

WHEN ULAMA SUPPORT A POP SINGER Fatin Sidqiah and Islamic Pop Culture in Post-Suharto Indonesia

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Abstract

Television, music videos, films, and pop bands are all part of global popular culture and thought to be the product of “the west”. These media are therefore often seen as a threat to the identities of nationalities, local cultures, and religious groups. In contrast, in the context of Indonesian Muslims, the Indonesian Ulama Council’s (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) showed support for Fatin Shidqia Lubis to the singing contest of Indonesian X Factor, 2013. This paper intends to study the presence of Fatin Sidqiah as the winner of Indonesian X Factor and the response of Indonesian muslims regarding Islamic popular culture in Indonesia. This paper argues that the presence of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia through books, novels, films, as well as fashion, show that Indonesian Islam and muslims are compatible not only with democracy but also with global popular culture. In addition, the presence of Fatin is a symbol of young Indonesian muslims who already connect globally. Whatever they consume in terms of popular culture is intrinsic to the creation of their hybrid identities, as both Indonesian muslims and global citizens.

[Televisi, musik, film, dan bands merupakan bagian dari budaya populer dunia dan selalu dipandang sebagai produk “barat”. Karenanya, media ini sering dianggap sebagai ancaman bagi identitas nasional, budaya lokal, dan kelompok agama. Namun, dalam konteks keindonesiaan, Majelis Ulama

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Indonesia (MUI) memberikan dukungan kepada Fatin Sidqia Lubis dalam kompetisi menyanyi “Indonesian X Factor” Tahun 2013. Tulisan ini mencoba menelisik kemunculan Fatin sebagai pemenang “Indonesian X Factor” dan tanggapan masyarakat mengenai budaya pop Islam di Indonesia. Melalui artikel ini penulis berpendapat bahwa kehadiran budaya pop di Indonesia dalam berbagai buku, novel, film, serta pakaian menunjukkan bahwa Islam dan masyarakat Islam di Indonesia tidak hanya sejalan dengan demokrasi, tetapi juga dengan budaya pop dunia. Lebih dari itu, Fatin adalah simbol muslim muda Indonesia yang telah terhubung dengan dunia. Apa pun yang mereka nikmati dalam hal budaya pop telah menciptakan identitas ganda: sebagai muslim Indonesia sekaligus sebagai warga dunia.]

Keywords: Fatin Shidqia, MUI, popular culture, the Indonesian X Factor, pop media

A. Introduction

Although Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation, definition of Islamic identity as a pious Muslim, who practices pure and Islamic values comprehensively in accordance with the source of Alquran and Hadiths is still contested and unfinished. Unsurprisingly, a battle between Islamisation versus localization of Islamic values within Indonesian culture and its secular state ideology often emerges in the Indonesian public sphere, especially in relation to events related to the notion of a sense of Indonesian Muslim brotherhood. According to Heryanto,² there are two factors related to why this emerges, these are mainly internal and external. Internally, the advent of both Hinduism and Buddhism in Indonesia prior to Islam encouraged Indonesian Muslims, especially on Java, to adopt a syncretic approach to their religious practices. Surely, these religious practices have created tension for ‘modernist groups’, of which many are conservative, in order to purify Islam from both local belief systems and cultural practices. On the other hand, there is a ‘traditionalist group’ in Indonesian Muslim society who insist on keeping their local culture together, with Islamic principles as a part of their tradition. On the external level, there is the colonial legacy, inherited by the New Order regime to enforce a secular-oriented daily life through the

² Ariel Heryanto (ed.), “Pop Culture and Competing Identities”, in *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), pp. 74–5.

implementation of Pancasila as the sole Indonesian ideology. In addition to both Abdurahman Wahid and Nurcholish Majid's contributions in delegitimizing Islam as the sole Indonesian ideology and the preference of Pancasila during the Suharto presidency, there are other factors in the struggle of Islamisation that have emerged in the post-Suharto period.³

One event in the ideological battle was the emergence of Inul Daratista, a popular music singer (*dangdut*) from East Java, who in 2003 became a sensation with her performance of the 'drill dance' (*goyang ngebor*). Inul became the focus of public debate. For many Muslim conservative groups, Inul's attire was seen as erotic and her dancing as pornographic, usually performed in front of eager, predominantly male, audiences. As a result, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) issued a fatwa *haram* (forbidden in Islam) forbidding her dancing and costume. This fatwa became a trigger for the local MUI chapter in Surakarta to force local police to ban Inul's performances in her hometown. It also encouraged the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (Council of Mujahidin in Indonesia, MMI) in Yogyakarta, to protest Inul's appearance on the television show *Duet Maut* (TransTV). At the national level, the famous Dangdut singer, Rhoma Irama, made a public statement that Inul's performance was not a part of Dangdut music as he perceived it. Indeed, he asserted that her performance was degrading to Islam. These public statements about Inul were the starting point for a national debate on religious authority, freedom of expression, women's rights, and a redefinition of the notion of Muslim piety among politicians, religious leaders, feminists, intellectuals, celebrities, fans and ordinary people in the popular print media.⁴

Though it did not have quite same impact on Indonesian audiences as Inul's performance, the presence of Fatin Sidqiah Lubis as the winner of *Indonesian X Factor* (IXF) singing contest in 2013 raised questions in relation to her performance among conservative Muslims. The questions they proposed included: why did Fatin, a veiled Muslimah girl, join a singing contest on a public secular television program? Indeed, instead of singing Islamic songs to praise both Allah and the prophet of Muhammad, she danced and sung mostly western songs considered to be un-Islamic and

³ Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere", *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2009), p. 210, accessed 8 Jul 2014.

