Remapping the World in Indonesian Islamic Films

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ABSTRACT

Following the release and success of Ayat-Ayat Cinta (2008) set mostly in Cairo, many subsequent Indonesian Islamic-themed films have been set overseas. For Islamic-themed films such as Ketika Cinta Bertasbih (2008), it has been argued that the Egyptian setting enhances the film’s Islamic credentials. More recent Islamic-themed films have moved away from the Middle East to feature stories set in Europe, South Korea, and mainland China. These overseas settings appeal to the audience’s cosmopolitan desires for travel, sightseeing, and exotic foods. Beyond cosmopolitanism-as-consumption though, to what extent do these films engage with cosmopolitan ethics?

Looking at four recent Islamic-themed films – 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa (2013), Assalamwalaikum Beijing (2014), Haji Backpacker (2014), and Jilbab Traveller - Love Sparks in Korea (2016) – I explore the extent to which they create the possibility for a cosmopolitan ethics as the Indonesian characters encounter others of different cultures and faiths. I argue that the four chosen films opt instead to remain rooted in an Indonesian Islamic worldview and thereby only evoke a limited cosmopolitan ethics. Although the films are presented as potentially cosmopolitan, they merely serve as a means of proselytization by remapping the world according to an Indonesian Islamic perspective.

KEYWORDS: Indonesia, Cinema, Islam, Cosmopolitanism, ummah, film, ethics, desire.

Cosmopolitanism has become the progressive philosophy of our time, dedicated as it is to transcending parochial nationalism and proposing living in the world as a ‘global citizen’. Whilst cosmopolitanism is often presented as inevitable, there remains a need to investigate whether cosmopolitan ideas and thinking as described in theory are shared across the world. This paper considers how Indonesian
Muslims approach the world by discussing the content of three recent Islamic-themed feature films with overseas settings. Although fictional, feature films as with many texts of pop culture, provide insight into imaginations and fantasies. An Indonesian Muslim viewpoint is instructive because of its historical marginalization as Muslim, Southeast Asian, post-colonial, and ‘Third World’. This paper argues that the cosmopolitan project which is so often seen as inevitable, may in fact splinter, as other subject groups, in this case Indonesian Muslims, find different ways of engaging with the world.

Representations of Islam and the expression of religious life have become more prominent in Indonesian pop culture since the end of the New Order regime in 1998. Suppressed under the New Order, expressions of religiosity have entered public discourse in a variety of formats and media, containing a proliferation of representations and viewpoints. Observers have discussed cases of Islamic tele-preachers (Hoesterey, 2008), women’s fashion (Heryanto, 2011), television programs (Rakhmani, 2014), music and film (Sasono, 2010), and other consumer goods and services as indicative of an increased expression of religiosity amongst the Indonesian population. Whilst some have argued that using Islam is a sales technique and that Islam is being commodified if not commercialized (Hasan, 2009; Sasono, 2010; Fealy, 2008), the consumption of Islamic content represents a growing desire on the part of audiences for fantasies, stories and issues based on an Islamic foundation.

Following the box-office success of Ayat-Ayat Cinta (2008, Verses of Love), feature films have become an important site for the representation of Islamic characters, ideals, fantasies, and stories. Eric Sasono (2010) has linked this to a growing confidence amongst writers and filmmakers to represent lifestyles, values and aspirations based on Islamic principles. In Ayat-Ayat Cinta for example, Sasono argues
that the film describes a new set of middle-class aspirations that extol values of hard work, study, religious dedication, and filial piety as ingredients to worldly success measured by getting married, gaining a university degree, and embarking on a successful career. Broadly, Islamic-themed films promote piety and sincerity of belief (ikhlas) as necessary ingredients to overcoming life struggles and finding reward and satisfaction in love, marriage, community, and work.

