

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

Article history

Submitted:

4 June 2025

Accepted:

29 July 2025

Published:

31 July 2025

Citation (APA Style):

Sudibyo, S., Andalas, E. F., & Taufiqurrahman, M. (2025). Reclaiming supremacy, negotiating modernity: Islamism and post-Islamism in post-Suharto Indonesian novels. *LITERA*, 24(2), 98-111. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v24i2.86216>

INTRODUCTION

Islamic literature, particularly in post-1980s Indonesia, exemplifies resistance to state censorship by merging modern aesthetics with Islamic values to critique policies perceived as undermining religious principles (Faisal, 2023; Antriani and Islahuddin, 2024). These works transcend regulatory boundaries, addressing contemporary sociopolitical challenges while reflecting the spiritual and cultural ethos of Indonesian Muslims. Their prominence in the national literary landscape highlights literature's dual role as both artistic expression and social critique.

State governance and literature intersect through censorship, where policies regulating public perceptions of Islam directly influence literary freedom. Yet Islamic literature persists as a subversive force under such constraints, negotiating themes of justice and morality to critique state power (Newey, 1993; Whetnall, 2024). By reframing national identity narratives, these works challenge homogenizing state agendas (Wroldsen, 2021), demonstrating literature's capacity to resist authoritarian control while fostering ethical discourse.

The New Order regime (1966–1998) institutionalized Islamic power narratives to consolidate political authority (Budijanto, 2003; Formichi, 2015). However, the 1998 Reformation Era dismantled state-imposed ideological constraints, enabling unprecedented intellectual and creative freedom for

Islamic discourse. This shift catalyzed a surge in Islamic literary production, fueled by expanding publishing opportunities and ideological pluralism. The resultant proliferation of Islamic-themed works now reflects competing interpretations of religious thought, transforming literature into a dynamic arena for ideological contestation.

In the early 2000s, two years after the Reformation, a notable development emerged in the sphere of Islamic novels in Indonesia (Andalas and Sugiarti, 2024). The rise of Islamic literature was greeted with significant enthusiasm by the Indonesian public (Graf, 2007). Several novels with Islamic themes have achieved remarkable commercial success, such as Habiburrahman El-Shirazy's "Ayat-Ayat Cinta", which sold 700,000 copies (Arnez, 2009). Additionally, many of these literary works have been adapted into films (Widodo, 2008). At its zenith, between 2007 and 2008, no fewer than 50 new Islamic-themed novels were introduced to the market (Rakib, 2015).

Recent scholarship underscores Islamic literature's dual role in Indonesia as both a vehicle for religious pedagogy and economic enterprise, particularly through youth-oriented storytelling (Muzakki, 2017). Hakim (2023) traces its political engagement to 20th-century works that wove Islamic themes with critiques of ideologies like communism. Feminist readings of *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004) position it as a challenge to patriarchal norms and sexualized stereotypes of Muslim women (Arimbi, 2009; Hellwig, 2011; Wiyatmi, 2010). Similarly, *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) interrogates Muslim women's resilience in maintaining faith amid secular or non-Muslim environments, reframing the hijab as both identity and resistance (Arnez and Nisa, 2016).

Post-New Order Islamic literature reflects two divergent currents: Islamism, marked by strict adherence to sacred law and rejection of Western influence (Pipes, 2000), and post-Islamism, which embraces ambiguity and integrates religiosity with human rights, autonomy, and pluralism (Yilmas, 2014). While Islamism frames belief as ideological obligation, post-Islamism prioritizes individual agency within Islamic frameworks, illustrating the tension between doctrinal rigidity and adaptive modernity.

This study examines the evolution of Islamic thought in Indonesian literature from 2000 to 2019, focusing on three critically acclaimed works: *Geni Jora* (Abidah El Khaleiqy, 2004), *Jilbab Traveler* (Asma Nadia, 2012), and *Bumi Cinta* (Habiburrahman El-Sirazy, 2019). Selected for their commercial success, gendered authorship, and representation of two decades of post-New Order Islamic discourse, these works illustrate how literature negotiates state secularization policies and asserts Islamic identity through modernist aesthetics (Lukens-Bull, 2016; Connley, 2016; Thippimol, 2019). By addressing themes of justice, morality, and resistance, the novels exemplify the role of Islamic literature in fostering sociopolitical critique and cultural dialogue.

