ISLAM AND TERRORISM:
UNRAVELLING NARRATIVE BIASES IN AN INDONESIAN INDIE FILM

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Abstract: Since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, terrorism in the name of Islam has become a common occurrence in Indonesia. As a result, violent images of Islam widely circulated in the media. Islam and its minor images have permeated the Indonesian entertainment media landscape, including independent cinema. This study addresses the lack of research on Indonesian independent films with Islamic themes. In its earliest stage, this study studied how an independent movie, *Train To Heaven* (TTH), examined the language surrounding terrorism in the name of Islam. The analysis in this paper, which was conducted within the context of social semiotics, indicated that the sarcastic tones used in the text were consistent with the film's principal focus, which was rejecting violent acts in the name of Islam. TTH, an independent film that tackles the issue of terrorism committed in the name of Islam, frequently expresses resistance to the act at the outset of its cinematic portrayal. As the scenes develop, the story becomes increasingly ambiguous. TTH's antagonistic stance on alleged Islamic terrorism has not been maintained. The emergence of contradictions after the story, the TTH indie film's position, which has not been fully designed to address a specific alternative "voice," and the Islamic dynamics in Indonesia, which are not well mapped in discourse formation, are some of the particular factors that contributed to the ideological ambiguity of TTH's existence. Lastly, TTH's oppositional positioning or subtleties of resistance are questionable. The linguistic creation appears to be overtaken by ideological ambiguities. There is no doubt that Islamic doctrinal viewpoints will never include the death of God. The ending of the film was incongruous with the subject of criticism from the start, resulting in a confusing discourse about Islam and terrorism. Finally, this study reveals that TTH is ambiguous in defining the extent of its critique, whether it is directed at acts of terrorism in the name of Islam or Islamic beliefs. This study is limited by its focus on a single independent film, *TTH*, and is constrained by the evolving nature of Indonesian cinema and global perceptions of Islam and terrorism. Future research should examine a broader range of Indonesian indie films, explore the relationship between media representation, religion, and societal values, and consider audience reception studies to deepen the understanding of how such films are interpreted across different cultural and demographic contexts.

Keywords: social semiotics, Islam, Indonesian Indie film, logonomic system.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of religion in the media industries, particularly in the form of popular products, is frequently a part of public discourses. The growth of human civilization in the contemporary era due to the advancements in media technology has led to public debates about the potential abuse of religious teachings

when mediated in the commercialized popular form. The practice of commodifying religion has become an issue among Indonesian academics, manifested in some studies of popular media, such as *Instagram* (Illiyun, 2018), on *Youtube* channel (Nurfudiniyah, Hakim, and Fonny, 2023), in the form of film (Hakim, Puspita and Abdullah, 2024) or even related to food (Makiah et al., 2022), hijab and lifestyle (Hanik, Zahid and Sholikhah, 2022) and to cosmetics (Pribadi & Sila, 2023) through *Halal* certification. Concerning religious commodification, the intertwining between religion and film has arisen as a social reality during the Indonesian Reformation. Many religious film productions, particularly Islamic films, have included a fusion of two entities previously thought to originate from different areas.

As Indonesia entered the Reformation Era in 1998, the exploration of Islamic film became progressively more intense. The Reformation's values and principles promoting freedom of speech, among other things, had driven issues involving Islam in the landscape of Indonesian cinema throughout this era. Unlike the previous two periods, when film productions were under the shadow of government dominance, the Reformation Era freed up space for filmmakers' creativity by reducing the role of official oversight. Institutional reforms that reduced the state's authoritarian power, like the abolition of government information agencies (Barker, 2019), which were frequently 'hegemonic actors,' or the loosening of restrictions on journalism practices (Weintraub, 2011), had become essential markers for the proliferation of individual expressions on many media platforms. Under this condition, films with Islamic undertones emerged. They shaped a new popular cultural identity (Heryanto, 2012) and socially manifested a new Islamic movement (post-Islamism) (Heryanto, 2018) amid Indonesia's social, cultural, and political dynamics.