To date, almost all Islamic-themed films are either set in Indonesia or in a majority Muslim country (usually Egypt), raising few problems for the characters in terms of cultural adaptation or cross-cultural encounters. Operating within such an Islamic habitus offers little space to explore how Indonesian Muslims see themselves in relation to others of different faiths, cultures, or backgrounds. In order to explore such cross-cultural encounters, this essay discusses three recent films that are set overseas in non-Muslim countries: 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa (2013, 99 Lights in the European Sky), Assalamualaikum Beijing (2014, Peace be upon you Beijing), and Haji Backpacker (2014, Backpacker Pilgrimage). In these films the overseas setting represents an aspirational space for travel, tourism, and self-discovery but it is also a space of encounter between the film’s Indonesian Muslim characters and others of different cultures and religions. By identifying the main characters as Muslim, each of the three films explores how Indonesian Muslims encounter otherness, negotiate difference, and imagine the world. In these encounters and stories lies the potential for a cosmopolitanism seen from the perspective of young, Indonesian Muslims.

As this paper will argue however, although the scenarios and encounters could engender cosmopolitanism on the part of the Indonesian characters, they prefer to

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1 Exceptions include CinTa (2008, Love) about a romance between a Chinese Christian and a Muslim, and Hanung Bramantyo’s film Tanda Tanya or ? (2009, Question Mark) which explored issues of conversion and inter-faith relations.
develop forms of solidarity with other Muslims, producing instead a limited cosmopolitanism. As a result, these three films and their characters produce new forms of Islamic solidarity, place-making, and history-making that serve to remap the world according to an Indonesian-Islamic viewpoint. Remapping of the world is both explicit and implicit, and evident in physical geography as well as human relationships. What remains of the cosmopolitan potential is reduced to what Ulrich Beck calls ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ in which the culture of the other is commodified as exotica for touristic consumption but never real engagement. It suggests that the cosmopolitan project which is so often seen as inevitable, may in fact splinter, as other subject groups, in this case Indonesian Muslims, find different ways of engaging with the world.

STRAINS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

Although the history of cosmopolitan thinking can be traced back to Greek philosophy, it is its contemporary articulation and debates that interest us here. At its most basic, being cosmopolitan means to be ‘a citizen of the world’ or a ‘global citizen’. In part it suggests “an openness to transcultural social interaction” (Aboulafia, 2010: 2), “which encourages us to appreciate and recognize difference, embed our politics in universal principles and commit ourselves to the dethronement of one’s unique cultural identity” (Skrbiš & Woodward, 2013: 2). Cosmopolitan theorists emphasize thinking beyond the nation and nationalism as the realm of political and ethical concern to consider the whole world and humanity as the realm of individual responsibility. Awareness of the world is aided by the global media and in the emergence of global threats and risks such as environmental problems (global warming, pollution), epidemics (e.g. Zika, SARS, H1N1), and global terrorism (Beck,
To see the self in relation to the world in this way is what Appiah calls having a ‘cosmopolitan outlook’ (Appiah, 2006).

To live according to cosmopolitan principles means to encounter differences of practice and opinion with openness and be willing to change or be changed as a result (Skrbiš & Woodward, 2013: 10). Kwame Anthony Appiah writes that cosmopolitanism is also the “recognition that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other’s differences” (Appiah, 2006: 4). The continual engagement across difference is the hallmark of the cosmopolitan encounter as questions of difference are discussed although not necessarily resolved. Cosmopolitanism is an attitude or an outlook, but it is also a project that has no definite end point. At the same time, cosmopolitanism invokes a “responsibility for every human being” (Appiah, 2006: 7-8) and presents a set of ethical considerations for how we might respond to the plight of others who may not share our beliefs, nationality, or culture.

In principle approaching others with openness and willingness to discuss and resolve difference is straightforward, but in practice resolving encounters of difference may prove problematic or impossible. Contemporary iterations of cosmopolitanism are premised on certain liberal democratic principles that originate in Western political and philosophical traditions that stipulate respect for liberal democracy and human rights – concepts that are often challenged according to ‘tradition’, religious belief, or ‘culture’. In some or many instances these may be spurious claims or objections that seek to justify existing local power structures or systems of oppression, but in others such claims present an impasse to a cosmopolitan politics. For example the practicing of veiling women in Islam is often seen simplistically as either women’s free choice or as an oppressive religious practice. Proponents often fail to consider how women are pressured in daily life by family, religious leaders, and others to veil, limiting
women’s free choice; whereas opponents of the veil fail to see how veiling can be empowering for women in male-dominated contexts. Even if women’s autonomy is the desired outcome, the assumption is that all sides of the debate are willing to change when in reality many are not.

