

Bridging Modernity and Religiosity: A Semiotic Analysis of Islamic Values Representation in Contemporary Indonesian Digital Cinema

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Abstract: Ethics and morality are central to Islamic education in shaping youth character and spirituality. In the digital era, when media strongly influences adolescents' values and behavior, film can become an effective medium for contextual Islamic teaching. This study analyzes the representation of Islamic values in **Santri Pilihan Bunda** through symbols, narrative structure, and character development, while offering a different focus from Harahap (2025), which examines children's animated films with explicit religious symbols. Unlike that study, this research explores a youth-oriented digital series and how Islamic values are negotiated within modern popular culture. Using a qualitative semiotic approach, the study examines scenes, dialogues, and visual signs through repeated viewing and interpretation. The findings show that the film represents key Islamic values, including parental responsibility, the sanctity of relationships through **ta'aruf**, respect for parents, sincerity, patience, and the spirit of **hijrah** (self-improvement). The film also constructs these values as a counter-narrative to permissive culture by framing app-based dating and social-media virality as signs of moral crisis, then presenting **ta'aruf**, family authority, the pesantren environment, and religious rituals as symbols of moral restoration. Thus, **Santri Pilihan Bunda** functions not only as entertainment, but also as a medium of **da'wah** and character education for Muslim youth in the digital age.

Keywords: Character Education In Islam; Counter-Narrative; Islamic Values; *Santri Pilihan Bunda*; Semiotic Analysis.

Abstrak: Etika dan moralitas merupakan komponen utama dalam pendidikan Islam yang berperan penting dalam membentuk karakter dan spiritualitas generasi muda. Di era digital, ketika media sangat memengaruhi nilai dan perilaku remaja, film dapat menjadi media yang efektif untuk menyampaikan ajaran Islam secara kontekstual. Penelitian ini menganalisis representasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam *Santri Pilihan Bunda* melalui simbol, struktur naratif, dan perkembangan karakter, sekaligus menawarkan fokus yang berbeda dari Harahap (2025) yang mengkaji film animasi anak dengan simbol-simbol religius yang ditampilkan secara eksplisit. Berbeda dari penelitian tersebut, studi ini menempatkan objek kajian pada serial/film digital yang ditujukan bagi remaja dan mengkaji bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam dinegosiasikan dalam budaya populer modern. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis semiotik, data dikumpulkan melalui pengamatan

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mendalam terhadap adegan, dialog, dan tanda-tanda visual melalui proses menonton berulang dan interpretasi makna yang terkandung dalam unsur visual maupun naratif film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film ini merepresentasikan nilai-nilai Islam yang utama, seperti tanggung jawab orang tua, kesucian relasi melalui ta'aruf, adab kepada orang tua, keikhlasan, kesabaran, serta semangat hijrah (perbaikan diri). Film ini juga membangun nilai-nilai tersebut sebagai counter-narrative terhadap budaya permisif, dengan menampilkan relasi berbasis aplikasi dan viralitas media sosial sebagai tanda krisis moral, lalu menghadirkan ta'aruf, otoritas keluarga, lingkungan pesantren, dan ritus keagamaan sebagai simbol pemulihan moral. Dengan demikian, Santri Pilihan Bunda tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai media dakwah dan pendidikan karakter yang relevan bagi remaja Muslim di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Semiotik; Counter-Narrative; Nilai-Nilai Keislaman; Pendidikan Karakter Islam; Santri Pilihan Bunda.

Introduction

Amid the very rapid development of technology, children today are being raised in an environment heavily influenced by digital media and high use of electronic devices (Richards, 2024). Their daily activities are greatly influenced by the images and content they see, ranging from online games to entertainment shows that do not always have educational value (A.-C. E. Ding & Yu, 2024). This situation affects children's mindset, social interactions, and moral values in their daily lives.

This is in line with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which states that humans, including children, learn through observation and imitation of the behaviors they see. In the context of technological development, digital media—such as films, social media, and online games—becomes a powerful symbolic model. Children imitate the behaviors, ways of speaking, and even the moral values presented by figures in these media (Smith, 2021).

Therefore, the presence of films that promote Islamic values, such as *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, becomes a positive choice that can broaden understanding and instill good morals through a medium that is close to children's daily lives (Agustin & Zalnur, 2024). Through a semiotic analysis method, this film can be examined to explore the symbolic representation of Islamic values presented both visually and narratively, as well as how these values may influence children's ways of thinking and habits amid the dominance of electronic device culture.