Throughout the Reformation era, commercial Islamic film production frequently resulted in clashing viewpoints, with filmmakers' freedom of expression having to confront Islamic precepts. This condition has an impact on the scholarly debate surrounding the genre. For some scholars, Islamic films cannot be viewed merely as 'the extensions of religiosity' (adopting McLuhan's term (1994), 'the extensions of man') or 'the extensions of dogma ' since the film is still positioned as a dramatized fictitious form of media entertainment. Filmmakers are free to present a creative fictitious product that includes Islamic nuances. For the proponents of this view, Islamic films can be the media for interpreting Islamic doctrines (Aulia & Miski, 2020). Having a different perspective, some scholars address the potential of films as a medium for dawah (Islamic preaching) (Arifuddin, 2017; Nurmansyah, 2021). The proponents of this view believe that Islamic films cannot be seen as an 'interpretation' of religious doctrines because filmmakers are not authorized to do so. According to this view, the symptoms of rising commercialization in all aspects of human life, including religion (Steger, 2003), are the most prominent triggers for the possibility of abusive practices towards mediated Islam, notably in the form of commercialized popular films.

Regarding the abovementioned disputes, previous studies mainly focused on commercial film products linked to business and industrial processes. No prior research has examined Islamic films in the context of independent Indonesian films that are not 'imprisoned' by commercial norms. As a result, there has been little clarity about how Indonesian Indie filmmakers position their creative productions when attempting to present Islamic-themed issues within their works.

This condition is not surprising given that productions and exhibitions are typically segmented and network-based, making it hard to access this indie film. It is also difficult to identify independent Indonesian films that discuss the complexity of Islam. Therefore, there is a need to find an elaborative discussion regarding Islam depicted in indie films. Given the gap, this paper aims to contribute to an academic conversation on Indonesian independent films incorporating Islamic aspects. This study fills a research gap on how Islamic themes are addressed in Indonesian independent films, especially given the lack of attention in this genre. One of the indie films discussing religious issues is a twelve-minute short film directed by a local Malang filmmaker, Mahesa Desaga, entitled *Train to Heaven* (*TTH*), produced in 2017.

Desaga is a young filmmaker born in Kediri in 1989. He first became acquainted with film when he was a college student. For him, films provide a space for understanding the world. Apart from that, it is a means of expressing his thoughts (Putra, 2017). Desaga's films were mainly inspired by his uneasiness about social situations and immediate surroundings (cinemapoetica.com). Two of his indie films, *Jumprit Singit* (Hide and Seek) and *Nunggu Teko* (Waiting to Come), have participated in some international film festivals. The latter had won the 2017 Australia Indonesia Cinema Festival (FSAI) competition organized by the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and presented at the 2017 Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF). *Train To Heaven (TTH)* was one of his works produced in 2017. The film was challenging to find because it was not widely distributed and exhibited since it contained a contentious theme and could be too sensitive for some Indonesian communities.

In the media era, a film should not be seen merely as a cultural product designed to satisfy society's entertainment needs. It is also a social practice. Turner (1999) argued that films do not simply reflect or record reality; rather, like other forms of representation, they construct and present their images of reality through the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of their culture, as well as the specific practices of the medium. Following this perspective, TTH is viewed as both a social practice and a cultural embodiment of the process through which individuals or groups construct meaning in response to existing events.

The authors chose to study the *TTH* film for some reasons. First, in terms of the film's idea, *TTH* depicted a highly sensitive issue that combines religious teachings with the violent deed known as terrorism in the name of Islam. This theme is complicated since human crises intersect with the issue of religious interpretations. Second, given the film's indie status and contentious issue, *TTH* may be an ideal instance of how personal creativity was constrained within socio-religious polemics and established unsettling ideological positionings as the foundation of creative, independent film production.

