

Exploring polygamous and adulterous narratives in Indonesian Islamic literature: a Cawelti framework in rural and urban contexts

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This article examines Indonesian Islamic novels: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), *Hati Suhita* (2019), *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014), and *Layangan Putus* (2020), to analyse how popular fiction narrates polygamy and adultery across contrasting rural and urban settings. Although these texts have often been discussed in relation to Islam, gender, and morality, less attention has been paid to formal logic through which marital transgression is structured as romance.

Design/methodology/approach

This article traces patterns of plot repetition, character pairing, religious legitimization, and spatial movement in four Indonesian Islamic novels. This analysis draws on John G. Cawelti's framework of romance formula, convention and invention, characterization, and moral fantasy to show how texts organize desire, conflict, and resolution, and how each novel adapts romance conventions to different rural and urban contexts.

Findings

All novels centre on a husband whose attachment is divided between two women, although the form varies from formal polygamy and concealed marriage to adultery and unresolved emotional loyalty. In rural narratives, marital conflict is closely tied to family authority, pesantren values, and expectations of female patience. In urban narratives, secrecy, broken trust, and personal dignity become more prominent. Rural heroines tend to negotiate suffering through endurance, faith, or gradual resistance, whereas urban heroines are given greater room to confront betrayal, redefine marriage, or leave it. The same romance formula therefore produces different moral outcomes across distinct social worlds.

Originality/value

By reading these novels as culturally specific popular romances, this article shows how familiar narrative structures register changing debates over Islamic marriage, women's agency, and gender justice in post-Reformasi Indonesia.

Introduction

Since Reformasi, polygamy and extramarital affairs have drawn sustained public debate in Indonesia. The collapse of Suharto's New Order in 1998 also gave writers and filmmakers greater scope to address subjects previously treated as taboo (Hellwig, 2011;

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Wajiran, 2018). Polygamy, in particular, provokes heated debate: some view it as a permissible Islamic practice while others condemn it as patriarchal oppression (Wajiran, 2018). This divide was dramatically illustrated in 2003 when a “Polygamy Award” event sparked nationwide controversy, eliciting arguments defending polygamy (as a male duty or a way to save destitute women) versus arguments decrying its harm to women and family unity (Schmidt, 2014). Adultery, though universally considered sinful in Islam, is equally charged in modern Indonesian context as a threat to the ideal Muslim family. The popularity of Islamic romance novels and films dealing with these issues attests to their social relevance: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) drew large audiences, even outperforming Hollywood at Indonesian box office (Schmidt, 2014). Such stories have not only mirrored societal dilemmas but also helped catalyze public discourse, for example, *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share, 2006) directly challenged the silence around polygamy and encouraged open discussion of women’s experiences (Schmidt, 2014). Therefore, study on polygamy and adultery narratives in popular Islamic literature is crucial to understanding contemporary debates on gender, morality, and religious values in Indonesia.

Previous studies have often focused on gender ideology and narrative content. Hellwig (2011) shows that Muslim women writers like Abidah El Khalieqy use fiction to critique polygyny and patriarchal norms, breaking taboos on domestic violence and marital rape while advocating for women’s rights. Others have examined how Islamic popular novels balance piety and romantic drama to attract readers; Rani (2012) highlights how the best-seller *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004) blended formulaic romance with religious themes to cater to popular taste. This controversial themes have been explored from a feminist perspective: Wajiran (2018) finds that Muslim authors address polygamy in divergent ways (some glorifying it as divine will, others exposing its injustices) reflecting broader societal rift on this issue. Notably, narrative formula theory has also been applied. Merawati and Astuti (2019) employed Cawelti’s popular fiction framework to study Islamic novels from 2004-2015, finding that while these works follow a romance formula, they exhibit innovative twists (*inventions*) in response to changing times. This genre’s themes evolved from portraying “blessed” polygamous unions to depicting polygamy borne of deceit, and a traditionally closed-ended plot gave way to an open ending in a modern novel like *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014). These studies confirm strong interest in Islamic romances’ content and conventions. However, no comparative research has yet scrutinized how polygamous vs. adulterous storylines are formulaically constructed across rural and urban settings. Prior analyses tend to treat such narratives in isolation or as a monolithic trend, leaving a clear research gap regarding the influence of socio-cultural context (traditional vs. modern environment) on popular romance formula in Indonesian Islamic literature.

This research examines how Indonesian Islamic popular narratives of polygamy and adultery conform to and deviate from conventional romance formulas, and how differing social contexts shape these narratives. Using Cawelti’s formula theory (1976) as an analytical lens, this study identifies genre conventions (recurring plot structures, character archetypes, and resolutions) at work in four post-Reformasi Islamic novels: *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014), *Hati Suhita* (2019), and *Layangan Putus* (2020). This article examines context-driven “inventions” or modifications to those formulas. The central question: How are polygamous and adulterous relationship narratives formulaically portrayed in contemporary Indonesian Islamic literature, and in what ways do rural (traditional) versus urban (modern) settings influence depiction of female agency and moral outcomes in these romance formulas? This entails sub-questions such as whether rural, religion-rooted polygamy stories employ different tropes and endings than urban adultery stories shaped by capitalist modernity. Formula theory offers

a productive analytical foundation because popular genres are structured through a dynamic relation between established conventions and culturally specific innovation. As Cawelti (1969, 1976) argues, formulaic narratives sustain audience recognition through recurrent motifs, yet they also rework those motifs in response to changing historical and cultural conditions. Merawati and Astuti (2019) show that this genre has changed with shifts in setting, values, and social expectation. These novels are therefore read not merely as collections of formulaic devices, but as culturally situated revisions of romance. Their differences reveal how rural Islamic tradition and urban modernity reshape familiar stories of divided love, marital betrayal, female endurance, and resistance. Formula, in this context, is neither fixed nor culturally neutral. It becomes a means through which popular literature negotiates changing relations among religion, gender, and marriage in contemporary Indonesia.