This film presents Islamic values by portraying the life journey and character development of teenagers who are raised in a *pesantren* environment with deeply rooted Islamic principles (Irfan dkk., 2025). It also shows the role of a wise mother (Bunda) in guiding and shaping her child's future, particularly in choosing an ideal environment so that the child develops good behavior, remains obedient in worship, and can become a good example for others. In addition, the film emphasizes the values of respect (adab) toward parents, sincerity, and wholehearted acceptance when facing life's situations, while also fostering a strong sense of brotherhood in everyday life.

The film tells the story of Aliza Shaqueena Iqala, played by Naura Ayu, a progressive university student who dreams of continuing her studies abroad. She lives a modern and independent life until one day an incident occurs when she picks up her friend, who is stranded at a hotel after meeting someone from a dating app. The incident is recorded and goes viral, causing her mother, Mira Mahira, played by Sarah Sechan, to worry that Aliza has strayed from religious teachings and family norms.

Because of this concern, her mother decides to arrange a marriage for her through a *ta'aruf* process with Kinaan Ozama El Fatih, played by Fadi Alaydrus, a handsome and religious *santri* and the son of the owner of Al-Falah Islamic boarding school. Based on information from IDN Times Sumut, this series is adapted from a popular Wattpad novel that had been highly anticipated. *Santri Pilihan Bunda* has been airing since March 16, 2024, and consists of eight episodes, each with a duration of around forty-five minutes. In its first season, *Santri Pilihan Bunda* successfully attracted thirteen million viewers within just two weeks of its release and has been watched more than thirty-three million times.

The film *Santri Pilihan Bunda* presents various elements that can inspire viewers. First, it raises the theme of religious and family values through an approach that is understandable for the younger generation, showing that a marriage arranged by parents can lead to happiness. Second, the film emphasizes the importance of steadfast faith and how to face various challenges in married life, while upholding the values of honesty and commitment (Sarmila, 2025). In addition, the film also highlights the beauty of nature, which reminds us of God's greatness, as well as a variety of supporting characters that add depth to the storyline.

Santri Pilihan Bunda is crucial to study not merely because of its “religious” label, but because of its very broad social reach and its ability to shape public discourse on Islamic morality in the digital space. Its first season was reported to have reached around 33 million views on the Vidio platform—an indication that the Islamic narratives and symbols presented do not circulate only within a limited community, but have become part of mass consumption and potentially influence how teenagers and families understand relationships, parental authority, and social ethics.

This significance becomes even stronger because *Santri Pilihan Bunda* is also positioned as a Vidio Original Series with the highest viewership in 2024 in the drama category, indicating broad public acceptance and a wide reach compared to many other religious shows, which are often niche or limited to particular moments. In other words, this series becomes a “space for negotiating” values. (value negotiation) in a tangible way: it brings religious themes—such as ta’aruf, adab, and hijrah—into a popular drama-romance format that is close to the everyday lives of digital audiences. Because it has been consumed tens of millions of times, the representation of Islamic values in *Santri Pilihan Bunda* deserves to be read as both a cultural phenomenon and a form of public pedagogy, namely how popular media plays a role in shaping moral standards, relationship preferences, and the religious identity of the younger generation amid the competitive flow of digital culture.

Relevant previous research was conducted by (Harahap, 2025) through an analysis of the animated film *Hafiz dan Hafizah*. This film is an educational animated program that contains Islamic values and is produced in Indonesia. The story follows two main characters, Hafiz and Hafizah, a pair of siblings who enjoy memorizing the Qur’an and strive to practice Islamic teachings in their daily lives. In this film, Islamic symbols such as congregational prayer, the Qur’an (mushaf), recitations of prayers, and respectful attitudes toward teachers and parents are presented clearly and in a way that is easy for children to understand.

In contrast, *Santri Pilihan Bunda* presents Islamic values within the context of modern teenage life. The story is packaged in a light yet touching way, making it more easily accepted by young audiences. With an approach that is contextual and close to the realities of teenage life, this film functions as an effective educational medium for instilling noble character and a spirit of religiosity in the younger generation.

Unlike previous research on the animated film *Hafiz dan Hafizah*, which focused on instilling Islamic values in general for children, research on *Santri Pilihan Bunda* has a more specific and contextual focus. This study seeks to analyze how religious messages are conveyed through symbols, scenes, and dialogues that reflect the realities of modern Muslim teenage life (Firmansyah, 2024). A semiotic approach is used to interpret the meanings behind the characters' behavior, the dynamics of the pesantren environment, and the expressions of faith that are presented subtly yet rich in values.

