ISLAMIC POPULAR CULTURE AND THE NEW IDENTITIES OF URBAN MUSLIM
YOUNG PEOPLE IN INDONESIA:
THE CASE OF ISLAMIC FILMS AND ISLAMIC SELF-HELP BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the emerging phenomenon of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia. Islamic popular culture has been thriving in Indonesia for more than a decade. It is a new and important aspect of the Islamic revival in this country and beyond. Popular culture has sometimes been viewed as a Western product and many people in Indonesia think that it introduces a Western lifestyle that is incompatible with Islam. Some Islamic teachings in Indonesia indeed challenge values from the West. However, my thesis shows that Islam and Western-influenced popular culture are not necessarily incompatible with each other.

In this thesis, I examine Islamic films and Islamic self-help books as forms of popular culture. I also look at how Indonesian Muslim young people in urban areas interpret Islamic films and Islamic self-help books as a way of constructing their identity. I analysed some Islamic films and self-help books, as well as conducted interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation of young people who watch Islamic films or read Islamic self-help books. My informants were university students in Jakarta and Bandung, particularly students of Universitas Negeri Jakarta and Institut Teknologi Bandung respectively. Their consumption of Islamic popular culture suggests that urban young people in Indonesia are aiming to be modern and pious at the same time. In doing so, urban Indonesian Muslim young people demonstrate that they do not exclusively belong to either Westernisation or Islamism: they are creating their own distinctive identity.

Islamic films have re-appeared recently to address practical issues and everyday life problems faced by Indonesian young people. They offer Islamic-style solutions and have become a means for the propagation of Islamic values. However, film is a sort of a battlefield for competing and contradicting ideas. Some Islamic films, which have been remarkably successful at the box office recently, adhere to more conservative Islamic principles. Other Islamic films tend to resonate with more liberal Islamic thinking. My informants did not intend to actually do the things they saw modelled in the films, though they did not object to the values that Islamic films nurture. Therefore, the intention of some Islamic filmmakers and book authors to educate urban young Muslims to be good Muslims in accord with the spirit of Islamisation has perhaps not translated into practice in quite the way some of them might have expected or hoped.
Islamic self-help books are a technique of governmentality (Foucault) that prescribes particular ways of life and living for all Muslim readers. The discourses of the Islamic self-help books resonate with American self-help books, as well as the *tarbiyah* movement, the increasingly prominent contemporary Islamic movement in Indonesia, to which many Islamic self-help writers belong. The books have become one of Muslim young people’s sources for learning about Islam; the books remind them of their duties as Muslims, and counter the influence of a Western lifestyle. However, my informants also criticised the books for being mass-marketed commodities with repetitious messages. They also felt that only a few points from the books are truly important in their daily lives.

Although film is a powerful medium through which messages can be delivered, in order to influence and to transform behaviours, and self-help books are a technique of governmentality that constructs subjects, urban Indonesian Muslim young people saw these two forms of popular culture less as moral authorities than as references and sources of inspiration. Indonesian Muslim young people are not passive recipients, as proposed by some popular culture theorists. They did not show total acceptance of the propagating mission of Islamic films and the governing power of Islamic self-help books over their conduct. Rather than imposing a particular ideology on Indonesian Muslim youth, Islamic films and books serve to show, involve, engage, motivate and inform Indonesian Muslim youth about a model of a particular version of Islam. Through modified appropriation of particular values offered by Islamic films and self-help books, urban Indonesian Muslim young people constitute themselves as modern Islamic subjects. A stable and unified Islamic identity that film directors and self-help book authors might want to see among Muslim youngsters does not exist. Urban Indonesian Muslim youth identities are non-essentialist identities, which are constantly being created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. Their identities are not subject to external actors who want to put them in certain categories. The distinctive components of these identities are yet to be fixed and, perhaps, will be forever ‘in process’ as Muslim young people search for and construct their identities.
DECLARATION FOR THESIS

This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below.

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INTRODUCTION

The Phenomenon of Islamic Popular Culture

Since the 1990s, Islam has been a major focus of popular preoccupation in Indonesia. Although Islam was an important element in Indonesian society after Independence in 1945, and in centuries before, considering the political pressures of the New Order government on Islamic forces in the 1980s, the rising level of Islamic observance among Muslims was remarkable. After the 1990s, the use of Islamic symbols – veil wearing among women was probably the most notable – and the establishment of Islamic financial institutions have operated to constitute a trend. Still, the rise of what is called 'Islamic popular culture' since the 2000s has been a surprising one. Sermon-filled TV soap operas, veil-wearing rock stars, trendy Muslim magazines, and films featuring burqa-wearers as main characters saturate the mediascape of contemporary Indonesia (Weintraub 2011: 1). This phenomenon did not appear in the New Order period (1966-98) not even in the later years of the New Order that were friendlier to Islam. Most people did not expect this alliance of Islam with popular culture, as popular culture had been considered the product of Western civilisation, and thus incompatible with Islam. It is a reality that currently, especially for young people, living an Islamic lifestyle by consuming Islamic symbols and practising Islamic popular culture is trendy and desirable. In other words, Islam, for Indonesian Muslim young people, has become friendly, trendy and inspirational. One can easily observe how Muslim young people use online social media to share their faith and discuss important Muslim-related issues, how urban teenagers flock to hear sermons by celebrity-preachers, how excited youngsters are with the new trendy veils available in boutiques, and how university students use magazines, newsletters, and books to campaign for Palestine’s independence. Even though these cases show how different the features of Islam in Indonesia today are compared to decades ago, if one looks beyond Indonesia, one can see that the emergence of Islamic popular culture is a global phenomenon.