Preliminary analysis suggests that Indonesia's Islamic romance narratives employ a common formulaic core yet diverge significantly in line with their rural or urban milieu. In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Hati Suhita* (2019), the village-based novels, polygamy is commonly framed by families, religious authorities, and local communities as legitimate, even when it causes visible harm. Wife is expected to endure it as duty, fate, or a test of piety. At first, the female protagonists occupy familiar position of obedient and self-sacrificing housewife associated with New Order gender ideals (Schmidt, 2014). Yet neither novel leaves its heroine entirely within that role. Suffering produces reflection and resistance. Women begin to question the religious language used to secure their obedience and seek dignity without abandoning faith. Their trajectories therefore reveal a tension within the rural formula itself. The narrative may value patience, but it also exposes injustice patience is asked to conceal. Even apparently conservative Islamic fiction can thus carry a muted critique of polygamy and patriarchal authority (Hellwig, 2011).

A different pattern emerges in urban worlds of *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) and *Layangan Putus* (2020). Their heroines are educated, professionally active, and less willing to treat betrayal as an unquestionable marital burden, reflecting more assertive female figures of post-Reformasi literature (Wajiran, 2019). Here, adultery or a secretly contracted second marriage forces women to confront, renegotiate, or leave damaged relationships. The city does not remove patriarchal power, but it gives female characters a wider language of choice, work, rights, and self-respect. It also unsettles conventional romance ending. Asma Nadia's novel, for example, resists full emotional closure and leaves betrayal only partly resolved (Merawati & Astuti, 2019). This contrast in endings is telling. Rural narratives therefore tend to place female suffering within reconciliation, devotion, and moral instruction; urban narratives more often turn it toward refusal, autonomy, or unresolved loss. The distinction is not absolute, but it shows how popular Islamic romance registers social change. Its formulas remain familiar, yet their outcomes shift as writers negotiate religious continuity, modern gender expectations, and changing attitudes toward marriage (Merawati & Astuti, 2019; Wajiran, 2019). Reading these contextual variations reveals the cultural work of popular literature: the ways Indonesian Muslim communities confront contentious questions of polygamy and adultery through the stories they produce and consume.

Theoretical background

John G. Cawelti's theory of popular fiction formula provides a critical lens for this study, particularly in examining polygamous and adulterous narratives in Indonesian Islamic literature. Cawelti (1969) defines a literary formula as "a conventional system for structuring cultural products," emphasizing recurring narrative patterns recognizable to

audiences. In essence, formulaic stories balance familiar conventions with inventive elements to maintain reader interest (Cawelti, 1976). This concept underscores how popular romance narratives often reuse proven story structures while introducing variations (what Cawelti calls inventions) to keep the formula fresh (Arvanitaki, 2024). Different scholars have nuanced understandings of formula: some view it pejoratively as cliché, whereas Cawelti highlights its artistic function in meeting audience expectations. Cawelti's formula posits that popular romances (including novels studied) follow established patterns of plot and character, which can be systematically analyzed to reveal their cultural significance.

Cawelti's framework delineates specific narrative structures and tropes that characterize popular romance formula. He identifies three archetypal romance plot patterns: Cinderella pattern, featuring a love story across stark class disparities (e.g. a poor young woman falling for a wealthy man) (Roesler, 2006); Pamela pattern, centering on a virtuous woman's struggle to secure sincere love against temptations or obstacles (Lafitte, 2013); and a contemporary career-woman pattern, wherein a professional woman outwardly rejects love in favor of ambition or fame while inwardly longing for true love (Caven, 2006). Beyond these plot types, popular romance formulas exhibit common conventions in characterization and outcomes. Studies of Indonesian popular novels find recurring elements such as an idealized, almost "perfect" hero paired with an ordinary heroine, an initial gesture of kindness (or gift) from hero to heroine, declarations of love, significant barriers to union, moments of affectionate intimacy, and a final resolution that delivers a happy ending (Kluger, 2024). These formulaic elements and categories serve as indicators when analyzing these novels, helping to reveal how each narrative conforms to or subverts expectations of romance genre.

Concept of gender representation in literary texts examines how novels portray roles, behaviors, and identities associated with women and men, reflecting or challenging societal norms. Gender here is understood not as a biological given but as a social construct: set of roles, attributes, and expectations that a culture assigns to femininity and masculinity (Khadam et al., 2024). Representations of gender often mirror the prevailing gender ideologies of their time (Yulianeta et al., 2016). In many classic works women were commonly depicted as passive, domestic figures defined in relation to male characters, embodying patriarchal norms. However, as consciousness of gender equality has grown, literary depictions of women have evolved. Indonesian context post-1998 Reformasi, more works began portraying women as empowered individuals with complexity and agency (Hughes-Freeland, 2011; Tjen Marching, 2007; Budiman, 2011; Downes, 2013). This shift in representation indicates differing theoretical understandings of gender: earlier views reinforced a naturalized division of male vs. female roles, whereas contemporary perspectives (influenced by feminist thought) stress that these roles are culturally produced and subject to change. In short, grasping concept of gender as a social construct is crucial for analyzing how these novels represent female characters and gender relations.

Several key aspects or indicators can be used to evaluate gender representation in novels, including character roles, power dynamics, and gender ideologies depicted. One major indicator is division between domestic and public sphere roles for women. Gender-focused analyses of Indonesian fiction have shown that certain works reinforce patriarchal and familial ideologies, such as *ibuism* (the idealization of women's domestic role as mothers), which serve to confine female characters to home-bound, submissive positions. Such ideologies result in domestication of women's positions in narratives, often supported by masculine hegemony in society (Yulianeta et al., 2016). Other texts challenge these norms by depicting women in professional or leadership roles, signaling a shift in

gender ideology. Four Islamic romance novels in question vividly illustrate this spectrum. They highlight gender injustices and tensions between traditional and modern female roles: for example, emotional and social struggles of wives in polygamous marriages underscore patriarchal constraints, while presence of career-oriented women in urban settings reflects changing norms. Additional indicators include level of agency afforded to female characters (whether women are portrayed as decision-makers or as objects of male decisions) and portrayal of gendered conflicts (such as resistance to or acceptance of polygamy). By examining these aspects, one can discern how each novel constructs or contests social position of women, thereby revealing narratives' commentary on gender relations in contemporary Indonesian society.