Much of the cosmopolitan theory has come from thinkers in the developed West which has historically benefited materially from the exploitation of the undeveloped or Third World through colonialism and neo-colonialism. The perspective of citizens from the non-West is therefore bound to be inflected through their historical experience and disadvantage. Not everyone comes at cosmopolitanism with the same historical, economic, and political baggage. For citizens in the non-West, former colonies and the Third World, their experience and entry into the global political arena is shaped by their experience as members of societies that have historically been colonized and exploited by the West. To what extent can citizens of a country such as Indonesia comfortably sign up to the values and expectations to cosmopolitanism given their historical disadvantage?

Much of the theory and discussion of cosmopolitanism has focused on its political potential as a way of reorganizing and re-orientating politics, but there is a manifestation that Ulrich Beck (2006: 41) calls ‘banal cosmopolitanism’. Here cosmopolitanism is reduced to a consumption object or experience such as tourism, eating exotic food, or consuming foreign media products without any real or sustained engagement with others. One recent critique article in the New York Times (2 July 2016) laments that cosmopolitanism is synonymous with bland ‘global’ spaces that look the same the world over which increasingly are inaccessible to many citizens around the world except for the privileged global or cosmopolitan class. In other forms, global exotica are sold through contemporary forms of pop culture such as Korean
drama which sell commodified forms of Korea represented in images of food, beautiful landscapes, and well-groomed characters.

Seeking cosmopolitanism in feature films will therefore be visible in a number of different ways. By default the travel genre is about transnational encounters which opens the door to exploring these encounters as more than just transcultural meetings. How characters negotiate encounters with others and other cultures come to represent their openness to difference. Other kinds of actions – forms of altruism, kindness, compassion, and so on – can also reflect the extent to which the characters feel ‘responsibility’ for others. In analyzing the three films I am interested in how the characters choose to interact with the foreign location, who they interact with, and how they make sense of the place(s) that they are in. This will provide insight into the ways Indonesian Muslims as represented through the films’ characters see themselves in relation to the world, to others, and to other cultures.

THREE RECENT ISLAMIC-THEMED FILMS

Before getting into specific narrative details, a brief description of each film is warranted. 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa (2013) is set in Vienna, Austria, based on a novel by Hanum Salsabiela Rais and Rangga Almahendra, directed by Guntur Soeharjanto, and produced by Maxima Pictures. Hanum Salsabiela Rais is the daughter of Islamic leader Amien Rais and a former reporter with Metro TV. Haji Backpacker (2014) which begins its story in Bangkok, is written and directed by Danial Rifky, and produced by Falcon Pictures. Assalamualaikum Beijing (2014) is based on the best-selling Asma Nadia novel of the same title, directed by Guntur Soeharjanto, and produced by Maxima Pictures. All three performed well at the box-office, and were in the top-ten best-selling films in the year of their release.
In terms of genre, these films are part of the travel genre in which characters embark on a life-changing journey. Characters develop and change as individuals, learn something about themselves, and encounter new situations and people along the way that they need to deal with. Over the past fifteen years a number of Indonesian travel films have been released that include domestic (e.g. *3 Hari Untuk Selamanya, Merantau, Tabula Rasa*) as well as international journeys (e.g. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta 2, Eiffel I’m in Love*). Indonesian Islamic films represent a new type of travel film since the main characters are more clearly identified as Muslim, and the films foreground their religious beliefs and principles as informing their choices and action in the overseas setting. Such films are a fecund site to observe and analyze the intercultural encounters and interactions between the Indonesian characters and the foreign ‘other’.

