

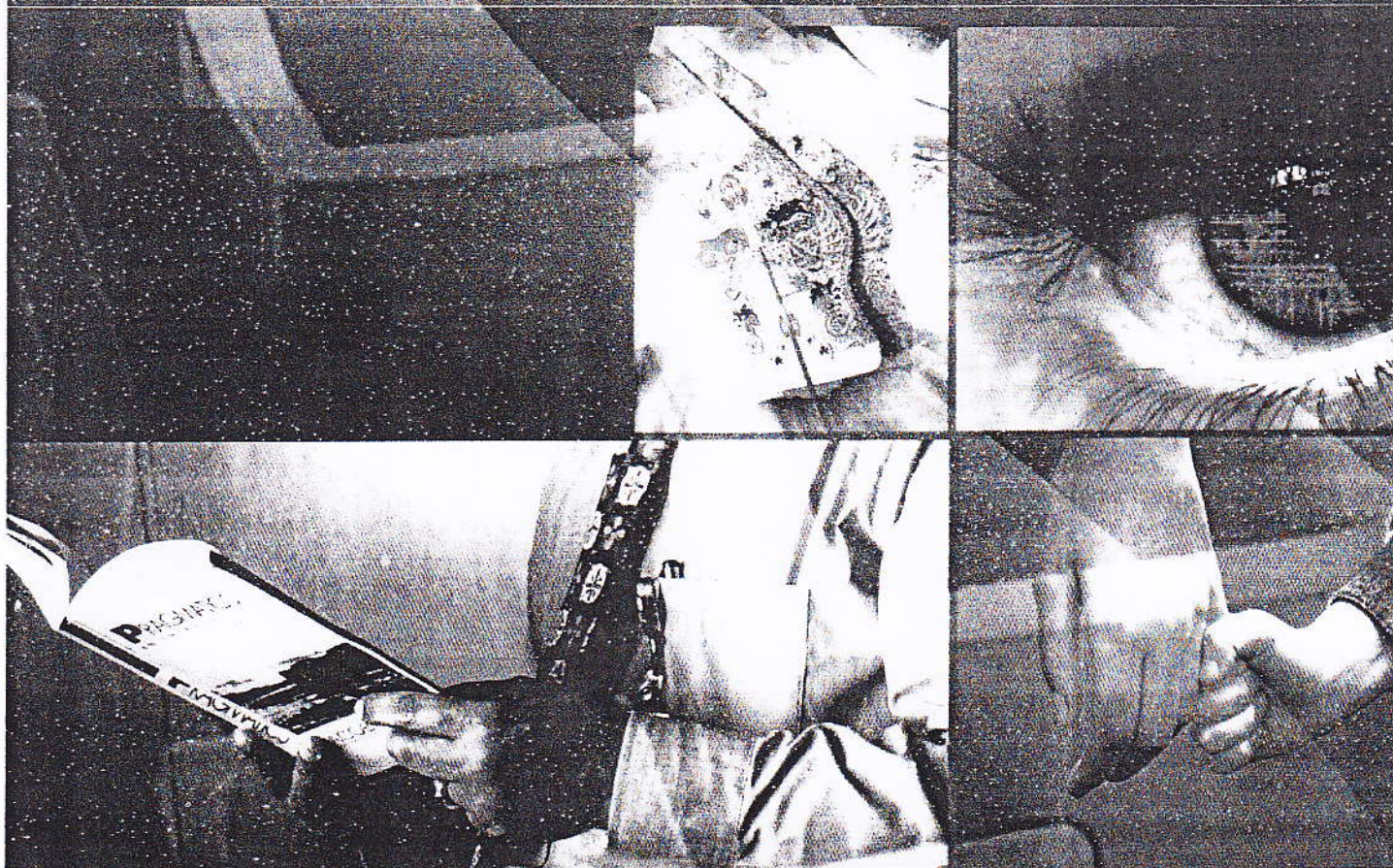
ISSN 2086-3187



PROCEEDING

International Seminar
21 - 22 October 2009

**MULTICULTURALISM
AND (Language and Art) EDUCATION
Unity and Harmony in Diversity**



FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND ARTS
YOGYAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY, INDONESIA

Proceeding

International Seminar on Multiculturalism and (Languages and Arts) Education

Publishing Institute

Languages and Arts Faculty, Yogyakarta State University

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ISSN No: 2086-3187

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Printed in Yogyakarta

By Ash-Shaff

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Multi(lated)culturalism? *A Reading on Contemporary Indonesian Cinema, Cin(T)a*

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Abstract

This paper is designed to disclose a cinematic recording on contemporary Indonesian pluralism issue as screened in Cin(T)a (2009), a movie which brings ethnic and religion diversity into question. This paper assumes that film as a form art practice is a particular product constructed within a given system of political and cultural relation. In this reading, Parekh's perspectives on how multiculturalism insight operates are in use.

