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Exposing the Distortion of Faith and Jurisprudence in Bidaah (2025) Through Social Criticism in Cinema

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the representation of social criticism against deviant religious practices in the film Bidaah and evaluate it through an integrative framework of Islamic theology, Islamic law, and media studies. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach, strengthened by semiotic analysis to uncover layers of meaning embedded in its narrative and visual codes. The main data source is the film Bidaah, which is analysed through thematic identification techniques for scenes and dialogue that contain representations of deviant religious practices. The analysis combined normative evaluation using the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic scholarship with semiotic interpretation of the film's visual, symbolic, and narrative strategies as a cinematic text. The research results show that the film Bidaah represents various forms of deviation from faith and jurisprudence, such as cults of spiritual figures that lead to shirk, superstition in the form of seeking blessings that are not syar'i, inner marriages without harmony and legal conditions, as well as polygamy and divorce which are carried out based on ideological pressure, not the principles of justice and consent. At the same time, the film employs dramatic narratives and visual metaphors to highlight how religion is manipulated to legitimize the power of spiritual figures, which creates blind obedience and erodes the rationality of the people. The conclusion of this research is that the film Bidaah not only presents a fictional narrative, but also opens up a reflective space for the phenomenon of deviation in religious practice that actually occurs in society. The film's representation provides criticism of the dominance of a single interpretation, abuse of religious authority, and the blurring of sharia institutions such as marriage and family. This research has important significance in the study of religious representation

in popular media. With an integrative approach between media studies, semiotics, and Islamic law, this study contributes to developing a more critical and contextual religious discourse.

Introduction

In an environment full of diverse practices, various dynamics emerge that bring together the preservation of local traditions and the push for purification of Islamic teachings. One issue that stands out in this context is Bidaah. The phenomenon of Bidaah in the Islamic education environment, especially in Islamic boarding schools, has become the subject of serious attention in various countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia. Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, function not only as centers for learning religious knowledge, but also as communities that reflect various religious practices (Dhofier, 2011; Azra, 2017). This term, which generally refers to new religious practices that are not found in the Koran or Sunnah, is a central issue that is complex and multidimensional. Debates surrounding Bidaah reflect not only methodological differences in understanding the sources of Islamic law but also demonstrate the dynamics between traditional authority and religious reform tendencies. In the Islamic boarding school environment, this discourse extends to socio-cultural aspects, especially in assessing the legitimacy of local religious practices that have been rooted for generations. The tension between preserving tradition and returning to primary Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, is a source of dialectics that continues to develop. Discourse regarding Bidaah also raises theological and social implications, including in relation to the authenticity of teachings and the potential for stigmatization of groups deemed to deviate from Islamic orthodoxy (Hasan, 2012; Zuhri, 2019).

Continuing the complexity of the theological discourse, in classical Islamic legal literature, bid'ah is understood as a form of innovation in religion that does not have an explicit basis from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This view explains why most scholars consider Bidaah to be a form of deviation. However, on the other hand, there are classification efforts by some scholars who differentiate between *hasanah Bidaah* (good innovation) and *bid'ah sayyi'ah* (bad innovation). Examples of hasanah Bidaah include the establishment of modern Islamic educational institutions which did not exist at the time of the Prophet but were considered to bring benefits. However, this classification has sparked controversy because some scholars reject this division. They are of the view that all forms of innovation in religion, without exception, are heretical because they do not have an explicit basis in the Koran and Sunnah. This view strengthens the conservative position in understanding the purity of Islamic teachings. As a result, the debate regarding bid'ah does not only stop at the normative level but expands into a space of contestation of thought that includes theological, sociological and historical dimensions—where authority, tradition and change are actively contested by various groups in Muslim society.

Departing from the dynamics of contemporary religious practices, there emerges a need for communication media that can reach the public domain broadly. Popular media such as films and web dramas now play a strategic role in voicing social criticism of religious issues. Beyond entertainment,

they have developed into forums for public discussion, enabling sensitive matters to be debated openly and critically. By employing visual narrative, symbolism, and strong characterization, films can translate complex religious issues into forms that are persuasive and accessible to diverse audiences, particularly the younger generation familiar with the digital ecosystem (Hoover, 2006; Campbell, 2010).

In this regard, Elsaesser (1987) emphasises that films do not merely mirror reality but actively structure and organize it, translating ideological tensions into narrative and visual form. Through melodramatic plots, symbolic mise-en-scène, and the affective positioning of audiences, cinema encodes conflicts of power, identity, and belief in ways that appear naturalized and persuasive. From this perspective, Bidaah should be read not only as a theological critique of deviant practices but also as an ideological text that dramatizes the contestation between orthodoxy and reform, authority and resistance, obedience and critique. The representation of pesantren life, the dramatization of blind obedience, and the symbolic use of religious rituals exemplify how theological debates are mediated through cinematic form. Employing Elsaesser's framework therefore allows this study to move beyond normative assessments of Islamic law and theology, positioning Bidaah as a cultural artifact embedded in broader ideological negotiations about religion, authority, and social order in contemporary Muslim society.

Within this framework, film becomes a medium that both represents social reality and reinterprets religious discourse in a contemporary context. Bidaah stands as a significant example, using the theme of bid'ah not as mere background but as a central narrative device to reveal tensions between conservative and progressive groups in the Muslim community. Through dramatic plotting and complex characterization, the film explores the abuse of religious authority, repressive dogmatism, and the psychological pressure experienced by pesantren students, thus offering audiences a reflective space to reconsider questions of authenticity, justice, and humanity in religion (van der Veer, 2009).

Seen in this light, media should not only be regarded as a mirror of reality but as a cultural actor that shapes public perceptions of religion. In the contestation of discourse surrounding bid'ah, Bidaah contributes by challenging the dominance of singular interpretations and encouraging pluralism in religious expression. Yet, it is equally important to acknowledge that media can also reproduce ideological bias and commodify religious issues for market interests. For this reason, the analysis of social criticism in film must be accompanied by critical awareness of its production context and political-economic entanglements (Couldry, 2012). Such an approach enables the study of Bidaah to contribute to more inclusive, reflective, and transformative understandings of religious discourse in popular media.

Based on the description above, the researcher formulated research questions; how about movies *Bidaah* represents social criticism of deviant religious practices, especially from the perspective of Islamic law and Islamic theology? In response to this research, this research aims to analyse the forms of representation of deviations from faith and principles of jurisprudence that appear in film narratives and visuals, as well as reviewing the extent to which these representations are in accordance with or contrary to the principles of Islamic law regarding Bidaah and deviation from teachings. Thus, this research not only explores the symbolic dimensions in films, but also offers a normative assessment based on an integrative framework between Islamic theology and law.