The state's regulation of Islamic thought and literary texts has a long history in Indonesia. In Aceh during the 16th and 17th centuries, numerous texts were destroyed to propagate specific Islamic teachings (Christomy, 2008; Khan, 2012; Wormser, 2012). Prior to independence, the government, through the Commissie voor de Volkslectuur, imposed restrictions on publications, prohibiting religious aspirations and enforcing moral and political standards (Fitzpatrick, 2000, 2008; Maier, 1991; Teeuw, 1972; Watson, 1973).

During Soekarno's tenure (1945-1967), state regulation was absent concerning Islamic texts, with the majority of works concentrating on the theme of nation-building. Nevertheless, certain texts have encountered resistance from the Muslim community (Chisaan, 2012). A prominent instance of this was Ki Panji Kusmin's "Langit Makin Mendung" (1968), which portrayed religious figures in a contentious manner, inciting public outrage and calls for the author's imprisonment. H.B. Jassin intervenes to defend Kusmin, averting his imprisonment, although Jassin himself is subsequently sentenced (Arimbi, 2009; Roskies, 1990).

Initially, Islamic activists expressed support for the New Order, anticipating greater accommodation; however, the Soeharto regime soon implemented more stringent control (Budijanto, 2003; Formichi, 2015). The New Order exerted a significant influence on historiography, resulting in subtle critiques of societal injustices in literature (Formichi, 2015; Hadiz, 2019). Prophetic literature has emerged, employing symbolism to critique societal conditions (Kuntowijoyo, 2019). Kuntowijoyo's "Wasripin & Satinah" (2003) critiques state oppression through the lens of Muslim marginalisation.

In the 1990s, the New Order regime enacted a series of policy relaxations that facilitated the acceptance of hijabs, the establishment of Islamic financial institutions, the incorporation of Islamic studies into educational curricula, endorsement of the ICMI, and promotion of Muslim generals

(Formichi, 2015). Despite these concessions, Islamic authors have persisted in engaging in symbolic writing practices.

The post-New Order Reform Era (post-1998) expanded intellectual and creative freedoms, catalyzing Islamic literary production and ideological debates. Two dominant trends emerged: Islamism which advocates strict adherence to Sharia, rejection of Western cultural-political norms, and the transformation of Islamic belief into ideology, positing that Muslims' deviation from devout practices caused their decline (Pipes, 2000) and post-Islamism which embraces pluralism, ambiguity, and compromise, integrating Islamic values with individual autonomy, human rights, and democratic freedoms (Yilmas, 2014). This ideological duality reflects broader tensions between doctrinal revivalism and adaptive modernity in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Islamism (also termed Islamic fundamentalism, political Islam, or revivalism) is framed as a reaction to Western modernization, often seen as anti-democratic and regressive, particularly by traditional communities, intellectuals, and the urban poor (Bayat, 2005). Its proponents are frequently portrayed as assertive, exclusive, and resistant to pluralism (Yilmas, 2014).

Islamism emerges from sociohistorical contexts (Heryanto, 2015; Rahmat, 2018) as a response to capitalist and socialist failures, positioning religious morality as an alternative political framework. It mobilizes marginalized middle-class groups against Western hegemony by synthesizing religious, nationalist, and socialist ideologies. However, its stagnation—due to unrealized goals like institutional Islamization—has spurred post-Islamism, which reimagines religiosity through pluralism and adaptability (Bayat, 2007).

Post-Islamism reimagines Islam's role in modernity by prioritizing *rights over obligations* and *plurality over dogma*, synthesizing religiosity with individual freedoms (Bayat, 1996, 2007). Unlike Islamism's fusion of faith and political responsibility, post-Islamism embraces ambiguity, inclusivity, and compromise, reflecting a broader societal shift from radical politics to cultural adaptation (Gole, 2002). Contemporary Muslim communities increasingly engage with globalized spaces—adopting market dynamics, professional norms, and digital activism—while advocating for pluralistic societies over Islamic statehood (Boubekeur and Roy via Müller, 2013).