⁴ Andrew N. Weintraub, "Dance Drills, Faith Spills: Islam, Body Politics, and Popular Music in Post-Suharto Indonesia", *Popular Music*, vol. 27, no. 03 (2008), p. 9; Heryanto (ed.), "Pop Culture and Competing Identities".

inviting sexually immorality. Surely what Fatin did was not representative of Islamic values and culture. Therefore, Fatin's victory in the IXF in May 2013 was a kind of loss for Islam. However, many Indonesian Muslims supported Fatin's performance. For them, she represented not only a modernist Muslimah capable of adopting western culture by consuming western songs, but also represented a young Muslimah following a global trend without losing her identity by consistently wearing the veil as the symbol of her Islamic faith. Surprisingly, when the IXF program closed its final session, KH A. Cholil Ridwan, the chairman of the MUI Centre for Cultural Arts, supported Fatin's performance through an open letter in the national media, *Republika*, representing the voice of Islam in order that she win the contest. He also invited the Muslim majority to support her by voting via short message service (SMS).

Both these examples illustrate how Islam in Indonesia is not merely concerned with violence, terrorism, and the 'conservative turn' which is developing within Indonesian mass Muslim groups especially in relation to Islamic studies discourses. Islamic popular culture is a subject of study that needs to be explored deeply in order to understand the current perceptions and practices of Muslims in the midst of a global capitalist culture that is interconnected with local cultures. Within this context, this paper intends to look at the victory of Fatin Shidqia in the IXF competition and the responses of Indonesian Muslims to new forms of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia by answering the following questions: what is the face of current Indonesian Muslim in the post-Suharto period? Why did KH. A. Cholil Ridwan (Chairman of the MUI Centre for Cultural Arts) support Fatin as a contestant in the IXF? Was such support a sign of a new perspective to how to view a Muslim woman who sings western songs on a public reality show such as IXF as part of a global popular culture, or was it merely a sentimental moment in which a Muslimah girl sung on a secular TV show? What is the impact of Fatin as the first veiled Indonesian Muslimah to win the IXF on Islamic popular culture in Indonesia?

This paper argues that the presence of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia – magazines, books, novels, films, as well as fashion shows Indonesian Islam and Indonesian Muslims as compatible not only with democracy but as active in the localization of global popular culture. In addition, it looks at Fatin as an icon for young Indonesian Muslims who connect globally whenever they consume, and which leads to the creation of their hybrid identities as both Indonesian Muslims and global citizens

B. Islamic Popular Culture in Indonesia

Dressed in school uniform, and wearing a white veil and a name tag with the audition number 11218, Fatin shyly came into the audition room having obtained a permit from school to attend. She looked innocent and awkward. Watching her performance, many IXF judges (famous musicians and singers, such as Beby Romeo, Ahmad Dani, Rossa, and Mulan Jameela) looked at her as though she was any other person auditioning, perhaps without any special talent. Both Beby Romeo and Ahmad Dani underestimated her abilities. Before she started singing, Dani in his usual style, asked a sarcastic question regarding Fatin's muslim clothes, jokingly asking, 'could you please explain the meaning of Grenade in Arabic?' The judges were very surprised when she started singing *Grenade* with an amazing voice, and began to follow her performance closely. After she finished, the judges praised her voice, particularly Dani who said, "I really like your voice". Indeed, Dani said openly that her voice similar to that of Cyndi Lauper who sung *Time after Time*. Surprisingly, the compliments did not stop there – she became the center of debate among the judges (Dani and Rosa) who wanted to ask her to be their student in the coming IXF. Fatin's audition performance became very popular for not only Indonesian audiences but also for netizens. At the time of writing this paper, there were 5.409.33 people who had viewed her audition video on *Youtube*. It then had attracted international singer, Bruno Mars, who put her video up on his website. Fatin Sidqiah, a young-urban girl from Jakarta quickly became a new Idol for many young Indonesian Muslims.

Fatin is not the first veiled Muslim girl to have entered a public singing contest. Previously, Malay singer, Shila Hamzah, won Asian Wave in Shanghai, China. She sang in Mandarin without fully understanding the lyrics, and defeated famous boy bands from East Asia such as Teen Top, Zea, and Cross Gene.⁵ Surely these moments seem difficult to believe when we consider them in the context of the ways in which many Muslim countries in the world categorize both music and singing in relation to

⁵ "Malay Singer Shila Wins China Competition Singing Mandarin While Sticking to Her Religious Belief", *The Real Singapore* (10 Jun 2013), <http://therealsingapore.com/content/malay-singer-shila-wins-china-competition-singing-mandarin-while-sticking-her-religious>, accessed 5 Nov 2014.

the discourse on Islamic law. As cited by Barendregt⁶ and Nieuwkerk,⁷ there at least are three categories in accordance with Islamic law on both music and singing, mainly “the commendable recitation of al-Quran; the singing of work or wedding songs which is neither discouraged nor encouraged (*makrūb*); and sensuous music that is performed in association with condemned activities or that is thought to incite such prohibited practices as consumption of drugs and alcohol, lust, and prostitution”. In addition, regarding reasons why women are prohibited from singing in public, it is not only related to the interpretation of Islamic law by ‘conservative Islamic groups’ in which the female voice is perceived as part of the *aurāt* (parts of the body that must be concealed), but it is also thought that “the position women as the weaker sex in need of protection from male desire”.⁸ However, I realize that comparing both Malaysia and Indonesia with other majority Muslim countries regarding the possibility of women singing in the public sphere is not only about exploring the government, it’s institutional interpretations, and Islamic institutional apparatuses from the level of the Quran and sunah, but also about understanding relations of power in both structure and agency which dominate and which are contested in order to shape society.