Previously, there have been many studies examining Islamic genre films, which show that films are not only a medium of entertainment, but also a space for representation and criticism of socio-religious phenomena. Faturrahman's (2020) research on films *Heaven's Chariot* reveals that films can function as an effective medium for conveying criticism of sensitive issues such as radicalism, through visual symbols, dialogue and character construction. Using a semiotic approach, this research proves how film narratives shape meaning and influence public perceptions of religious reality. These findings provide an important basis for film analysis *Bidaah*, which also raised social criticism against deviations in religious practice. Further, research by Bahruddin and Hamad (2022) on the film Bidaah *Love* shows that individuals like Ustadz Jaiz act as agents of social change by bringing a scripturalist understanding of Islam and trying to eradicate local religious practices that are considered Bidaah. This study confirms that social change in Muslim societies is not only determined by established social structures, but also by individual ideologies and religious beliefs. Meanwhile, Putra (2021) through its study of the film *Java Heat*, reveals how representations of Islam are framed in a binary opposition between Arab Islam, which is depicted as violent, fundamentalist, and synonymous with terrorism, and American Islam, which is pluralist, tolerant, and friendly to the West. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this research shows how religious stereotypes are formed through visual and symbolic narratives that support certain ideological constructions.

These three studies strengthen the argument that film is an important medium in the formation of religious discourse and contribute to the understanding of how symbols and narratives in cinema reflect the dynamics of religious ideology. However, the three of them have not specifically studied the representation of social criticism of heretical practices and deviant teachings from the perspective of Islamic law. Faturrahman's research focuses more on the issue of radicalism, while Bahruddin and Hamad focus on the relationship between agents and structures in changes in local religious practices, and Putra reviews the construction of Islamic stereotypes in the context of Hollywood cinema. Different from the three, this research offers novelty by combining visual semiotic analysis of films *Bidaah* with an integrative approach between Islamic theology and Islamic law, especially in the context of Bidaah and deviant teachings. The significance of this research lies in its contribution in enriching the study of

religious representation in popular media through this integrative approach. Apart from that, it is hoped that this research can be a reference for academics, filmmakers and religious institutions in understanding the ethical boundaries, preaching messages and social criticism contained in religious-themed cinema works. Thus, films are not only seen as cultural products, but also as discursive spaces that reflect and shape society's religious views.

Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a semiotic-content analysis approach to visual texts, namely the film *Bidaah*. The main focus of this study is to identify and explain the representation of deviant religious practices shown in films and then assess them through an integrative approach that combines the perspectives of Islamic theology and Islamic law. Semiotics is employed to decode visual signs, symbols, and narrative strategies in the film, while the normative framework of theology and fiqh is used to contextualize these representations within Islamic discourse. In this way, films are positioned not just as cultural objects, but as texts that can be read both as cinematic narratives and within the horizon of religious ethics and law.

The main data source for this research is films *Bidaah*, which is systematically analysed through identifying scenes, dialogue and narratives that contain representations of certain religious practices. Each scene is read semiotically—considering imagery, gesture, setting, and dialogue as sign systems—and this interpretation is strengthened by secondary data in the form of authoritative Islamic literature. Tafsir Al-Qur'an and authentic hadiths are also used as a normative basis to evaluate the representation that appears in the film.

Data collection in this research was carried out through a series of systematic steps starting with the formulation of thematic categories based on deviant religious issues that were the focus of the study, such as figure worship, superstition, inner marriage, ideological divorce, and abortion. After these categories were determined, the researcher observed the content of the film *Bidaah* by watching thoroughly and paying close attention to every scene, dialogue and narrative related to these themes. Scenes that are considered relevant are then recorded systematically, including their semiotic elements (visual codes, symbols, character positioning, and narrative structures) that strengthen the representation of certain religious practices. The next step is to carry out a documentation study of authoritative Islamic texts, both from classical literature and from contemporary thought. This reference is used to build a strong and valid argumentative basis in assessing religious representations in films. All data, both from observation and documentation, is then compiled and classified thematically as a basis for the semiotic-content analysis process at the next stage.

Data analysis in this research was carried out using a thematic-semiotic analysis, namely by grouping the findings based on the main themes that have been previously formulated while interpreting the signs and symbols used to convey them. Findings of religious deviation obtained from observing the content of films are classified into two large categories, namely based on religious values and Islamic jurisprudence. In maintaining validity, this research applies source triangulation by comparing film representations with primary religious texts (Al-Qur'an and hadith) and the views of ulama.

In addition, the consistency of the analysis is tested through references to credible literature in the disciplines of Islamic theology and law. Each finding is evaluated in depth within the framework of an integrative approach that combines semiotic film analysis with Islamic theological and legal perspectives, in order to reveal both the artistic strategies and the extent to which the representation in the film deviates from valid Islamic teachings. Thus, the resulting analysis is not only descriptive and normative, but also interpretative of the film's visual-symbolic language as a work of cinema.
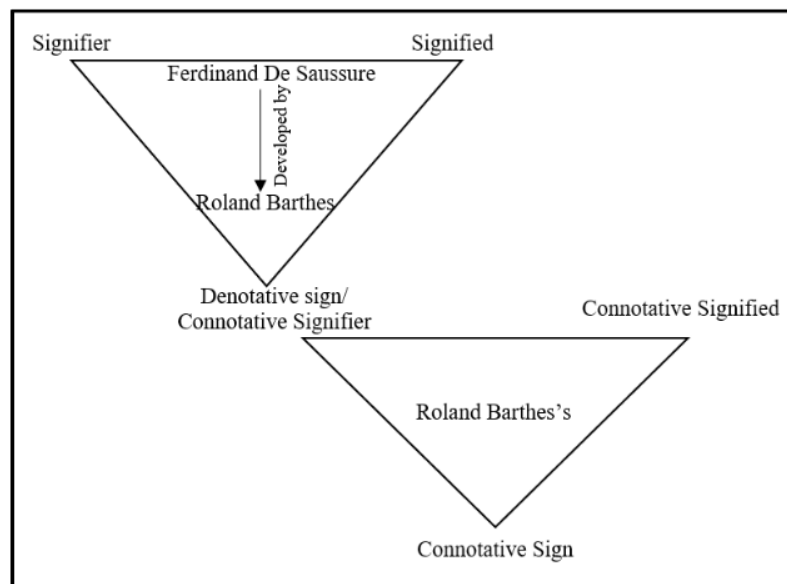

Figure 1. Semiology Concept De Saussure - Barthes Framework Analysis (Source: Aidatul Fitriyah)

Results and Discussion

Representation of Deviations in Faith in Film Bidaah

Shirk Practices and Individual Cults

Draft *monotheism* In Islam, it is the main foundation in building aqidah. It comes from the word *wahhada-yuwahhidu-tawhīdan* which means to unite or make one. In the classical division of the ulama, monotheism consists of three main aspects: *rububiyyah monotheism*, *uluhiyah monotheism*, And *monotheism asthma wa nature*. *Tawheed rububiyyah* means believing that Allah is the only Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of the universe. This is confirmed in QS. Al-A'raf:54, *"Truly your Lord is God who*

created the heavens and the earth...". Imam Ath-Tabari in *Tafsir Jami' al-Bayan* explains that this verse shows the exclusivity of God's power in the creation and regulation of nature. Furthermore, *uluhiyah monotheism* emphasizes that only Allah has the right to be worshipped. All forms of worship, both external and internal, must be directed to Him alone, as emphasized in the QS. Al-Fatihah:5, *"Only to You we worship and only to You we ask for help."* As for *monotheism asthma wa nature* asserting faith in the names and attributes of God as mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, without tasybih (simulating), ta'thil (negating), or tahrif (distorting the meaning). Imam Ibn Katsir in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azhim* emphasizes that Allah has perfect qualities and that no creature is similar to Him.

