of bowing down is reserved for God alone, regarded as the most exemplary form of worship from the time of Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad (Shirazy, 2009:210).

To Ayyas, Anastasia seems to forget that, as an Orthodox Christian, she is equally capable of committing offenses against God. God is, according to Ayyas, self-relying, unbegotten, uncreated, and has no equal. Ayyas, then, had an understandable intellectual frustration with Anastasia since Ayyas thought no one, especially someone as intelligent as Anastasia, would ever think that God had children. This idea is worse, if one can believe that, when the child, which is human, is imagined to be raised to a level of God. Ayyas believed that the source of such doctrines was the ancient Greek tradition, especially the pantheistic Stoic school of philosophy that maintained God and creatures are one, only differentiated by the coverings of form (Shirazy, 2009: 447-448).

In completing the theological dialogue, the narrator again stresses Ayya's conviction on one hand and the firm belief in the truth of Islam on the other. His readiness to go to any lengths, including losing his life, to protect his belief is vivid. Still, he acknowledges, there is no requirement for conversion on

either side. The narrator appreciates the variety of views and understands the almost impossible nature of conversion, for belief systems are set in during early formative years. The crucial point is that, through Ayyas, he conveyed his perspective on the oneness of God, emphasising that there is only one God (Allah). He acknowledges that there is no compulsion in accepting religious beliefs. Nevertheless, he feels it is his duty to extend an invitation to those who question the truth of his belief, underscoring one incontrovertible principle: Islam is faithful, and there are consequences for those who do not believe in it (Shirazy, 2009:449).

The religious outlooks of the Ayyas are thought to be the same as the author's beliefs. In the context of social interactions, particularly in the relations of believers and non-believers, a Muslim may show a degree of tolerance to a non-Muslim. However, in the domain of principle, and especially concerning the religious and the sacred, a Muslim is bound to defend his position, without any hesitation, even if it is painful for him. If necessary, they should point out the shortcomings of specific religions in their belief systems. It is important, however, that they do not attempt any form of imposition or resort to force.

Bumi Cinta supports the constructive and practical use of Islamic teachings in places where the truth of Islam is denied or where religion is deemed important. In these places, Muslims are able to take the role of moral and ethical integrators (Belt, 2009), especially in relation to the activities that need guidance based on Islamic principles. It is important to remember that Muslims should not lose faith in the capacity of Islam to address a range of social problems and even the ills of modernity, capitalism, and socialism. Despite the prevalence of agnosticism and atheism, which, whilst creating highly civilized and modern people, destroys deep emotional stability, Islam is proven to be relevant.

Hidayat & Santosa (2019) take into account the Islamist bent of Bumi Cinta in El-Shirazy, and focus on the Muslim protagonists' attempts to preserve moral principles in the context of Western civilization. However, there is a significant shift in El-Shirazy's ideology. While Pudarnya Pesona Cleopatra (2004) and Bumi Cinta (2010) are supportive of Islamism, Ayat Ayat Cinta 2 (2015) is a post-Islamist novel. As noted by Hassan & Pawi (2019), the novel in question is constructed on a dual narrative; what is central in the book is marketing-driven, structured Islam and Islam-related messages intertwined with intimate and personal relationships, including love and sexuality.

Negotiating Modernity: Post-Islamist Voice in Geni Jora

In Abidah El Khalieqy's novel Geni Jora (2004), the main character Kejora grows up in a slavishly patriarchal and polygamous family structure. Female family members are oppressed under a system of male preference (Kejora observes her brother being favored), and this polygamous home sets the stage for her male dominance critique. Kejora's denial of a traditional feminine role and her stormy romance with Zakky, a womanizer who erodes her trust, also epitomizes a residual defense of patriarchal constraints. This narrative embodies El Khalieqy's critique, aligning with Candria's (2018) analysis of systemic discrimination, injustice, and violence against Muslim women under an entrenched Indonesian patriarchy.

Furthering the critique above, Geni Jora also seems to retain some distinct narrative qualities, a post-Islamist framework contrasting with the Jilbab Traveler and Bumi Cinta. It postulates the tenet of post-Islamism, the synthesis of faith and self-governed emancipation, which the author describes as a critical re-engagement with Islamic tradition through contemporary practices, and inequities redefined as modern acts of piety. Kejora, a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood studying abroad in 1993, practices transnational activism across Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Her commitment to decentralized Muslim solidarity, particularly via Palestinian resistance networks and associations with Hamas activists (Khalieqy, 2004:22–23), exemplifies a post-Islamist reimagining of ummah beyond state-centric orthodoxy.