Representation of Islamic religious values in literature (particularly concerning polygamy and extramarital affairs) is grounded in how authors interpret and dramatize Islamic teachings on marriage and morality. In Islamic doctrine, polygamy, a husband taking up to four wives, is permissible under specific conditions, whereas adultery (sexual relations outside of marriage) is unequivocally forbidden. This fundamental distinction informs how narratives frame such relationships. Indeed, in post-Reformasi Indonesian literary discourse, polygamous arrangements are often depicted as “halal” or religiously sanctioned, in line with Islamic law, while illicit affairs are portrayed as transgressive or “secular” acts divorced from religious approval (Nurmila, 2009). However, concept of representing these practices in fiction is not monolithic; it varies with author's perspective and sociocultural debate surrounding issue. Some Muslim authors and readers regard polygamy as part of Islamic tradition and may present it with sympathetic justification (for example, citing religious dogma or altruistic motives for a second marriage), whereas others adopt a critical stance, highlighting emotional toll and inequality it imposes on women. Literature thus becomes a site of contesting interpretations: as one study notes, contemporary Indonesian writers who address polygamy do so from differing viewpoints, reflecting a society divided between those who accept polygamy as an Islamic teaching and those who challenge it (Wajiran, 2018). In conceptual terms, “Islamic representation” here involves how faithfully or critically a story aligns with religious norms, such as whether polygamy is normalized via scripture and piety, and whether adultery is condemned and resolved through repentance or conversion. Understanding these divergent definitions and understandings is essential, as it frames the way each novel communicates its moral and religious message about marital infidelity and plural marriage.

Several telling aspects emerge in how these novels represent Islamic values vis-à-vis polygamy and adultery, especially when contrasting rural traditional settings with urban modern ones. One key aspect is agency and characterization of parties involved in polygamous or adulterous relationship, specifically, who is portrayed as the initiator or “active” agent of the transgression. In traditional village-based narratives, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Hati Suhita* (2019), extra-marital or polygamous union is driven largely by male protagonists, and other woman (second wife or would-be mistress) is depicted as a passive participant. Samsudin and Gus Birru actively pursue or insist on additional relationship, while women they become involved with remain relatively withdrawn or acquiescent. By contrast, *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) and *Layangan Putus* (2020), the urban-set stories, narrative blames an aggressively active “third person”, *pelakor* (acronym for *perebut laki orang*, or husband-stealer), for disrupting marriage. These *pelakor* characters (e.g. Mei Rose and Lydia) are portrayed as instigators who actively seduce or manipulate husbands for personal gain, effectively seizing the role of temptress and forcing polygamy into an initially monogamous marriage.

Inversion of agency between rural and urban contexts signals a deeper commentary on moral environment: rural scenarios align with a view of polygamy as arising from patriarchal authority and religious reasoning, whereas urban scenarios frame adultery (and resulting polygamy) as a symptom of individual desire and moral corruption in a modern capitalist setting. Another aspect is depiction of women's socio-economic roles. In traditional milieu, wives are generally portrayed in domestic or community-bound roles (often within *pesantren* circle), emphasizing their duty and obedience, and they typically lack independent careers. In modern city milieu, female protagonists like Arini and Kinan are professionals (a publisher/author and a veterinarian, respectively) reflecting an urban social context that normalizes career women. This difference in representation underlines how religious polygamy narratives may justify women's passivity through piety and tradition, whereas urban adultery narratives highlight women's autonomy yet also their vulnerability in a fast-paced, materialistic society.

Novels differ in intensity of Islamic religiosity portrayed: village-set tales steep characters in devout Islamic backgrounds from birth (all central figures are Muslim and shaped by *pesantren* values), whereas city-set tales introduce characters who are recent converts to Islam or not initially observant, such as a non-Muslim who converts before marriage. This contrast suggests that in rural stories, polygamy is woven into an already religious fabric (often justified through scripture and clerical authority), while in urban stories the lack of deep-rooted religiosity among some characters is part of the narrative tension, for example, conversion or a newfound piety might be used opportunistically to legitimate an otherwise illicit union. These indicators; locus of agency in polygamy/adultery, gendered role (passive housewife vs. career woman), and degree of inherent religious context, collectively illuminate how different settings shape portrayal of Islamic principles. They demonstrate that novels use formula of romance not just to entertain, but to negotiate meaning of Islamic morality in contemporary Indonesian life, oscillating between affirming traditional doctrine and critiquing social injustices tied to polygamy and infidelity.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative comparative textual approach to examine four Indonesian Islamic popular novels; *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (El Khaleqy, 2009), *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (Nadia, 2014), *Layangan Putus* (Prasetyawati, 2020), and *Hati Suhita* (Anis, 2019) together. These texts were chosen because all centre on polygamy or adultery, yet situate marital conflict in different socio-cultural settings. Abidah El Khaleqy's Novel (2009) and Khilma Anis' novel (2019) place polygamous marriage within conservative rural religious worlds and depict wives who initially occupy subordinate positions, whereas Asma Nadia's novel (2014) and Eka Nur Prasetyawati's novel (2020) locate infidelity in an urban capitalist milieu and foreground educated, professional women (Ismah, 2024). Despite these differences, these novels share comparable structures of romantic conflict, making them suitable for comparative analysis. This study therefore draws on Cawelti's understanding of formula as the interplay of recurring narrative patterns and culturally specific conventions, with particular attention to plot repetition, stock character roles, moral fantasy, and the tension between convention and variation.

The primary sources are four novels, while film reviews and critical discussions of their adaptations serve as secondary materials. Data were collected through repeated close reading and comparative textual analysis. Each novel was first read to establish its overall narrative structure, then reread to identify recurring conflicts, character pairings, religious legitimization, spatial movement, and modes of resolution; secondary materials were used to situate these features within broader reception and debate. This combination of literary

and reception-oriented materials also provides data triangulation, strengthening analytic credibility through the use of multiple sources (Schlunegger et al., 2024). Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2020). In practice, this meant coding key formulaic elements, organizing them in comparative displays, and interpreting them across corpus through Cawelti's (1969, 1976) framework. Repeated close reading remained central throughout, since qualitative textual analysis depends on moving from broad narrative structure to finer motifs, tensions, and patterned variation (Darragh & Kelley, 2022).