Maintaining the purity of monotheism is the most fundamental principle in Islamic teachings, which means to recognize God in all aspects of rububiyyah (belief that only God creates and regulates the universe), uluhiyah (worshiping only God), as well as asma wa sifat (believing in the names and attributes of God as He has determined them without likening them to creatures). The opposite of monotheism is shirk, which is the act of associating God in those matters, and shirk is the greatest sin in Islam. This is confirmed in the words of Allah SWT in Surah An-Nisa verse 48: *"Surely Allah will not forgive the sin of associating partners with Him, and He forgives sins other than that for whom He wills."* This verse shows that shirk is a form of offense that cannot be forgiven except by repentance before death.

The interpretation of this verse is explained by Al-Qurthubi in his interpretation, that God's reluctance to forgive the sin of polytheism shows how severe the consequences of such actions are. It is a form of rejection of the oneness of God which is the core of all Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the Prophet SAW warned in his words narrated by Imam Muslim: *"Whoever dies in the state of associating with God, then he goes to hell."* This hadith strengthens the understanding that shirk is not only a theological violation, but also an existential sin that breaks humans' relationship with God.

Shirk itself is divided into two main types: major shirk (*great shirk*), namely worshiping or submitting forms of worship to other than Allah, as well as minor shirk (*Asghar's shirk*), like riya, namely showing worship in order to get praise from people. Even though it is more subtle in form, minor shirk is still dangerous because it can damage sincerity in worship.

This phenomenon of deviation from the principles of monotheism can be found in films *Bidaah*, which depicts excessive worship of the character Walid. Walid is positioned not just as a spiritual leader, but as a source of salvation, a place for inner complaints, and a figure who is believed to have metaphysical powers. In various scenes, Walid's followers utter sentences such as, "Only Walid can help us from darkness," or "With his blessings, the sky does not become angry." This is a form of deviation from *uluhiyah monotheism*, because the essence of absolute help belongs only to Allah. As

mentioned in QS. Al-Ankabut:65, *"So when they boarded the ship, they prayed to God by purifying their obedience to Him..."* This verse shows that only in sincerity towards Allah can salvation be achieved. The cult of Walid also resembles the behavior of polytheists towards figures they consider to be divine intermediaries, as criticized in the QS. Az-Zumar:3.

In addition, the glorification of Walid in the film also reflects attitudes *ghuluw* or extremism in glorifying religious figures. This attitude is prohibited in Islam because it can lead to hidden worship. Allah warns in QS. Al-Ma'idah: 77, *"O People of the Book! Do not overstep the limits of your religion in an unrighteous way..."* In *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, Al-Alusi interprets this verse as a strict prohibition against exaggeration in glorifying people, even those considered holy. The Prophet SAW also said, *"Do not praise me as the Christians praise Jesus, son of Mary. I am only a servant of Allah, so say, 'Servant of Allah and His Messenger.'"* (HR. Bukhari). Prayers to Walid in the film, such as "Ya Walid, guide our steps," are a form of spiritual supplication that should be addressed to God. Imam Al-Ghazali in *Oh Ulumuddin* states that placing spiritual hope on other than Allah absolutely shows weakness of faith and can lead to subtle forms of shirk (*Shirk Khafi*), especially if accompanied by belief in the character's power to provide blessings or supernatural help.

Thus, the film *Bidaah* not only presents narrative aesthetic problems, but also reveals the reality of deviations in faith that occur symbolically in society. Representations of worship of figures such as Walid illustrate a shift from pure monotheism to syncretic beliefs that mix charisma, spirituality and mysticism of figures. In this context, criticism of *ghuluw* and shirk has become very relevant, not only as a response to the film, but also as an effort to make people aware of the importance of maintaining the purity of monotheism as taught by the prophets and explained in depth in the books of interpretation and creeds of classical scholars.

Practice Superstition towards Spiritual Figures

In Islamic teachings, superstition is part of a belief that is considered deviant because it does not have a sharia basis from either the Al-Qur'an or Sunnah. Terminologically superstition comes from the word *imaginary* which means imagination or imagination, and in practice often refers to belief in something that is not real but is believed to be able to directly influence human life. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulumiddin* mentions superstition as part of "waswas shaytan", ie baseless whispers that lead a person into irrational actions and away from pure monotheism. Scholars such as Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyah in *Book of al-Fawaid* underlines that superstition often becomes an opening for the practice of petty shirk (shirk ashghar), because it attributes benefits or harm to something other than Allah SWT without any evidence.

Islam is very strict in setting the boundaries between what is included in the domain of worship and what is just custom or culture. The proofs of the prohibition of seeking blessings from something that is not prescribed can be seen in the words of Allah SWT: *"And if you obey most of the people on this earth, they will surely lead you astray from the path of God. They are nothing but following mere conjecture and they are nothing but lying (against God)."* (QS. Al-An'am [6]: 116). This shows that truth and blessings cannot be taken from the majority tradition but must come from revelation. Hadith of the Prophet SAW which reads, *"Whoever does a deed that does not have an order from us, then the deed is rejected."* (HR. Muslim no. 1718), emphasized that forms of seeking blessings that do not have a sharia basis are rejected and have no value of worship.

The practice shown in the film Bidaah, namely the scene of drinking "walid" washing water as a form of seeking blessings, is a clear example of a deviation from the faith that originates from superstition. In the monotheistic view, Allah is the only source of all blessings, as stated in the QS. Al-A'raf [7]: 96, *"If only the inhabitants of the lands had faith and piety, surely We would shower them with blessings from the heavens and the earth..."* Blessings in Islam are: *tauqifiyyah*, meaning it cannot be claimed unless there is a clear argument. Al-Hafizh Ibn Hajar in *Faith al-Bari* states that blessings can only be taken from something that is explicitly given that status by the Shari'a, such as the Al-Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and things that are authentically relied on. Drinking water used from the washing of a religious figure without any basis in authentic texts is an act that is not only bid'ah, but also close to shirk if it is believed that the water contains certain spiritual or metaphysical elements.

The dangers of conflating cultural rituals with acts of worship in Islam have been repeatedly emphasized in both classical and contemporary scholarship. Imam al-Nawawi, in his Sharh Sahih Muslim, distinguishes between *bid'ah hasanah* (commendable innovation) and *bid'ah sayyi'ah* (reprehensible innovation), a categorization that reflects the long-standing tension within Islamic thought between preservation of orthodoxy and the necessity of contextual adaptation. While this binary provides a normative framework—judging innovations according to whether they align with or contradict the Sharia. It also raises broader analytical questions. What is considered "contradictory" is not always universally agreed upon, and interpretive authority plays a decisive role in framing certain practices as deviant. From a critical perspective, then, bid'ah is not only a matter of theology but also a contested discursive category through which power, legitimacy, and religious authority are negotiated. Consequently, what one group deems a harmful innovation may, for another, represent cultural continuity or spiritual renewal.

