
Multiculturalism Issue and Religion Conflict in Film ? by Hanung Bramantyo

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify and interpret the phenomenon of religion conflict in film ? with an emphasize on multiculturalism. It began by textually analyzing the film's characters as a representation of multiculturalism issue and religion conflict emerging as a result of the gender, religion, belief, and ethnic diversity. It was followed by pointing out that the result of identification affects protest and criticism from many sides such as religious organization and society. Afterwards, the interpretation and clarification of media's repression through the novelization was obtained by means of conflict and functional theory's perspective. Religion conflict in the film and novel's clarification emerged as a result of the ignorance of multiculturalism as foundation and value in social life. It served as an interesting social phenomenon due to the fact that the diversity of view, religion, and belief became one of the main causes of social conflict.

Keywords : *film, multiculturalism, pluralism*

INTRODUCTION

MASS media, both print and electronic, plays a significant role in determining social phenomenon in social life. A significant number of films promoting multicultural issue can be seen as a form of reintroducing the meaning of pluralism, one of which is film ? (also known as "Question Mark") which was released in 2011. A high number of adaptation from novel to film improves to deliver the content of the story by means of audio visual, which is known as ecranisation. It signifies that the adapted novels possess a good track record or are best sellers. It appears also as a result of the significant number of demands from readers as well as directors to film the novels. The same thing happens with the contrary of ecranisation, namely novelization. Novelization begins to take its position as a form of popular adaptation enthused by writers and litterateurs.

The concern from writers as well as litterateurs in evaluating the development of a film is important due to the fact that not all films are interesting to be novelized. Novelization is possible when a film is considered selling and appreciated by various parties, especially by film enthusiasts, and is bestowed various awards in the world. Only after this that it is possible to write a novel based on the script of the film. Novelization provides a new media to expand writers' ideas and imaginations in creating their work.

Damono (2012) emphasizes on several important matters regarding an adaptation process, especially novelization: first, a novel is written based on the film's script; second, a novel is written after the film is released and receives a wide attention. One of the reasons to initiate a novelization is the film per se, not the script, meaning that the novel is written after the film gains its popularity. Regarding this matter, Damono argues that it is important that the writer considers not merely the film but also the script as well because commonly, a film doesn't deliver itself with a detail and explicit narrator.

NOVELIZATION

Film ? was released on 7 April 2011 and was a critical and commercial success for receiving favorable reviews and was viewed by more than 550,000 people. However, despite of its success, this film also received criticism from various circles. This film, which was also screened internationally, was nominated for nine Citra Awards at the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival and succeeded in winning one. At the sixth Indonesian Film Festival in Australia, ? was screened to full theatres on 25 August 2011 as the festival's closing film. The film was also screened in Vancouver and Paris and received positive feedback. After that, a novel titled *Harmoni dalam “?”* was published by Mahaka Publishing and was released on December 2011. It signifies the novelization of the film ?.

The novel, which was written by Melvi Yendra and Adriyanti, expands the controversial film's background, including the relationship between its characters, Hendra and Menuk. On February 21th 2012, ? was released on DVD by Jive! Collection after passing censorship on January. The DVD features Indonesian audio, Indonesian and English subtitles, behind-the-scene documentary, and production photo gallery. However, a critical response came from a conservation Islamic group Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*), opposing the film for its pluralism message. In addition, Banser, the youth wing of *Nahdatul Ulama*, also censured this film due to the scene where members of Banser were paid to perform their duty of deed. They claimed persistently that it was factually incorrect.

SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Harmoni dalam “?” is a novelization written by Melvi Yendra and Andriyati. This novel is an adaptation of film ? directed by Hanung Bramantryo, released in 2011. The film tells and describes a story containing pluralism issue and religion conflict occurring in Indonesia. Film ? is opened by a sound of church's bell followed by a worshipping song. The film then continues by displaying Kong Hu Cu's believers' performing their worship, then showing Muslims' performing congregational prayer, then back to Chinese's worshipping, back to the activity in the church, congregational prayer in the mosque, and it goes on repeatedly.

The film then arrives at the scene where a pastor was stabbed as he was welcoming his congregation in front of the church. The stabbing was conducted by an unknown subject who then fled from the scene in a motorcycle ridden by his partner. Such phenomenon of inter-religious community is shown continuously and presented openly throughout the film. The religion conflict begins to show in the film from the first scenes where the pastor was stabbed. It signifies that multiculturalism has not yet considered as guidance by the society for such cases

occur frequently.