Result

Across the post-Reformasi Indonesian Islamic novels, marital betrayal provides common narrative core. Each story centres on a husband whose emotional or marital commitment is divided between two women, whether through formal polygamy, concealed marriage, adultery, or an unresolved attachment to a former lover (Wajiran, 2018; Wiliana, 2023). In Cawelti's (1976) terms, this is a recognizable romance formula: intimacy is obstructed, desire divided, and relationship driven toward reconciliation, separation, or moral judgment. Here, rival woman becomes the principal obstacle and love triangle main source of tension. Yet the formula does not take an identical form in every novel. El Khaleqy's (2009) and Nadia's text (2014) turn the triangle into an actual second marriage. Prasetyawati's novel (2020) moves from secrecy and infidelity toward polygamous legitimation. Anis' novel (2019), by contrast, retains triangle at the level of memory and emotional loyalty. Their moral positions also differ (some expose polygamy as injustice, others accommodate it through piety or sacrifice) but underlying pattern remains: wife must confront a husband whose desire exceeds the marriage (Wajiran, 2018). The recurring "menduakan" husband thus unifies the corpus, giving culturally contentious questions of fidelity and Islamic marriage the familiar form of popular romance. This pattern corresponds to fiction's central finding that novels organize marital conflict through a doubled male figure, although they assign different meanings to that doubling.

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban (2009), set in a Javanese pesantren community, heroine Annisa endures her husband's polygamy, which he justifies with conservative religious dogma (Muzakka & Suyanto, 2020). Her pious family expects her to accept this fate, though it sparks her eventual rebellion against patriarchal norms. In text, the formula appears in its most coercive form. Samsudin impregnates another woman, after which sexual misconduct is converted into a socially sanctioned second marriage. Annisa recounts that, to protect family's honour, "*jadilah Samsudin melaksanakan niatnya untuk berpoligami.*" (Samsudin thus went ahead with his plan to take another wife) (El Khaleqy, 2009). This brief statement is revealing. Polygamy does not emerge from mutual affection or transparent marital negotiation, but from pregnancy, damaged reputation, and a family decision that Annisa is expected to endure. Rival woman therefore functions both as a conventional romantic obstacle and as evidence of masculine impunity. The second marriage regularizes Samsudin's conduct without repairing injury done to Annisa, turning religious legitimacy into narrative cover for prior betrayal (Gumelar et al., 2023).

Hati Suhita (2019) repeats the triangle, though not as literal polygamy. Centers on a pesantren marriage, Alina is a dutiful young wife in an arranged union that is emotionally cold. Her husband, Gus Birru, remains in love with another woman from his past, effectively rendering Alina invisible in her own household (Salafi, 2023). Trapped by tradition, Alina's conflict is largely internal as she maintains patience amid neglect. Alina's marriage to Gus Birru is continually shadowed by Rengganis, his former lover and intellectual companion. Alina's quiet anxiety surfaces when she thinks, "*Aku meminjam Pajero Mas Birru karena bisa*

saja ia nanti sore akan berjalan-jalan dengan Rengganis.” (I borrowed Mas Birru’s Pajero because he might otherwise take Rengganis out that afternoon) (Anis, 2019). Rengganis need not enter household as a second wife; her remembered intimacy with Gus Birru is enough to displace Alina emotionally. This novel therefore revises polygamous formula into an affective one: one lawful marriage, three emotional positions. Desire remains divided, but the rival’s power lies in memory, compatibility, and imagined possibility rather than another marriage contract (Mardiyah, 2021).

The urban novels make concealment and discovery more prominent. *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) unfolds in a modern urban milieu. Its protagonist Arini faces a devastating trial when her husband Pras takes a second wife ostensibly to save a stranger’s life, a polygamy borne out of charity that nonetheless shatters Arini’s world (Indarti, 2023). Pras marries Mei Rose without first allowing Arini to participate in a decision that transforms her marriage. His act is later framed as rescue and charity, yet narrative remains anchored in Arini’s injury. When she confronts existence of second wife, “*Arini berusaha sekuat tenaga meredam gelegak di hatinya. Dia sangat terluka.*” (Arini struggled to contain the turmoil within her. She was deeply hurt) (Nadia, 2014). This wording joins restraint to pain: Arini controls her outward response, but control does not turn betrayal into consent. Struggling between anger and her religious ideals, Arini copes even as she battles a terminal illness that complicates her response (Maulinda, 2017).

Layangan Putus (2020) intensifies the same structure through prolonged secrecy, disappearance, and a marriage conducted without Kinan’s knowledge. Her discovery that Aris has travelled to Cappadocia with his new wife transforms a private dream into evidence of exclusion. An ultimate betrayal that breaks their “perfect” family (Wiliana, 2023). Her emotional is compressed into the words, “*Aku marah dan murka. Hatiku pedih luar biasa.*” (I was furious. This pain in my heart was unbearable) (Prasetyawati, 2020). Unlike more restrained wives of pesantren narratives, Kinan names her anger and treats second relationship as a breach of marital agreement rather than a trial demanding silent acceptance (Novita et al., 2025). This same formula produces different narrative consequences. Annisa confronts polygamy as patriarchal coercion; Alina, emotional displacement; Arini, concealed sacrifice; Kinan, broken trust and refusal. Formal or affective, husband’s dual attachment drives heroine’s crisis and determines the movement toward endurance, resistance, reconciliation, or separation.

The persistence of this formula is closely tied to Indonesia’s post-Reformasi social climate and to cultural work of popular fiction. Greater expressive freedom after 1998 allowed writers to address gender injustice, polygamy, and marital betrayal more openly. Polygamy consequently became a prominent subject in contemporary Indonesian literature, reflecting a dispute that remains unresolved: some Muslims defend it as religiously permissible, while others expose its unequal emotional and social consequences (Wajiran, 2018). By embedding this conflict in melodramatic romance, novels engage readers emotionally while prompting reflection. We see heroines torn between religious duty and personal anguish, mirroring tension many women experience between piety and their ‘gut’ reaction to betrayal (Dickson, 2007). In effect, formula’s popularity lies in its cultural relevance. It dramatizes common anxieties and moral questions in a familiar narrative framework, offering audiences both entertainment and a form of catharsis. This commercial success of these works suggests that readers are drawn to such formulaic retellings, indicating that popular literature serves as a barometer of collective anxieties and values regarding marriage and faith. These stories combine a conventional structure (the obstructed relationship and rival woman) with culturally specific inventions: pesantren authority, concealed Islamic marriage, professional female identity, and competing

interpretations of piety. Popular romance thus offers more than catharsis. It provides a narrative space in which readers may judge whether polygamy constitutes duty, charity, deception, or injustice, and whether injured wife should endure, negotiate, resist, or leave.