Post-Islamism rejects the notion of inherent conflict between Islam and democracy, positing that *passive secularism*—which protects religious freedom and human rights—enables devout Muslims to coexist within secular democracies without state intervention (Yilmas, 2014). Advocates argue that Islam sustains itself through individual practice, not institutional support, provided secular frameworks prevent interference in religious life.

Islamism and post-Islamism serve as frameworks to analyze sociopolitical change and adaptation in Muslim societies. While Islamism persists as a discourse, post-Islamism emerges as a distinct paradigm, reflecting Muslims' simultaneous engagement with both ideologies. Bayat (2005) observes that Islamization and post-Islamization coexist, illustrating the fluidity of Islamic thought in practice.

METHOD

This qualitative study analyzes three commercially successful and critically representative post-New Order Indonesian works—Geni Jora (El Khaliqy, 2004), Jilbab Traveler (Nadia, 2012), and Bumi Cinta (El-Shirazy, 2019)—selected for their diverse-gendered authorship, popular impact (including cinematic adaptations), and reflection of key Islamic literary trends (2000-2019). Primary textual data from these sources was supplemented with secondary scholarly materials on post-1998 Indonesian Islamism and post-Islamism. Close reading identified narratives and dialogues pertinent to these ideologies. Subsequent thematic coding categorized patterns related to individual freedom, Islamic cosmopolitanism, and moral agency. Analysis involved systematic textual scrutiny, exploration of narrative strategies, and critical synthesis linking themes to their socio-religious context.

Methodological rigor and validity were ensured through Creswell and Creswell's (2014) framework: iterative researcher reflexivity to minimize bias; interdisciplinary peer debriefing to challenge interpretations; and expert consultation with specialists in Indonesian literature. This three-pronged validation process fortified the study's theoretical coherence, methodological soundness, and resultant conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Applying close reading to dialogue, character arcs, and narrative strategies in *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004), *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012), and *Bumi Cinta* (Shirazy, 2009), this article unpacks significant expressions of Islamism and post-Islamism. The analysis yielded five central themes: sharia compliance, religious supremacy, individual freedom, cosmopolitan identity, and moral agency, codified thematically in the table below.

Table 1.

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

Based on the table, the findings are presented into three sub-sections: dominant Islamist narratives of sharia, supremacy, and moral exemplar as depicted in *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta*; negotiating modernity of post-Islamist voice in *Geni Jora*; and a critical reflection of why Islamism dominates in post-new Order Indonesia.

Discussion

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

The work *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) is a collaborative creation by several female authors associated with the Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP). The authors aimed to share their experiences of international travel. The narrative is intended for an audience, presumably Muslim women, to demonstrate that travelling abroad while maintaining a Muslim identity—specifically by wearing traditional Muslim attire and the hijab—is not only possible but also enhances feelings of safety, comfort, and security. The hijab is a fundamental element of Muslim women’s cultural identity who follow religious guidance (Arnez & Nisa, 2016).

In the narrative “Savoring Pangandaran in the Caribbean”, the protagonist remains unfazed when people in the Dominican Republic express surprise at what they believe to be an apparition of Mother Teresa. She is not bothered by comparisons made by those around her. When asked about her attire, she readily explains that her garments are traditional Muslim clothing (Nadia, 2012:18-19). The narrator illustrates the characters’ efforts to assert themselves as moral agents. She depicts Muslims as patient and self-controlled, countering the stereotype of Muslims as troublemakers or terrorists (Nadia, 2012:18-19). Furthermore, Muslim women are portrayed as global citizens who engage openly with other global citizens, challenging the stereotype of backwardness and isolation often associated with Muslim women confined to their homes under the supervision of their husbands.

The sixth and ninth narratives highlight the importance of prayer in every journey undertaken. In the sixth narrative, it is illustrated that prayer can be conducted in various settings, such as a city park, a building lobby, a fitting room, a parking lot, and even by the roadside: “There are several places that I usually use to pray in the middle of my busy life. In city parks, in the lobby of a building, the fitting room, even on the side of the road, or in the parking lot.” (Nadia, 2012:107). Thus, there is no excuse for a traveller to neglect prayer, as it is not limited to places of worship. Implicitly, the narrator seeks to demonstrate that Muslims are disciplined in fulfilling their religious obligations. This duty is non-negotiable and must be observed in all circumstances. The narrator aims to challenge the negative stereotype that Muslims lack discipline, suggesting that this perception is incorrect.

