GENDER EQUALITY IN MARLINA THE MURDERER IN FOUR ACTS AS SEEN FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts, an Indonesian movie, was played for the first time in cinemas in 2017, and outstandingly, this movie returned to be shown again in 2019. The movie has won many awards that prove its quality and excellence. Since this movie powerfully conveys gender equality in a country with the world's largest Muslim population, it is challenging to observe how the depicted gender messages are based on Islamic values. Hence, this article combines the analysis of gender equality and Islamic perspective with Marlina Murderer in Four Acts as the object of the study. The representation theory of Stuart Hall will be applied to observe the signs which represent the gender issues. Then, this research is qualitative research supported by Gillian Rose's visual approach. The data analysis technique is conducted by observing the representations of gender equality in the film while analyzing those with the concept of gender equality in Islam. The research finds that gender equality is reflected in the narrative and cinematic elements. Furthermore, it is correct that men and women are biologically different, but both genders have equal capabilities and skills. In conclusion, Marlina represents the struggle for equality and the result of such a struggle because equality should be obtained by consciousness, willpower, and acts.*

Keywords: gender equality, Indonesian movie, Islamic perspective, representation, visual analysis

INTRODUCTION

One of the symbols of the struggle for gender equality in Indonesia is Raden Adjeng Kartini. In the era before independence, she sent a letter to her friend in the Netherlands, the contents of which questioned the injustice of society's views based on gender differences. Her struggle continued afterward, even in the reform era or post-new order collapsed in 1998. The struggle for gender equality resulted in many things, starting from issuing legal regulations that protect women's rights, which previously did not yet exist (Mursidah, 2012).

Some phenomena show the concrete results of this struggle. One of them was the election of Megawati Soekarno Putri as the fifth president of the Republic of Indonesia for July 23, 2001 - October 20, 2004. Many regional heads, both regencies or cities, and provinces, led by a woman.

The struggle undertaken to achieve gender equality in Indonesian society is not only carried out in the political sphere. But also, in the arts and culture, one of them, through the dissemination of moral messages from films produced by the nation's children (Kartika, 2015).

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One of the films that chanted the issue of gender equality is *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*. The film was first shown in theaters in 2017 and was re-aired in early 2019. This film won many awards at home and abroad. Several studies on feminism have made this film a subject. This research is more focused on the struggle for gender equality. In reality, women have the same potential as men (Walby, 1992). Such a message surfaced through a movie entitled *Marlina The Killer in Four Acts* (Surya, 2017).

The film is a mass communication medium that is classified as the youngest artwork when compared to literature, music, dance, and theater (Rachman, 2016). The film, which is only around a century old, has managed to infiltrate all levels of society. Everyone, except the blind, can enjoy the visuals displayed by the film (Siagian, 2006).

Rogen Manvell, as quoted by Siagian, explained that film had become a part of people's social life (Siagian, 2006). Everyone, men, women, old, young, from various backgrounds, often watch movies without first knowing whether they will like it or not. Movies have become like food. Everyone needs food, and occasionally it is possible to eat food that is not following his taste. In principle, it can be said, however it may be, food remains a basic human need (Rachman, 2020b).

Based on the above approach, the urgency of understanding film messages well has become a basic need. Thus, a film can provide significant benefits in life (Rachman, 2020a). This research attempts to explain the importance of understanding film well. This qualitative research uses a visual analysis approach to see the discourse displayed by the film.

On the other hand, the message conveyed by the film does not only revolve around the plot, setting, conflict, and resolution. Different meanings might be inserted in it, like the main content or agenda of the film. In general, films can talk about subjects and objects with unclear positions when discourse in messages is thrown into the public space through the media (Stam, 2008). For example, when a filmmaker comes to the cinema and is in front of the big screen, who is the subject of the text being displayed? Is the audience watching the text (film)? Or is it the film or filmmaker who is influencing ideology or meaning? The complexity of all elements in the film makes the audience flexible and free to absorb and interpret messages. On the other hand, the audience must understand the message carefully.

Based on the background that has been described above, the purpose of this study is to find out the struggle for gender equality in the post-reform era represented in the Indonesian film, *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*. This research is expected to be used as a scientific reference for further research that discusses the discourse in the film, can also be about the definition of values, teachings, and so forth that are shown through discourse analysis films. There have

been several studies regarding the representation of women's struggles in Indonesian films. However, there are not many studies that link it with Islamic values. This study fills the position to add to the literature regarding Indonesian films, women's struggles, and Islamic values.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several previous studies were used as references in writing this article, including research about cultural violence against women in three Thai films (Ruangnapakul et al., 2018). The similarities between the research and this article are in the subjects, namely, women and films. However, this article discusses only one film from Indonesia. Another research used as a reference is the discussion of *Wanita Berkalung Surban*. In addition to discussing women in the film, the research also mentions the nuances of Islam in the film (Yusoh et al., 2018).