Representation of Deviations from Fiqh Law in Films Bidaah

Inner Marriage

The film *Bidaah* offers a pointed critique of the ways in which religious symbols may be appropriated to legitimize exploitation, most explicitly through its portrayal of the so-called "inner marriage." One of the film's pivotal scenes depicts Walid proposing to his student Amira in the confines of a dimly lit cave—a spatial setting that symbolically conveys secrecy, transgression, and a rupture from established social and legal norms. The accompanying dialogue exposes the mechanism of "spiritualization" as a discursive strategy, one that cloaks desire and coercion beneath the language of sanctity.

In *Bidaah*, this normative framework is deliberately subverted through the depiction of an "inner marriage." In one of the most striking scenes, Walid proposes to his student Amira:

Walid: *"Amira, mesti Walid jadikan istri batin."* ("Amira, Walid must make you his spiritual wife.")

Amira: *"Istri batin?"* ("Spiritual wife?")

Walid: *"Kita nikah batin dan menghalalkan semuanya. Bila batin Amira dah bersatu dengan batin Walid, maka Amira akan naik. Amira faham? Amira sanggup jadi istri batin Walid?"* ("We perform a spiritual marriage and make everything lawful. When your soul unites with Walid's soul, you will ascend. Do you understand? Are you willing to be Walid's spiritual wife?") *(Amira nods)*

Walid: *"Ya Rasulullah, aku terima nikahnya Amira binti Marzuki, maksud nikah batin, bermaskawinkan Al-Fatihah. Mulai malam ini Amira jadi istri batin Walid, sah."* ("O Messenger of God, I accept the marriage of Amira binti Marzuki, through a spiritual bond, with Al-Fatihah as her dowry. From tonight, Amira is my lawful spiritual wife.")

(Bidaah Series, 2025, Ep. 13)

The scene employs several layers of symbolism. The cave functions as a metaphor for concealment and distortion, underscoring that this union takes place outside the visibility of the community and beyond legal accountability. Walid's invocation of *Al-Fatihah* as dowry transforms a sacred text into a performative tool of control, while Amira's voiceless consent through a mere nod reflects the silencing of women under charismatic authority. Cinematically, the dim lighting, the echoing cave acoustics, and the asymmetry between Walid's long declarations and Amira's silence accentuate the imbalance of power.

Building on this symbolism, *Bidaah* explicitly frames the act as an "inner marriage," a practice that radically departs from the legal and ethical provisions of Islamic marriage. The secrecy of the cave, combined with the absence of a guardian, witnesses, and lawful *ijab-qabul*, dramatizes a ritual stripped of every pillar that grants legitimacy. The scene illustrates how religious language is re-signified to sanctify exploitation: Walid's claim that only the Messenger and Allah witness the contract exposes how spirituality can be misused to validate illicit relations.

Such a representation inevitably pushes the audience to reflect on the wider social danger of symbolic distortion. Rather than presenting marriage as a covenant of mutual responsibility, the film reframes it as domination disguised as sanctity. This critique also functions as a cultural warning: in popular imagination, especially among viewers unfamiliar with Islamic law, such dramatization risks being read as a legitimate mystical practice. Here, the film exposes not only the vulnerability of symbols but also the susceptibility of audiences to their manipulation.

At this point, the contrast between cinematic distortion and religious norms becomes crucial. From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, marriage is a sacred contract whose validity rests on specific pillars, namely the presence of both bride and groom, the consent of the guardian, the testimony of two just witnesses, and the giving of a dowry. Classical jurists consistently reinforced these conditions. Sheikh Abu Syuja' in *Fath al-Qarib al-Mujib* explicitly states that acceptance is the essence of the marriage contract, which must be declared orally and in a single assembly (*Fath al-Qarib*, p. 254). Similarly, Imam al-Nawawi in *al-Majmūʿ Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab* underscores that a marriage without a guardian and witnesses is invalid that state as "A marriage is not valid except with a guardian and two fair witnesses" (*al-Majmūʿ*, Juz 16). Ibn Qudamah, in *al-Mughni*, firmly declared: *"Marriage without a guardian and without witnesses is false and cannot be enforced legally because it does not fulfill the legal requirements set by the Shariʿa"* (*al-Mughni*, Juz 9, p. 346). These authoritative rulings, reinforced by the Prophet's hadith, mentioned as *"Marriage without a guardian is not valid"* (HR. Abu Dawud, no. 2085; HR. Tirmidhi, no. 1101). This illustrate how far the "inner marriage" diverges from normative law.

The consensus of scholars, including Imam al-Shafiʻi, is equally firm that marriage without guardianship and witnesses undermines the very foundations of Shariʿa designed to protect lineage and dignity. Ibn Kathir, in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-ʿAzhim*, interprets QS. An-Nur: 32 that stated, *"And marry those who are alone among you"*. He interprets to emphasizing that the marriage process must be carried out by the guardian, who bears responsibility for the guardianship of the woman. By placing this exegetical consensus alongside the film's narrative, it becomes clear that the "inner marriage" is not

simply unlawful but a symbolic deconstruction of the sacred institution of marriage in Islam, eroding both its spiritual integrity and its social safeguards.

Seen in this light, the film's critique operates on a dual register. Legally, the ritual violates the *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*, which aim to preserve religion, reason, and lineage. Yusuf al-Qaradawi in *Fiqh Maqashid al-Shari'a* explicitly explains that one of the main purposes of Shari'a is to protect *hifzh ad-din, al-'aql, wa an-nasl* (religion, reason, and lineage) (*Fiqh Maqashid al-Shari'a*, p. 95). Culturally, the dramatization warns of the dangers posed when pseudo-spiritual practices, left unchallenged, seep into popular imagination and normalize moral deviation under the guise of sanctity. By situating its critique at the intersection of cinematic symbolism and theological principles, *Bidaah* highlights both the abuse of sacred symbols and the broader social risks of their misinterpretation.

Legitimacy of Forced Polygamy

The film *Bidaah* offers a critical examination of the ways religious symbols may be appropriated to legitimize coercive practices, most explicitly through its depiction of polygamous "chosen marriages." One pivotal scene portrays the announcement of selected brides, a spatial and ceremonial staging that conveys secrecy, hierarchy, and institutionalized control. The accompanying dialogue exposes the ritualization of authority as a discursive mechanism, cloaking domination beneath the veneer of sanctity:

> Abi: "*Alhamdulillah. Syukur pada Allah. Malam ini, atas putus Walid dan khususnya pesanan Rasulullah SAW, tiga orang akan jadi insan terpilih untuk mengairi kehidupan dunia dengan berbakti pada insan yang akan menjadi syurga buatan.*"
> (Praise be to Allah. Tonight, by Walid's decision and specifically the Prophet's instruction, three individuals will be chosen to irrigate worldly life by serving those who will become paradise incarnate).

> Abi: "*Insan terpilih yang pertama, Salmiah Khairuddin. Dengan syurganya, Syekh Ali Anwarullah. Yang kedua, Muhaymah Syukur. Dengan syurganya, Syekh Karim Al-Baratfah.*" (The first chosen one, Salmiah Khairuddin, with her paradise, Sheikh Ali Anwarullah. The second, Muhaymah Syukur, with her paradise, Sheikh Karim Al-Baratfah).