In addition, this study offers novelty in combining spiritual and social values that are organically intertwined within the film's narrative. Values such as ta'aruf, sincerity, hijrah, family responsibility, patience, and proper conduct (adab) are not merely presented as moral doctrines, but are shown through contextual life practices that are relevant to teenage audiences. Against the backdrop of a strong media culture, this research expands the function of religious films from merely a source of entertainment into an instrument of character education in the digital era. This study also positions Islamic values as a counter-narrative to popular culture, which tends to be liberal and permissive, thereby making an important contribution to the development of moral literacy, media-based Islamic education, and the strengthening of the religious identity of Muslim youth amid the currents of cultural globalization.

The focus of this study is to identify and analyze the depiction of Islamic values as seen in *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, with an emphasis on how these meanings are constructed through visual elements, symbols, and the film's narrative. By using semiotic analysis, this research aims to uncover the messages that shape the image of characters as Islamic role models for viewers, especially among teenagers. Therefore, the author considers it important to conduct broader and deeper research on Islamic values in *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, with the aim of improving understanding of Islamic values so that they can serve as guidance in everyday life.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, as it is the most relevant for interpreting the representation of Islamic values in film through three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. This model allows the researcher not only to describe signs literally, but also to interpret implicit meanings as well as the ideology/moral messages constructed by the film regarding

morality (akhlak), the sanctity of relationships, the role of parents, and the identity of Muslim youth in popular culture.

The main data source of this study is the film *Santri Pilihan Bunda* by Salsabila Falensia. (Cloud Books, 2023). The data consist of visual and audio signs, including scenes, dialogues, gestures, expressions, costumes, settings, and audio elements such as intonation and music. Data were collected through in-depth observation by watching the series repeatedly and systematically recording every moment that contains religious values along with the context of its appearance, so that the analysis would be more accurate.

The unit of analysis consists of scenes and dialogues selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) they clearly contain religious symbols/practices, (2) they present moral conflicts related to modern teenage life, (3) they are key moments in the plot (turning points) or show recurring patterns, and (4) they show the responses of other characters that reinforce the value message. These scenes are considered representative because they most strongly convey the construction of Islamic values in the narrative. The analysis is conducted by describing the denotative meaning, interpreting the connotation, and then formulating the myth/ideology constructed by the film as a conclusion about the representation of Islamic character education.

Results and Discussion

According to the research findings obtained through a semiotic analysis of *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, the focus of the analysis lies in the depiction of Islamic values as reflected through symbols, conversations, characters, and key moments in each episode. All visual and narrative elements in this film are analyzed using a semiotic approach to uncover deeper meanings related to moral values, spirituality, and the Islamic identity of young Muslims in the digital age.

Table 1. Analysis of Islamic Values in the Film *Santri Pilihan Bunda*

N o.	Value	Symbol	Semiotic Meaning	Islamic Value	Theoretical Concept (Al- Ghazali)
1	Parental Responsibility	<i>Bunda</i> rejects Zero despite his financial stability	Parents as guardians of moral direction	<i>Amanah</i> (trust), family guidance	<i>Tarbiyah akhlak</i> (moral education), parental <i>amanah</i>
2	Ta'aruf &	<i>Ta'aruf</i>	Sacred	<i>Iffah</i>	<i>Tahdzib al-nafs</i>

	Social Etiquette (<i>Adab</i>)	process guided by parents	relationship vs. permissive dating culture	(modesty/chastity), obedience to Sharia	(self-discipline), control of desires
3	Adab & Sincerity	Kinaan accepts the arranged marriage	Obedience as a form of sincere conduct	<i>Birr al-walidayn</i> (devotion to parents), sincerity, patience	<i>Ikhlas</i> (sincerity), <i>adab</i> toward parents
4	Religious Obedience	Congregational prayer in the <i>pesantren</i>	Discipline and collective obedience	Obedience in worship, <i>ukhuwah</i> (brotherhood)	<i>Tazkiyah</i> (purification), habituation in worship
5	Sincerity & Patience	Kinaan remains gentle	Emotional control, love based on faith	<i>Sabar</i> (patience), <i>hilm</i> (forbearance), household <i>adab</i>	<i>Mujahadah al-nafs</i> (self-struggle), patience
6	Hijrah & Self-Transformati on	Aliza becomes more religious	Inner transformati on toward faith	<i>Taubah</i> (repentance), <i>hijrah</i> , <i>muhasabah</i> (self-reflection)	<i>Tazkiyat al-nafs</i> (purification of the soul), repentance