During the New Order regime and after the downfall of Suharto, the emergence of Fatin Sidqiah in the Indonesian public sphere was not sudden, though her presence brought novelty to strengthen Islamic popular culture in Indonesia at the time. As is well known, the seeds of Islamic popular culture had emerged in the increasing Islamic symbolism and its public expression during the New Order Regime, especially in 1990s while the Suharto presidency pretended to be an Islamic regime (1990-1998), implementing an Islamisation strategy by focusing on ‘the accentuation of Islamic symbols in public discourse and accommodating

⁶ Michael Buehler, “Elite Competition and Changing State-Society Relations: Shari’a Policymaking in Indonesia”, in *Beyond Oligarchy: Wealth, Power, and Contemporary Indonesian Politics*, ed. by Michele Ford and Tom Pepinsky (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2014), pp. 157–75, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/18932/>, accessed 8 Jul 2015.

⁷ Karin Van Nieuwkerk, “An Hour for God and An Hour for the Heart: Islam, Gender and Female Entertainment in Egypt”, *Umbc.edu* (13 Jun 1998), http://www.umbc.edu/eol/MA/ma_stg/altri/karin1.htm, accessed 14 Oct 2014.

⁸ Bart Barendregt, “The Art of No-Seduction: Muslim Boy-Band Music in Southeast Asia and The Fear of The Female Voice”, *IIAS Newslette* (2006), http://www.iias.nl/sites/default/files/IIAS_NL40_10.pdf, accessed 14 Oct 2014.

religious socio-political powers'.⁹ The main reason Suharto engaged this strategy was due to the military's disappointed partly who were backing him, because his family member's corruption asked to greater share of pie. Using this strategy was a rational choice to rebalance his power significantly changed the position of Indonesian Muslims from 'object as enemy' to be 'subject as friend, from a peripheral to a central position within the government. One of ways Suharto approached Indonesian Muslims was to present as a pious Muslim. He went on pilgrimage to Mecca with his family and when he returned to Jakarta he added the name "Muhammad" as his first name, he became *Muhammad Subarto*. His first daughter, Tutut started to wear a veil (*kerudung*) while attending public events. Other programs supporting Islam then followed, such as the establishment of the first of Islamic bank in Indonesia, Muamalat, and the establishment of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI*).¹⁰

In this context, fashionable Muslim clothing boutiques were established by prominent fashion designers, such as Alphiana Chandrajani, Ida Royani and Anne Rufaidah. These attracted Indonesian celebrities to wear the veil. Due to this momentum, institutions such as Paramadina Eksekutif, Tazkiya Sejati, IIMAN (Indonesian Islamic Media Network) and ICNIS (Intensive Course and Networking for Islamic Science) were established to encourage upper class Indonesian Muslims to study Islam.¹¹ Islamic public sermons became a new activity for most Indonesian Muslims in many places in tandem with the emergence of popular preachers; one of those popular preachers was Zainuddin MZ. As well, there were Islamic music events such as Kantata Takwa and singers such as Rhoma Irama. The number of Islamic books jumped in the big cities of Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta, while they indirectly strengthened Islamic public discourse in 1990s.¹² Capturing this image of Suharto's support of Islam, Robert Hefner¹³ as cited by Burhani has

⁹ Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam", p. 235.

¹⁰ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 128.

¹¹ Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam", pp. 229–50.

¹² Najib Kailani, "Forum Lingkar Pena and Muslim Youth in Contemporary Indonesia", *informit.com* (2012), <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=984332214396280;res=IELAPA>, accessed 23 Dec 2014.

¹³ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 128; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring: A Comparative Study of Popular Uprisings in *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2014 M/1435 H

described it properly as a man who “shattered in one fell swoop one of the most enduring stereotypes of New Order politics. Here, after all, was a man long regarded as a staunch defender of Javanese mysticism and Pancasila pluralism giving his blessing to an elite Muslim organization openly dedicated to the Islamization of Indonesian society”.

In the post-authoritarian period, this Islamic identity and its symbols are practiced more explicitly in the Indonesian public sphere. This indicates three factors – the emergence of conservative Islamic groups such as *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) and *Hizbut Tabrir Indonesia* (HTI); new regulations focused on Islamic Law through *Perda Syariah* in some Indonesian provinces from 2000-2009;¹⁴ the appearance of Islamic popular culture (movies, religious soap operas/*sinetron religi*, books, magazines, music, and Islamic public sermons both on television and on the internet) that shape the Indonesian public sphere.¹⁵ Hasan tends to explain those conditions as being New Order legacies.¹⁶ However, I argue that is not an adequate argument through which to understand the phenomenon of the explosion in Islamic popular cultural forms and their popularity. The transformation of the governmental structure in the transition from the New Order regime to the *Reformasi* era could be an alternative explanation for two possible reasons. First, the downfall of the Suharto presidency created a power vacuum that provided the opportunity for members of society to propose their own ideology. Hence, Indonesia in the post-New Order period became the arena for

Indonesia and Tunisia”, *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2014), p. 212.

¹⁴ Michael Buehler, “Elite Competition.

¹⁵ Widodo Amrih, “Writing for God: Piety and Consumption in Popular Islam. Inside Indonesia 93”, *INS Insideindonesia* (2008), <http://www.insideindonesia.org/writing-for-god>, accessed 10 Oct 2014; Hasan, “The Making of Public Islam”, pp. 129–50; Rianne Subijanto and E. Ardevol A. Roig, “Producing TV Series: The Making of Popular Piety Culture in Indonesia”, in *Researching Media Through Practices: An Ethnographic Approach* (Digithum: UOC, 2009), pp. 32–7; Hariyadi, “Islamic Popular Culture and the New Identity of Indonesian Muslim Youth”, presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (Adelaide, 6/07 2010), http://asaa.asn.au/ASAA2010/reviewed_papers/Hariyadi.pdf, accessed 23 Aug 2014; Ariel Heryanto (ed.), *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008) ; Wahyudi Akmaliah Muhammad and Khelmy K. Pribadi, “Anak Muda, Radikalisme, Dan Budaya Populer”, *MAARIF Institute for Culture and Humanity*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2013), pp. 132–53; Inaya Rakhmani, “Mainstream Islam: Television Industry Practice and Trends in Indonesian Sinetron”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 42, no. 3-4 (2014), pp. 435–66.