> Muhaymah: "*Terima kasih, Abah. Terima kasih Walid.*" (Thank you, Father. Thank you Walid).

Baiduri: "*Mereka memang suka kahwin macam ini kah?*" (Do they like getting married like this?).

Amira: "*Eh, sukalah. Berkat tahu dapat kahwin dengan ulama ni.*" (Of course they do. It is a blessing to marry these religious scholars).

Abi: "*Dan yang terakhir, Liana Surya Abdul Ghani. Dengan syurganya, Syekh Husin bin Hamzah.*" (And finally, Liana Surya Abdul Ghani, with her paradise, Sheikh Husin bin Hamzah).

Liana: "*Ya Allah, terima kasih Ya Allah, terima kasih Walid. Syukurlah, Alhamdulillah.*" (O Allah, thank you, thank you Walid. Praise be to God).

Baiduri: "*Kahwin dengan orang tua, habis itu jadi bini nombor berapa pula?*" (Married to an old man, what number wife is she going to be now?).

Amira: "*Muda saja. Kalau yang muda, dapat tujuh hari bersama. Kalau yang cantik, dapat dua minggu bersama. Bagus kan?*" (Young ones just get seven days with him. If you're pretty, you get two weeks. Isn't that great?).

Walid: "*Salmiah Khairuddin. Aku nikahkan akan dikau dengan Syekh Ali Amirullah. Disaksikan Rasulullah SAW. Berwalikan aku, Muhammad Mahdi Ilman, dengan mas kahwinnya, senaskah Al-Qur'an.*" (Salmiah Khairuddin, I marry you to Sheikh Ali Amirullah. Witnessed by the Prophet SAW, with me, Muhammad Mahdi Ilman, as your guardian, and the dowry a copy of the Qur'an).

(Bidaah, 2025, Ep. 2)

The scene employs multiple layers of symbolism that operate simultaneously on visual, ritualistic, and discursive registers. The ceremonial staging, in which the chosen brides are formally announced by guardians in a public yet tightly controlled setting, functions as a performative enactment of authority. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory of ritualized social performance, the guardians' pronouncements serve to legitimize hierarchical power relations and codify social roles. The repetitive invocation of spiritual sanction transforms ordinary social decisions into acts of ritualized obedience, thereby naturalizing the imbalance of power between male authorities and female subjects.

Furthermore, the women's limited verbal responses—mere expressions of gratitude or nods of acknowledgment—symbolically represent their marginalization within these institutionalized power

structures. From the perspective of feminist film theory, particularly Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze," these moments visually and discursively position the female characters as objects of authority rather than as autonomous subjects, reinforcing their symbolic subjugation. Their consent, constrained to performative affirmation, highlights the tension between outward compliance and inward agency, exposing the coercive dimensions of ritualized religiosity.

The use of the Qur'an as a dowry amplifies this dynamic by transforming a sacred text into a performative instrument of control. Drawing on Talal Asad's theory of the codification of religious authority, the text is recontextualized not as a source of moral guidance but as a legitimizing artifact, ritualizing the subordination of women under the guise of divine sanction. By embedding the Qur'an within the staged marriage ceremony, the scene performs a symbolic translation: the sanctity of scripture is mobilized to validate social and sexual hierarchies. This manipulation of religious symbols exemplifies what Clifford Geertz describes as "religion as a cultural system," in which symbolic forms are used to convey and reinforce societal norms, even when these norms contravene ethical or legal injunctions within the religion itself.

Through the lens of classical fiqh, these pseudo-ritualized polygamous marriages diverge sharply from the normative legal framework. The Shafi'i school, as codified in Zainuddin al-Malibari's *Faith al-Mu'in* and Sayyid al-Bakri's *I'anah at-Thalibin*, asserts that a marriage without the explicit consent of a woman of maturity and sound mind is invalid. Hadith literature confirms that *"A widow cannot be married until her opinion is asked, and a girl cannot be married until her permission is asked"* (Bukhari, Muslim). The absence of meaningful consent, alongside the rigid orchestration of guardianship and the ceremonial witness, illustrates a systematic violation of the contractual pillars of marriage.

Exegetical sources further reinforce this critique. The basis of polygamy is found in QS An-Nisa: 3, *"...marry (other) women that you like: two, three or four. But if you are worried that you will not be able to do justice, then (marry) just one..."* (QS. An-Nisa: 3). This verse was revealed in the post-Battle of Uhud social context, where many women became widows and children became orphans, so social solutions were needed that could protect them. However, this polygamy permit is not absolute; There is an explicit requirement, namely justice towards wives. According to interpretation *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* Imam al-Qurthubi's work, justice is not only the material aspect, but also emotional justice and fair attention between wives, even though Rasulullah SAW himself once said, *"O Allah, this is my share of what I have. So do not reproach me for what You have and I do not have (namely heart and feelings)"* (HR. Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi). Scholars uniformly stress that absent equitable treatment, polygamy cannot be construed as beneficial or lawful in the ethical sense. Ibn Qudamah in

al-Mughni explicitly asserts that marriage without the woman's consent is invalid, reflecting the broader consensus that fairness, consent, and legitimacy are inseparable.

The film also situates these ritualized marriages within a broader socio-cultural critique. By dramatizing age disparity, coerced consent, and the commodification of women—illustrated by lines such as "Young ones just get seven days with him. If you're pretty, you get two weeks"—*Bidaah* exposes the moral hazards of ritualized authority. Furthermore, this action violates the principle *maqashid al-syari'ah*, especially in maintaining the five main principles, namely religion (din), soul (nafs), intellect ('aql), lineage (nasl), and property (mal). Imam Ash-Syatibi in *al-Muwafaqat* emphasizes that Islamic law aims to maintain human benefit and prevent damage (mafsadah). If a marriage practice actually causes damage—whether in the form of psychological trauma, sexual exploitation, or neglect of women's rights—then the practice not only deviates from sharia values but can be categorized as a violation of the basic principles of Islamic law itself. This is also confirmed in *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* the work of Imam al-Mawardi, which emphasizes the importance of protecting society from deviant religious practices carried out by religious authorities.

Ultimately, *Bidaah* demonstrates that polygamy, when ritualized and manipulated, functions not as a mechanism of justice but as a tool of social control. By dramatizing violations of the core Sharia values of consent, fairness, and the protection of women's rights, *Bidaah* underscores that polygamy, in its proper legal and ethical framework, is intended as a regulated solution based on justice and benefit. When Sharia is narrowly interpreted and applied manipulatively, religion ceases to function as a safeguard for the community and instead becomes an instrument to legitimize coercion and exploitation. In this light, the film's social critique should be recognized as a deliberate effort to advocate for women's protection, reflecting the broader spirit of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy and blessing for all creation).