Based on the table above, it can be further elaborated in the form of an analysis of messages on Islamic education and children's moral development as follows:

Parental Responsibility

A mother's decision not to approve of her child's relationship with a man who is unable to become a good *imam* reflects parental responsibility in Islam, namely the obligation to educate and protect children in matters of religion, including in the choice of a life partner. This shows that parents have a significant role in ensuring that their child chooses a husband who can provide spiritual guidance, so that the household they build in the future can be grounded in Islamic values and protected from mistakes that may bring harm both in this world and in the hereafter (Fijriani, 2024).

In Episode 1 at minute 6 and second 16, a man named Zero, Aliza's boyfriend, responds to Bunda Aisyah's statement (Aliza's mother). He insists that he already has a stable job. However, Bunda Aisyah is not concerned with how much Zero earns, because for her, the most important thing is character.

According to Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, parental responsibility toward children includes not only fulfilling their physical needs, but also instilling moral values and nurturing character (akhlak) based on religion (Bensaid, 2021). Al-

Ghazali emphasizes that a child's heart is like an empty land that can be planted with anything; if values of goodness and faith are instilled, the child will grow into a righteous person, but if left without guidance, it will be filled with the harmful influences of the environment (Nurhikmah, 2024).

A mother's action in the film *Santri Pilihan Bunda* rejecting her child's relationship with a man considered unable to become a good *imam*—is a clear reflection of the implementation of this theory (X. Ding & Yu, 2022). Symbolically, this attitude illustrates the function of the family as a guardian of moral values and a fortress of faith (aqidah), where the role of parents is not merely that of caregivers, but also of spiritual guides who have the right to direct their children toward the path of goodness.

Thus, based on Al-Ghazali's theory of Islamic education, the parents' decision in this context is not a form of restricting freedom, but rather an expression of moral-religious responsibility (mas'uliyah diniyyah) to safeguard the child's well-being in this world and the hereafter. This principle emphasizes that the success of family education is not measured only by material aspects, but by the parents' ability to pass on values of faith, morality, and spiritual intelligence to the next generation.

The Value of Purity and Proper Conduct in Social Relationships

One important aspect of Islamic teachings portrayed in *Santri Pilihan Bunda* is the need to maintain purity and ethics in interactions between men and women. This is shown through the ta'aruf process between Kinaan and Aliza. In contrast to the dating culture commonly found among today's youth, the film offers an Islamic way of building a relationship—getting to know a potential partner in a directed and guided manner while still observing syar'i (Islamic legal) boundaries.

The ta'aruf process, which is initiated by Aliza's parents, shows that in Islam, marriage is not merely about love, but also a social and spiritual responsibility. This process reflects the values of caution, proper manners (adab), and respect for religious teachings and women's dignity. From a semiotic approach, the ta'aruf scene in the film functions as a symbol of resistance to a permissive lifestyle, while also affirming that Islam has clear and noble guidelines for building relationships between human beings (Devi, 2023).

The concept of ta'aruf in Islam, as depicted in *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, is a concrete manifestation of these teachings. The process of introduction, conducted in a directed manner and guided by parents, is not merely a tradition, but a form of implementing Islamic morality (akhlaq) that emphasizes caution, modesty, and respect for women's dignity. From a semiotic perspective, the ta'aruf scene becomes a visual sign of tazkiyatun nafs—that is, an effort to preserve the purity of the heart and intentions so that the relationship between men and women remains within the framework of worship (ibadah).

Thus, Al-Ghazali's theory of Islamic ethics strengthens the meaning that purity in interaction is not a form of restriction, but rather a protection of the spiritual and social values of the Muslim community. The film affirms the moral message that Islam has provided noble relational guidelines, in which love and marriage are understood not merely as emotional bonds, but also as moral responsibilities and social acts of worship that must be maintained within the boundaries of proper conduct (adab) and purity.

The Moral Value of Respect for Parents and Sincerity

The character Kinaan Ozama El Fatih in the film represents the value of sincerity (ikhlas) when facing an arranged marriage situation. In various scenes, Kinaan does not show resistance or humiliate his parents' decision, even though it is clear that he has not fully accepted the situation. His calm attitude, gentle way of speaking, and effort to go through the introduction process with maturity reflect his spiritual understanding of the importance of respecting one's parents and surrendering to God's will.