TTH portrays the narrative of two "spirits" (*ruh* in Islamic terminology), an extremist and a suicide bomber. On their way to Heaven, they discussed the concept of Islamic teachings or doctrines related to *jihad*. *Jihad* is a word absorbed from Arabic that means "to mobilize one's potential to do something." This word is mentioned forty-one times in the Qur'an with numerous derivations, all of which have connotations of war. However, the word *jihad* is not only used to refer to literal war, as Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) introduced it as an effort to control oneself from worldly desires) (*Apakah Sebenarnya Makna Jihad?*, 2020). One of the subjects addressed concerning *jihad* is the motivations or justifications for suicide bombers (the *jihadi*) to commit bombing in a church to exterminate disbelievers. Another subject, two "Islam defenders," addressed in the *TTH* movie, is the reward of 72 beautiful virgins God promised to the *jihadi*. After such a lengthy discussion, these two "spirits" have finally arrived at their destination, Heaven. Then, they walk through the vast place and discuss plans to build their houses at a particular site in Heaven. This 12-minute short film ends with two characters' shock and confusion as they find God's tomb amid their journey to Heaven.

This study explores the potential of this film's texts to offer complex discourses on Islam by relying on the textual design. This study aims to investigate the narrative structure of the film text to know how the construction of narrative patterns leads to the formation of Islamic discourses. To do this, the notion of representation (Hall, 1997), which focuses on the interaction between the 'language of film' and the transmission of meaning through the signification process, will be the underlying paradigm for the analysis. With a primary focus on textual analysis within the social semiotics theoretical perspective, this research seeks to develop a more rigorous understanding of the ideological aspect of a fictional film produced outside themainstream entertainment industry. The final thrust of this article is to display the logonomic system and ideological stance that conceptualize the film's text.

METHOD

Focused on the narrative complexities of *TTH*, the analysis utilizes social semiotics theory, which allows for flexibility in

incorporating various conceptual frameworks from different disciplines to better understand the complexities of meaning-making processes. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), the social semiotics framework is designed to define institutions and analyze the processes involved in meaning creation. In their view, meaning is shaped by individuals with social histories, who are located in specific social environments and use culturally available resources. These individuals, as Kress (1988) notes, are agentive and generative in the process of sign-making and communication. Long and He (2021) further explained that social semiotics has moved beyond the structuralist emphasis on the internal relationships within a self-contained system, seeking instead to explore the use of symbols in specific social situations.

Building on the concept of *a logonomic system* coined by Hodge and Kress within social semiotic theoretical frameworks, the analysis of *TTH* will investigate the work of the sign system constituted of narrative and cinematic compositions. Logonomic system is a set of rules that govern the conditions for the creation and reception of meaning; it determines who can claim to initiate (create, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meaning about a topic and under what conditions and modality (how, when, and why) (Hodge and Kress, 1988). It is also known as a high-level control mechanism.

The data examined in this analysis includes dialogues between characters, characterizations through acting and physical appearances, and the settings highlighted in scenes addressing acts of violence in the name of Islam. Methodologically, the analysis followed three phases. The first phase described the logonomic system of the film within the context of indie fiction, focusing on the textual features of TTH that reflect the "natural" qualities of side-stream cinema and its experimental style. It also identified the film's ideological position, which aligns with the third cinema paradigm. The second phase examined the ideological complexity within the text by deconstructing the film's ending to uncover textual contradictions, revealing the intricate building of ideologies. This phase also sought to determine whether TTH critiques a specific socio-religious phenomenon. In the final phase, the analysis explored the flow of discourse across scenes, highlighting shifting ideas and ideological biases throughout the film, while also emphasizing the socio-cultural contexts that shaped its ambiguous ideological position and orientation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Independent or indie films are often characterized by their deviation from mainstream production norms, such as those typical of Hollywood, and their emphasis on artistic expression rather than commercial profitability. These films, which can include short films, documentaries, and experimental works, often rely on alternative funding models that prioritize creative freedom over industrial mechanisms driven by profit (Newman, 2011; King, 2017). Indie films typically reject commercial constraints, focusing instead on cultural or artistic exploration (Baltruschat & Erickson, 2015). Unlike major studio films, which are influenced by profit-driven motives, indie films are defined by their low-budget nature, unconventional themes, and the personal vision of the filmmaker, as Levy (1999) explained. This underscores the importance of the director's artistic autonomy in independent film production, contrasting with mainstream cinema, where corporate influence often limits a director's creative freedom. Holmlund and Wyatt (2005) identified four interconnected aspects—economics, technology, aesthetics, and ideology—as central to independent filmmaking. While these elements are fluid and context-dependent, "creative imagination, determination, and courage" remain foundational to indie film projects.