It is believed that a phenomenon and a condition of a society is inevitably correlated with different perceptions held among generations. This matter causes the missing and shifting of social values which then leads to conflicts, one of which is religion conflict happens as a result of formed social system. According to Narwoko (2004: 48), conflict is defined as a social process which occurs by involving opposing individuals or groups attended by threat of violence. Many factors induce conflicts, such as different principle, which in this case appears in the form of believes (religions) that was intentionally presented in both film and novel.

The next factor is different cultures or traditions and interests, which is signified both in the film and novel by the conflict between Chinese and Javanese ethics. These factors lead to the social shifting due to religion conflict as well as a result of different perceptions toward multiculturalism in society. If a society believed in acceptance of a difference, namely religion and ethnic difference, the religion conflict would not have happened. Furthermore, both the film and the novel provide some kind of enlightenment by displaying multiculturalism amiably despite its incongruity with the fact in the real life and the controversy toward it.

THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

According to Alfin Niti Hardjo in his writing “*Teori-Teori Perubahan Sosial*” (Theories of Social Change), the theories of social change or shifting become a reference that provide a viewpoint in perceiving how a social shifting occurs. One of the factors inducing a religion conflict is the society’s incomprehension about the definition of multiculturalism. Many definitions of multiculturalism evolve in social and cultural studies, but basically multiculturalism is understood as a worldview—which is then able to be interpreted into various cultural policies—that emphasizes on the acceptance of diversity, plurality, and multicultural reality occurring in social life.

The reality is illustrated in the opening minutes of the film in scenes where each religious community performs act of worship, showing the life of different religious communities who live side by side. Different from the novel when this adapting media opens itself by describing Pasar Baru as the setting of the story, the film presented multiculturalism view from the very first minutes by means of those scenes. However, this act of worship performed by each religion believer presented in both the film and novel symbolizes multiculturalism.

This condition can be understood by the aid of functionalist theory. One of the theoretician is William Ogburn. A concept derived from the functionalist theory is the theory of cultural lag. This concept supports functionalist theory to explain that a social change is inevitably in correspondent with relation among elements of culture in society.

Functionalist theory supports the idea about the way in which society consisting different religious communities live side by side according to each believe. Religious conversion phenomenon becomes a trivial issue despite the idea that Islam is the dominant religion in film ?.

According to functionalist theory, some elements of culture can change rapidly when other elements are unable to coincide with the change’s rapidity of those elements. Consequently, the elements which change slowly are then left behind. This condition causes a cultural lag.

Functionalist theorists perceives social changes more as a constant matter and is self-explanatory. Changes are considered destructive for social order. This idea is shown in the film by the scene in which Hendra made some changes in the way of running his father's restaurant. He persisted on opening the restaurant in month of fasting and didn't grand his employees leave of absence for celebrating religious holiday Eid al-Fitr.

MULTICULTURALISM AND RELIGION CONFLICT

Comparing the film and the novel's texts, it is obtained that there aren't many changes appear in the transformation from the film to the novel. Most of the sequences in the novel are in complete congruity with the film. However, the novel provides a significant portion in adding the background story for character Menuk's family. It describes in detail how she came working in Hendras's family's restaurant. The novel also tells the history about how Menuk's family is in a well relationship with Soleh's and how finally they're arranged to be married.

Another story added in the novel is the love story between Menuk and Hendra which isn't presented explicitly in the film. The film provides the information about the two characters' relationship merely by the scene in which Hendra opened a box containing his picture with Menuk. Both characters were able to accept their religious difference. However, in the end the acceptance was then shifted as Hendra felt that the reason of Menuk's rejection toward him was because his ethnicity and religion. This matter then led to religion conflict which disturb the harmony in their families and society.

In addition to that, other scenes are presented in attempt to visualize the conflict due to different religions and ethnicities. One of which is where Menuk run into Hendra as he was on the way out of the restaurant. Outside the restaurant, Hendra crossed path with some men wearing Islamic clothing who then mocked him for being Chinese. Hendra avenged the insult by calling them "*teroris asu*" (literally meaning "dog terrorists"). They then involved in a fight which then mediated by an Ustad (an honorific title for a man in Islamic world). The setting of the event is in Semarang, a city which represents diversity. This scene signifies that the value of diversity has not yet embraced in social life. This condition then leads to lingering conflict. The scene also presents the fact that label of 'terrorist' is frequently attributed to Islamic community and that Chines is considered as a 'kafir' (Arabic term meaning 'disbeliever') and enemy.