In semiotic analysis, his facial expressions, calm body language, and soft-toned conversations symbolically represent sincerity. This strengthens the message that Islamic teachings emphasize the values of patience, ethics, and sincerity in every aspect of life, including marriage.

The Value of Devotion to Religion

In one moment that conveys strong religious values, we see Kinaan performing congregational prayer (shalat berjamaah) with his peers in the pesantren area. Visually, the scene presents neatly arranged prayer rows (shaf), prayer movements carried out with full concentration, and a solemn atmosphere that reflects discipline and unity in worship. From a semiotic perspective, the congregational prayer performed by Kinaan and the other students carries a meaning that goes beyond a mere religious ritual; it

becomes a powerful symbol of commitment to Islamic principles, obedience to the shari'a, and the formation of a santri character that is devout and humble.

The camera focuses on Kinaan standing in the front row, emphasizing his position as a religious, responsible figure and a role model for his friends. Through this scene, *Santri Pilihan Bunda* delivers the message that youth life should remain connected to spiritual values. In togetherness through congregational prayer, the film portrays the growth of brotherhood, the cultivation of discipline, and the development of Islamic character education that remains relevant in facing the challenges of the digital era. (Syaefudin, 2024). These symbols are very important for understanding the deeper meaning offered by the film, in which the *pesantren* is seen not only as a place to study religion, but also as a space for shaping a complete Muslim identity.

The Moral Value of Sincerity and Patience

Santri Pilihan Bunda also portrays the value of sincerity in a very profound way through the character of Kinaan. This sign of sincerity is clearly seen when Kinaan, as a husband, realizes that Aliza – his wife, whom he has just married through the *ta'aruf* process – has not fully ended her relationship with her former boyfriend, Zero. In this emotional and challenging situation, Kinaan does not display excessive anger or act impulsively. Instead, he continues to treat Aliza with gentleness, patience, and respect as his wife. From a semiotic perspective, Kinaan's attitude becomes a symbol of love grounded in faith and commitment, not merely in feelings or worldly desire.

The sincerity shown by Kinaan becomes a sign of the Islamic value of *ikhlas* (sincerity), in which love for one's spouse is tested not only in times of happiness, but also in difficult moments and in the face of disappointment. Symbolically, this scene conveys a deep meaning about how a man who behaves in accordance with Islamic teachings does not immediately judge, but instead chooses to give guidance with patience while still preserving the honor of the household. It also functions as a subtle critique of today's youth culture, which often gives up easily when relationships become difficult (Andriese, 2025). Kinaan emerges as a symbol of a *santri* who is mature both emotionally and spiritually, reflecting that the principles of sincerity and patience are essential foundations in building a family in accordance with Islamic teachings. From a semiotic perspective, the relationship between Kinaan and Aliza reflects a struggle between the permissive values of the modern world and the deeper

values of Islam. Through the sincerity demonstrated by Kinaan, a bridge between these two worlds begins to take shape.

Hijrah and Self-Improvement as Moral Values

The value of *hijrah* as a step of self-transformation toward something better is clearly reflected in the character of Aliza, who at the beginning of the story is portrayed as a modern, independent figure and less closely attached to Islamic teachings (PREHATIN, 2024). Aliza's formerly free lifestyle gradually changes after she marries Kinaan, a devout and patient *santri*. This spiritual transformation does not happen suddenly, but unfolds through a process of deep reflection, inner conflict, and a search for identity that leads Aliza to reconsider the meaning of life and the principles she holds.

In semiotic analysis, Aliza's *hijrah* journey can be interpreted as a sign of changing identity meaning – from a symbol of a liberal lifestyle to a symbol of spiritual awareness. Changes in the way she dresses, speaks, and interacts within the pesantren environment serve as visual representations of this shift in self-meaning. This process of *hijrah* becomes a meaningful symbol that Islamic values are not merely taught verbally, but are instilled through lived experience and the example set by those around her, especially her husband, Kinaan.

Film as a Bridge Between Modernity and Islamic Boarding School Tradition

Santri Pilihan Bunda can be read as a cultural text that seeks to bridge two worlds often positioned in opposition: the modernity of urban youth shaped by digital media, and the pesantren tradition oriented toward moral discipline and character formation (akhlak). This bridge is constructed through a narrative strategy that combines popular forms (romance drama, family conflict, and the fast pacing typical of serials) with religious symbols (pesantren, congregational prayer, ta'aruf, and the language of adab). In this way, Islamic values do not appear as a formal "sermon," but rather as an everyday language that enters the lived experience of youth, so that the pesantren is seen not merely as an exclusive space, but as a moral reference that can still negotiate with contemporary realities.