Setting does more than locate the action; it determines what kinds of women these novels make imaginable. *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Hati Suhita* (2019) unfold in pesantren-centred rural worlds, where communal authority, religious obligation, and domestic duty narrow the heroine's choices. Movement toward city therefore carries symbolic force. Annisa's departure for Yogyakarta is not simply spatial; it marks a turn toward education, distance, and possible self-determination. In *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) and *Layangan Putus* (2020), this pattern is reversed. Urban life gives women professional identities and greater room to act, yet marital crisis often draws characters toward quieter spaces, familiar values, or a more traditional domestic ideal. This contrast also shapes gender representation. Rural wives are initially defined by patience, piety, and service; urban wives by work, mobility, and a stronger claim to personal judgement (Hellwig, 2011; Wajiran, 2018, 2019; Yulianeta et al., 2016). The distinction is not absolute: the village heroine may resist, while the career woman remains vulnerable to marital discipline. Yet place, movement, and female agency repeatedly work together. The village contains; the city opens. The city unsettles; tradition promises refuge. In Cawelti's terms, these shifts constitute contextual inventions within a shared romance formula, giving rural and urban narratives their different trajectories (Cawelti, 1976).

In rural novels, movement (village to city) functions as a narrative ascent. In El Khaleqy's work (2009), Annisa leaves a restrictive village for higher education in Yogyakarta. Her journey is spatial, but also intellectual and moral: distance from pesantren world allows her to question the authority that has confined her. The author thus turns mobility into a condition of female self-recognition, consistent with her broader critique of patriarchal Islam (Hellwig, 2011). Anis' narrative (2019) develops contrast differently. Alina is trained within pesantren for domestic service and marital obedience, whereas Gus Birru returns from city carrying wider political and social horizons. The city is therefore not simply a modern backdrop. It signifies education, mobility, and access to forms of life unavailable within heroine's prescribed domestic role. Such contrasts reflect the wider shift in post-Reformasi fiction toward more complex representations of women's work, knowledge, and agency (Ismah, 2024; Yulianeta et al., 2016). In both narratives, city represents a horizon of empowerment and "civilization" beyond the parochial world.

Urban novels reverse this movement at a symbolic level. In Nadia's novel (2014), Pras presents his second marriage as an act of rescue and charity, returning a modern household to an older paternal logic in which male authority appears benevolent. In Prasetyawati's text (2020), Aris turns toward a more compliant partner, suggesting a desire to escape the equality demanded by marriage to an independent woman. Similar narratives justify second wife by depicting the first as stubborn, ambitious, or insufficiently supportive (Wajiran, 2018). Yet women's autonomy does not cause betrayal; rather, narratives show male privilege interpreting autonomy as a threat. Rural heroines move outward from domestic confinement, while urban husbands retreat toward an imagined comfort of obedience. These opposed movements are contextual inventions within a shared romance formula: female mobility marks growth in rural stories, whereas masculine nostalgia for traditional femininity drives conflict in the urban ones.

The rural-urban contrast should not be read as a simple sociology of Indonesian life. In these novels, place works as moral shorthand. Pesantren villages concentrate kinship, religious authority, and ideal of patient wife; cities make education, paid work, mobility, and personal choice more visible. This opposition reflects a wider post-Reformasi tension.

Democratic reform expanded women's public presence, yet the rise of public piety also renewed pressure to return them to traditional familial roles (Afrianty, 2020; Brenner, 2006). Rural narratives therefore make education and self-determination possible routes out of coercive custom. Urban narratives pose a different question: how far can patriarchal privilege survive when wives possess economic independence and power to refuse? Hellwig's (2011) reading of El Khaleqy is instructive here. Islamic fiction may challenge patriarchal interpretations without rejecting Islam itself.

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce contrast to a devout village and a secular city. Islam structures both worlds, but it performs different narrative work in each. Rural stories may present polygamy as lawful, protective, or socially necessary; urban stories cast secrecy and adultery as failures of trust and allow women's resistance to limit male authority. These scenarios echo a longer public dispute: supporters have defended polygamy as a safeguard against illicit relationships, while critics regard it as a gendered inequality sustained by patriarchal readings of religion (Brenner, 2006; Wajiran, 2018). Popular Islamic romance does not settle this dispute. It makes conflict intimate and emotionally legible. As Rani (2012) observes, genre combines religious concerns with the pleasures and expectations of popular romance. In Cawelti's (1976) terms, village and city function as contextual inventions within a shared formula: familiar plots remain, but their moral emphasis shifts with changing ideas of piety, marriage, and women's autonomy.

Religiosity shapes all four novels, but it does not carry the same authority in every setting. In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Hati Suhita* (2019), religious discourse enters the household through fathers, husbands, pesantren elders, and inherited ideas of dutiful wife. Male characters invoke scripture and conservative interpretation to secure authority or justify polygamous desire (Muzakka & Suyanto, 2020). Women, meanwhile, are taught to understand patience, obedience, and self-denial as signs of virtue. Prayer, parental blessing, and Javanese-Islamic ideals of devotion give them the strength to endure neglect and unequal marriage (Furoidatul et al., 2022; Husniah & Taufiq, 2023). Yet faith does not only discipline them. It can also provide a language for questioning injustice. As Hellwig (2011) observes in El Khaleqy's fiction, resistance to patriarchal interpretation need not amount to a rejection of Islam. Conflict lies instead over who may define piety and whose suffering that definition protects.

Urban novels are not devoid of religion; rather, religion competes with trust, professional identity, emotional injury, and personal dignity. In *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014), Islamic teachings on plural marriage and fairness are invoked to make Pras's second marriage appear morally defensible (Indarti, 2023). This appeal to charity softens betrayal without removing its consequences for Arini. *Layangan Putus* (2020) moves further from this accommodation. Kinan refuses to let religious language turn secrecy into legitimate marriage and chooses divorce instead (Wiliana, 2023). Her response reflects the wider tension of post-Reformasi Indonesia, where expanding female participation coexists with renewed public piety and persistent conservative pressure on women's familial roles (Afrianty, 2020; Brenner, 2006). Religion thus performs different narrative work across the corpus. In village stories, it largely orders conduct and sustains marital hierarchy, though women may reinterpret it against abuse. In city stories, it remains morally present but loses its monopoly over judgment. The heroines weigh piety against honesty, justice, and self-respect, a variation that allows the Islamic romance formula to accommodate changing ideas of female agency (Rani, 2012).