Conversely, the narrator engages in self-criticism by asserting that enforcing the obligation to worship should not infringe on the comfort and privacy of others. Since worship is fundamentally a private matter, it is crucial for Muslims to understand the etiquette appropriate for specific public spaces

such as airports. Demonstrative acts of worship might give the impression that Muslims exhibit tendencies toward anarchism and exclusivity.

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

The narrator of *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) pays particular attention to the culinary offerings in the destination country, as emphasised in the fifth story. Interestingly, not all food made from ingredients permissible under Islamic law is halal. The preparation process might not follow religious guidelines, and certain spices used may be unsuitable for pregnant women. Therefore, “unless in an emergency, travellers are advised to seek halal food or to bring durable halal provisions from their homeland when embarking on a journey” (Nadia, 2012: 75-76). In cases where the halal status of food is uncertain, travellers are encouraged to cite dietary restrictions as a reason for declining food offerings. However, this approach may not always be effective, as dieting depends on specific conditions. For example, a person with a slender build may not convincingly claim to be on a diet of foods that promote growth (Nadia, 2012:132-133).

Jilbab Traveller promotes the integration of Islamic principles into various public spheres, even in secular countries or those that have traditionally followed a specific religious path. The protagonist confidently challenges the stereotypes often associated with Muslims and the cultural dominance imposed by the global community on Muslim populations. Additionally, it highlights the importance of modernity. This modernity, usually linked to Western paradigms and often seen as disregarding Muslim interests, is addressed through various strategies aimed at harmonising it with the Islamic identity. Consequently, the narrative demonstrates the preservation of Islamic identity through negotiations with different facets of modernity.

This description suggests that the work embodies the ideology of Islamism, underscores the imperative to adhere comprehensively to the principles of Islam, or Islam that is *kafah*, by advocating against the abandonment of Islamic teachings under any circumstances and in any location. The works' cosmopolitan yet Islamic characters facilitate a dialogue between tradition and modernity. The narrative serves as a bridge for understanding both traditional and contemporary values, prompting readers to reflect on their roles and positions within an evolving social structure. Through this work, the author conveys moral messages and offers space for personal interpretation and reflection by the current generation.

The novel *Hijab Traveler* highlights the profound and multifaceted significance of the hijab by weaving together the evolution of thought and the representation of identity within a literary framework. This approach illustrates the ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity. This is particularly important as many writers in the Muslim world face the challenge of expressing innovative perspectives on Islam while preserving their cultural and religious heritage (Kasmawati et al., 2023).

The novel *Bumi Cinta* by Shirazy (2009) tells the story of Ayyas, an Indonesian research student from a prestigious university in Medina, who seeks guidance from Professor Abramov Tomskii, a philology and history expert, in Moscow, Russia. At the beginning of the narrative, Ayyas reconnects with David, a former friend and junior high school classmate from Indonesia. During their encounter, David discloses to Ayyas that he has undergone significant changes and embraced modernity. He admitted to having been involved in relationships with numerous women and living with some of them. Additionally, David acknowledges that he has long since abandoned the principles of Islam (Shirazy, 2009:20-25).

With David's help, Ayyas found accommodation in Moscow, although he was unaware that the apartment was already occupied by two women. One of them, Yelena, was a native Russian, while the other, Linor, had an undisclosed background. Unknown to Ayyas, these women were not of reputable character or university students. Yelena worked as a high-class escort, while Linor, a journalist and Israeli Mossad secret agent, was similarly involved in questionable activities. Linor often invited male acquaintances to stay in her apartment. Ayyas confided in David about his predicament, but David was unable to offer further assistance as he was also searching for new accommodation in Moscow.

Consequently, Ayyas was compelled to live in the apartment with two women who were not his relatives (Shirazy, 2009:32-42).

In this narrative, Ayyas is portrayed as an apostle or prophet who dwells in ignorance. Yelena and Linor represent the forces of darkness, ready to challenge Ayyas' faith at any moment. These two women, along with their associates, take turns trying to destabilise Ayyas' spiritual conviction. Through their distinct methods, Yelena and Linor attempt to lure Ayyas into their embrace. Yet, despite the intensity of their temptations, the Ayyas remain steadfast. He has a unique way of preserving his faith; whenever it seems to waver, he performs ablution, engages in prayer, and recites the Quran (Shirazy, 2009: 91-93).