For the purposes of this study, indie films are defined as productions that embody freedom in finance, content, creative construction, and distribution, offering ideological perspectives that challenge mainstream norms. While this definition may not fully encompass the broad spectrum of indie films in Indonesia, it applies to many community-based films, often created by young, amateur filmmakers, that fit within this framework. The following discussion will explore three central aspects: *The Issue of Terrorism within the Paradigm of Independent Film*, *TTH's Satirical Narrative: Manifestation of the Spirit of Third Cinema*, and *'The Death of God': TTH's Problematic Ending*. These

elements will provide insight into how *Train to Heaven* (TTH) navigates and critiques complex socio-religious issues within the context of Indonesian independent cinema.

The Issue of Terrorism within the Paradigm of Independent Film

TTH is an indie film discussing the act of terrorism in the name of Islam (simply addressed as 'Islamic terrorism'). As a multimodal artifact, *TTH* can conceptually perform various integrated tasks such as disseminating knowledge, communicating concepts or ideas, and even building versions of"reality" about Islamic terrorism. The nature of the indie film text implies the employment of enormous material resources that create a typical 'genre' understood by producers and consumers to be a precondition of the development of such a text. These material resources form some discourses and give the text a specific status of resistance or opposition. They also posit audiences in one particular conceptual domain and orientation toward the status.

This article groups the discourse formations into three classifications that are believed to represent the narrative's flow, as shown below.

Table 1. Discourse Formations in TTH

Characters	Acts	Issues	Discourse Formation
An extremist and a terrorist	'On their way to Heaven'	The act of terrorism	An extremist and a terrorist are on their way to Heaven, interpreting the act of violence as an Islamic religious practice known as *jihad.* (DF1)
An extremist and a terrorist	'On their way to Heaven'	The reward for *jihadi*	An extremist and a terrorist are on their way to Heaven, discussing the reward promised by God for *Jihadi.* (DF2)
An extremist and a terrorist	'On their journey in Heaven.'	The Death of God	An extremist and a terrorist are exploring Heaven, and they finally find God's tomb. (DF3)

The discourse formation marked with DF1 determines the logonomic system of indie films while also explaining a social practice, especially the mediatization of Islamic doctrines. *TTH* creates its narrative series based on the journey of two antisocial characters (adopting Halliday's term in his article *Anti-Languages*). They are the spirits of an extremist and a suicide bomber on their journey to Heaven. The existence of the antagonists and the location stated as Heaven is the first contradiction represented in the narrative structure.

The existence of these two antisocial characters on their way to Heaven indicates an anti-mainstream narrative construction. In a mainstream view, perpetrators of violent crimes, including extremists and terrorists, are never excused. In Islam, the Quran explains that killing innocent people is a crime. The label of criminals ascribed to those extremists and terrorists in the name of Islam indicates that the perpetrators of these terrible acts are not righteous people. Theologically, they are sinners who should be barred from paradise. This mainstream view seems to be problematized in the film composition of *TTH.*

The symptom of anti-mainstream operates through tension around the 'normal' and mainstream views of the so-called violent doers and God's Heaven. *TTH*'s narrative structures that highlight the issue of Islamic terrorism from the perspective of the doers can destabilize the normative construction of terrorism discourse. The discourses of terrorism and extremism can and will never be justified or considered in line with any religious teachings or human values in general. In other words, acts of violence that result in the death of others are a symptom of a general lack of religiosity or humanitarian ideas. Therefore, terrorists and extremists are 'rationally' justified to be punished in this world and the hereafter.

Interestingly, the opening of TTH's narrative structure does not follow the logic. The perpetrators of violence are heading to Heaven, the highest reward humans can get from God. Due to this uncommon narrative, a

fundamental inquiry arises: Is the narrative point of view in *TTH* attempting to give a counter-discourse to the general premise of society's dominant logic? Or, is there any possible alternative discourse to tolerate the actions of terrorism and extremism? Or, more simply, might Heaven be a reward for extremists and terrorists?