Each novel's resolution illustrates how religiosity and female agency interplay in different contexts. In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), Annisa ultimately escapes her polygamous marriage, implying that true Islamic justice is on her side as she challenges a

patriarchal misuse of religion (Wajiran, 2018). Alina in *Hati Suhita* (2019) remains in her arranged marriage and endures with devout patience; though treated as “invisible” by her husband for a long time (Salafi, 2023), her faith-fueled perseverance is eventually rewarded when he has a change of heart. Alina’s story suggests that piety and forbearance can gradually reform a flawed tradition from within. *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) depicts a modern woman choosing self-sacrifice: confronted with her husband’s second wife, Arini (who is terminally ill) accepts polygamy as God’s decree, relinquishing personal happiness for what she believes is a higher good (Pane, 2018). This ending frames Arini’s acquiescence as an act of profound faith and generosity, consistent with religious teachings on patience and charity. *Layangan Putus* (2020) has Kinan reject polygamy outright, she divorces her unfaithful husband rather than share him. Kinan’s conclusion affirms that personal dignity and justice can take precedence, a stance permissible within an Islamic framework since her husband broke his vows. Thus, rural narratives (Annisa and Alina) resolve through either inner reform or steadfast forbearance rooted in religious virtue, whereas the urban narratives (Arini and Kinan) provide one example of devout selflessness and one of empowered self-determination. Each outcome reflects a negotiation between Islamic values and heroine’s sense of justice appropriate to her social context.

These novels use polygamy and adultery not merely as sensational conflicts, but as a way of staging unresolved arguments about marriage, piety, and women’s rights. Across this corpus, wives respond to male betrayal in markedly different ways: some endure it as a religious trial; others question, resist, or leave. This range reflects the wider division surrounding polygamy in Indonesia, where religious permissibility coexists with sustained criticism of its emotional and gendered consequences (Brenner, 2006; Wajiran, 2018). Love triangle makes that dispute intimate. Doctrine enters the household; moral argument becomes grief, jealousy, patience, or refusal. Such tensions are especially significant in post-Reformasi Indonesia, where growing public piety has developed alongside women’s greater visibility and demands for equality (Afrianty, 2020).

What makes this formula effective is its capacity to hold these competing positions within a familiar story. Cawelti’s romance pattern offers recognizable conflicts, polarized characters, and expectation that emotional disorder will eventually acquire moral meaning (Cawelti, 1976). Yet the endings need not say the same thing. One novel rewards patience; another validates separation. One restores the marriage; another leaves betrayal unresolved. In each case, the formula directs sympathy toward injured wife and provides some measure of justice, recognition, or peace. At the same time, these variations prevent Islamic romance from speaking with a single moral voice. As studies of Indonesian popular fiction suggest, religious themes gain force when joined to affective pleasures of romance and adapted to contemporary social concerns (Hellwig, 2011; Rani, 2012). Formula fiction is therefore far from trivial. It turns abstract debates about faith, gender, and power into recognizable domestic experience, while both reflecting and shaping the cultural language of marriage in post-Reformasi Indonesia.

Discussion

Across the four novels, marriage is unsettled by same intimate crisis: a husband whose affection no longer belongs to one woman alone. In some stories, the rupture takes form of polygamy or a concealed marriage; in others, adultery or an attachment that survives beyond marital bond. In Cawelti’s terms, this repeated arrangement constitutes a formula: a recognizable structure of plot and characterization that offers familiarity while permitting cultural variation (Cawelti, 1976). Such dual-partner storylines have become prominent in Indonesian popular fiction since late 1990s, reflecting new social concerns.

Polygamy in particular emerged as a significant theme in post-1998 novels (Wajiran, 2018), with early examples like *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004) and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) bringing Muslim polygamous marriage to the forefront. In parallel, adultery narratives have surged in popular culture, articulating anxieties about infidelity in modern marriages. The sensational success of *Layangan Putus* (2020) exemplifies this trend, continuing Indonesia's legacy of infidelity dramas in contemporary era (Auteur, 2024).

Yet repetition does not produce identical stories. *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) presents polygamy as patriarchal coercion; *Hati Suhita* (2019), as emotional displacement within an arranged marriage. *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) gives the second marriage an altruistic justification, while *Layangan Putus* (2020) begins with secrecy and betrayal. Different circumstances, the same pressure: a wife must confront a marriage whose emotional centre no longer belongs to her alone. Such narratives gained greater visibility after 1998, when expanded expressive freedom enabled Indonesian Muslim writers to address polygamy, female suffering, and marital inequality more openly. Their positions remained divided, reflecting a wider Muslim debate over whether polygamy should be defended, endured, reformed, or rejected (Hellwig, 2011; Wajiran, 2018).

This development also belongs to the growth of Indonesian popular Islamic romance, a genre that joins religious discourse to familiar emotional pleasures and broad popular appeal (Rani, 2012). Prasetyawati's story (2020) marks a later variation of formula. Its screen adaptation attracted and polarized Indonesian audiences by placing infidelity, masculine entitlement, and female resistance at the centre of domestic melodrama (Widodo & Mochtar, 2023). Earlier polygamy narratives often ask whether a second marriage can be morally or religiously justified; later adultery narratives ask what legitimacy means when it follows concealment, deception, and injury. This shift is significant. The divided husband remains, but wife is no longer confined to patience or reconciliation. She may investigate, confront, refuse, or leave. This formula therefore records changing anxieties about marriage, piety, and women's authority in post-Reformasi Indonesia, where greater female visibility coexists with renewed pressure to preserve traditional gender roles (Afrianty, 2020).