To support this reading, first I compile and construct notes based on the film as the main text to discuss. Second, since film consists of sign production, semiotic method is employed to interpret the data. Third, since film is not the reality itself but it is situated in its society and its milieu, a discourse on Cinema/Ideology/ Criticism is in a need to enlighten the data. Fourth, the reading is shifted into the main site of this arena, multiculturalism, to bring Indonesian insight of diversity into light.

The result of the reading are: (a) there are differences alive in reality and the differences fortified by the grand narratives of ethnicity and religion which strengthens the exclusive (homogeneity of) truth as barriers rather than diversity (heterogeneity) which enriches human experience; (b) love is the very thing which transgresses the barriers bring people into a particular experience as human being; (c) the ending of the story is not emphasized, meanwhile rhetorical/cathartic discussion between the characters is put forward; and (d) the solution of the problems faced by the characters is open ended to occasion dialectics.

One critical question comes up when the film director chose to end the movie with no real solution. If there was, then this movie would incite further controversy since religion has been highly sensitive. At this border, the reason why it is the choice, as filmic fact, is not independent of given system of Indonesian political and cultural relation, as cinematic fact. This is a homework to think of. But, based on Parekh's three insight models, audience are able to understand multiculturalism model wherein the movie was produced.

Key words:, grand narratives, heterogeneity, filmic fact, cinematic fact.

Multiculturalism model, dialectics

"Unity in Diversity" is a political-philosophical thesis that slips into the communal consciousness of Indonesian consisting of extremely heterogeneous and segmented societies. It is pleasant-sounding but it becomes discordant in dealing with bitter experiences Indonesia had/has faced such as May 98 riot, Maduranese-Dayak ethnic conflict, Poso and Ambon religious conflict, church bombing, implementation of sharia bylaw and radicalism. These set forth "Unity or Diversity" as an antithesis of "Unity in Diversity". So far, these bitter experiences stay as nightmares left to forget. Situated in this domain, this paper places a provocative Indonesian film as an art practice that

discursively contributes towards Indonesian synthesis, since harmony in pluralism context is not given and static but it is a result of its dialectical process.

***Cin(T)a*, a cinematic recording on pluralism**

Metz (in Stain et al, 1992:34) makes the distinction between cinematic fact and filmic fact. Cinematic fact refers to cinematic institution as multidimensional socio- cultural complex. Filmic fact refers to the localizable discourse, a text, film as a signifying text. In semiotic perspective, film as a text is the proper object to study but it bounds to its multidimensionality as a discourse concentrating an intense charge of social, cultural and psychological meanings. In this sense, I place *Cin(T)a* as an indie that asserts political statement against dominant culture; I focus on cinematic specificity, the totality of film, as its priority. This leads the reading of the film into two, love story between two individuals and issues on pluralism.

The story was about a relationship between two individuals named Cina, the male character, and Annisa, the female character. They met at a campus in Bandung. Annisa was his senior but she was a student of low GPA, 2.1 because of her familial problem and career as an actress; and she faced difficulty to complete her study because of her idealism. She seemed to be pessimistic. Meanwhile Cina was a smart student who was optimistic to reach his bright future.

Their relationship started to grow when accidentally Annisa found him as a reflexology therapist. Then, she intended to know more about him. Since he was a bright student, he helped Annisa to complete her final project, which before was rejected several times. Their relationship became closer and shifted into love status.

So far so good, as long as it is a love story with sterile background, but they was constructed by different social, ethnic and religious background. When love between two individuals is attached with different attributes, it becomes problematic as it was in *Cin(T)a*. This film accentuated love to deepen its meaning as well as to explore its borders: "What is the meaning of love between Cina, who is Chinese and Christian, and Anissa, who is Moslem and Javanese?" There are two levels of answers.

First, their early exploration of religion differences occasioned them to discuss rare topics on religion differences.