To understand the complexity of narrative, here are the dialogs that structure certain logic and construct DF1.
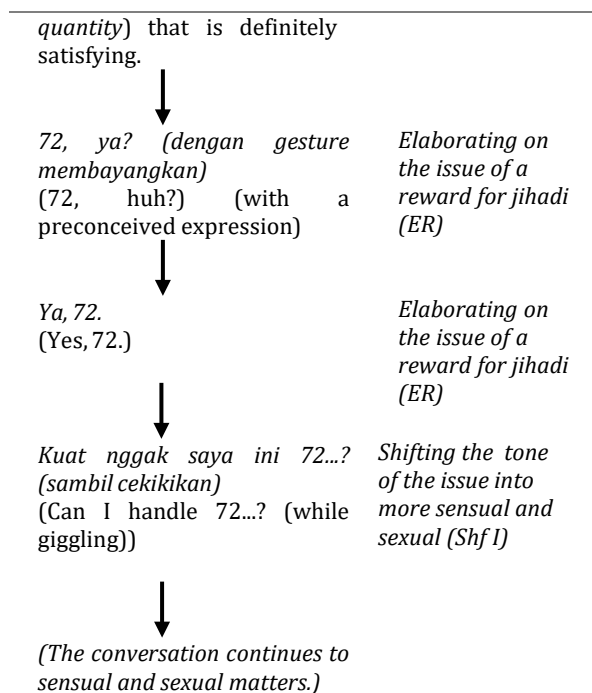
Table 2. Dialogues to Form DF1

Characters' Dialogues	The Function of Utterances
Subhanallah, anta syahidul jihad, anta syahid, kafir-kafir mati sangit, subhanallah. (*Subhanallah*-Glory be to God-You died as a martyr, the scorched bodies of disbelievers rot, *SubhanAllah.*)	*Glorifying the act of terrorism (GT)*
Ngebom apa itu? Dimana? (What did you blow up? Where?)	*Clarifying the act of terrorism (CT)*
Ngebom gereja. ([I] blew up a church)	*Providing information (PI)*
... Ana dulu juga pernah bakar gereja, (In the past, I also burnt churches.)	*Providing information (PI)*
Wah ya memang jihad itu memberantas kafir, jihad memberantas kafir, kafir-kafir yang menyesatkan. (You know, *jihad* exterminates disbelievers, infidels who lead people astray.)	*Emphasizing an agreement toward The Act of Terrorism (Emp T)*
Ndak ada itu jihad yang apa itu, jihad kok bekerja, jihad belajar, bukan jihad namanya itu, jihad ya memberantas kafir (There is no such thing as *jihad* in work or study. That's not what we call *jihad*. *Jihad* is exterminating disbelievers)	*Enforcing a single interpretation of jihad (EI)*

In DF1, narrative bias emerges when the two antisocial figures discuss their perspective and interpretation of *jihad* within an Islamic framework. From their dialogues, it can be noticed that those characters bring conversations regarding a violent activity, i.e., suicide bombing, into such a positive nuance. It is highlighted in the utterances of the praise *Subhanallah* ("Glory be to God"), which occurred several times. This positive nuance is strengthened even more by some of the last utterances indicated by two final nodes, Emp T (emphasis on the act of terrorism) and EI (enforcing interpretation). The Emp T node above functions as a bridge to bring a theological legitimation toward the act of church bombing. Finally, the last node (EI) indicates a subjective interpretation of the theological doctrines concerning *jihad*. Simply put the glorification of terrorism and extremism acts prominently appears in DF1. This discourse of terrorism manifests into a specific statement involving a subjective ideological position of the maker.

The logic of utterances in Table 2 becomes more complicated when those two characters deliver more dialogs, developing DF2, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Dialogues to Form DF2