¹⁶ Hasan, “The Making of Public Islam”, p. 236.

an ideological battle in the struggle for power to determine who will dominate. ‘*Islamisation*’ is one of the dominant ideologies, inclusive of Islamic popular culture in its various forms.¹⁷ This situation, therefore, provided a space for freedom of expression. It created an opportunity for new groups, mostly those that were repressed under the New Order regime, to express their political aspirations and strengthen their religious identities, thereby exposing the weaknesses of the government’s political will in upholding justice and equality during the transition. Second, decentralization in Indonesia has had both a positive and negative impact. On the level of the positive, regional autonomy (*otonomi daerah*) allows for the possibility of social justice and regional prosperity. On the negative side, however, the new smaller provinces and regions have been encouraged to act corruptly and have in many cases to increased their level of authority over religious expression by discriminating against those societal groups perceived as other.¹⁸

C. The Headscarf and its Impact in Popular Reality Television

Like other popular talent reality programs such as RCTI’s *Indonesian idol*, Indosiar’s Fantasy Academy (AFI), TPI’s *Kontes Dangdut Indonesia* (KDI), and TransTV’s *Indonesia Mencari Bakat*, *Indonesia X Factor* (IXF) is one of the most popular programs, adopted from global X Factor and adapted to suit Indonesian audiences. The IXF is sponsored by the Fremantle Media and RCTI. It is originally based in the United Kingdom where it replaced *Pop Idol*. As a television music competition, *the X Factor*, created by Simon Cowell, has franchises 42 countries, while there are 2-4 for countries that are joining within one program of TV channel.¹⁹ However, unlike previous talent reality shows where judges review, evaluate and criticize each contestant’s performance, in the *X Factor* judges act as mentors for the contestants in their particular category. The mentor does not only aid his or her students to select songs but they also

¹⁷ Ariel Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), p. 208.

¹⁸ Hairus Salim H. S, Najib Kailani, and Nikmal Azekiyah, *Politik Ruang Publik Sekolah: Negosiasi dan Resistensi di Sekolah Menengah Umum Negeri di Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Center for Religion & Cross Cultural Studies, 2011), p. 10, <http://www.youthnation.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ICR.2011.PluralismeSMUN-Jogja.pdf>, accessed 15 Aug 2014.

¹⁹ Penelope Coutas, “Fame, Fortune, Fantasi: Indonesian Idol and the New Celebrity”, *Asian Journal of Communication*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2006), pp. 371–92, accessed 8 Jul 2014.

judge contestants of other categories. A democratic system is applied in which votes are cast by the audience via short message service (SMS).

Though the IXF is not something new for Indonesian audiences, it is quite different from other popular reality programs in Indonesia. The appearance of a veiled young girl, Fatin Shidqia Lubis, her amazing voice, fashionable Muslim clothes, and articulate English singing, caught the attention of not only Indonesian audiences but also the Indonesian vocalist Anggun, an IXF judge, who praised Fatin for her beautiful voice and beautiful headscarf. Anggun's comments on Fatin's performance of Rihanna's song *Diamond* were as follows.

“Fatin you've got it all. You are beautiful with an amazing voice. Indeed, your voice is very unique. You have natural talent. By the way, how old are you? You're 16, am I right? Have you ever taken a vocal course for singing? You're really annoying. Even though you haven't had any training your voice is so good. There's one more thing – the eccentric way you wear your the veil, is really very intriguing to me. You have shown that the jilbab can be both modist and fashionable, which is great!”²⁰

The power of Anggun's comments, as an Indonesian and French-naturalized singer-songwriter who has an international reputation, with were surely powerful in promoting Fatin Shidqia as the veiled girl with the beautiful voice. At the time of the contest, two French journalists came to Jakarta to document Anggun's daily life for 48 hours. While covering Anggun's role as one of the judges, they were very surprised to see one of the contestants in a veil. As Anggun expressed to Fatin after she had sung Rihanna's *Stay* inat the final of XFI on May 17, 2013:

“Last week, two French journalists came to cover my activities over a 48 hours period in Indonesia. And they came to *X Factor* and saw you singing. To them you are a most unique figure. Besides your unique voice, they were surprised that you wearre a veil. I told them it is something allowed/ legitimated in Indonesia. However, they thought that it was really cool that for you to have this style and such a voice, and yet arebe so young, I hope you stay this way after *X Factor*. All of these qualities are your

²⁰ “Fatin kamu itu kelebihannya banyak banget. Kamu cantik dan suaranya bagus. Suaranya juga punya identitas. Kamu juga kayak punya natural bakat. Kamu umur berapa sih? 16 tahun yah? Dulu kamu pernah latihan vocal yah? Kan nyebelin banget, belum latihan aja udah kayak begini. Udah gitu satu lagi, dengan kelebihan kamu berjilbab buat aku itu justru jauh sangat menarik. Karena kita bisa buktiin. Kamu buktiin dengan berjilbab bisa *modist* bisa *fashionable* itu bagus sekali.”

strengths, so please don't change".²¹

Anggun's two comments above assert that Fatin's strengths lie in her appearance and her husky voice. These unique characteristics certainly differentiated her from other contestants. Unsurprisingly, George Levendis, record executive and current International Head of Syco TV, and international judge for the X Factor, praised her performance as the one "making an impact on the XF Indonesia" on both twitter and facebook especially while she was singing Rihanna's *Diamond*, on February 15, 2013. Her Fatin indirectly became the symbol for the IXF to increase RCTI's ratings nationally. Although the IXF always runs at night for 60-240 minutes, from 21.00 PM, its rating was often highest during the day to day in average about 45-40 %. Meanwhile, shares for the IXF steeply grew from 15, 6- 28, 3 %. Hence, keeping Fatin in the program seemed a rational choice for RCTI.