The film is a medium to strengthen the image and trust in front of the audience. Each meaning the film carries comes from a series of signs arranged to form a meaning. The film cannot be separated from the framework of thinking of the makers to propose a frame of thought that is explicit or implied. In addition to forming a community construction, the film is also a recording of reality that grows and develops in the community and then projects it onto the screen (Sobur, 2003). The film is a mass communication media that presents stories, music, and other technical offerings.

Furthermore, the film has become a powerful tool for instilling ideas, such as Hollywood filmmakers framing discourses and ideas about Islam through the big screen. The film is a product that should be studied in the message related to the creator's perceptions and experiences about a matter. The mass media, including films, are amid social realities with diverse and complex interests, conflicts, and facts. According to a critical view, the media is a group tool with dominance to manipulate and strengthen its presence while marginalizing non-dominant groups.

One function of mass media, including film, is cultural transmission. Related to this function, Lippmann (1998), with the popular proposition of the world outside and pictures in our heads, argues that the media functions as forming meaning. The picture contained therein related to an event can change people's interpretations of reality and the pattern of their actions. Views of reality are displayed by the media in certain ways. The conceptualization of the phenomenon of mediation through the function of cultural transmission in the terminology of knowledge is known as the concept of representation (Mudjiyanto, 2011).

McQuail (1987) explains films can deliver messages in a unique and manipulative power. With this ability, a film can become an instrument of public diplomacy. The film can convey ideology or thoughts to the public. Pratista (2008) states two elements form a film. The two elements are the narrative element and the cinematic element. The two elements interact and are continuous and dependent on one another. The narrative element is the material to be processed. In a film, the plot and content of a story or script are narrative elements.

Meanwhile, a cinematic element is a way to process the film. The cinematic element is technical in filmmaking. There are four elements there. The first element is mis-en-scenes or everything in front of the camera, with four main components: settings, lighting, costumes, and makeup. The second element is the cinematography, which is the treatment of the camera and film as well as the relationship between the camera and the captured object. The third element is editing or selecting the transition from one image to another. The fourth is sound or anything that the listener's senses can catch. It can be a back sound or soundtrack that accompanies the film. There is also a dialogue that will strengthen the message through the audio aspect earlier. The elements forming the cinematic elements are the setting, fashion, or appearance of the characters and the sound consisting of background music and dialogue.

Ida (2011) explained representation is one of the processes of producing culture. The meaning process takes place in a particular context that is influenced by the cultural background of a particular community. There will be special meanings in certain conditions and contexts. Representation explains the meaning of something through something else. In the context of film research, the thing to be explained is illustrated or represented by visual images. Representation is the production of meaning from concepts that exist in the minds of humans through language, including visual language that is displayed through the film (Stam & Raengo, 2008).

There are two points of view in this representation process. First, it is a system consisting of objects, people, and events related to concepts in the human head. It can be termed "mental representation." Without concepts, humans will not interpret anything. The concept in question is not only related to concrete things and can be seen with the eye, but also abstract concepts such as love, ideology, happiness, and so forth. The concept is not only owned by individuals. The concept can also be shared with others. In a sense, it is always possible that one person and another have the same basis in interpreting the world. This phenomenon is referred to as "belonging to the same culture" because people understand something more or less the same way. After the shared culture stage, a point is reached where the ability to describe and

exchange concepts and meanings is necessary. It was there that the second process, which was a system derived from language, emerged.

Language is a means in the process of construction of meaning. To convey meaning from one person to another, language is needed as a communication tool (Hall, 1997). Language makes people able to externalize meaning about all kinds of things. Language gives meaning and changes the meaning conveyed about a particular thing. Through language (including symbols, writing, pictures, speech, films, etc.), humans express thoughts, ideas, and concepts about something. Up to the stage of cultural similarity and understanding of similar languages above, the circulation of representation can run smoothly because the meaning of something depends on how it is represented.

Some scholars explain three approaches to understanding the meaning represented through language (Hall, 1997). The first is the reflection approach that uses language as a mirror to reflect meaning directly following the reality in which the meaning is produced. The second is an intentional approach that uses language to convey meaning according to the perspective of the individuals concerned. The third is a constructionist approach that positions language to construct meaning. This interaction can give birth to new construction in the community. The construction of meaning or definition of Muslims can be renewed by the mass media in films. In this condition, it is possible for the meaning of Muslims in the film to become a new feature of Islam in society.