Doctrine Divorce Due to Differences in Ideological Loyalty

The film *Bidaah* offers a sharp critique of how religious discourse can be appropriated to legitimize coercion within intimate life, most strikingly through its portrayal of divorce as an act of ideological conformity. Rather than framing divorce as a last resort in the breakdown of marital harmony, the film dramatizes it as a ritualized tool for disciplining women and enforcing loyalty to charismatic authority. One of the most pivotal scenes depicts Umi Hafizah, wife of the spiritual leader Walid, pressuring a follower, Fauzia, to abandon her husband. The dialogue crystallizes this coercion:

> Umi Hafizah: *"Cerai. Lelaki-lelaki yang keji untuk perempuan-perempuan yang keji. Perempuan-perempuan yang baik adalah untuk lelaki-lelaki yang baik. Dia tak layak untuk jadi suami awak sebab dia tak mampu untuk memimpin awak ke*

syurga.” (Divorce. Wicked men are for wicked women, and good women are for good men. He is unworthy of being your husband because he cannot lead you to paradise).

Fauzia: *“Saya sayangkan dia, Umi. Kami dah lama berkahwin. Tak ada sebab untuk saya berpisah dengan dia.”* (But I love him, Umi. We've been married for a long time. I see no reason to leave him).

Umi Hafizah: *“Tak ada sebab, awak cakap? Dia menolak ajaran Walid. Di mana baik dia? Fauzia, betul perbuatan halal yang paling dibenci Allah adalah cerai. Tapi dalam Al-Quran ada menyatakan, perempuan berhak untuk menuntut cerai sekiranya suaminya tidak mampu untuk memimpinnya ke jalan Allah, ke syurga.”* (No reason, you say? He has rejected Walid's teachings. What goodness is left in him? Fauzia, it is true that divorce is the most disliked permissible act in Islam, but the Qur'an also states that a woman has the right to divorce if her husband fails to lead her to Allah's path to paradise).

<div align="right">(Bidaah, 2025, Ep. 2)</div>

The scene's construction underscores the imbalance of power. Close-up shots of Fauzia's tearful hesitation contrast with Umi Hafizah's commanding posture, visually highlighting the asymmetry between individual agency and communal pressure. The dim setting and tense pauses accentuate the suffocating atmosphere, suggesting that the command to divorce emerges not from mutual reflection but from the imposition of religious authority.

Symbolically, Umi Hafizah's invocation of Qur'anic verses transforms scripture into a performative weapon; an instance of what Talal Asad (2003) terms the "politics of religious authority," where sacred texts are reframed to secure obedience to leaders rather than devotion to God. The dialogue dramatizes the tension between personal affection and communal conformity. In this scene, Fauzia appeals to her emotional bond with her husband, while Umi Hafizah insists on loyalty to Walid as the ultimate measure of faith. it is depicted how the wife of a spiritual leader (walid) gives instructions to the female congregation to divorce their husbands who are not ready to follow the teachings of the walid. This layering of emotion, doctrine, and coercion exposes how religion may be instrumentalised to fracture family bonds and consolidate group identity.

Bidaah reframes divorce as more than a personal choice. It becomes a cultural metaphor for how religious symbols can be manipulated to fracture family bonds and consolidate power. This narrative shows the ideological transformation of Islamic family law, where the right to divorce is used

as a tool to enforce ideological compliance. It can be interpreted as a critique of patriarchal manipulation, while others might view it as a warning of how sacred texts can be selectively mobilized in ways that distort their original intent. This plurality of interpretations demonstrates that the film operates dialogically, inviting the viewer to negotiate meaning rather than passively receive it.

At the normative level, the film's critique becomes clearer when contrasted with Islamic jurisprudence. Divorce in Islam is permitted as a last resort when marriage no longer achieves its intended goals of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (QS. Ar-Rum [30]:21). The Prophet described it as "the most hated permissible act" (HR. Abu Dawud no. 2178), and jurists such as al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulumuddin* emphasized reconciliation before separation. Valid grounds, according to Sayyid Sabiq in *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, include abuse, neglect, or irreconcilable disharmony—not ideological nonconformity. In this sense, the order to divorce in *Bidaah* starkly departs from the principle of *dar' al-mafāsid* (preventing harm) and the objectives of Shari'a to safeguard family stability.

From the point of view of jurisprudence, the action is against the principle *dar' al-mafāsid* (prevent damage) and *jalb al-maṣāliḥ* (bringing benefit). The reasons for divorce in Islam must be: *syar'i*, as mentioned in *Fiqh al-Sunnah* by Sayyid Sabiq: domestic violence, neglect of livelihood, infidelity, and irreconcilable disharmony are valid grounds for divorce. Without this valid reason, divorce falls under the law *makruh punishment*, it can even be close to haram if it causes greater damage.

The right of a wife in fiqh to obey her husband's orders or the teachings of her teacher must be returned to principle *al-walā' wa al-barā'* in faith and jurisprudence. Obedience to the husband is obligatory as long as it does not conflict with the Sharia, based on the hadith of the Prophet SAW: *"If I can order someone to bow down to another person, I will surely order the wife to bow down to her husband, because of the great right of the husband over his wife"* (HR. Tirmidhi no. 1159). However, obedience to the husband is not absolute if it leads to immorality, as the Prophet SAW said: *"There is no obedience to creatures in disobedience to Khaliq"* (HR. Ahmad and Al-Hakim). The same goes for teachers or spiritual leaders, obedience only applies as long as their teachings are in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* emphasizes that loyalty to a figure must not exceed the boundaries of sharia and can even fall into shirk if it leads to ideological servitude.

Walid's wife's order in the film to divorce husbands who disobey the group depicts divorce as an instrument of group exclusivity and ideological uniformity. This is a form of manipulation of Islamic law and deviation from maqāṣid al-syarī'ah. Al-Syatibi in *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* explains that one of the main goals of sharia is to maintain social stability, one of which is realized through protecting the institution of the family. When divorce is used as a means of separating those who are

considered disloyal to the group, then this falls into the category *facade* social (damage) that must be prevented.

Thus, such a divorce order has no legal basis in the Shari'a, both in terms of Naqli arguments and Ushuliyyah rules. It is more a form of legal deviation that wraps itself in religious symbols but actually creates damage (*mafsadah*) which is contrary to the main vision of Islamic law: spreading mercy, maintaining justice, and protecting the benefit of the people.

Abortion Practices According to *Hifz al-Nasl*

The film Bidaah offers a trenchant critique of how religious discourse is manipulated to justify coercion over women's bodies, most explicitly through the ritualization of abortion as a tool of patriarchal control. Instead of recognizing pregnancy as a site of ethical responsibility and familial continuity, the narrative reconfigures it as a terrain for ideological conformity, where mystical authority overrides both maternal agency and theological consensus. One of the most pivotal scenes features Walid, the self-proclaimed spiritual leader, pressuring his wife Mia to terminate her pregnancy. The dialogue crystallizes this coercion:

> Walid: *Walid sayang Mia. Memang Mia isteri batin Walid. Sebab itu anak dalam perut Mia itu tak boleh dizahirkan. Sebab hubungan kita hanya pada batin sahaja."* (Walid loves Mia. Mia is indeed Walid's spiritual wife. That is why the child in Mia's womb cannot be brought into the physical world, because our relationship exists only in the spiritual realm.)