There are two reasons for Fatin's impact in the IXF. First, there was impunity for Fatin from her mistakes although she forgot the lyrics while singing four times.²² Forgetting lyrics in singing competitions is usually considered a big mistake. Not only does the singer feel ashamed but the audience tends to punish them by not voting for them. Secondly, there were no comments from the judges criticizing Fatin's forgetfulness during the final session. They knew Fatin had an amazing voice but during the competition her technical skills, especially her ability to manage her speed and control of her voice did not grow vastly like other contestants. However, as explained, the strength of Fatin's performance was in her headscarf, symbolic of her Muslim identity, and which was capitalized on in order to commercialize her identity on television to attract the

²¹ "Minggu lalu aku didatangi oleh dua wartawan dari Prancis yang dia meliput aku selama 48 jam di Indonesia. Dan mereka meliput X Factor dan melihat kamu menyanyi. Dan kamu adalah salah satu sosok yang unik yang enggak ada sebenarnya di luar. Dari suara kamu yang khas, tapi penampilan kamu, mereka agak kaget melihat penyanyi berjilbab. Aku bilang ini sesuatu yang sab di Indonesia dan banyak di negara. Tapi buat mereka itu melihat orang berjilbab itu bernyanyi itu keren banget. Dan kamu masih muda dengan gaya kamu bernyanyi dengan gaya kamu seperti ini. Ini dipertahankan ya setelah X Factor juga. Karena ini menjadi kekuatan kamu. Tetap menjadi seperti ini".

²² Darmansyah, "Empat Kali Sudah, Fatin Lupa Lirik Saat Perform", *nuga.co* (5 Nov 2013), <http://www.nuga.co/nuga-forum/empat-kali-sudah-fatin-lupa-lirik-saat-perform.html>, accessed 11 May 2014; Examples include: at the bootcamp, January 25, 2013 while singing *Rindu*; at bootcamp, on february 1, 2013 while performing *Pumped Up Kicks*; at the *Gala Show*, March 8, 2013 during *Girl on Fire*; and at the *Gala Show*, May 11, 2013 during *Everything at Once*.

D. MUI Support for Fatin Shidqia

As explained earlier, Fatin's appearance as a veiled young woman on IXF attracted the attention of Indonesians, especially Muslims, attention to r, People of all ages and of including KH A. Cholil Ridwan, chairman of the MUI centre for Cultural Arts and former Chairman of the Indonesian Council for Islamic Predication (*Devan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia/DDII*). Fatin's fans adopted the name the Fatinistic community, from the acronym of *Fatin Idol Saving the Incredible Characteristic*. Instead of only backing Fatin by SMS, they also sent support through twitter and facebook, becoming her supporters online, while she also attracted were also her "haters" who who disliked both edher voice and appearance. Cholil Ridwan wrote a public statement in the reader letter section of the *Republika* daily national newspaper to support Fatin and inviting all Indonesians to send their short messages on April 9, 2013, one month before the final IXF. Unlike both *Kompas* and *Tempo Magazine* that tend towards nationalist ideology thereby targeting Indonesians generally, *Republika* is focused on Islamic values and its audience is drawn mostly from Indonesian Muslims. Cholil Ridwan states below:

Assalaamualaikum. Men, watch Fatin's performance on the "X Factor". Men and families are proud of you in your arecommittment to wearing the veil during your performance in the "X Factor". As the chairman of the MUI's Center for Cultural Arts, I have a message for Fatin.²³

There will come a time when you will have to choosechoice, either the *jilbab* or a career. For instance, someone will whisper

²³ *Bapak sering menonton penampilan Fatin di X Factor. Bapak dan keluarga bangga dengan kamu yang tetap berjilbab dalam penampilanmu ikutan di X Factor. Bapak sebagai ketua MUI Pusat yang membidangi seni dan budaya ingin berpesan untuk Fatin. Satu, pada suatu saat Fatin akan dihadapkan pilihan jilbab atau karier. Misalnya, akan ada yang membisikkan Fatin dengan kalimat, "Kalau mau menang, jadi juara I, kamu harus copot jilbab" atau "Kalau mau ikut menyanyi di luar negeri, kamu harus copot jilbab". Bapak pesan jangan sekali-kali kamu jual akidahmu demi karier duniawimu. Dan, jauhi pergaulan negatif. Dua, jangan tinggalkan salat lima waktu dengan alasan apa pun. Kalau terpaksa, boleh di akhir waktu. Dan, kalau betul-betul darurat, bisa dijamak. Tiga, kepada umat Islam, khususnya muslimah yang sudah berjilbab dan anggota Hijabers, setiap Fatin mau tampil di X Factor, dukunglab dan niatkan untuk dakwah dan syiar jilbab. Empat, rumus jilbab itu 3T (tidak buka aurat, tidak transparan, dan tidak ketat). Terima kasih atas perhatian Fatin dan salam buat kedua orang tuamu.*

to Fatin, “If you win, and take first prize, you must take off your headscarf”. I suggest that you do not sell your belief for your career, and avoid negative social interactions

Do not stop performing your daily prayers for any reason. If you are in pinch, you can pray later. If you are in the midst of an emergency, you can pray by merging the prayers into one.