**99 CAHAYA DI LANGIT EROPA (2013): EUROPE’S FORGOTTEN ISLAMIC HISTORY**

*99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa* follows Hanum, a former journalist who moves to Austria with her husband Rangga who is pursuing his doctorate on scholarship at Vienna University. Unemployed, Hanum begins exploring the city first as a wide-eyed tourist enjoying the sights and sounds of Europe, but coming to be aware of the plight of a veiled Turkish woman who she sees being declined a job by an Austrian boutique owner. When Hanum takes up German classes she meets Fatma Pasha, the aforementioned Turkish woman, and later her young daughter Ayse. The opening scene of the film shows Asye being bullied at school since she is the only Turkish girl in class. Hanum comes to learn about the history of Islam in Austria through Fatma whose ancestor Kara Mustafa Pasha (1634/5-1683) had invaded Austria in 1683. As Hanum finds out about the secret Islamic history of Europe, her husband Rangga
encounters various challenges as a Muslim in a majority Christian country.

Austria, and by extension Europe, is shown to be difficult place to live for Muslims following the requirements of their religion. In an early scene in a cafe, Rangga struggles to communicate with the barista to order food since everything contains pork. He ends up disappointed that he can only eat the fruit salad. Ayse is bullied at school for being Turkish, and later the teacher implores Fatma to remove Asye’s headscarf so that she will not be targeted by other students. This is of course impossible and deeply offensive to Asye and Fatma. Rangga’s female classmate - Marja - constantly flirts openly with Rangga in a way that is construed as being disrespectful of his marriage and religion. In another instance, Rangga’s professor schedules the PhD qualifying exam on a Friday afternoon causing Rangga and his Pakistani friend Khan to protest the timing as it conflicts with their Friday prayer. All these, and other episodes during the film, highlight the incompatibility between Islamic faith and life in Europe, heightening the status of Muslims as outsiders.

These challenges for the Muslim characters set up potential scenarios for differences to be resolved and thus creating moments of potential cosmopolitanism. Instances occur where the Muslim characters confront prejudice and racism and work to bridge the cultural divide between themselves and Europeans. In one café scene, Hanum and Pasha overhear two Austrians saying that croissants represent Islam because of their crescent moon shape and that eating them is a symbol of Europe’s defeat of Islam. Hanum is angry and upset and wants Fatma to defend herself, her religion, and her country. Instead, Fatma pays for their meal and asks the waitress to give the men a note in English that says “Hi, My Name is Fatma I am a Muslim, Enjoy you meal. Fatma.Pasha@hotmail.com.” In another scene, Hanum and Rangga’s

2Although presented as a religious obligation and Asye’s choice, we find out later in the film that Asye is bald due to cancer treatment. She dies at the end of the film.
Austrian neighbor angrily knocks on the door complaining about the ‘fish smell’ from her cooking. Later, Hanum offers him some Indonesian food as a gesture of kindness and generosity, and he later tells her that he loved her cooking and the flavor of her food. These two scenes suggest that ignorance of Islam can be overcome through acts of generosity and kindness.

Most of the film however is dedicated to showing how Hanum comes to learn about the suppressed or hidden history of Islam in Europe, forgotten by Muslims and Europeans alike. When Hanum travels to Paris she meets Pasha’s friend Marion Latimer who gives her a tour of Paris. It is an unconventional tour in that Marion shows her the hidden presence of Islam in France. At the Arc de’Triumph Marion directs Hanum’s gaze down the Champs-Elysées and asks her where it points. When Hanum cannot answer, Marion claims that the Champs-Elysées is in fact a kiblat that points directly to the Kaaba in Mecca, built by Napoléon following his military campaign in Egypt and Syria. Although patently false – the Champs-Elysées does not point to Mecca nor was it built by Napoléon – Marion’s claims are given authority by the fact that she is introduced as a French mualaf who willingly converted to Islam and is an academic who works for the Arab World Institute. For Hanum, and by extension the audience, icons of French culture undergo a historical reinterpretation that reveals the previously hidden or denied Islamic history.