-*"Why do You create us differently if You only want to be worshipped in one way?"*

-*"That's why God create love to unite all differences."*

Some scenes showed couples of different religions got married and had a happy family. This showed that interfaith marriage was not a problem. The strength of love led them to understand each other. To sum up, this answer sounds romantic. Then a scene depicting con-celebration of Christmas and Idul Fitri told more about their deep understanding.

Second, this film was set in 2000 when church bombings happened in Indonesia. The critical events reconstructed their romantic understanding. This directed them to open their mind that factually there was an unbreakable gap between them. In turn, communal construction replaced their inter-individual understanding. Syamsul Arifin (in Fatoni's *KOMPAS*, 2009), an Indonesian scholar on Sociology of Religion, stated that research of religion is possible to the extent the differentiations in religions stand as social facts, not

normative doctrine. In this case, the two characters signifying social construct as the result of religious conflict. They feel uncomfortable to each other. They become fragmented. Besides, Cina's scholarship was rejected because of discrimination upon his ethnicity. In brief, *Cin(T)a* is about:

"Dear God. This is Cina.

This is Annisa.

You love Cina and Annisa.

But since they call You with different name (Allah, YHV, El, God, Tuhan), they can not love each other.

God is a director."

and about its multidimensionality as a discourse concentrating an intense charge of social, cultural and religious meanings.

Competing narratives, a face of heterogeneities

Semiotically, film as a signifying system does not end in itself; it turns into discursive practices. Consequently, there are competing texts between ultimate Truth versus diverse truth. Now, *Cin(t)a* is under the issue of banning since it is supposed as subverting religious doctrines. Even, some are pessimistic if this film will pass the censorship of LSF due to its sensitive content. Some regret its limited screening and access because they argue this film may promote tolerance and pluralism.

Audience's response on *Cin(T)a* are varied. One group praised and appreciated it because of its risk to offer hidden issues of diverse religion context of Indonesian pluralism such as interfaith love relationship (intermarriage) and critical question about the role of religion and God(s) existence; meanwhile the other criticized and warned the producer of misinterpreting religious doctrines, inviting controversies and risking Indonesian pluralism.

-*"You are Chinese already, how come your dad give you name Cina?"*

-*"You father was meanier, he knew you woman, then why he gave you name "woman"?"*

-*"Annisa is a part of Al-Quran. It means woman. I do not like my name. In Annisa (Indonesian version?) there is an interpretation suggesting to beat wife. Marriage is not a boxing arena. Islam is not barbaric religion. That is why I like its English version. It was interpreted by an Iranian woman. The Annisa, there, is softer and better."*

A dialogue in the other scene commented that religion brings fight rather than peace.

-*"God does like to be admired and worshipped, but all the time?"*

-*"Why did God create atheis? Maybe He is so tired to be worshipped all the time."*

-*"It's better if there is no God, no religion, no fight."*

Sembilan Matahari Film in which the young producers under thirties produced the film, seemed to anticipate the disapproving reaction to *Cin(T)a*. The director Sammaria Simanjuntak (Agustina, *The Jakarta Post*, 2009) said that she wanted to find God with the movie. The similar tone was stated its official web: *God is the most unpredictable character. Everybody tries to describe Him, everybody thinks they know Him, every artist has tried to picture Him, but nothing is really like Him or Her.* The film is promoted in internet, it was premiered in London, screened at Jakarta Blitzmegaplex and in limited cultural discussion community only in Java.

This cinematic fact signifies various competing constructs in society within which art exploration transgresses the boundaries between the tolerable and the taboo, between art and religion, between the fantasy and the real. The blurring distinction between the fantasy and the real is one characteristic of postmodern art which does not intend to dictate reality but to bear it as it is. This style is termed as vicious circle. It arises in postmodernist fiction (Sim, 2001: 121) when both text and the world are permeable, to the extent that we cannot separate one from the other. As a result, Truth in its conventional sense becomes unstable. It comes into the new realm of truth and reaches the same status as story. Anything is told, anything is constructed. Salman Rusdie's *Satanic Verses* and Dan Brown's *Davinci Code*, which triggered wide protest and controversy, exemplify postmodern exploration into its extreme points.

On the contrary, public in general is constructed -among others- by religion with its undeniable and absolute Truth. To believers religion is not negotiable since Truth in religion is not only a version but religious doctrines bring implication into real life and have formed human culture and history for thousands of year. Human beings need foundations and values to create civilization and world order. Annihilation of the established religious truth, as the source of values, will endanger order.