However, when read critically, this bridge is also built through a binary opposition structure that tends to simplify social complexity. The film often positions the modern world—especially elements related to dating apps, virality, or urban

lifestyles—as a source of moral crisis, while the pesantren (and religious/family figures) is portrayed as a space of recovery with almost no internal problems. This pattern works effectively as a counter-narrative to permissive culture, but it risks creating the framing that “modernity=damaged” and “pesantren = the only solution.” In social reality, however, modernity also contains positive practices (education, digital literacy, and spaces for expression), and pesantren itself has complex internal dynamics. In other words, the film reinforces a moral message, but at the same time simplifies a much more layered cultural landscape.

In addition, the characters’ “recovery” process is often shaped through a transformation mechanism that tends to be rapid and centered on institutions (family/pesantren), rather than on a long and reflective psychological struggle. The characters’ spiritual transformation—which is semiotically interpreted as *hijrah*—is more often symbolized through behavioral change and obedience to norms (for example, patterns of relationships, religious rituals, and family decisions) than through an in-depth exploration of inner conflict. This structure is dramatically effective because it provides a clear resolution, but it can shift *hijrah* from a gradual ethical process into a “submit-and-resolve” narrative, thereby underrepresenting the often ambiguous and evolving experiences of youth.

On the other hand, the film also presents an interesting cultural tension that deserves critique: Islamic values are popularized through the format of the digital entertainment industry, which operates according to the logic of ratings, romanticization, and dramatization. This means that the pesantren and religious symbols simultaneously function as sources of moral legitimacy and as narrative commodities to attract audiences. Cultural criticism here is not meant to reject the film’s *da’wah* function, but to show that religious representation in popular media is always shaped by a tension between educational mission and commercial interests. Therefore, *Santri Pilihan Bunda* is important to read not only as a “good film,” but as a cultural product that reformulates the image of the pesantren so that it becomes compatible with modern audience tastes.

With this reading, the film can be understood as a practice of “mediation” between tradition and modernity: it expands access to pesantren values for young audiences, but it also filters and reorganizes the complexity of pesantren life to fit the structure of popular drama. This is where its academic significance lies—not only in

the Islamic values it presents, but in how those values are organized through narrative structure, moral opposition, and the logic of the media industry, all of which shape how young people understand Islam, modernity, and pesantren in everyday life.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Santri Pilihan Bunda* represents Islamic values through consistent visual and narrative signs, such as parental responsibility, the purity of relationships through *ta'aruf*, respect (*adab*) toward parents, obedience in worship, patience, sincerity, and the spirit of *hijrah*. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic reading (denotation-connotation-myth), these values appear not only as religious practices, but also as constructions of meaning that affirm Islam as an ethical guide for youth amid the pressures of popular culture. The film also builds a counter-narrative to permissive social culture by positioning the pesantren, family, and religious rituals as spaces of moral recovery and identity formation.

The limitations of this study mainly lie in its scope, which focuses on a single object, namely the film/series *Santri Pilihan Bunda*, so the findings are not intended to represent all youth-themed religious films. In addition, this research emphasizes textual analysis (scenes, dialogue, and visual-audio signs) and therefore does not directly measure audience responses or reception. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the novelty of the study, because its primary focus is to reveal the construction of meaning and the representation of Islamic values through an in-depth semiotic reading of a popular youth-themed work.

Practically, the findings of this study have implications in two areas. For educational policymakers, popular films such as *Santri Pilihan Bunda* can be utilized as media for moral literacy and media literacy in schools/madrasahs through guided discussions: teachers can encourage students to identify moral messages (*akhlak*), evaluate ethical conflicts, and distinguish between religious values and entertainment dramatization. In this way, film becomes not only entertainment, but also teaching material that promotes critical reflection and character development. For producers of religious films, this study highlights the importance of presenting Islamic narratives that are relevant to youth life without falling into the binary judgment of "modern = bad, religious = good." In the future, religious films will be stronger if they portray a more gradual process of *hijrah*, more realistic inner conflict, and more layered

representations of pesantren and family life, so that their moral messages remain educational while also becoming more authentic and inclusive for a wider audience.

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