For all Indonesian Muslims, especially *Muslimah* who wear the veil and members of *Hijabers* (veiled Muslim women), when Fatin is on stage on the “X Factor”, please do support and plan for religious proselytizing on the magnificence of the *jilbab*.

There are three formula (rumus) for veiling, the 3T: Tidak Membuka Aurat, Tidak Transparan, Tidak Ketat (Doesn't expose the aurat, Not transparent, Not tight).

Thank you for attention Fatin and send my regards to your parents. Wassalam.

KH. A. Cholil Ridwan, the chairman of the MUI Centre for Cultural Arts

This public statement had a big impact on the Indonesian public, and Cholil Ridwan's statement was reproduced in the media. This led to two kinds of public response; those who agreed and those who disagreed. For those who agreed, this was a form of support for Islam and the progress of Indonesia, and an example of how Indonesian values and culture can connect with global “western culture” without any “class of their civilization”. Fatin's performance also showed that Indonesian Muslims can practice Islam in their unique way and in which there is dialogue between Islamic texts (Quran), Hadiths and cultural modernity.²⁴ On the other hand, for more literalist, conservative Muslim's, Fatin's performance was not in accordance with the source of both the Quran and Sunnah in which women are not permitted to perform in public, as her voice and appearance may provoke male desire.²⁵ In addition, the

²⁴ M. Bambang Pranowo, “Fatin Dan X-Islam Factor”, *Okezone.com* (27 May 2013), <http://celebrity.okezone.com/read/2013/05/27/386/813133/fatin-dan-x-islam-factor>, accessed 14 Oct 2013; M. Husnan Ulinnuha, “Fatin Dan Gaya Baru Islam Indonesia”, *nu.or.id* (30 May 2013), <http://www.nu.or.id/a,public-m,dinamic-s,detail-ids,4-id,44785-lang,id-c,kolom-t,Fatin+dan+Gaya+Baru+Islam+Indonesia-.phpx>, accessed 10 Oct 2014.

²⁵ Ageung Reza, “Fenomena Fatin Shidqia Dan Gejala Kompromi Fikih”, *Hidayatullah.com* (11 Apr 2014), <http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/ghazwul-fikr/read/2013/04/11/2514/fenomena-fatin-shidqia-dan-gejala-kompromi-fikih.html>, *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2014 M/1435 H

IXF was considered a product of capitalism, created by Jewish people to mobilize young Muslims away from their Islamic daily life and bring them closer to cultural hedonism and its entertainment.²⁶

These conflicting viewpoints raise several questions. What led Cholil Ridwan to support Fatin's performance? Is there any relation between the change in the MUI and its members' perspective on Islam and its social realities, especially in the case of a Muslimah (female Muslim) singer who performs in public? These questions are historically based on two facts from previous MUI policies. First, as I described at the beginning of this paper, the MUI had issued the *haram* fatwa (declaring something as forbidden in Islam) in regards to Inul's performance, especially her drill dance as it was perceived to inspire erotic fashion and was claimed to have involved pornographic action (in front of a predominantly male audience) in 2003. Second, the MUI's conservative fatwa caused conflict by excluding Indonesian Muslim groups such as Syiah and Ahmadiyah from the milieu of Indonesian Islam as their schools of thought were perceived as deviating from Islam. The MUI, represented by Cholil Ridwan, had a different perspective, however, in which they were more moderate and inclusive in supporting a veiled Muslim girl in her performance in IXF, despite that her choice of song and the context of the program are seen as a representation of western culture and part of more secular life style. Indeed the perception of Muslim youth has shifted and changed over the decades. In the mid-1980s they were often represented as economically poor and conservative in outlook, while nowadays they are associated with 'wealth, icons of modernity, urban lifestyle, or popular culture'.²⁷

In regard to the second fact, Cholil's reason for supporting Fatin can seemingly explain it. For him, although he does not like music or watching television, did not know who Fatin was, or anything about the X Factor program and its origins, on seeing a veiled girl with her 'syariah culture' (*budaya syariah*) competing in a non-*syariah* (not in accordance

accessed 13 Oct 2014; Further, because the event was held in on a public stage, the coming together of men and women in one place could not be avoided. In fact, in Islam there what is known as a border of *mahram*, where those who were not related by blood or are not married are prohibited to perform *kebahwat*.

²⁶ "Klarifikasi Kyai Cholil Atas Dukungannya Kepada Fatin X Factor", *VOA-ISLAM.COM* (29 May 2013), <http://www.voa-islam.com/read/indonesiana/2013/05/29/24889/klarifikasi-kyai-cholil-atas-dukungannya-kepada-fatin-x-factor/>, accessed 12 Oct 2014.

²⁷ Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure*.

with Islamic law) forum consumed by a large number of Indonesians, he felt compelled to support her. In addition, her wearing of the *jilbab* in the contest was not a barrier to her success. Clearly, he saw Fatin as an inspiration and role model for female Muslim youth who want to work and achieve their career goals without feeling they have to abandon wearing the marker of their Islamic identity, the *jilbab*. At a glance, his perspective as MUI representative is moderate. My assumption is strengthened by Cholil's opinion when interviewed by *Kapanlagi.com*²⁸ that confirmed his support. He did not only like Fatin's performance and the fact that she wore the veil, but also her singing of the Western, English language songs. Nevertheless, his views remain conservative. Indeed, the reason behind his support for Fatin was the fact that one of her competitor's in the IXF final, Novita Dewi, a Christian, wore sexy clothes and a necklace bearing a cross. Support for Fatin's performance was therefore intended to defeat the unbeliever culture (*budaya kafir*) and to advance the use of the *jilbab* in accordance with Islamic law.²⁹