In the social relationships that Hanum and Rangga develop, being Muslim (or not) becomes the determinant identity marker. Hanum’s friendships narrow to other Muslims, including a women’s study group she joins to discuss scripture. Rangga’s friendships are more diverse, and despite joining Khan in protest at the scheduling of

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3 Fatma takes Hanum to the national gallery one day where she weeps in front of the portrait of her ancestor Kara Mustafa Pasha. “Kita biarkan karena Mustafa menikmati malam-malam di sini…”

4 Some sources claim that Napoleon converted to Islam when he was in Egypt. It seems to have been to enable his rule and authority rather than for spiritual reasons.
the exam on a Friday, relents and takes the exam unlike Khan. The most cosmopolitan place in the film is a ‘pay-by-donation’ restaurant run by a Pakistani Muslim where Pasha takes Hanum and Rangga for dinner one night. Here they meet other Muslims and come to see themselves as part of a Muslim brotherhood that transcends national background (Indonesian, Turkish, Pakistani, African). The overall effect is to see the Indonesian characters identify much more with their Islamic identity and be drawn more closely into an Islamic habitus where solidarity with other Muslims is privileged. These social relationships are multinational, but they are also premised on a shared religion which shape how Hanum and Rangga identify themselves and come to understand social life in Austria.

**HAJI BACKPACKER (2014) : A JOURNEY BACK TO ISLAM**

As its title implies, *Haji Backpacker* combines the religious obligation of the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) with a mode of travel that requires little money but promises authentic experiences. Backpacking is often seen as providing a grounded experience, because the backpacker is forced by circumstances to engage with local people by relying on cheap accommodation and modes of transport. Being on the ground and in touch with ordinary people, the backpacker can understand and sympathize with others which in turn can be a means to cosmopolitan understanding. In *Haji Backpacker*, Mada’s journey begins without destination but becomes an ‘inspirational’ journey back to Islam as he realizes that his destination is Mecca and that he is aided and protected by God.

Mada’s journey begins in Bangkok where he lives a party lifestyle with Western friends: drinking, taking drugs, and angry at both the world, God, and his family. Following the death of his father, Mada left Indonesia for Bangkok feeling betrayed by the God he had been faithful to as a boy. Whilst his life is pleasurable and
fun, it is an escape and leaves him spiritually empty as a murtad (apostate). One night, Mada kills a Thai gangster following a drunken altercation, forcing him to flee Thailand to escape both the police and the other gang members intent on revenge. From Thailand he escapes into Vietnam where he is helped by an old Vietnamese couple before sneaking onto a fruit truck bound for China. Arriving in Yunnan in southern China, Mada is taken in by a Chinese ustaz and his daughter who help him recover. When they learn that he is a Muslim too, they begin to guide him back onto the path of faith, awakening in him the realization that his journey will take him to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

From China Mada travels through Tibet, Nepal, India, and Iran to reach Mecca. It is a symbolic ‘return to Islam’, having begun in decadent Bangkok and ending at the spiritual center of the religion where Mada finds a new sense of religious enlightenment. Along the way he meets fellow Muslims who guide him back onto the path of faith. As he travels and encounters other Muslims, he realizes that “God truly loves him and protects him with his perfect regulations” provided that he is ‘ikhlas’ (sincere) in his belief.5 This is reinforced by the moral and spiritual lessons he is given (dakwah) by the Muslim leaders in China and India and friendship offered in Iran. Mada’s return to Islam is a very personal journey that nevertheless affords space for him to develop a cosmopolitan outlook since he is travelling as a backpacker. However two key events put into doubt Mada’s ability to become cosmopolitan and not just religiously enlightened.