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

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

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

Ayyas pointed out to Anastasia that Orthodox Christians, like herself, engaged in actions that might be seen as offensive to God. According to Ayyas, God is the ultimate source of reliance, without offspring, uncreated, and having no equal status. Therefore, Ayyas was surprised that someone as intellectually capable as Anastasia believed that God had children. This belief becomes even more peculiar when her human child is elevated to a divine status. Ayyas attributed such beliefs to the influence of ancient Greek philosophical thought, particularly the pantheistic Stoic school, which posits that God and creatures are essentially one, differing only in form (Shirazy, 2009: 447-448).

The narrator concludes the theological discourse by affirming Ayyas's respect for Anastasia's beliefs while maintaining his own unwavering conviction in the truth of Islam. He expresses his readiness to take any necessary action, even sacrificing his life, to defend his faith. However, he acknowledges that conversion is not required by either party. The narrator values the diversity of beliefs and recognises the inherent difficulty of conversion, as beliefs are deeply ingrained from early childhood. The crucial point is that, through Ayyas, he conveyed his perspective on the oneness of God, emphasising that there is only one God (Allah). He acknowledges that there is no compulsion in accepting religious beliefs. Nevertheless, he feels it is his duty to extend an invitation to those who question the truth of his belief, underscoring one incontrovertible principle: Islam is true, and there are consequences for those who do not believe in it (Shirazy, 2009:449).

The perspectives of Ayyas on religion and God are widely considered to mirror the author's own views. In the realm of interpersonal relationships, particularly between religious adherents or between adherents and non-adherents, Muslims may demonstrate tolerance toward non-Muslims. However,

when it comes to matters of principle, especially those concerning religious truth and divinity, Muslims are compelled to assert their stance unequivocally, even if it causes them discomfort. If necessary, they should point out the shortcomings of certain religions in their belief systems. Nonetheless, it is crucial that they avoid imposing their will or resorting to violence.

Bumi Cinta champions the effective application of Islamic teachings in countries that either do not recognise the truth of Islam or consider religion to be insignificant. In these settings, Muslims have the potential to act as agents of moral cohesion (Belt, 2009), especially in addressing issues that require guidance rooted in Islamic ethics. It is crucial for Muslims to have confidence in Islam's ability to provide solutions to various social challenges, including those stemming from the deficiencies of modernity, capitalism and socialism. Islam can sustain its relevance amid agnosticism and atheism, which, despite producing intellectually advanced and modern individuals, often leads to psychological fragility.

Hidayat & Santosa's (2019) analysis of El-Shirazy's *Pudarnya Pesona Cleopatra* corroborates the Islamist orientation evident in *Bumi Cinta*, demonstrating Muslim protagonists' endeavors to uphold moral values within Western cultural contexts. However, El-Shirazy's ideological trajectory reveals a significant shift: while *Pudarnya Pesona Cleopatra* (first published in 2004), *Bumi Cinta* (first published in 2010) aligns with Islamism, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2* (first published in 2015) embodies post-Islamism. As Hassan & Pawi (2019) argue, the latter novel employs a dual narrative structure—privileging Islamic messaging alongside personal themes (e.g., romance, sexuality)—unified through commercially mediated elements commodified for mass-media markets.

Negotiating Modernity: Post-Islamist Voice in Geni Jora

Abidah El Khalieqy's *Geni Jora* (2004) centers on Kejora, a protagonist raised in a polygamous patriarchal household where gendered inequities—exemplified by her brother's preferential treatment—catalyze her critique of male dominance. Kejora's rejection of traditional femininity and tumultuous relationship with Zakky, a womanizer who erodes her trust, symbolize resistance to patriarchal oppression. This narrative embodies El Khalieqy's critique, aligning with Candria's (2018). analysis of systemic discrimination, injustice, and violence against Muslim women under entrenched Indonesian patriarchy.