Characters' dialogues	The Function of Utterances
Tadi itu yang menguatkan saya, yang meyakinkan hati saya itu ya karena 72 bidadari itu. Gara-gara 72 itu, saya mantap. (The reward of the 72 virgins, that was what strengthened and convinced me. I was certain because of those 72.)	*Revealing the issue of a reward promised by God for jihadi (RR)*
Ya memang itulah nikmatnya jihad itu. (Yes, that is the pleasure of *jihad*.)	*Affirming the issue of a reward for jihadi (AR)*
Bayangkan, 72 bidadari, cantik- cantik... yang selalu perawan menanti di surga. Wah itu nikmat sekali. 72 bidadari (berhenti sejenak)... pasti nikmat. (Imagine 72 beautiful virgins who are forever virgins in Heaven. Oh my, 72 virgins are so satisfying (*stop for a moment, being amazed by the*	*Elaborating on the issue of a reward for jihadi (ER)*

quantity) that is definitely satisfying.	
↓	
72, ya? (dengan gesture membayangkan) (72, huh?) (with a preconceived expression)	*Elaborating on the issue of a reward for jihadi (ER)*
↓	
Ya, 72. (Yes, 72.)	*Elaborating on the issue of a reward for jihadi (ER)*
↓	
Kuat nggak saya ini 72...? (sambil cekikikan) (Can I handle 72...? (while giggling))	*Shifting the tone of the issue into more sensual and sexual (Shf I)*
↓	
(The conversation continues to sensual and sexual matters.)	

The narrative structure in Table 3 demonstrates different functional nodes when two antagonists discuss the reward of 72 virgins for *jihadi*. One node that appears as a unique structure in this segment is the *shifting issue* (Shf I) node. This utterance significantly creates an ambiguous discourse on the reward promised by God. The conversation between the two antagonists regarding the 'reward' for *jihadi* is opened by revealing an issue of reward (reveal of reward node) for *jihadi* promised by God. The following utterance delivered by the extremist functions to affirm the issue of rewards. Then, the subsequent utterances function to elaborate the issue of reward until the last and vital node from the excerpt, the shifting issue (Shf I) node, comes into being.

As in the previous analysis of DF1, the second discourse shows the audience a version of 'reality.' However, compared to the reality in DF1, the reality constructed and represented in DF2 is more problematic since it deals with the afterlife. It is a mystery, a perplexing condition for which no empirical evidence exists for those still alive. Living creatures will not have any chance to experience the reward promised by God in the afterlife. Therefore, the discourse about it logically embodies imagined, crafted, constructed knowledge materialized with any possible and available material resources that people agree on. Here, the appearance of Shf I node becomes significant for the whole discourse formation. The shifting issue (Shf I) node transforms the sacred into the sexual one. Whether it is consciously or unconsciously designed so, the narrative sequences structurally indicated by the flow of functional nodes depict the ambiguity and the conflicting voices embedded in the formation of discourse about the reward for *jihadi*. Potential polyphonic and conflictual voices within DF2 are even more transparent and more robust in the production of subsequent utterances that become more sensual and sexual in tone.

Based on the clues provided within the textual construction, this article contends that the two discourse formations examined above (DF1 And DF2) reveal subjective and arbitrary practices for understanding and comprehending Islamic theological doctrines. In DF1, the logic of produced utterances promotes the rejection of other different possibilities of interpretations of what is intended to be deemed *jihad*, which sounds more human than killing people or bombing churches. Meanwhile, in DF2, the conversation about the reward promised by God for *jihadi* is conveyed vaguely.

TTH's Satirical Narrative: Manifestation of the Spirit of Third Cinema

The intricacy of Islam, particularly fundamentalism and radicalism in the name of Islam, which pervades numerous facets of people's lives, is an uncomfortable experience, particularly since the 9/11 tragedy. Media on many different platforms, specifically in the Western hemisphere, have framed Islam as violent, confrontational, barbaric, and simply terrorizing (Kanji, 2018). Not only facilitating the emergence of public anger in its various articulations, but the negative images of Islam also create the so-called Islamophobia in different parts of the world, such as in Spain (Cervi, Tejedor, Gracia, 2021), in America manifested in American newspaper (Bleich, van der Veen, 2018 and Tariq, Iqbal, Khan, 2021) and Korea (Ko, 2018). Not only in the Western world, this condition became a third-world contextual component (including in Indonesia), inspiring Desaga, a young Malang filmmaker, to convey it in *TTH*. *TTH's* satirical style appears to be colored by 'anger' at the dynamics of fundamentalism and radicalism as they relate to social, cultural, and national political issues.