> Mia: *"Mia tak tahu nak buat apa, Walid. Semua orang dah tahu Mia mengandung, memang malu, Walid."* (Mia does not know what to do, Walid. Everyone already knows I'm pregnant. It's shameful, Walid).

> Walid: *"Mia sayang Walid? Mia masih nak jadi isteri batin Walid? Yang batin tetap batin. Kita tak boleh zahirkan. Walid nak Mia gugurkan anak itu."* (The one who loves Walid. Does Mia still want to be Walid's spiritual wife? What is spiritual must remain spiritual. It cannot be made visible. Walid wants Mia to terminate the pregnancy).

> (Bidaah, 2025, Ep. 14)

This sequence may be read as a form of pseudo-ritual, wherein the boundary between the spiritual and the physical is not merely blurred but deliberately and artificially severed. Within this constructed boundary, the unborn child is symbolically positioned as the sacrificial object that sustains

the separation itself. The process does not function as a genuine rite but as a simulation of ritual authority, one that re-inscribes patriarchal control over women's reproductive bodies. In this sense, the ritualization of abortion under the guise of mystical authority exemplifies what can be termed *pseudo-ijtihad*, a distorted appropriation of religious discourse in which the interpretive tradition of *ijtihad* is invoked not to promote ethical reasoning or contextual understanding, but rather to sanctify violence and subjugation. Such manipulation of religious language reveals how spiritual authority can be strategically mobilized to render women's embodied experiences invisible, displacing their agency with an imposed theological script.

As Saba Mahmood (2005) has argued, religious authority is not merely imposed from above but is also constituted through embodied practices, discursive traditions, and modes of ethical formation. Her analysis challenges liberal-feminist assumptions that agency always manifests as resistance, showing instead how women may inhabit religious norms in complex ways that both enable and constrain subjectivity. This framework underscores the ambivalent role of religious language and authority: while it may appear to empower, it can simultaneously regulate and discipline women's bodies, often rendering them sites of theological negotiation rather than autonomous choice.

In the frame *Shariah Objectives, hifz al-nasl* or preserving offspring is the goal of the Shari'a which aims to protect the existence and continuity of humanity through legal and honorable means. Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in *al-Mustashfa* emphasizes that the five main objectives of sharia are to protect religion (*hifz al-din*), soul (*hifz al-nafs*), reason (*hifz al-'aql*), descendants (*hifz al-nasl*), and property (*hifz al-mal*). In context *hifz al-nasl*, Islam pays very high attention to the sanctity of lineage and the protection of children as the fruit of a valid marriage. This is closely related to the prohibition of adultery (QS. Al-Isra: 32), as well as the recommendation of marriage as a means of legalizing sexual relations and regeneration of the people. The protection of descendants also includes the recognition of the rights of children from the womb, including the right to live and be born whole into the world, as emphasized by usul fiqh scholars such as Imam Ash-Syatibi in *al-Muwafaqat*.

Departing from this principle, Islamic law views abortion as an action that must be studied with great care. The majority of scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools agree that after 120 days of pregnancy - when the spirit is breathed into the fetus, based on the authentic hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim about the process of human creation in the womb - abortion is strictly prohibited and is equated with murder (*qatl al-nafs*). According to Shaykh Wahbah az-Zuhaili in *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuh*, post-spiritual abortion is only permitted if there is an emergency reason such as the threat of death to the mother, and even then, it must be based on medical considerations and Sharia law. Meanwhile, before 120 days, there were differences of opinion. Some scholars from the Shafi'i and

Hanafi schools make concessions if there are strong reasons such as permanent damage to the uterus, but not for social or moral reasons alone.

In the film, which is the object of analysis, the figure of Walid, the leader of the ummah jihad group, appears, who mentally orders his wife – Mia – to abort the pregnancy. The reason given by Walid was that their relationship was in nature *inner* and is not legitimate outwardly, so that the child from that relationship is not worthy of being born. This shows that there is a form of manipulation of the concept of spirituality in Islam which is twisted into a tool for legitimizing power. Walid's statement is contrary to principle *hifz al-nasl*, because he consciously tried to cut off the continuity of the lineage under the pretext of exclusive, sectarian beliefs. This kind of action is similar to what Imam al-Syatibi criticized in *al-I'tisam*, namely the tendency of some religious leaders to use religious arguments for group interests and power, which in the end actually destroys the maqasid of the Shari'a itself.

If it is related to the position of the fetus in Islamic law, then the actions ordered by Walid are strictly a form of violation of the right to life. In Imam al-Ghazali's view *Yes' 'Ulumuddin*, the fetus since in the early stages of creation (*cum*) already has moral and spiritual values. He said that aborting a pregnancy is a form of aggression against the potential life that God has created. Tafsir al-Maraghi when interpreting QS. Al-An'am: 151, *"And do not kill your children for fear of poverty,"* underlines that the life of a child, including a fetus, is a trust that should not be sacrificed just for reasons of worldly worries, let alone for reasons of far-fetched spirituality as happens in the film.

The film thus offers more than a personal tragedy; it operates as a cultural critique of how religion can be manipulated to silence women's agency and negate their rights. Mia becomes a symbol of women rendered voiceless in patriarchal religious discourse; her body reduced to a site of unilateral interpretation. the abortion order carried out by Walid is not only contrary to Islamic law, but also a disobedience to the values of justice and humanity in Sharia. By staging this pseudo-ritual within a religious community, Bidaah critiques the dangers of pseudo-ijtihad and highlights the broader sociocultural consequences of misusing sacred texts as instruments of domination.

Social Criticism of Deviant Religious Practices in Films Bidaah

Religion, in its social manifestation, often serves both as a source of moral legitimacy and as a contested arena of meaning. The film Bidaah presents a stark portrayal of how religious teachings can be distorted through deviant practices that erode the critical reasoning of the faithful. Rather than functioning as a spiritual sanctuary, religion is depicted as a tool of social control, veiled in the guise of piety. The film's social critique not only addresses the abuse of religious authority but also highlights the condition of communities trapped in fear, blind obedience, and traditions devoid of rational consideration. Through

its straightforward cinematic approach, Bidaah opens a reflective space to examine the complex relationship between faith, power, and human consciousness.

Blind Obedience and Loss of People's Rationality

The phenomenon of blind obedience in religious communities often becomes the entry point for symbolic domination by authoritative figures. In the film Bidaah, the character Walid appears not just as a religious leader, but as a representation of a single truth that cannot be challenged. He positioned himself as the owner of absolute authority in determining the boundaries of faith and Bidaah, so that all his actions were simply accepted by his followers without room for critical dialogue. This pattern reflects what Weber (1947) called charismatic leadership, where leadership legitimacy is not obtained through rational procedures or normative laws, but rather through perceptions of spiritual power or closeness to God. Walid not only claimed a sacred position but also made fear of "deviations in the faith" a tool of social control.