Building on this analysis, *Geni Jora*'s narrative is distinctively framed through a post-Islamist lens, contrasting with the Islamist orientations of *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta*. The novel articulates post-Islamism by negotiating Islamic faith with individual autonomy, critically engaging tradition through modernity, and challenging systemic inequities while redefining piety. Protagonist Kejora—a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood affiliate studying abroad in 1993—embodies this through transnational activism across Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Her commitment to decentralized Muslim solidarity, particularly via Palestinian resistance networks and associations with Hamas activists (Khalieqy, 2004:22–23), exemplifies a post-Islamist reimagining of *ummah* beyond state-centric orthodoxy.

Post-engagement, Jora challenges Zakky's commitment, asserting her equal rights as a woman (Khalieqy, 2004: 187–188). Her skepticism intensifies upon returning to Damascus, where she engages romantically with Asaav, a Jewish acquaintance, defying patriarchal expectations and Zakky's hypocrisy. This act of agency underscores the novel's feminist critique of gendered double standards within Islamic frameworks (Khalieqy, 2004: 187-188). *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004) concludes in 1993 with Zakky and Jora invited to speak at a Yogyakarta university seminar. During their visit, they revisit locations imbued with personal significance, symbolizing their unresolved tensions and evolving identities within Indonesia's New Order landscape.

Jora's early rejection of patriarchal norms—rooted in her grandmother's preferential treatment of her brother—shaped her commitment to gender equality. Despite her devout Muslim upbringing, she defied familial dismissiveness toward women, forging an identity centered on dignity and independence beyond male validation (Khalieqy, 2004: 60-61). During her boarding school years, Jora and Elya Huraibi bonded through shared Islamic rituals—*tahajud* (Quran-recommended night prayer, Al-Isrā': 79), *tafakur* (contemplation), and *tadabur* (reflection on divine signs)—which deepened their spiritual exploration and resilience (Khalieqy, 2004: 89–90).

Jora's bond with Elya transcends spiritual companionship, sparking rumors at the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) about their romantic entanglement. Despite Jora's poetic

admission of conflicted desire ("*I am swept away by the swift flow of your love...*" [Khalieqy, 2004:105]), neither woman seeks divine absolution for their perceived impropriety. Elya defiantly continues their nightly rituals (*tahajjud*, *tafakur*, *tadabur*), retaliating against accusers while Jora distances herself—a duality reflecting resistance to patriarchal policing of female intimacy and piety.

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

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

Zakky's lifestyle starkly contrasts his pious public persona. While projecting virtue within familial and academic circles—even leading a religious studies group in Damascus—he privately indulges in hedonism, alcohol, and serial womanizing, flouting Islamic tenets he publicly espouses (Khalieqy, 2004:17). His hypocrisy underscores the novel's critique of performative religiosity, juxtaposing his global Islamic engagements with a deliberate disregard for moral consistency. Jora concludes the narrative by challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islam, asserting women's equal rights to polygamy (if men claim it) and demanding Zakky's monogamous commitment (Khalieqy, 2004:207–208). She rejects misogynistic stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed or powerless, advocating reciprocal resistance against gendered injustice. Her stance epitomizes post-Islamist negotiation, reconciling faith with feminist autonomy and democratic principles.

Geni Jora (Khalieqy, 2004) exemplifies post-Islamism, reframing Islam as a framework harmonizing religiosity with individual rights—particularly women's autonomy—rather than rigid communal obligation (Bayat, 2013). By advocating political structures that balance Islamic principles with personal freedoms (Bayat, 2013), the novel critiques Islamist prioritization of collective identity (Dokhanchi, 2020). This shift reflects Indonesia's post-New Order democratization, enabling diverse Islamic movements—from traditional to secular—to flourish, supported by a middle class leveraging cultural and economic capital to redefine religious modernity.

Geni Jora intricately weaves a narrative that delves into the complex interplay between Islam, individual freedom, and independence, themes that resonate across global literary landscapes. For instance, Fakiha et al. (2023) examined the novel "The Holy Woman", highlighting the challenges Muslim women face as they balance traditional expectations with the quest for personal autonomy. Shahraz depicts women who persist in advocating for their rights despite societal constraints. This narrative underscores a significant theme in Islamic literature, where the tension between religious norms and personal freedom sparks broader discussions and debates within Muslim societies (Stadlbauer, 2012). Fida (2023) offers a nuanced perspective on women in the Islamic context through Sherry Jones' *The Jewel of Medina* illustrating how women can assert their identity and pursue equality with men, even when historical contexts may not support such autonomy. Within this framework, the novel seeks to reconcile Islam with the concepts of personal freedom and independence. Literary works challenge the prevailing order by portraying women as active advocates of their rights and independence (Fakiha et al., 2023). This is vital for dismantling the negative stereotypes of Muslim women, who are often perceived as passive and powerless.