After getting engaged, Jora questions Zakky's loyalty, claiming her rights as a woman (Khalieqy, 2004: 187–188). This skepticism only worsens when Jora returns to Damascus and finds herself romantically involved with Asaav, a Jewish acquaintance, while ignoring patriarchal social structures and Zakky's double standards. This act of agency highlights the novel's feminist engagement with the gendered double standards of Islam (Khalieqy, 2004: 187–188). Geni Jora (Khalieqy, 2004) concludes in 1993 with Zakky and Jora being asked to present at a seminar in a university in Yogyakarta. During the trip, they also return to places of great personal importance, reflecting their unresolved issues and changing sense of self in the context of the New Order of Indonesia.

Supported by her grandmother's preferential treatment of her brother, Jora readily rejected the patriarchal norms. Her commitment to gender equality advanced despite being brought up as a devout Muslim. Defiance of any family's foul treatment of women allowed her to construct a sense of self beyond dependence on men, and, as a result, dignity and independence were obtained (Khalieqy, 2004: 60-61). Throughout her years in boarding school, Jora and Elya Huraibi connected over Islamic practices of the tahajud (Quran-suggested night prayer, Al-Isrā: 79), tafakur, and tadabur, building to a self-strengthening in the form of spiritual exercise (Khalieqy, 2004: 89-90).

Elya's and Jora's relationship takes a more profound form than spiritual companionship, as it gives rise to passions of romance within the context of the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) Jora and Elya attended. Despite Jora's poetic pangs of conflicted desire ("I am swept away by the swift flow of your love..." [Khalieqy, 2004:105]), neither woman seeks divine absolution for their perceived impropriety. Jora is the one on the defensive, "retaliating so to speak against her accusers". At the same time, Elya keeps on practicing their nightly combined spiritual exercises (tahajud, tafakur, tadabur), and, as a result, their dualistic behavior shows a certain degree of internalized oppression and external oppression due to the patriarchal systems that control female relationships and religion.

"Sonya's disdain was evident in her bitter sneer, which silenced the others. "Between tahajjud and tafakkur, in the midst of an embrace? How romantic our friend's narrative is," she remarked derisively. "Are you not aware, Sonya, that romance is a trait of the true Muslim woman? In contrast, the kufr women, who are mundane and immoral, cannot express themselves romantically, even for a moment." Sonya glanced around, perhaps not fully grasping Elya's statement. (Khalieqy, 2004:97)

Unlike most Muslim women, who typically seek divine guidance when confronting religiously contentious issues, Jora and Elya defy norms by refusing to repent for their perceived transgressions. Despite Islamic prohibitions against same-sex relationships, Elya confronts accusations with defiance, allowing rumors to dissipate without seeking forgiveness (Khalieqy, 2004:101-103). Zakky, despite his elite Islamic lineage and international religious networks, embodies hypocrisy as a womanizer and drinker. His relentless pursuit of Jora—persisting in physical advances she resists but occasionally falters against—contrasts sharply with his pious facade. Jora ultimately thwarts his aggression by invoking Quranic verse Al-Isra:32, which condemns adultery (Khalieqy, 2004:129-133).

Zakky's lifestyle deeply contradicts the persona he publicly displays. While wearing the "robe of virtue" in social and academic relations, even heading a religious studies group in Damascus, he privately indulges in hedonism, alcohol, and serial womanizing, flouting Islamic tenets he publicly espouses (Khalieqy, 2004:17). His duplicity highlights the novel's focus on critique performative religiosity, in particular, framed as global engagement into Islam, with bare contempt of the moral backbone that accompanies such action. Jora ends the story by confronting the novel's patriarchal readings of Islam, which, on the one hand, defend Zakky's undue wish to take, and by the same token, the rest to endorse, women's equal rights for polygamy (Khalieqy, 2004:207-208). She does not endorse misogynist images of Muslim women as victims of oppression and domination who do not fight back and are submissive to gender-based injustice. Standpoint in, post-Islamism rests on the violence of the faith as the elementary emancipation, and the system is based on the one belief in that democratic order of principles.

Geni Jora (Khalieqy, 2004) serves as an example of post-Islamism who, rather than seeing Islam as a system of social control, integrates personal religiosity with personal freedoms, especially the autonomy of women (Bayat, 2013). The novel's advocacy of political forms that integrate Islamic tenets with personal liberties (Bayat, 2013) stands in sharp contrast to the Islamists' focus on a collective identity monoculture (Dokhanchi, 2020). This change is a result of the post-New Order democratization of Indonesia, which allowed a wide range of Islamic movements, from the traditional to the secular, to flourish with the support of a middle class that used cultural and economic resources to redefine religious modernity.