On the other hand, the film also visualizes harmonious relationship between Menuk and Hendra's parents as the owners of the restaurant. Menuk was reminded to do salat (Islamic prayer) as Hendra's mother was also performing her Kong Hu Cu's ritual. This harmony changed abruptly when Hendra was given the right to manage the restaurant. As the son of the owner, Hendra had the authority to change the rule that was arranged by his father. This point signifies the religion conflict which will be elaborated in the later part of this essay. Hendra's breaking his father's rule inevitably led to religion conflict in the film.

On the other hand, both film and the novel deliver the idea that acceptance begin to emerge. It shows by the part where character Rika decided to convert from her previous religion, as it is delivered in her line:

“Aku cerai dari Mas Panji bukan karena aku mengkhianati kesucian perkawinan, dan aku pindah agama bukan karena aku mengkhianati Tuhan” tukas Rika kemudian benar-benar pergi.” (Yendra and Adriyanti, 2011: 161)

This statement points out a woman’s viewpoint about her principle toward religion she believed. She has the freedom to choose what religion she will believe. As for the idea of religious conversion, it was clearly not a simple decision for Rika who was experiencing a mental breakdown for having to go through a divorce. Rika was then shown to seek shelter and remedy for her sorrow. She thought that conversion would provide her remedy. This character is then shown to get baptized in church.

Rika had to experience social and mental conflict consequently. Her choice to convert was not an acceptable matter for many people, especially her family. Ever since she was little, Rika was raised as a Muslim. When she became adult and was divorced from Panji, her decision to convert was apparently not welcomed since a religion is believe and faith is not something that lingers in the heart solely but to also be realized in the form of action.

In addition to the story of Rika, the harmony is also illustrated in other scenes, one of which is the scene where Mami (Hendra’s mother) comforted Menuk after she had a fight with his husband in front of the restaurant. This scene denotes the value of assimilation and toleration between two different religious community, Islam and Kong Hu Cu. The two characters was then shown to deeply engage in Menuk’s marriage problem. Mami comforted her by providing her point of view as a woman, a mother, and a working wife for her family. It signifies the harmonious condition between two people who come from different background of religion and ethnicity. The harmony is also pointed out by the dialog between Menuk and Rika in the novel:

“Dia minta cerai, Mbak.” Tangis Menuk pada Rika yang baru datang untuk menenangkannya.

“Tolong jangan masukkan kata-kata itu dalam hidup kamu dan Soleh, kamu harus kuat, supaya Soleh juga kuat.” Hibur Rika. (Yendra and Adriyanti, 2011: 194)

The film does not provide an explicit information about Hendra’s sudden decision to convert to Islam. The film only gives a little clue by showing this character reading a book of Asmaul Husna (99 beautiful names of God in Islam). In the other hand, the novel plays its role by adding the explanation about how Hendra accepted and appreciated Islam by willing to convert from his previous religion. It shows in the novel in his following monologue:

“Bila saja engkau tahu Menuk, aku rela mengikuti keyakinanmu, agamamu, demi mendapatkanmu. Dan beberapa terakhirini aku pergi, juga karena inginku mempelajari lebih dalam agamamu, agar ketika kita bersatu, aku mampu menjadi imam yang baik untukmu dan anak-anak kita. Andaikan engkau tahu apa yang sedang aku perjuangkan, Menuk.” (Yendra and Adriyanti, 2011: 123)

This part helps to reveal this character’s process until he finally decided to convert. The novel provides a straightforward explanation that Hendra’s intention to convert emerged from a reasonable consideration, in contrast to how the film depicts it as a sudden decision merely due to his reading of Asmaul Husna book, even though in the end his change and decision was welcomed.

The conversation between Menuk, Mami, and Rika mentioned above indicates how they overlook their difference. The fact that they are believers of different religions does not complicate them to care, love, and cherish each other. Harmonious relationship ties Manuk the Muslim, Mami the Kong Hu Chu believer, and Rika who was a Muslim before converting to be a Catholic. Through these characters, the film supposedly insinuates the idea of harmony among inter-religious community. Both Mami and Rika are shown to be empathetic about Manuk's burden as a woman. The three characters are attributed with humane characteristic, make them respect each other and overlook their difference.

CONCLUSION

Religious conflict in both film and novel appeared as result of the society's ignorance toward multiculturalism which serves as a basis and foundation of social life. This condition emerged as an interesting social phenomenon for issue of view, religion and belief differences have become the triggers of conflict in society. Acceptance of change is supposedly regarded by all circles of people for changes arise as result of careful consideration and is correspondent with Indonesia's value of diversity. In the case that was elaborated above, novelization appeared as an attempt to appease the protest from the repression of the media.

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