This contrast between novels is not simply one between rural polygamy and urban adultery. In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), pesantren world gives polygamy a communal language: religious permission, family honour, and wife's duty to endure. *Hati Suhita* (2019) does not depict an actual polygamous marriage, but it draws on the same triangular structure. Alina shares her marriage with Gus Birru's continuing attachment to Rengganis, and the pain lies in being lawful yet emotionally displaced. In *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014), city does not remove religious justification. Pras presents his second marriage as an act of rescue, turning charity into a defence of a decision made without Arini. *Layangan Putus* (2020) makes the breach more explicit: adultery, concealment, then a secret marriage. In each case, another woman enters marital bond, but language used to explain her presence changes: from duty and legitimacy to secrecy, trust, and betrayal (Hellwig, 2011; Pane, 2018; Wajiran, 2018; Widodo & Mochtar, 2023).

The rural–urban difference therefore lies less in the presence or absence of Islam than in the authority religion holds over the conflict. The rural narratives place marriage within families, pesantren hierarchies, and inherited expectations of female patience. The urban narratives remain religious, but faith competes with emotional honesty, professional identity, personal dignity, and wife's right to judge what has happened to her. This distinction matters because Islamic law separates permitted polygyny from forbidden adultery, while these novels ask a different question: does formal legitimacy erase secrecy, neglect, or emotional harm? Indonesian debates over polygamy have long turned on this

gap between religious permission and women's lived experience (Brenner, 2006; Wajiran, 2018). Popular Islamic romance brings that debate into household, joining religious argument to jealousy, grief, and divided loyalty (Rani, 2012). In Cawelti's (1976) terms, these novels retain the familiar romantic triangle but revise its moral force: village settings foreground communal legitimacy; cities, injured trust and individual judgment. This formula stays recognizable. What changes is meaning of betrayal.

Village and city do not merely house these stories; they shape what marriage may demand from a woman. In El Khalieqy's (2009) and Anis' (2019) novel, *pesantren* world binds female virtue to patience, domestic service, and communal approval. Annisa's departure for Yogyakarta turns education into a route beyond inherited obedience. Alina remains closer to *pesantren*, but her marriage is unsettled by Gus Birru's urban experience and continuing attachment to *Rengganis*. The triangle in *Hati Suhita* (2019) is emotional rather than legally polygamous, yet its effect is similar: the lawful wife finds herself displaced by another woman. These rural narratives therefore look outward, toward education, mobility, and a wider social life. Nadia's (2014) and Prasetyawati's (2020) stories reverse the movement. Their heroines already inhabit educated, professional worlds, while husbands turn toward an older domestic fantasy: a second household, a quieter partner, the promise of obedience. Less a literal return to village than an imaginative retreat from female autonomy. This contrast is not absolute, but it gives the romances a clear social direction: women move toward greater independence; men unsettled by that movement seek refuge in tradition. This tension echoes post-Reformasi Indonesia, where women's expanding public roles coexist with renewed demands for piety and domestic respectability (Afrianty, 2020; Hellwig, 2011; Wajiran, 2018).

What holds these different movements together is obstacle at the centre of romance. A husband's divided loyalty separates couple, whether rival enters as a second wife, a concealed lover, or an attachment that survives within marriage. Cawelti's framework is useful precisely because repetition does not require sameness. A familiar triangle acquires new moral force when placed within different religious, spatial, and gendered worlds (Cawelti, 1976). *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004) offers an earlier precedent: several women are drawn around one male protagonist, while religious morality reshapes a familiar popular-romance structure (Rani, 2012; Rokib, 2016). These novels retain this recognizable conflict but vary its resolution. Some restore marriage through patience, sacrifice, or reconciliation; others permit confrontation, separation, or unresolved grief. These variations reveal how Indonesian Islamic romance combines popular convention with changing social expectations. Village and city are therefore more than contrasting backdrops. They help decide who may desire, who must endure, and what kind of ending can still be presented as morally just.

The difference between rural and urban heroines grows from the same patriarchal order, though it takes different forms. In village narratives, women are taught to value obedience, patience, and domestic service; male authority appears natural because family, religion, and community reinforce it. In urban novels, women possess education, careers, and a stronger sense of personal judgment. Their independence does not cause marital betrayal. Rather, it exposes how fragile masculine privilege becomes when a wife is no longer economically or emotionally dependent. Husband's turn toward a more compliant partner can therefore be read as an attempt to recover an older domestic hierarchy in which female virtue means accommodation and male misconduct remains negotiable (Nurmila, 2009; Harahap & Hasanah, 2022). This tension runs through the characterization of Arini and Kinan. Both inhabit modern social worlds, yet their marriages remain governed by expectations inherited from a more traditional gender order. When they question

secrecy, unequal marriage, or divided loyalty, they are not simply rejecting domestic life; they are refusing the assumption that a good wife must absorb every injury in silence. Such expectations continue to place women under a double burden: success in public life, compliance at home (Pauzian et al., 2023; Sho'ib, 2025). The rural–urban contrast is therefore less a divide between passive and liberated women than a difference in how resistance becomes possible. In village, authority is communal and difficult to escape. In city, women have more room to confront it, though not without emotional cost. Across both settings, the romance formula is driven by the same unresolved struggle: whether marriage should preserve male privilege or recognize women as equal moral subjects.

Place does more than provide scenery; it determines how marital conflict is lived and judged. Annisa's suffering is interpreted through family honour, religious obedience, and the expectation that a wife should endure. Her refusal therefore challenges not only Samsudin, but also the social order that protects him (El Khalieqy, 2009). Alina is not displaced by a second marriage, but by Gus Birru's continuing attachment to Rengganis. Her patience keeps the household intact, yet the novel also shows the loneliness produced when devotion is demanded without reciprocal affection (Anis, 2019). Annisa resists openly; Alina survives through restraint and careful self-command. Neither can be reduced to passive rural wife. Their different responses instead reveal unequal moral labour demanded of women when marriage is treated as an institution they alone must protect. Hellwig (2011) offers a useful distinction: El Khalieqy's fiction does not reject Islam, but contests patriarchal interpretations that convert women's pain into proof of piety. Alina's story develops a related tension. Her endurance carries moral force, but it also reveals how marriage can depend on one woman absorbing the consequences of another person's desire.