TTH, coated in dark comedy nuances, refuses to be a one-time event that will be forgotten once the film ends. The film excels at presenting stomping, rageful, satirical, and complex religious issues that are fallacious and cannot be accepted by common sense. In terms of aesthetic cultural creation, Desaga materializes the spirit of third cinema. As a fictional artifact, *TTH* takes a different path to fulfill a different perspective on Islam. Echoing many incidents of terrorism in the second decade of Indonesia's reform era, *TTH* refuses to be neutral and objective in articulating its statements within the discourse on Islam and terrorism.

The celebration of satirical nuances eclipses the substantive 'idea' of criticizing the act of terrorism in the name of Islam. While the form, the spirit, and the aesthetic matters support political positioning against the issue of terrorism, *TTH* misses entangling the tensions between the act of terrorism and Islam or Islamic doctrines. To be more precise, *TTH* misses the contradictions between terrorism and Islam or Islamic ideologies that must be firmly segregated to reaffirm its status as a third cinema opposing the act of terrorism. As having a politicized issue, the film that embodies the spirit or paradigm of the third cinema fails to broaden our critical horizon to envisage alternatives to the phenomena of so-called Islamic terrorism. It is particularly evident in the construction of the *TTH* film's ending, which will be explained in the next section.

'The Death of God': TTH's Problematic Ending

The exploration of the narrative presented in TTH, initially intended to be textually prepared to criticize the 'cheap' acts of violent criminals who prefer to incorporate Islam into their activities, becomes problematic as the film's scene advances toward the end. At the beginning of this article, it was stated that the entire sequences of film scenes are classified into three discourse formations. Narrative complications occurred in the third discourse formation (FD3).

The story sequences culminate with the two antagonists previously engaged in train conversations about jihad and the prize for *jihadi* upon arriving in Heaven. They arrive at Heaven, shown cinematically in the film as a vast, green, tranquil, peaceful, and lovely setting with birds singing. These two antagonists then started their journey on foot, touring Heaven and occasionally pointing to a specific spot in Heaven as the location of their houses. The journey ended when they discovered a tomb inscribed with God's name. The scenes, shot in close-up, depict the two antagonists' faces filled with awe and uncertainty as they face the reality of the death of God. Put in one sentence: the end of *TTH* has manifested the following discursive formation.

#One extremist and one terrorist + find + God's Tomb + in Heaven#

The Death of God casts doubt on the film's status as a work that only opposes the act of terrorism in the name of Islam. The death of God in a place known as Heaven evokes multiple ambiguous meanings. Is God's death a metaphor for the death of Islamic teachings? Or is it a symbol of humanity's annihilation due to terrorism? Or is it a symbol of the defeat of truth at the hands of evil since the perpetrators of evil are now in Heaven? Or is it a symbol of the philosophical thought of 'the Left' that questions the existence of God?

TTH carries out this ideological standpoint in the tension between two things that should not be side by side: religion vs. violence or religion vs. sexual exploitation. The understanding that the *TTH* text is a resistance text, which means that it will never be neutral and even tends to be political, necessitates firmness in placing the text's alignment on one of the two contested poles above.

Interestingly,, by 'corrupting' the film's text with an ambiguous ending showing the death of God, the filmmaker inserts the text into a different semiotic field, opening the door for the audience's interpretation, to travel to further and more diverse orientations from what was previously set up.

The 'plot twist' scheme in the ending functions to surprise the audience and is the starting point for a wide range of interpretations because *TTH's* alignment can no longer be validated just on one of the two poles

competing, as previously stated. Suicide bombing and other extreme thoughts and actions are radical expressions driven by any social, cultural, political, or ideological cause. Those actions are unjustifiable and immoral for all Indonesians, regardless of their religions. As a result, the ideological stance of *TTH* must be determined to ensure that the film text will lead to an orientation consistent with efforts to become an alternative voice for 'Islamic terrorism' conduct.

The most troubling aspect of this film's conclusion is not only the scene of 'God's death' but also the relationship between the scene of God's death and the setting, Heaven. Heaven is the location that serves as the story's final setting. It is undebatable, conclusive, and not symbolical. The conclusion that the setting is Heaven is confirmed rationally and textually. Muslims believe that the afterlife consists of only two places: Heaven and Hell. The concept of Heaven derived from any Islamic religious sources will vividly be different from Hell. If Hell is depicted as a place full of scorching fire, far from peace, and full of misery, Heaven becomes, rationally and theoretically, the inverse of Hell. The title and the sequence of actions have directed the audience to follow the trip of two antagonists to Heaven. When two antagonists arrive at their destination, it is also confirmed, particularly from visual and auditorial aspects, that it is Heaven. So, it is unreasonable to say the antagonists are in Heaven.