When crossing Iran, the bus Mada is travelling on is hijacked by Islamist militants. Passengers are pulled off, and Mada is singled out as a potential Israeli spy. In a small hut, he is interrogated and threatened with execution unless he can prove

5 Original reads: “Tuhan sebenarnya mencintai dan selalu menjaganya dengan aturan yang sempurna”.

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himself a Muslim by reciting the Koran. Mada performs the correct ablutions before reading and proves that he is in fact a Muslim. When this occurs, the militant’s demeanor suddenly changes from hostile to friendly, inviting Mada to eat, and later arranging him passage to Saudi Arabia as a deckhand on a rich Saudi friend’s yacht. For Mada and for the film, this encounter in Pakistan is the most suspenseful moment of the film. Succeeding here allows Mada to continue his journey, but he ignores the fate of others on the bus, especially Israeli passengers. Once freed Mada does not question or challenge the actions of the militant, for example by questioning his use of violence, but accepts his friendship and offer of help uncritically. Mada’s need to keep following his ‘Islamic’ path towards Mecca makes him inattentive to the fate of others, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

The other event that overshadows the entire journey to Mecca is the killing that prompts Mada to flee Thailand at the beginning of the film. This represents the turning-point of his party-life in Bangkok. Throughout the journey to Mecca, no further mention is made of this event, and even when Mada reaches his redemption in Mecca and reconciles himself with his faith and his dead father, he does not then return to face justice in Thailand. It is as if the journey to Mecca and his rebirth into Islam absolves him of responsibility and of wrongdoing. His own journey of self-discovery and return to Islam become more important than facing justice for a crime he has committed - even when that crime was committed during his *murtad* phase. Here then Mada has not taken on the cosmopolitan ideal/ethic that concerns the responsibility for others and for action in the world. Instead, his journey is self-centered and focused on the redemption of the self in Islam.
ASSALAMULAIKUM BEIJING (2014): TRANSNATIONAL LOVE

Assalamualaikum Beijing follows the story of Asma as she leaves Jakarta following a bad break up to take up work as a journalist for a small Indonesian-language publication in Beijing. She calls her column ‘Assalamualaikum Beijing’ after she discovers that China hosts a small Muslim community with a rich tradition and culture. Assisting her as her guide is the young Chinese man Zhongwen (whom she affectionately calls Wen Wen) with a pop-star look and romantic streak. By coincidence Zhongwen had met Asma on a bus one day before becoming her guide, attracted by the fact that she was in headscarf and reminded him of a mystical Chinese princess called Ashima. Over time the two fall in love, but consummation remains impossible since she is a muslimah and he is a self-confessed agnostic. When Asma falls sick and is flown back to Jakarta for surgery, a heartbroken Zhongwen seemingly converts to Islam and travels to Jakarta to propose to her. Despite her physical debility, she accepts his offer since their love is now possible, and they journey back to China together as husband and wife.

The link between faith and reward is a clear motif in Assalamualaikum Beijing, as it is in many Islamic-themed films. Asma is a beautiful, outgoing, sociable, smart, ambitious and self-reliant muslimah who is dedicated to her religion and its principles. When she first meets Zhongwen on the bus, she declines to shake his hand because he is non-muhrim, exemplifying her adherence to Islamic rules of social interaction. Marrying the beautiful and romantic Zhongwen – a model of the Korean pop stars who have become icons and fantasy objects for thousands of young Indonesians – becomes the ‘reward’ for her faith and dedication. He not only falls in love with Asma, but converts to Islam, travels to Indonesia, and proposes marriage without caring that she is now physically disabled. The implication is that he has fallen in love with her
because of her attractive personality and good character, a product of her religious principles and devotion.

Asma’s interactions with China and its people illustrate the nature of her interests and cosmopolitan outlook. On the one hand, China is shown as a beautiful country with a rich history and heritage including the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square. Beautiful scenery represents part of the film’s appeal to Indonesian audiences, showing China as an exotic tourist destination. Eko Satrio Wibowo writing for the Cinema 21 website describes the following:

Elements of travelling that are displayed in this film are very effective. Your eyes will be spoilt by a number of beautiful tourist destinations in Beijing and China. You will feel like you are experiencing the wonder of the tourist destinations there. And for sure, this will make you want to travel to Beijing.⁶

At the same time, Asma’s journalistic interests narrow to the Chinese-Muslim community and their way of life. It is with this community that she identifies, and with whom we see her interacting the most. Zhongwen represents the bridge between the two: he embodies the beauty and charm of China and also its potential as a place that accommodates and accepts Islam. Zhongwen’s conversion to Islam is not just a romantic gesture, but speaks of how attractive Islam can be to non-Muslims if each Muslim becomes an ambassador for the religion.