The visual analysis explains the visual culture, which refers to conditions in which visuals are part of social life. According to Rose (2001), the portrayal is never just an illustration. The depiction is a place to construct and display social differences. There are three areas in visual research. All three describe the position of the researcher's perspective when conducting research or visual studies (Rose, 2001).

The first area is the site of self. The researcher acts alone to interpret and understand the observed visual objects. With the ability of critical analysis, the researcher reads and decodes or parses the meaning one by one from the compositions that form and are attached to objects of visual images that exist. Methods or tools to analyze it can be content analysis, discourse, semiotics, or other textual analysis.

The second is the site of production, which is more inclined to parse the production area or make visual images like seeing the genre or forms of images based on specific categories such as paintings, murals, walls, and so forth. The questions raised in this research area include: Who made it? Who was the picture made for? Why is it made? When was it made? What event is the context in which the picture was made? The methodological approach used to examine

this second area can use ethnography as in the anthropological tradition or use discourse analysis studies.

The third is the site of the audience. This research area determines how audiences read and interpret visual images on display, circulated, exhibited to the public. Research in this area looks at how the audience takes a foothold or position to see the visual (viewing position) and associates the visual image with other texts in the vicinity of intertextuality. The questions that usually arise are who interpreted the picture (audience profile)? How do these audiences interpret? Why do they interpret or interpret the picture? What is the pleasure of the image (visual pleasure) owned by the public? Methodologies that can be used include psychoanalysis, audience ethnography, and reception analysis commonly used in the tradition of media studies.

Discourse is the field of all statements, sometimes as an individualization of groups of statements, and sometimes as a regulative practice of many statements (Mills, 2001). Discourse is a social practice (constructing reality) that causes a dialectical relationship between the discourse event and a particular social, cultural, ideological context. At this point, language is seen as an essential factor to represent the intent of the discourse maker.

Some scholars revealed discourse is a communication process using symbols related to interpretations and events in the broad social system. Through the discourse approach, communication messages such as words, writing, pictures, etc., are not neutral or sterile. The existence of discourse relates to the people who use it and deal with it, the context of the events relating to it, the situation of the wider community that lies behind its existence, and others. All of that can be values, ideology, emotions, interests, and so forth.

Discourse analysis attempts to reveal the hidden intentions of the subject or message maker who put forward a statement. Disclosure is done by placing oneself in the position of the subject by following the meaning structure of the subject. Thus, the form of ideological distribution and production disguised in discourse can be known. So, discourse can be seen from power relations, especially in the formation of the subject and various acts of representation.

Discourse analysis refers to the level of the text along with the history and context of the discourse. Next, the study continues on the factors that influence the text. In his understanding, Foucault defines discourse as a group of statements that form a structure of how something is interpreted and how ultimately, the meaning affects the way it acts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method. This method is defined as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in written or oral words from people and observable behavior (Bogdan & Taylor, 1990). This study analyzes existing concepts and data so that they spawn descriptive data. The meaning of the struggle for gender equality representation is carried out on two film-forming elements formulated by Pratista (2008). Meaning or interpretation is based on visual analysis of the site of self, popularized by Rose (2001). This research only uses the site of self area because it only sees discourse displayed in visual.

In the area of sit of self, researchers conduct interpretation, meaning, and understanding of the discourse of the object being observed. Researchers use critical analysis to read and decode or decipher the meaning of compositions that exist in visual objects. It was done to answer the formulation of the problem raised, namely, how the struggle for gender equality in the post-reform era was represented in the Indonesian film, *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*.

Based on the arguments presented above, it can be understood that the area of site of self is the most compatible position in research to examine the discourse of Muslim representation in the visual film conducted this time. This research is not focused on the process of production and acceptance or audience profile but is concentrated on how the discourse of representation in visuals is interpreted or interpreted. The target of this research is the film *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*. The unit of analysis in this study is the text in the film, which consists of visual images and language used in it. The primary data in this study is the film *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*. Secondary data in this study came from literature such as books, journals, previous studies, and other materials obtained through internet networks.