Nadia's (2014) and Prasetyawati's fictions (2020) move the conflict away from communal supervision and toward secrecy, selective disclosure, and control over knowledge. Pras presents his second marriage as an act of rescue, as though benevolent intention could lessen Arini's exclusion from decision. Aris conceals another relationship until Kinan encounters betrayal as an accomplished fact. Education and professional standing do not protect either woman from injury. They do, however, give them a stronger language for naming deception and judging whether the marriage remains worthy of preservation. Religion still matters, but it no longer settles the conflict by itself. Permission is weighed against honesty; patience against reciprocity; marital continuity against personal dignity. This tension reflects a wider post-Reformasi paradox: women's public visibility has expanded, while religious and social discourse continues to privilege their traditional familial responsibilities (Afrianty, 2020). Popular Islamic romance translates that contradiction into domestic feeling, allowing questions of law, faith, and gender to be experienced as jealousy, grief, endurance, and refusal (Rani, 2012). The obstacle remains familiar (a husband's divided attachment) but its moral meaning changes with authority surrounding marriage and choices available to injured wife.

The endings differ because each novel asks a different moral question. El Khalieqy (2009) asks whether piety can require a woman to remain in a violent and polygamous marriage. Annisa's departure answers in the negative: religious commitment need not mean obedience to injustice. Anis (2019) offers a quieter resolution. Alina is not confronting legal polygamy, but Gus Birru's emotional loyalty to Rengganis. She stays, and her patience is eventually met by her husband's recognition. One story permits escape; the other repairs marriage from within. In both, however, Islam provides more than an excuse for male authority. It also supplies a language of justice, responsibility, and moral accountability. Hellwig's (2011) reading of El Khalieqy is criticism falling on patriarchal interpretations of

Islam, not on faith itself. Wajiran (2018) likewise shows that post-Reformasi Muslim writers approach polygamy from conflicting positions, sometimes legitimizing it as divine permission, sometimes exposing the suffering concealed by that permission. Nadia (2014) and Prasetyawati (2020) should not, therefore, be described as simply secular alternatives. Religion remains present, but it no longer decides the outcome on its own. Pras invokes rescue, charity, and religious legitimacy to explain his second marriage; Arini must decide whether good intention can excuse exclusion and emotional harm. Kinan faces a harsher problem: another relationship has been concealed until trust is no longer recoverable. Her decision to leave gives honesty, consent, and dignity greater weight than formal legitimacy later attached to her husband's conduct. The difference lies in range of judgments available to heroines. Reconciliation remains possible, but no longer compulsory. Husband's divided attachment supplies the familiar formula; the ending reveals invention. Patience may restore a marriage, resistance may end one, and neither outcome carries precisely the same meaning across the four novels.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Indonesian Islamic popular romances employ distinct formulaic narratives in rural versus urban contexts, especially regarding polygamy and adultery. In traditional rural settings, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Hati Suhita* (2019) utilize romance formula to portray polygamy as religiously sanctioned ("halal") and socially acceptable. Women in these stories are often depicted as pious, obedient housewives who passively endure polygamy, reflecting an archetype of *sholehah* (virtuous) Muslim woman (Wajiran, 2018). Such characterizations align with Cawelti's theory that popular formulas are shaped by cultural conventions and audience expectations (Merawati & Astuti, 2019). By contrast, urban-set narratives, *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2014) and *Layangan Putus* (2020), frame extramarital affairs as sinful transgressions and feature modern career women who actively resist betrayal. For instance, in *Layangan Putus* (2020) wronged wife ultimately seeks a divorce in response to her husband's infidelity (Ace et al., 2022). This contrast underscores how the formula romance adapts to context: rural polygamy tales impart lessons of patience and religious devotion, whereas urban adultery dramas emphasize personal agency and moral accountability, condemning unfaithfulness as incompatible with Islamic and modern values (Hanifah & Ningsih, 2023).

Reading these novels together reveals how questions of gender and Islam are organized through a recurring popular form. Cawelti's (1969, 1976) framework makes it possible to see what the narratives share: a divided husband, a rival woman, an injured wife, and a plot moving toward moral resolution. This comparison also shows where repetition gives way to variation. In some novels, polygamy is presented through religious duty and female endurance; in others, concealment and betrayal make the same triangular structure harder to reconcile. Endings likewise shift from patience and marital repair to separation or unresolved pain (Merawati & Astuti, 2019). This formula remains recognizable, but its moral emphasis changes with setting, gender role, and authority granted to religion. This approach offers a clearer account of how Indonesian Islamic romance responds to social change. Rather than treating rural and urban narratives as separate traditions, this study places them within one shared structure and asks how each setting revises it. Rural stories bind marital conflict to family, *pesantren* authority, and communal expectations. Urban stories move this emphasis toward secrecy, trust, professional identity, and women's right to judge marriage for themselves. Formula analysis therefore reveals both continuity and change: continuity in plot, change in meaning of patience, betrayal, and justice. Its wider value is methodological. Cawelti's

theory, when grounded in Indonesian religious and cultural contexts, helps explain how popular fiction turns contested questions of polygamy, adultery, and female agency into accessible narrative experience. This study thus contributes to scholarship on Indonesian popular literature by showing how genre convention can register cultural tension rather than merely repeat it.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that open avenues for further inquiry. Four novels cannot represent the full range of Indonesian Islamic romance, while rural-urban distinction risks making social worlds appear more separate than they are. *Hati Suhita* (2019), for instance, complicates image of the passive pesantren woman. Alina is patient, but also intelligent, courageous, and capable of critical judgment, showing that village-centred narratives may contain forms of agency that exceed the obedient-wife archetype (Astuti & Wiyatmi, 2022). The categories used here are therefore best understood as dominant tendencies, not fixed identities. This analysis also privileges textual form over circulation and reception. This study explains how romance formulas organize polygamy, adultery, female suffering, and moral closure, but not how readers interpret these stories or how adaptations reshape them across print, web series, film, and online serialization. This omission matters because popular formulas develop through their interaction with audience expectations, commercial platforms, and changing cultural debates (Merawati & Astuti, 2019). Further research should extend the corpus, compare print and screen versions, and examine reader responses across different social groups. Feminist, reception-oriented, and politic-economic approaches could also clarify how patriarchy, class, publishing markets, and digital platforms influence the changing form of Islamic romance after Reformasi 1998. Such work would test the patterns identified here while offering a fuller account of how genre evolves across texts, media, and audiences.

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