As a result, God's death becomes problematic. The *TTH* film depicts how awful Islamic terrorists and extremists are at exploiting Islamic doctrines to benefit their interests. However, the solution proposed is not the restoration of fundamental Islamic principles. *TTH*'s anti-mainstream status does not offer any punishment that logically should be undergone by the two antagonists' for their deeds in the world. On the contrary, the film finishes dangling in a 'plot twist' style and promotes 'leftist' thinking by echoing the notion of God's absence in human life. Suppose the film is screened in an Islamophobic society that does not have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and how it is associated with terrorism, which resonates strongly in the current era. There is a potential chance for further and more profound misunderstanding of Islam and the issue of *jihad*. Even worse, Islam would be considered sexist and concluded as a complicated one for the life of modern people.

Islam's dynamics influence TTH's incapacity to establish itself based on a solid ideological position in Indonesia at the time of its production. *TTH* was produced in an uncertain socio-religious milieu in Indonesia, with the buzzing debates on Islam and numerous discourses regarding the Islamic movement in the Indonesian public. These debates exhibited various types of opinions. Islamic discourses had ranged widely from terrorism to *hijrah* movements (the movement to become more pious), from the most destructive to the most peaceful ones. This circumstance contributes to the ideological complexity depicted in the *TTH* film.

Considering the mediatization concept coined by Hjarvard (2008), the authors argue that ideological complexes based on current socio-cultural and political situations burden the ideological stance of TTH. The representation of theological discussion in *TTH* is vulnerable to distortion due to its incapability to establish a firm ideological position. Given the abundance of contradicting Islamic discourses, it seems vital for a TTH to clarify and be consistent in its ideological alignment to develop a more productive narrative and discursive formation for terrorism masked by Islamic doctrines for the Indonesian audience.

CONCLUSION

As an indie film addressing the topic of terrorism in the name of Islam, *TTH* tends to consistently voice the opposition toward the act at the beginning of its cinematic representation. Through the unfolding scenes, the narrative turns into more ambiguous. TTH has failed to keep its oppositional positioning on the so-called Islamic terrorism. This failure is mainly caused by ideological complexes that cannot be resolved within the text due to the tendency to display excessive satire terrorism in the name of Islam, resulting in stuttering when handling conflicts within the narrative sequences. In detail, several factors contributed to the ideological ambiguity of the existence of *TTH*, including (1) the emergence of contradictions at the end of the story; (2) the

position of the *TTH* indie film, which has not been fully designed to address a specific alternative 'voice'; and (3) the Islamic dynamics in Indonesia, which are not well mapped in discourse formation. Finally, the nuances of resistance or oppositional positioning of *TTH* are dubious. After considering the textual compositions of the film and the dynamics of Islam globally and nationally, the researcher concludes that the idea in the film TTH has become a cinematic declaration of doubt as well as evidence of the symptoms of 'self-Islamophobia'unconsciously produced by groups of people living in Indonesia, a country with Muslims as the majorities. Ideological uncertainties seem to overwhelm the textual composition and show the unresolved societal debate related to Islam and violence. What is certain is that the death of God will never be a part of Islamic ideological perspectives.

This study, while offering valuable insights into *TTH* and its ideological complexities, is limited by its focus on a single independent film. The analysis is also constrained by the evolving nature of both Indonesian cinema and global perceptions of Islam and terrorism. Future studies should consider a broader range of Indonesian indie films to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how independent filmmakers navigate sensitive socio-religious themes. Additionally, the relationship between media representation, religion, and societal values remains a rich area for exploration. Further research could explore how other cultural contexts influence similar themes, particularly in countries where religious identity is central to national discourse. Expanding the scope of analysis to include audience reception studies could also provide a deeper understanding of how films like *TTH* are interpreted by different demographic groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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