On seeing the final of IXF, Cholil referred to it as 'an issue of Christian missionization (*keristenisasi*)', where it is the site of collective memory for Indonesian Muslims whom they reproduce and propagate in many events in order to shape both stigma and stereotype while they perceive Indonesian Christian people, particularly in establishing a relation between Islam and Christianity. Although it is difficult to clarify the issue of *keristenisasi*, the emergence of this issue could be awakening a primordial sentiment among them. An effort to establish it could be seen by the emergence of a short message on the BBM (Blackberry Messenger) network during IXF's final. The content of the BBM appealed for Muslims to choose Fatin as a Muslim rather than Novita as a Christian. Indeed, the final of IXF was not only a competition between Fatin and Novita but also between Islam and Christianity. Due to the extensive use of BBM as a form of social media, and the ease with which people connect and share information within their own personal networks, it is possible that the role of communications via BBM social media may have influenced the high number of votes for Fatin.

²⁸ "Surat Ketua MUI Untuk Fatin Merupakan Dukungan Pribadi", *Kapanlagi.com* (3 Apr 2013), <http://musik.kapanlagi.com/berita/surat-ketua-mui-untuk-fatin-merupakan-dukungan-pribadi-a8b49a.html>, accessed 4 Mar 2014.

²⁹ "Klarifikasi Kyai Cholil; A.Z. Muttaqin, "Dukungan Semu Ketua MUI Untuk Fatin", *Arrahmah.com* (31 May 2013), <http://www.arahmah.com/news/2013/05/31/dukungan-semu-ketua-mui-untuk-fatin.html>, accessed 6 Nov 2014.

*Friends! In just minutes, the Grand Final of Indonesian X Factor will begin! And so will the war between Islam and Christianity, Fatin Shidqia and Novita Dewi. So if you are Muslim! Vote/ support Fatin! A very devoted veiled girl! And very charming! Her voice is also beautiful. Support/ voting for Novita means that you are supporting Christianity! #SBC (Sorry for Broadcast) Sorry non-Muslims.*³⁰

So how did Fatin respond to support from the MUI, one of the biggest Indonesian Muslim organisations? Did she welcome it warmly and perceive it as normal, like the support she received from other people? Unlike people who have studied in Islamic schools such as *madrasah* and *pesantren* who have firm roots in traditional Islam, or those who are studying Islam directly under a religious teacher such as an *ulama*, *kyai*, *habib*, or *ustadz*, and taking courses and attending Islamic gatherings routinely in mosque, classes, and offices, Fatin is one of the new Muslim generation who are connected to the virtual world and global consumer culture. Growing up in the capital city of Jakarta, and living in urban South Jakarta, has strengthened her identity as a new Indonesian Muslim hybrid youth. Indeed, due to her abundant resources she has had many life experiences, yet her references to Islamic religious teacher/leader are without strong traditional roots.³¹ There are, however, two figures of moral and religious authority in her life, her teachers and her parents, especially her mother who taught her Islamic values. Therefore, although many people perceived that the MUI's support for her performance was a way of legitimizing the representation of Indonesian Muslim's, for Fatin, MUI support was no different from the support she was given from other famous figures and celebrities. As Fatin explained,

“I've heard about it, and am very happy. Because I am happy, I pray to Allah asking him for ongoing support... Since the beginning I have worn the *jilbab*, so it is part of my identity as veiled girl. Therefore, it is seemingly impossible to not wear one.”³²

³⁰ Kawan-Kawan! nanti Grand Final X - Factor Indonesia Loh! Perang Agama Juga Islam vs Kristen, Fatin Shidqia vs Novita Dewi! bagi yang muslim! ayo dukung Fatin! cewek berkerudung yang muslimah sekali! dan juga menarik hati! suaranya pun bagus! dukung novita! berarti anda mendukung kristian! #sbc sori nonmuslim; Andri M. Kusumawardhana, “X-Factor Indonesia, Dan Fans Yang Rasialis”, *Kompasiana.com* (7 Jun 2013), <http://hiburan.kompasiana.com/televisi/2013/06/07/x-factor-indonesia-dan-fans-yang-rasialis-566668.html>, accessed 11 May 2014.

³¹ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid: Esai-Esai Agama, Budaya, dan Politik dalam Bingkai Strukturalisme Transendental* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), pp. 33–9.

³² Nanda Hadiyanti, “Didukung MUI, Ini Tanggapan Fatin Shidqia”, *Tempo.co* (6 Apr 2013), <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2013/04/06/112471562/Didukung>

“I have been immune from its disturbance, temptation, and trial”³³

E. Concluding Remarks

Many Indonesian audience members and judges were surprised when Fatin won IXF due to the lesser quality of her voice and technical vocal skills compared to Novita Dewi's performance on May 25, 2013. Because it was a 'fair game' and the winner was the contestant with the highest vote, they eventually accepted it. Moreover, the program name, "X Factor", means that the judges and audiences are looking for the unknown factor that distinguishes one contestant from the rest. However, the most important point is that Fatin's victory has strengthened Islamic popular culture that shapes Indonesian Muslim identity in the post-Suharto period. Indeed, she has filled the vacuum in public figures representing Indonesian Muslim youth, because many Islamic popular culture products especially Islamic movies merely encourage youth to be pious Muslims in specific situations. Therefore, in the Islamic popular culture that has emerged, such as women's clothing, consumerism, print media, literature, social media, film, music, and television, Fatin represents a role model for Indonesian Muslim youth. She is a young Indonesian woman secure in her identity as a Muslim, capable of inspiring other young Indonesian Muslims to imagine how to be a Muslim woman who is pious, fashionable, modernist, and a consumer of western songs and capitalist products.