Data analysis in the study was carried out by analyzing the constituent elements needed to see the discourse about Muslims in the film with the steps: (1) watch *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*, (2) examine the representation of the struggle for gender equality conveyed through the forming elements in the film, (3) make a representation analysis connected with discourse about the struggle for gender equality, (4) make a comprehensive conclusion related to the discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Marlina the Killer in Four Acts shows two female figures, Marlina as the main character and Novi as the supporting cast. They show that women can do what men can do. In the first act of this film (the Robbery), the audience was treated to a story about Marlina, who was

robbed and raped by a group of gunmen. Apparently, Marlina was able to turn things around. She can kill the herd robbers. Some are killed with poison mixed into the chicken soup, while some are beheaded with the robber's weapon. In the second act of the film (the Journey), Marlina threatened the truck driver, who initially did not want to take her to the police station. In fact, the man in the truck chose to go down because he was afraid of Marlina, who threatened him with a sharp weapon. In the second half, Novi, who had the opportunity to get away from the ambush of the robber who wanted to take revenge on Marlina, decided to stay in the truck whose consequences, she was held hostage by the robber. In the third act (the Confession), Novi, pregnant and looking for her husband in the city on a truck, finally meets her husband. However, the husband accused Novi of cheating. At that moment, Novi, who was nine months pregnant, was pushed and left alone in the middle of an empty road. However, Novi remained able to stand up and did not want to ask for mercy from the husband who abandoned him. In the fourth act (the Birth), Novi kills the robber who raped Marlina. Not only that, she gave birth with the help of Marlina. The delivery was smooth even though Novi was abandoned by her husband.

The above explains gender equality messages in narrative elements or story content. There is also a representation of gender equality in the cinematic element seen when Marlina and Novi use machetes to kill robbers. Using a machete to kill so far is identical to violence perpetrated by men. In addition, at the end of the story, it appears they were riding motorbikes with large engines, which men commonly use.

Female Struggle

Many representations of the struggle for gender equality in this film are through the symbols and the storyline. The symbols that appear include how Marlina uses a machete to kill men. Machetes in the area where the film is set are generally used by men. Marlina can also ride a motorcycle with a clutch, which men usually use. The bike was previously owned by a male criminal. There is an impression, Marlina has succeeded in taking over the property of a man. In other words, Marlina's use of a machete attempts to deconstruct the discourse on male domination.

All this time, in Indonesia, it is widely understood that symbols are identified with a certain gender. For example, boys are often given car or gun toys. At the same time, girls are often given cooking toys or dolls. In fact, there is nothing wrong with girls playing with those toys of cars or guns. Likewise, there is nothing wrong with boys playing with cooking or dolls.

Take it further, many women later become police or soldiers and use a weapon for their daily activity, like many men who become famous chefs. On the other hand, men symbolize the family's economic support, while women are managers or house guards. In fact, many women are also the economic engine of the family. These dichotomous symbols need to be deconstructed as a form of effort to fight for gender equality. In this way, the community increasingly understands that the capacities of men and women are equal. Moreover, the goal of equalizing gender has become the world's agenda and has been a United Nations resolution since 2015 as one of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the storyline, there are many messages about gender equality. Marlina lives a quiet life after her husband has passed away. She was raped and robbed but managed to resist and win. She made a long journey to reach the police station and report what had happened to her, although she had to be upset because the report could not be received that day. Then she came home without any man's help. The story describes the spirit of an independent woman.

The story about Novi is more interesting to be observed, particularly in the struggle for gender equality. Novi is pregnant, but her husband leaves her. Marlina tries to help Novi. Unfortunately, they are visited by male criminals. In this situation, Novi helps Marlina, whom the criminal raped. Novi slashes the criminal's head with a machete. After that, Novi has contractions and looks like she will give birth, which Marlina will help later.

Both Marlina and Novi have difficult times. However, they can live it even without the help of men. All this time, there are many stories about great men who can overcome all obstacles alone. The storyline of this film shows that women can also live tough lives without depending on men. Myths or stories about the superiority of men over women are countered by the narrative in this film. In fact, there are many great women in Indonesia, even the world. In this era, symbols and understandings of the absolute dominance of men need to be straightened out.

Gender in an Islamic Perspective

There are many important points from the value of gender equality in the film *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*. The first is regarding the courage of women against men. This fact shows that both women and men have the same level of courage. The question of women's courage against men can be seen in the first act of the film (The Robbery). The second point is strong determination, which is seen in the second half of the film (The Journey). Marlina is not afraid of the truck driver even she dares to threaten the driver, who is a male. Marlina was driven by the determination to report the robbery she had experienced to the police station in the city.

The third is independence, which can be witnessed in the third and fourth acts (The Confession and The Birth). In the third act, Novi chooses not to beg for mercy from her husband, who has left her. In the fourth act, Novi could give birth without male assistance. Novi also showed courage when she dared to attack the robbers at Marlina's house.