Commenting on the contemporary phenomena, Lyotard (Sim, 2001: 261) argued nowadays grandnarratives (homogeneities) have lost their credibility such as capitalism with its free market, Marxism with dialectical materialism. So do most religions, which offer a similarly all-embracing explanation of human history. Such schemes are implicitly authoritarian, and that by the late twentieth century they have lost all claim over individual behavior. It is part of living in a postmodern world that we no longer can rely on such grandnarratives but we must construct more tactically mininarratives (diverse truths/ heterogeneities).

In this plane, the theme of love in *Cin(t)a* is not trivial. Love brought Annisa and Cina into its multi-facet meanings. It is not just a relationship between two individuals but it involves their Gods as their possessors. It is about triangle love between Cina, Annisa and God. Their love little story shifts into God's love grand stories. In this case, language categorization of love into uncountable noun is not sufficient to describe human experience of love. Love is not a single facet. There must be loves as countable noun. Their love actually transgresses the language grammaticality, religion grammaticality but there is no rule to validate this. This human experience is too rich to totalize.

Open-endedness, a discursive strategy

Another filmic fact significant in *Cin(T)a* is its open-endedness. The film audience will be disappointed if they expect much of the ending as solution to the conflicting differences. Differences make them impossible to glue together in love. Cina decided to leave for a scholarship in Singapore. Annisa run after him at the airport. The word "friendship" was written on finger as an answer of their unanswered questions about differences. This is realistic.

The filmic fact above seems to be parallel with post-structuralism stance to disrupt dominant discourse. It accepts there is no single final word, no meta-discourse to encompass all possible explanation. It favors to use theory in a pragmatic, eclectic fashion mainly to devise new modes of thought and hence of social being as practiced by Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988: 30). This is a strategy to counter the

power of dominant discourse, to open a space for slippage, heterogeneity and disclosure of power/truth.

The filmic fact of not emphasizing the ending strengthens the presence open dialogues on deity and ethnicity, unexplored issues of Indonesian pluralism taboos. *Cin(T)a* is not about religious moral teachings as celebrated by mainstream religious films. It is more about questioning on moral teaching themselves and God (Fatoni, *KOMPAS*, 2009). And it is crucial to note that the dialogues in *Cin(T)a* revolve into never ending rethorical and philosophical questions.

-“ *If they call You with different name (Allah, YHV, El, God, Tuhan). Ah, God what is your religion then?*”

-“*Shouldn't religion bring peace into the world, not hatred, even not alibi to kill each other?*”

The dialogues do not direct audience single opinion. This is the contribution film into discursive practices. Cina and Annisa bring their individual love relationship into the extent of questioning God and role of religion to create peace.

In this sense, discourses cannot simply control/contain all within their directions, so that the gap open up through which change can take place. The gap permits a point of resistance that enables new articulations, which in turn, begin to work on and to alter the dominant discourse (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988: 30). In Indonesian context, this non-mainstream film is able to put the roots and effects on the table of pluralism. So far, ethnic and religion diversities stay hidden under the red carpet of Unity in Diversity and which thus far become the source of conflicts because of misunderstanding, on the table of discussion on pluralism.

Multi(lated)culturalism?

Bhikhu Parekh stated that from multicultural perspective there is no political doctrine, no ideology representing the full truth of human life. Any claim that a particular way of thinking and life is perfect is found insufficient since this perspective affirms the fact that all versions of truth inherently limited and cannot represent richness and complexity of human experience. Multiculturalism is neither ideology nor philosophical theory; it is more about insights to promote peace and understanding in plural culture. Further he proposed creative interplay of three complementary insights, that is, *cultural embedded-ness, inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture.*

First, human being are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world, organize their live and social relations in terms of its system of meaning and significance, and place considerable value on their cultural identity. This does not mean that they are determined by their culture in the sense of being unable to critically evaluate its beliefs and practices and understand and sympathize with others, but rather that they are deeply shaped by it, can overcome some but not all of its influences and necessarily view the world from within the culture, be it the one they have inherited and uncritically accepted or reflectively revised or in rare cases, consciously adopted. *inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue*

Second, different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life. Since each realizes a limited range of human capacities and emotions and grasps only a part of the totality of human existence, it needs others to understand itself better, expands its intellectual and moral horizon, stretches its imagination and guards it against the obvious temptation to absolutize itself. This does not mean that one can not lead a good life within one's culture, but rather that, other things being equal, it is likely to be richer if one enjoys access to others and that culturally self-contained life is virtually impossible for most human beings in the modern world. Nor does it mean that cultures cannot be compared and judged, that they are equally right and deserve equal respect, that each of them is good for its members or that all cultural differences deserve to be valued. All it means is that no culture is wholly worthless, that it deserves at least some respect because of what it means to its members and the creative energy it displays, that no culture is perfect and has a right to impose itself on others, and that cultures are generally best changed from within.