Fatin's position as a figure of Islamic popular culture, as well as an icon for Indonesian Muslim youth can be demonstrated in three factors. First, she was supported by a large percentage of Indonesian Muslims to win IXF. Even KH A Cholil from the MUI, considered a conservative Islamic group, made a public statement inviting Indonesian Muslims to vote for her. Second, the way Fatin's styled (*bijab ala Fatin*) her headscarf become a trend, especially among young adult Muslims aged 12-30 years. Previously, headscarf styles were dominated by famous Indonesian public figures who do not wear the veil in their daily lives, such as Sahrini, Asanti, and Rosa. Third, Fatin was on the cover of *Hai*

MUI-Ini-Tanggapan-Fatin-Shidqi, accessed 6 Nov 2014.

³³ "Sudah tahan gangguan, godaan dan cobaan, insya Allah"; Sobri, "Fatin Shidqia X Factor Indonesia Tahan Gangguan, Godaan Dan Cobaan", *Hai Online* (2 Apr 2013), <http://www.hai-online.com/Hai2013/Entertainment/Music/News/Fatin-Shidqia-X-Factor-Indonesia-Tahan-Gangguan-Godaan-dan-Cobaan/>, accessed 13 Nov 2014.

magazine, that caters predominantly to adolescent males 17-30 years of age.³⁴ According to *Hai's* Editor-in-Chief, Dani Satrio, it was the first time in *Hai's* history that there was a girl in a veil on *Hai's* cover Hai, 2013. *Hai's* content contains everything from music, film, education, places to go, fashion, technology, sport and sex education. Due to high number of references to 'Western culture' in the content, the magazine has been stereotyped for years in some more conservative Islamic communities as the magazine that invites the destruction of Islam (*Hancurkan Agama Islam- HAI*) in accordance with its acronym (The Indonesian word *hai* means *hi* or *hello* in everyday Indonesian). The presence of Fatin on the cover then could be interpreted as a form of transforming the stereotype or image of *Hai* as secular magazine to that of a secular magazine that is Muslim friendly.

As the winner, Fatin became not only an icon for young Muslims but also an inspiration for Indonesian youth in general. Following her victory, companies including those producing the products *Pantene* and *Indosat IM3*, asked her to model in advertisements. One business/brand most appropriate to her Islamic identity was Rabanni Ambassador, one of the few large boutiques selling fashionable Muslim clothes in Indonesia, and producing Muslim clothing with the tagline *Profesor Kerudung Indonesia* (Indonesian Headscarf Professor). Due to Fatin's involvement, sales of their products, particularly items for young muslimah girls, have increased significantly and Rabanni's profits rocketed by around Rp. 500.000.000 (approximately AUD \$50000) in 2013.³⁵ In addition, Fatin sung two songs on the soundtrack to the movie, *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa* which based on Hanum Rais's novel depicting an Indonesian Muslim's experience in Europe. Fatin was chosen to sing on the soundtrack as a marketing strategy to attract the Indonesian Muslim audience and provide ongoing example of a modernist and fashionable girl who enjoys western songs while consistently maintaining her religious identity.

In regard to the above explanation, how can we contextualize the phenomena of Fatin in Islamic pop culture discourse in Indonesia?

³⁴ Sobri, "Fatin Shidqia Jadi Cewek Berhijab Pertama Di Cover Majalah HAI", *Hai Online* (8 Jun 2013), <http://www.hai-online.com/Hai2013/Entertainment/Music/News/Fatin-Shidqia-Jadi-Cewek-Berhijab-Pertama-di-Cover-Majalah-HAI>, accessed 13 Nov 2014.

³⁵ "Fatin Ikut Dongkrak Penjualan Kerudung Rabbani Hingga Rp 500 Miliar", *Kompas.com* (20 May 2014), <http://bisniskeuangan.kompas.com/read/2014/05/20/1437532/artikel-detail-komentar-mobile.html>, accessed 20 May 2014.

There are two perspectives on this. First, for several scholars³⁶ (Muzaki, 2007; Widodo, 2008; Howell, 2008; Hariyadi, 2010; Abdul Rani, 2013; Barkin 2014), she is a part of the commercialization of Muslim life and commodification of Muslim religious symbols, where Islam has been controlled by global capitalism as an object of consumerism. Second, instead of seeing Islam as an object of commercialization, for some scholars,³⁷ it is a wave of Islamization in the public sphere in which capitalist popular culture products are the medium through which to expand Islamic values and ideas of an Islamist politic in Indonesia. Nonetheless, I argue that the phenomena of Fatin can not be categorized within these perspectives. I prefer Heryanto's argument³⁸ that it is a process of encounter, a dialectic between 'religious pity' and 'capitalist logic respond' which result in "the growing market for Islamic revitalization and life style". Within this process of encounter, there are often contradictions in relation to Islamic values and the global culture which is dominated by the United States as the primary representation of the West, while on the other hand, in some cases, they substantively converge. Therefore, reading the Fatin phenomenon as a novelty within the wave of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia has to be considered in the context of this tension.

³⁶ Pattana Kitiarsa, *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods* (London: Routledge, 2008); Widodo Amrih, "Writing for God; Julia Day Howell, "Modulations of Active Piety: Professors and Televangelists as Promoters of Indonesian 'Sufisme'", in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 40–62; Hariyadi, "Islamic Popular Culture"; Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, "Islam, Romance and Popular Taste in Indonesia", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 40, no. 116 (2012), pp. 59–73.

³⁷ Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam"; Kailani, "Forum Lingkar Pena and Muslim".

³⁸ Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure*.

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