In the Islamic perspective, one's courage, determination, and independence should not differ by gender, male or female. In *Al-Isra': 70* (2021), God said humans were created male and female in the best form in the most honorable position. Humans are created noble by having reason, feeling, and receiving instructions. Therefore, the Qur'an does not recognize the difference between men and women because, before God, men and women have the same degree and position. What distinguishes them is only in terms of biology.

The biological difference is natural or inborn and cannot be seen as a justification for inequalities of ability. Differences can create a division of tasks. However, it is emphasized that every task is equally important to achieve true happiness under Allah's blessings. Islam has given women's rights fairly. Women do not need to ask, let alone demand or fight for them. In *Al-Ahzab: 35* (2021), Allah explains that men and women have the same rights and obligations. The reward and goodness on the last day will also be the same. Individuals will be judged based on their deeds in the world. Therefore, gender in the Islamic perspective considers women to have the same or equal position as men.

Islam views gender differences not as discrediting one another (Umar, 2001). Sexual relations are relationships between men and women based on physical demands and categories. At the same time, gender relations are a different concept and social reality. The division of sexual labor between men and women is not based on normative understanding and biological categories but qualities and skills based on social conventions. It could be someone biologically identified as a woman because she has specific roles. She chooses roles like men or vice versa. For example, in a household, for some reason, the wife develops her potential and career to earn a living, while her husband chooses to raise children and take care of the household.

Some scholars say, the problem of gender inequality in society lies in two main problems; First, the overlapping of public understanding between the concepts of gender and biological/sex/gender; Second, it is because of the first problem that there is an understanding and interpretation of religion that seems to contain a gender bias. On the other hand, genetic differences between men and women need to be discussed more carefully and carefully because wrong conclusions about this matter not only have an impact on scientific issues but also have further implications for humanitarian issues. By concluding that men and women are

genetically different without providing a complete explanation, this conclusion can be used as legitimacy for the social reality that treats men as the main sex and women as the second sex.

The misunderstanding of the term gender results in the ambiguity between gender and biology, even though the two are different. Genetics and sex are the characteristics of two biological sexes, such as men having a penis and sperm, while women have reproductive organs. These are inherent and are not interchangeable with one another. Meanwhile, gender is an inherent trait of both men and women that is socially and culturally constructed. For example, women are soft, beautiful, emotional; men are strong, mighty, and rational.

The theories mentioned above, of course, have elements of truth. However, none of the above theories have been agreed upon by all parties. Moreover, if one considers these theories, none of them involve religious values as a source of consideration, even though religious values are one of the essential elements in people's lives. Almost every religion has a holy book that is sourced from the Most Perfect and Most Neutral.

The Qur'an hints at gender equality with the following arguments, the Qur'an mentions men and women alike as servants (*Al-Zariyat: 56*), men and women as caliphs on Earth (*Al-Baqarah: 30*), men and women receive primordial promises (*Al-A'raf: 172*), Adam and Eve were actively involved in the cosmic drama (*Al-Baqarah: 35*), men and women can achieve achievements (*Ali 'Imran: 195*). Based on these arguments, the ideal image of the Qur'an about women, according to Nasarudin, turns out to be a bit far from the mainstream or traditional understanding of Islam so far which often divides the roles of men and women in a dichotomous manner; the public domain is the domain of men's power while women are sufficient in the domestic sphere (Janah, 2017). In fact, the ideal woman described in the Qur'an has various profiles and typologies; such as Queen Bilqis, a superwoman who has autonomous and independent political and economic power in the area of Prophet Sulaiman (*Al-Naml: 22*); Asiyah, a woman who dared to take on the role of critical and courageous opposition to her husband Pharaoh (*Al-Qasas: 9*); Maryam, a single mother and woman who dares to challenge public opinion (*Ali 'Imran: 45*) and many others.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions that have been carried out to determine how the struggle for gender equality is represented in the Indonesian film *Marlina The Killer in Four Acts*, two main points can be concluded. First, the struggle for gender equality is seen in the narrative element of the film, namely in the script or the overall story content. Second, the

struggle for gender equality is seen in the cinematic element or the attributes used by actors in acting. Gender equality can be seen when Marlina and Novi can survive the harsh life without a single help from men. In characterizing Marlina and Novi as a whole, it can be concluded that there is the independence of women, who can do anything without the help of men, things that men generally do. So, women can do what men do. The struggle for gender equality in this film aligns with the essential points of gender equality from an Islamic perspective. Men and women should have the same courage, determination, and independence. The struggle for gender equality carried out by filmmakers aligns with the noble messages in the holy book Al-Quran.

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