As viewers though, we are tricked into thinking that Zhongwen converted to Islam out of love for Asma. Early in the film Zhongwen tells Asma that he is agnostic, leading us to believe that he is of Buddhist or Taoist background. This is presented as

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the barrier between them, and when he converts for her, it represents a victory of faith over non-faith. However, at the end of the film, when they go back to China together and he introduces her to his family, we discover that in fact he comes from one of the Chinese Muslim families that Asma had covered in her column. This is important because it means the fundamental ‘difference’ that makes their love and therefore union impossible really just requires a decision on his part to return to Islam. He is therefore not a ‘kafir’ who converts to Islam but is himself a born Muslim who is brought back onto the path of faith by love and the appeal of the muslimah’s devotion. Although transcultural in that he is Chinese and she is Indonesian, their love and subsequent marriage is religiously homogamous and not as transgressively inter-faith as it first appears.

**DISCUSSION: REMAPPING THE WORLD**

Each of the three films tell us something about how Indonesian filmmakers see the world through the Islamic genre. True to the genre, the ‘solution’ or message of the three films is that religiosity brings reward, including love and marriage (*Assalamualaikum Beijing*), reconciliation and inner peace (*Haji Backpacker*), and confidence and knowledge (*99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa*). Going overseas involves enjoying the sights and sounds of somewhere new, but it does not mean discarding religious belief to become ‘like them’ or even a cosmopolitan ‘global citizen’. Whilst going overseas is a process of negotiation between self and the foreign culture, the self is identified as Muslim and this becomes the determinant frame through which the main characters come to interact with others and the foreign location. By becoming a foreigner and therefore different in another country is a challenge, and the means to deal with it is to assert religiosity and to seek Islam in these foreign places.
In order to make sense of the world and to navigate successfully within it, all three films engage in what I call a ‘remapping of the world’ according to an Indonesian Islamic worldview. Each film embarks on a journey overseas in which the sights and sounds of the new location are portrayed: Bangkok is shown to be a busy tourist city; Beijing is a beautiful historic city; and Vienna is full of classic architecture. These openings emphasize the excitement of an exotic location and their potential to be consumed for tourism. Each main character soon finds him/herself seeking Islamic icons, locations, pathways, and people in these foreign places. Islam and Muslims are themselves foreigners, but their shared faith gives reassurance to the Indonesian characters that they share commonalities whether of experience (e.g. discrimination, racism), religious requirements (e.g. halal food), or practices (e.g. Friday prayer).

Remapping also takes physical form in the locations and places that the characters choose to visit. Finding Islamic pathways underpins the journeys of Mada as a backpacker and Asma as a reporter in China. Although one is personal and the other professional, both characters seek Islamic communities in the foreign location. By focusing on Chinese Muslims, Asma shifts attention to the small Muslim community in China, thereby reducing the rest of China to a tourist attraction. Mada’s journey similarly reduces the countries he passes through to beautiful imagery whilst focusing on his personal journey of spiritual redemption. Mada’s journey to Mecca links Muslim communities or ‘nodes’ across different countries, creating a new route across Asia and to the Middle East. By the time he leaves Yunnan he no longer interacts with non-Muslims, and is only seen stopping in Nepal/Tibet to admire Buddhists praying before crossing into India.