Since each culture is inherently limited, a dialogue between them is mutually beneficial. It both alerts them to their biases, gains in itself, and enables them to reduce them and expand their horizon of thought. To be in a conversation ... means to be beyond one self, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another. The dialogue is possible only if each culture accepts the other as equal conversational partners, who need to be taken seriously as sources of new ideas and to whom it owes the duty of explaining itself. And it realizes its objective only if the participants enjoy a broad equality of self-confidence, economic and political power and access to public space..

Third, all but the most primitive cultures are internally plural and represent a continuing conversation between their different traditions and strands of thought. This does not mean that they are devoid of internal coherence and identity but that their identity is plural and fluid. Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interaction with each other, partly define their identity in terms of what they take to be their significant other, and are at last partially multicultural in their origins and constitution. Each carries bits of the other within itself and, is rarely sui generis. This does not mean that it has no powers of self-determination and inner impulses, but rather that it is porous and subject to external influences which it interprets and assimilates in its own autonomous way (Parekh, 2000: 336-338).

Based on Parekh's insights, this paper attempts to reflect Indonesian multiculturalism through the analysis of *Cin(T)a* which is placed as an artifact of Indonesian multiculturalism. The further analysis to reflect is focused into two levels: the filmic fact, the choice of open-endedness and the cinematic fact, audience's responses,

First, the producers did not arbitrarily choose to open-end the film since they tried to raise issues bound to culturally-contextualized real society who will likely be its potential audience. They timidly make a statement about interfaith relationship (inter-marriage). In one scene, there are testimonies of happy intermarriage couples; whereas there is no clear-cut solution to Cina-Annisa interfaith relationship. The producers' position is related with the first insights. They are culturally embedded. They grow up and live within a culturally structured world as the frame of their social relations and cultural value. They are not fully determined by their culture. They critically evaluate its beliefs and practices; and understand and sympathize with others but they -still- are shaped

deeply by their culture. They can overcome some but not all of its influences and necessarily view the world from within the culture.

Second, this film incites controversies between the pros and the cons among audience. Possibly the producers had calculated this excess so they decide to minimize it by limiting its distribution. The pros are eager to promote the idea but the cons try to halt the circulation the idea. Pros and cons are consecutively parallel with Parekh's insights on desirability and inescapability. Pros and cons represent different perspectives of the good life. Each has a limited range of explanation about the totality of human existence. Each needs others to understand itself better, expands its intellectual and moral horizon, and stretches its imagination in order that each can avoid absolutism. Each contributes to the formation of good life so each has equal position. Each is not perfect and each doesn't have a right to impose itself on others.

And to bridge pros and cons Parekh proposed a intercultural dialogue. Since each culture is inherently limited, a dialogue between them is mutually beneficial. The intercultural dialogue both alerts them to their biases, and enable them to reduce theirs and expand their horizon of thought. To be in a dialogue ... means to be beyond one self, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another. The dialogue is possible only if each accept other as equal conversational partners. And a dialogue is effective only if the participants enjoy a broad equality of self confidence, economic and political power and access to public space.

(Not) concluding remark

This paper is not intended to answer a question: whether *Cin(T)a* signifies multiculturalism or mutilated-culturalism . This is more about starting remark to place multiculturalism dynamics. It is not a fixed but a progressing dialectical process. In the context of Indonesian pluralism, the answer depends on the whole societal and cultural components. "Are we going to homogenize our differences, let the differences scattered all over our islands under one dominant culture (mutilatedculturalism) or accept heterogeneity as a sources of great creative opportunities to embody our great political and philosophical thesis, Diversities in Unity (multiculturalism), not Diversities or Unity?" One of benchmarks to check is how we response to a non-mainsteam artifact such as *Cin(T)a*. The test of time eventually will tell this.

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