The analysis of the concept of freedom in *Geni Jora* reveals a negotiation between religious identity and individual aspirations in the novel. This finding aligns with Sonafist (2023) perspective on the ability of Islamic law to protect individual rights while upholding justice. This underscores that the

narrative of freedom within the Islamic context is not monolithic; rather, it is characterised by complexities that reflect the diverse experiences within Muslim cultures.

Islamic literary works, such as *Geni Jora*, delve into the interplay between Islam and personal freedom, crafting narratives that underscore challenges and offer avenues for reflection and transformation. These works depict the journey of individuals as they endeavour to harmonise their faith with their quest for freedom, fostering a broader dialogue on human rights.

Why Islamism Dominates in Post-New Order Indonesia

The fall of the New Order totalitarian regime marked a significant revitalisation of literary expression. Under the New Order, Islamic literature primarily took the form of allegories and prophecies. However, with the regime's collapse, Islamic literature has become increasingly expressive and spontaneous. This transformation is closely tied to the burgeoning Islamic movements, which have increasingly enjoyed the freedom to articulate their perspectives, ranging from traditional, scriptural, and fundamentalist to moderate, liberal, and secular. This diverse spectrum of Islamic expression is supported by middle-class groups affiliated with various products, including commodities, intellectual thought, and artistic endeavours within their respective communities.

Islamic literature flourished significantly, driven by the support of the Muslim middle class, who longed for Islamic expression in literature—a desire that remained unfulfilled during the New Order Era. This aspiration found its voice during the Reformation period, as several literary authors adeptly engaged with emerging trends in Indonesia's Islamic society. Over the past two decades, a wealth of Islamic literary work has been produced. While these works exhibit diverse expressions, they can be categorised according to the tendencies outlined in the aforementioned grouping of Islamic thought, or, in this study, from the perspectives of Islamism and post-Islamism.

The dissolution of the New Order government and the ensuing Reformation period created an environment ripe for expression and intellectual exploration, leading to the flourishing of diverse Islamic literary styles in Indonesia. Some literary works lean towards Islamist thought, characterised by strict adherence to sacred law, rejection of Western influences, and the transformation of belief into ideology (Pipes, 2000). In contrast, other perspectives advocate for embracing ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusiveness, and compromise by integrating religiosity with human rights (Yilmaz, 2014).

This study sheds light on how Indonesia's social and political transformations have influenced the narratives and representations of Islam in literary works. After the New Order era ended in 1998, Indonesia underwent significant changes in freedom of speech and expression, resulting in literary works that reflect a multitude of societal voices (Saputra et al., 2024) and providing writers with the chance to express perspectives that were previously suppressed by the authoritarian regime (Bachtiar, 2018; Pal & Tok, 2019). The importance of this research lies in its exploration of literature as a medium for examining new ideas of Islamic identity and moderation. By portraying diverse characters, authors can depict life experiences within the context of modernisation and plurality in Indonesia. The novels *Geni Jora* (Khalieqy, 2004) and *Jilbab Traveler* (Nadia, 2012) exemplify the concept of post-Islamism, which transcends traditional values. "Geni Jora" illustrates an effort to reconcile Islamic values with individual freedom and independence, while "Jilbab Traveler" presents a cosmopolitan yet Islamic Muslimah character within the context of Western modernity. These narratives represent attempts to propose ideas that extend beyond conventional Islamic norms.