Remapping of the world in 99 Cahaya involves new myth-making that seeks to assert for Islam a historical and foundational place in European history and culture.
99 Cahaya signals its myth-making from the outset in its tagline which reads ‘Mengungkap Rahasia Islam di Benua Eropa’ (Revealing Islam’s secrets on the European continent). In a key sequence in the film, Hanum travels to Paris where she meets Pasha’s convert friend Marion. In the Louvre museum Mariam moves past the famous painting of Mona Lisa and instead directs Hanum’s attention to the painting Virgin and Child (1315-1320) by the Italian artist Ugolino di Nerio. She directs Hanum’s attention to the fact that Mary is wearing a ‘hijab’ and points to the script visible on the inside of the veil. After Hanum fails to read it, Mariam says to her that it in fact spells ‘La Ilaha Illallah’ (‘There is no god but Allah’) which Mariam says is an unacknowledged detail and proof of the hidden Islamic influence on European art and religion. Hanum has a moment of realization, saying: “This means that the influence of Islamic culture on the development of Europe is significant. Europe needs to be grateful towards Islamic civilization.”

Like the Champs-Élysées-as-kiblat myth mentioned above, this deciphering of the script as Islamic is factually incorrect. The writing is known as ‘pseudo-kufic’ and was used as a kind of decoration by artists during the Renaissance. The writing replicates Arabic, but is in fact gibberish. Yet what the film is doing however is reinterpreting the painting as having a significance to the role of Islam in Europe and thereby remapping the world according to a revisionist Islamic worldview.

When Indonesian Muslim characters travel to other parts of the world, they do so as minorities who have been excluded from or made invisible to the cultural achievements and economic success of other civilizations. In part these films are about rediscovering Islam and its place in the world – either in communities (in China, India, Iran) or in the cultural artefacts of European history. It is an attempt to rethink global

history and the places that Indonesian audiences think of when they think about the world. Typically this would be the iconic tourist destinations – The Great Wall of China, The Eiffel Tower, etc – places that have little meaning to an Indonesian Muslim. But when reinterpreted, these countries and places can take on new significance when they are connected to an Islamic history, personalities, or communities. It is in this sense that the films can be part of a broader remapping of the world according to an Indonesian Islamic viewpoint.

CONCLUSION

In the three recent Indonesian Islamic-themed film *99 Cahaya*, *Haji Backpacker*, and *Assalamualaikum Beijing* it is evident that the films share a particular vision of the world. I argue that this is an Indonesian Islamic viewpoint that seeks to remap the world according to pathways, icons, people, and places that can be attributed to Islam. This is favored over a broader cosmopolitanism in which forms of global citizenship and cross-cultural solidarity might emerge. The films present a limited cosmopolitanism in that they are set overseas situating Indonesian characters amongst others but come to invariably form bonds of solidarity with other Muslims. The films foreground Islam as the primary point of identification for the characters, and thus structure their interactions and perspectives around the needs of maintaining religious obligations and faith.

By operationalizing a ‘cosmopolitan desire’ for travel and presenting the world as an exotic consumption object, recent Indonesian Islamic films reiterate the importance of maintaining faith especially in these foreign locations. Each film is a story about developing or maintaining faith in the face of temptation and difference in a foreign setting. Similar to banal cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan desire sees the world and other cultures as an object of consumption represented by exotic locations, food,
activities, and romance. International travel is the means to access the world but once there, these films remind viewers not to forget their religious obligation and identity. Instead, the characters work to discover Islamic pathways and fellow Muslims in the foreign location thereby turning tourism into proselytization. By wrapping Islam within these cosmopolitan desires, it enables filmmakers to proselytize to Indonesian audiences about the world and their place within it.

For the broader theory of cosmopolitanism, this suggests that the ideas of cosmopolitanism are not universally shared but that different communities may have very different interpretations of the world and their role within it. Indonesian Islamic films do not see the world as a domain of cross-cultural encounter in which they can become global citizens, but rather as a space of interaction that is incompatible with Islamic principles and practices. Instead, these films prefer to turn to familiar and ‘safe’ pathways and interactions in which Indonesian Muslim characters can remain safe. Indonesian Muslims are encountering the world, not as privileged Western subjects, but as triple minorities – Southeast Asian, Muslim, and Third World – through the experience of which it is difficult to uphold the ideals of cosmopolitanism which presupposes privilege, Western values, and an ability to navigate the world confidently.

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