Author Geni Jora crafts a compelling narrative, weaving Islam with the themes of individual freedom and independence, which span internationally. As an example, Fakiha et al. (2023) analyzed the novel *The Holy Woman* and studied the crucial dilemma of Muslim women in the age of conflicting traditionalistic and autonomous ideals. Shahraz describes women who struggle to claim their rights in a

repressive society. This story and the issues it raises and the some stance it take on on works of fiction fall under theme of much Islamic literature and thus the work ignites themes about Islam and discourse on the status of an individual in Muslim civilization (Stadlbauer, 2012) Fida (2023) has reflected on the Islamic perspective on women through Sherry Jones' *The Jewel of Medina* and presented how women, irrespective of their historical contexts, deny passive status, claim their identity and strive for equality with men. Under this context, the novel aims to integrate Islam with individual freedom and independence. Literary pieces in question tend to take an oppositional stance regarding the status quo by depicting women fighters for their rights and independence (Fakiha et al., 2023). This is important in the context of dismantling the negative image of Muslim women, who are considered overly submissive and powerless.

The analysis of the concept of freedom in *Geni Jora* reveals a negotiation between religious identity and individual aspirations in the novel. This evidence corroborates Sonafist (2023), who suggests the unique ability of Islamic jurisprudence to bear individual liberties and justice. This indicates that the story of freedom in Islam is also not simple; it is layered and contains the myriad realities that shape the pluralistic Muslim world.

Islamic literary pieces, *Geni Jora*, for instance, engage with the theme of Islam and the self, constructing stories that illuminate problems and propose possibilities for change and growth. They reveal the striving of people to integrate religious devotion with the pursuit of freedom, and stimulate a larger discussion on human rights.

Why Islamism Dominates in Post-New Order Indonesia

Renewed expressions in literature followed a period of silence due to the New Order. Like in the previous period in the New Order's Islamic literature, the focus was mainly on prophecies and allegories. Islamic literature is now more vivid and free-ranging in its expressions. This is due to the unfettered movements within the Islamic writings and activities. These are supportive of Islamic groups that are affiliated with the communities of the middle class, intellectual supporters, and the arts. These groups, with a liberal, secular, fundamentalist, and even stringent approach, quilt the more simplified, traditional, and scriptural Islamic thought.

Support from the middle-class Muslim who wanted literature to fulfil the Islamic expression contributed to the flourishing of Islamic literature. Much of this desire was stifled in the New Order Era. It was during the Reformation period that this view of the literature emerged, primarily from the advanced skill of several author-functions with regard to the developing Indonesian Islamic society. Over the past two decades, a wealth of Islamic literary work has been produced. While these works exhibit diverse expressions, they can be categorised according to the tendencies outlined in the aforementioned grouping of Islamic thought, or, in this study, from the perspectives of Islamism and post-Islamism.

The end of the New Order government and the following periods of Reformation offered a space for the articulation of ideas that allowed various styles of Islamic literature to develop in Indonesia. Some of the literary works espouse the strongest Islamic legalistic and anti-Western position by the conversion of faith into an ideology (Pipes, 2000). Other voices advocate for the necessity of overcoming conflict, borders, and dichotomies by fusing spirituality with feminism and human rights (Yilmas, 2014).

This research analyses the impact of social and political changes in Indonesia on the portrayal of Islam in various literary works. An unprecedented change in the levels of literary censorship accompanied the fall of the New Order in 1998. Writers in Indonesia were able to reflect numerous societal voices that had been ignored by the authoritarian regime (Saputra et al., 2024). Moreover, they were able to exercise the creative freedom that had been severely repressed (Bachtiar, 2018; Pal & Tok, 2019). This research seeks to understand the role of literature in exploring new and moderate Islamic identities. Writers, through the construction of various personas, are able to reflect the realities of modern and pluralistic Indonesia. *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004) demonstrates a transition in Islam as explained by the concept of post-Islamism. "*Geni Jora*" seeks to blend Islamic tenets with the concepts of freedom and autonomy. These are examples of narratives that attempt to postulate formulations outside the boundaries of conservative Islamic practices.