Narratively, *Geni Jora* delivers a strong critique of patriarchal norms, polygamy, and gender inequality from an Islamic feminist perspective (Martha et al., 2018; Nugraha & Suyitno, 2019). *Jilbab Traveller* encapsulates post-Islamist themes, highlighting personal piety, global identity, and gender equality (Jayanti & Wiyatmi, 2022; Putri, 2020). In contrast, *Bumi Cinta* subtly transitions from Islamism to a post-Islamist exploration of morality and faith (Wajiran, 2018). This suggests that post-New Order Indonesian literature is increasingly influenced by global discourse, creating links between Islam and modernity. For example, some authors adopt a cosmopolitan outlook in their writings, reflecting the interaction of ideas and cultures beyond the local context (Iner & Ćufurović, 2022; Seeth, 2023). Essentially, writers delve into universal themes while remaining rooted in local wisdom relevant to their Islamic experience. This aligns with the rapid growth of moderate Islamic groups embracing democratic and pluralist values in literary expression (Jayanto, 2020; Kersten, 2009).

One notable aspect of the evolution of Islamic literature in Indonesia is the pivotal role of pesantren as an educational institution. It has adeptly adapted to the social dynamics of the post-New

Order era, thereby reinforcing the values of religious moderation and tolerance in society (Rusli, 2018). Literary works often feature characters from pesantren backgrounds, portraying their spiritual and intellectual journeys as they navigate the challenges of modernity. These narratives are influenced by post-Islamist thought, which emphasises intercultural dialogue and harmonious social interactions (Argenti, 2018; Faiz, 2023). In this context, the portrayal of characters in literature reflects a transformation in their understanding of Islamic identities. Characters in novels frequently struggle to reconcile traditional Islamic values with contemporary realities. This reconciliation involves engaging with modern issues such as human rights, liberalism, and feminism, which have emerged as significant themes in post-New Order literature (Pal & Tok, 2019; Suhaimis & Amrizon, 2024).

Amid significant political and social changes, contemporary Indonesian literature serves as a powerful medium for sharp social critique. The authors used narratives to explore the increasingly complex realities of politics, women's representation, and multicultural interactions in Indonesia. These literary works not only reflect the challenges society faces but also express emerging aspirations for rights and freedoms within a framework of more inclusive Islamic values (Huda, 2021; Seeth, 2023). Furthermore, the post-New Order era of freedom of expression has given rise to new voices advocating inclusivity and pluralism within Islamic societies. The dialogue between traditional and modern consciousness has become increasingly crucial in fostering acceptance of diversity among readers and writers. Literary texts that depict multiculturalism in religious and social contexts contribute to shaping a coherent and dynamic national identity (Kersten, 2009). It is also essential to recognise that the exploration of Islam's portrayal in literature is not limited to a single narrative but encompasses multiple perspectives. This diversity of representations illustrates how Islam interacts with evolving societal values, offering a rich depiction of individual and collective lives in Indonesia (Leccese, 2025; Thahir, 2025).

Consequently, exploring Islam in post-New Order literature goes beyond merely analysing narrative evolution; it becomes a means of reflecting on self-identity, cultural dynamics, and spiritual values within a broader context. Through literary works, authors bravely undertake the task of questioning, exploring, and engaging with the profound aspects of religious life in a society facing challenges. Thus, this study sheds light on the role of Islam in Indonesian literature and its evolving dynamics in the contemporary era (Irwansyah, 2021; Jayanto, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Analysis of three post-New Order Indonesian novels reveals a pronounced ideological inclination toward Islamism, with *Jilbab Traveler* and *Bumi Cinta* advocating Kafah Islam (comprehensive Islamic practice) that demands unapologetic assertion of religious identity across geopolitical boundaries, frames steadfast faith as non-negotiable duty even when perceived confrontationally and promotes non-violent defense of Islam's superiority while rejecting conversion compulsion. Conversely, *Geni Jora* embodies a post-Islamist countertrend, critically renegotiating norms (e.g., prohibitions on alcohol/relationships), implicitly accommodating capitalist modernity, and championing moderation over rigid Sharia enforcement while sustaining global Islamic dialogue. This reflects post-1998 Indonesian Islamic literature's predominant legitimization of Islamist imperatives—strict Sharia adherence, Western lifestyle resistance, and symbolic civilizational supremacy reclamation without caliphate demands—though emergent post-Islamist voices signal ideological contestation through rights-based piety and hybrid modernity. Future research should expand to diverse genres/authors (comparative textual analysis), investigate audience reception of ideological messaging, track post-2020 representations longitudinally, and apply intersectional lenses (class, ethnicity) to examine capitalism/gender co-production of narratives.

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