The transition from a personal figure to a broader social structure can be seen in the way the surrounding community responds to Walid's orders and prohibitions. There is a vacuum of reasoning power among the people, which results in the absence of the ability to differentiate between religious teachings originating from authentic propositions and symbolic manipulation intended to perpetuate power. Bourdieu (1991) calls this condition form *symbolic violence*, namely power that is legitimized not through physical violence, but through the domination of meanings and interpretations that are considered legitimate by society. When the narrative built by Walid is covered with religious terms such as "tawhid," "akidah," and "purification of the people," then these symbols become devices of domination that close the space for difference and reflection.

Furthermore, the loss of rationality of the people in responding to religious narratives like this shows the existence of a structural religious literacy crisis. In this context, people not only lose access to religious texts directly, but are also not equipped with epistemological tools to interpret texts contextually. Arkoun (2006) calls this condition a form *closure of Islamic reason*, where people tend to accept doctrines dogmatically without questioning the historical context or ideological interests behind them. When the space for ijtihad and tabayyun is castrated, then truth becomes the monopoly of the religious elite, and the people only become objects of passive obedience.

The criticism offered by the film Bidaah is important in challenging the power relations hidden behind religious symbols. Through visual narrative and dialogue between characters, this film subtly but sharply reveals how power can be disguised as piety, and how people who have lost their critical power can become a means of legitimizing symbolic violence. This approach is in line with the framework *Critical Discourse Analysis* developed by Fairclough (1995), who emphasized that

discourse not only represents the world, but also shapes power structures in society. Thus, obedience that is not accompanied by critical reasoning is not a form of piety, but rather a pathological symptom in religious life that requires a deep and reflective rereading.

Abuse of Religious Teachings as a Tool for Legitimizing Power

The misuse of religious teachings as a means of legitimizing power is a form of ideological manipulation that works through religious symbols, discourse and practices to strengthen the dominant position of certain elites, both in the political and socio-religious spheres. In this context, religion is not only treated as a belief system that regulates humans' relationship with God but is used as a symbolic device that infiltrates spaces of power to silence resistance and maintain the status quo. For a long time, religious symbols such as the typical clothing of ulama, the use of sacred terms such as "amar ma'ruf nahi munkar", and the use of places of worship for political agendas, have become the main instruments in constructing an image of pious leadership that cannot be disputed. Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized that religious symbols have appeal because they are multivocal and touch the realm of human existence. When these symbols are used by those in power, they not only function as signs of identity, but rather become an "architecture of meaning" that frames society's perception of what is true, good, and legitimate.

It is important to note that the influence of symbols is not neutral. In many cases, religious symbols actually become a medium for rationalizing exploitative social relations. The power elite, especially those in religious positions, are able to frame their actions as an extension of divine will. Michel Foucault (1980) stated that modern power no longer works solely through physical violence, but through a "regime of truth", namely a system of discourse that creates and regulates what can be thought, said and believed. In religious spaces, this discourse is present in the form of a single interpretation of sacred texts, the cult of certain figures, and the delegitimization of alternative interpretations that are considered deviant. So, it is not surprising that many communities are trapped in unequal power relations, where people are required to obey absolutely on the basis of "obedience to God", when in fact it is obedience to certain interpretations that have been politicized.

Furthermore, this domination strategy is also seen in deviations from religious ritual practices. Ritual practices, which are ideally a form of collective spiritual expression and transcendental experience, in the context of abuse turn into a tool of social control. For example, congregational prayer rituals, mass dhikr, or large-scale recitations are used as a means of affirming loyalty to certain leadership figures. When a ritual becomes a symbolically orchestrated routine and no longer touches the individual's spiritual consciousness, it becomes part of what Louis Althusser (1971) calls *Ideological*

State Apparatuses—social structures that subtly but effectively reproduce dominant ideologies through symbolic repetition and the formation of subservient subjects.

In more extreme cases, ritual deviations also occur through the manipulation of feelings of guilt and threats of sin that are continuously embedded in the preaching narrative. Religious leaders in positions of authority will claim that to reject them is to reject God, or that leaving their group is an act of apostasy. Here, religion no longer liberates but instead imprisons individuals in fear and dependence. This is in accordance with the findings of Talal Asad (2003), who criticized how the modernity project often creates new forms of religiosity that appear rational but are still controlled by political power.

The above practices produce a passive, defensive and anti-critical form of religiosity. In fact, within an emancipatory framework, religious teachings actually encourage moral awareness, liberation and social solidarity. Antonio Gramsci (1971) said that effective domination is not just working by force (*domination*), but also through active consent (*hegemony*) from society towards the values they accept without realizing it as universal truths. In this case, manipulated religious teachings played a major role in creating it *consent* which is uncritical, which makes society accept conditions of oppression as part of destiny or divine decree.

Therefore, the misuse of religious teachings is not only an ethical problem, but also a form of structural violence that endangers the sustainability of a just and conscious society. When religion is used to legitimize unlimited power, spirituality will lose its substance, and people will be alienated from the ethical and prophetic values that should be the core of religious teachings themselves (Zizek, 2008). For this reason, critical deconstruction of religious practices that actually reproduce injustice is needed, as well as restoring the meaning of religion as an ethical force that liberates, not one that binds.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that Bidaah is not only a film that exposes religious deviations, but also a work of art that employs visual narrative, symbolism, and dramatic tension to voice sharp social criticism. The film highlights various deviations from faith as well as violations of fiqh principles through inner marriage, forced polygamy, and ideological divorce. These representations indeed resonate with discourses in Islamic theology and law, yet their strength also lies in the way cinema translates abstract doctrines into emotional images, character conflicts, and symbolic scenes. Through this aesthetic dimension, Bidaah reveals how religion can be manipulated as an instrument of power, silencing criticism and legitimizing domination, while at the same time inviting the audience to reflect critically on issues of justice, authority, and humanity. In this sense, the film does not merely illustrate doctrinal deviations, but transforms them into a cultural narrative that contributes

to wider discussions about the place of religion, power, and ethics in contemporary society. Significantly, the reception of Bidaah has amplified its cultural impact, ensuring that its critique did not remain confined to the screen but entered public discourse. The way audiences engaged with the film, from resistance to recognition, shaped its role as a catalyst for reflection on the ethical and social dimensions of religion in modern life.

However, this research has a number of limitations. The analysis carried out focuses on one film only, so it does not reflect the diversity of representations of religious practices in Islamic popular media as a whole. The qualitative approach used is also limited to visual content analysis without involving audience perceptions or empirical approaches that can strengthen the findings. In addition, the production context and ideology of the film maker are not studied in depth, even though this can provide important information regarding the construction of meaning in the film. This limitation opens up opportunities for further broader and deeper research.

For this reason, it is recommended that further research examine more films with religious themes in order to compare representations and discourse trends that emerge in contemporary Islamic cinema. An interdisciplinary approach involving gender studies, the sociology of religion, and media studies can also provide a richer reading of power relations and religious symbols. In addition, it is important to involve audience reception studies in order to capture how films like this are received, understood and interpreted by society, especially Islamic boarding schools or religious institutions. Apart from that, research also needs to evaluate the role of Muslim filmmakers in shaping public religious discourse, as well as formulating film production ethics that are not only critical but also remain rooted in the principles of enlightening and liberating da'wah. With this step, it is hoped that the study of religious representation in popular media can contribute to strengthening critical, reflective and transformative religious literacy in society.

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