From a narrative perspective, *Geni Jora* offers a critique of the norms of polygamy, and the feminist Islam perspective focuses on the norms of the religion (Martha et al., 2018; Nugraha & Suyitno, 2019). *Jilbab Traveller* tackles topics such as private devotion, global citizenship, and the norms of the Islamic religion (Jayanti & Wiyatmi 2022; Putri 2020). In contrast, “*Bumi Cinta*” focuses on the norms of Islam and transitions to a post-Islamist consideration of morality and religion (Wajiran, 2018). This may indicate the growing global influence and, as such, the links to modernity discourse in the post-New Order Indonesian literature. Some authors, for instance, embrace a cosmopolitan perspective that illustrates the relation of transnational ideas and culture (Iner & Cufurovic, 2022; Seeth, 2023). Writers, in particular, address fundamental issues that reflect the norms and wisdom of the Islamic context. This is in line with the increasing soft Islamic movements embracing democratic pluralism in the norms of expression literature (Jayanto 2020; Kersten 2009).

The growth of Islamic literature has much to owe to the contribution of pesantren centres, particularly because of the adaptability to the social changes of the post-New Order period and the increasing social acceptance of moderation and tolerance for these values (Rusli, 2018). Literary characters often originate from pesantren institutions, and writers describe their attempts to embrace the modern world from the spiritual and intellectual perspectives. This is post-Islamist in character because it advocates for a strong emphasis on cross-cultural exchange and post-Islamist social relations (Argenti, 2018; Faiz, 2023). In these respects, the Islamic character has shifted in some of her understandings of Islamic identities. In these novels, a character has a strong tendency to hold on to a narrow understanding of Islamic values, and her articulation with the contemporary world is very tenuous. This articulation is done in the context of the rights of individuals, Liberalism, and even feminism, which has become a dominant discourse of the literature after the New Order period (Pal and Tok, 2019; Suhaimis and Amrizon, 2024).

Amid profound changes in culture and politics, contemporary Indonesian literature serves as an expressive form of social commentary. Writers employed narratives to unpack the ever-more intricate politics of Indonesia, as well as the intersection and representation of women and women’s issues, and multicultural dynamics. These narratives illustrate the myriad of challenges a society grapples with, and showcase the nascent hopes for a rights-bearing, freedom-filled existence within a framework of a more progressive brand of Islam (Huda, 2021; Seeth, 2023). Furthermore, the post-New Order period, with its newfound freedom of speech, has enabled the emergence of new voices within Islamic sociality that boldly advocate for inclusion and pluralism. The need to balance between conventional and contemporary worldviews has increasingly become important in promoting tolerance among the readers and writers toward diversity. Kersten (2009) asserts that literary works that seek to represent multiculturalism in the religious and social aspects of life aid in the construction of a fluid and coherent national identity. Also, one must consider the fact that the study of Islam in literature does not derive its meaning from a singular narrative, but from a multitude of narratives. Such diversity of representation demonstrates how Islam as an idea interfaces with the shifting values of society, providing a multifaceted portrait of the individual and social life of Indonesia (Leccese, 2025; Thahir, 2025).

Hence, moving past the New Order, looking into Islam concerning literature is more than simply looking at the changes in the storyline. It also has to do with broader issues of self-identity, culture, and spirituality. Authors in their literary works take the bull by the horns and address the religious complexities of their contemporary, if not troubled, society. Therefore, this research attempts to explain the importance of Islam in Indonesian literature and the current changes in the tension of the modern world (Irwansyah, 2021; Jayanto, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Analysis of three post-New Order Indonesian novels reveals a pronounced ideological inclination toward Islamism, with *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta* advocating *Kafah Islam* (comprehensive Islamic practice) that demands unapologetic assertion of religious identity across geopolitical boundaries, frames steadfast faith as a non-negotiable duty even when perceived confrontationally, and promotes non-violent defense of Islam’s superiority while rejecting conversion compulsion. Conversely, *Geni Jora* embodies a post-Islamist countertrend, critically renegotiating norms (e.g., prohibitions on alcohol/relationships), implicitly accommodating capitalist modernity, and championing moderation over rigid Sharia enforcement while sustaining global Islamic dialogue. This reflects post-1998 Indonesian Islamic literature’s predominant legitimization of Islamist imperatives—strict Sharia

adherence, Western lifestyle resistance, and symbolic civilizational supremacy reclamation without caliphate demands—though emergent post-Islamist voices signal ideological contestation through rights-based piety and hybrid modernity. Future research should explore varied genres and authors. For instance, an author might be approached through comparative textual analysis. It is also crucial to investigate how audiences receive ideologically charged narratives, longitudinally track narratives post-2020, and examine the overlapping divisions of class and ethnicity.

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