Weintraub (2011: 4) suggests that popular culture has been an important factor in the global resurgence of Islam. Forms of popular culture such as books, magazines, newspapers, TV, radio and the Internet have played a very important role in the proliferation of da’wah.
movements and the sense of Islamic identity throughout the Muslim world.¹ Eickelman and Anderson (1999: 1) also argue that new media – a part of popular culture – have been significant in linking Muslims around their common interest and in developing an Islamic-based politics of identity. Kraidy (2006) cites the popularity of Islamic boy bands in Malaysia, the appearance of Islamic videos in London, the broadcast of an ‘Islamically-correct’ reality television show in Dubai, and the widespread adaptation of Western game shows for Arab television stations as examples that show the popular desire in Muslim societies to consume Islamic symbols and practices, a desire that is not the result of the application of sharia (Islamic law) nor mediated by the establishment of Islamic banks. The examples also show that, rather than hostility, there is compatibility between the Muslim faith and global popular culture, globalising the belief of Islam as well as Islamising global popular culture. This compatibility might have encouraged some Muslim popular culture producers to employ forms of popular culture to nurture particular Islamic values and a certain Islamic identity to young adults. However, this thesis finds that urban Muslim young adults who consume Islamic films and Islamic self-help books are capable of constructing their own identities, which are different to those Muslim popular culture producers might expect.

**Focus of the Thesis and Central Argument**

I explore the nexus of three areas in this research: popular culture, Islamisation and the construction of identity among young people. I endeavour to address the shortfall in scholarly accounts of Islamic popular culture within Indonesian studies. The shortfall in studies of Indonesian popular culture studies will be described in the next section. My thesis explores the emergence of a new identity among Indonesian Muslim youth, arguing that they want to be both modern and pious at the same time. While both Fealy (2007) and Hasan (2009) have provided a comprehensive discussion of Islamic identity and the consumption of popular culture, their works mainly focused on Islamic popular culture producers rather than consumers. This study takes a slightly different route, maintaining the emphasis on analysis of texts, while also investigating cultural consumers – especially university students. However, my research is not the first to examine Islamic popular culture consumers since I follow Nilan (2006 and 2008), whose works have begun to illuminate the way Indonesian Muslim teenagers engage with Islamic media and consume Islamic popular culture. I also note that Nef-Saluz (2007) has written about the emergence of Islamic dress (particularly the

¹ Da’wah literally means ‘issuing a summons’ or ‘making an ‘invitation’. However, it usually refers to the proselytising or preaching of Islam. It.
veil) and Islamic media (press, soap opera and *nashid*) as well as how young people (university students) construct their social identity. Despite her discussion of identity formation among Indonesian university students, she did not really connect how they perceive Islamic popular culture with how they construct their identity. In her research, Nef-Saluz did not investigate whether or to what extent Muslim young people's identity formation process was influenced by their consumption of Islamic popular culture. In my research, I examined the relationship of Islam and popular culture, how Muslim young people perceived Islamic popular culture, Islamic films and Islamic self-help books, and how Islamic popular culture has influenced the processes of identity construction among Indonesian Muslim young people.

If we would like to know what Islam and Muslim societies will be like in the future amidst the surge of radicalism and neo-fundamentalism, we need to know about the relationship between Islam and popular culture as well as how Islamic popular culture influences the identity construction of Indonesian Muslim young people: it might well play a very important role in shaping the nature of Islam. In this thesis, I aim to gain an insight into the emerging phenomenon of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, and thereby to contribute to the analysis of the transformation of Islam in Indonesia.

In studying the phenomenon of Islamic popular culture, I decided to focus on Islamic films and self-help books. Fealy (2007) has examined Islamic marketing services, Howell (2008) has discussed the Islamic style of tele-preaching, and Hasan (2009) has analysed Islamic soap operas and music albums. But Islamic films and self-help books and their influence upon identity construction among urban Muslim young people in Indonesia are yet to be studied. Even though Nef-Saluz (2007) investigated how students of Gadjah Mada University, a major public university in Indonesia, commented on practices of popular culture, as I do in this research, she focused on the varieties of veil wearing among the students. Hoesterey and Clark (2012) and Heryanto (2008, 2010 and 2011) have written about contemporary Islamic films. However, they focused on the production side, the films themselves, not the consumption side, the audience. Hoesterey (2012) has investigated the emergence of Muslim trainers and self-help gurus, which is a sign of the Islamic self-help movement in Indonesia. Hoesterey (2009) has also researched a celebrity Muslim preacher who wrote some self-help

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*Nashid* is a type of Islamic vocal music that is either sung *a cappella* or accompanied by percussion instruments.
books. However, he did not focus on the books and their consumers, especially young people, as I do.

In this thesis, the designation ‘Islamic self-help books’ refers to books that advise young people how to behave or act in accordance with Islamic teachings. Islamic books that recommend appropriate behaviour and action for Indonesian Muslims, actually, have been appearing since the 1930s, e.g. Hamka’s *Modern Tasauf* (1939). Even though these books are considered the predecessors of current Islamic self-help books, the more contemporary books have distinctive features. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary Islamic self-help books are usually written in friendly, colloquial language, like other ‘secular’ lifestyle and self-help books for young people. Islamic films are, also, not something new in Indonesian film history. However, they have re-appeared recently to address practical issues and everyday life problems faced by Indonesian youth, and they offer Islamic-style solutions. I argue that films and books help young people develop their own distinctive identity, being new sources of authority apart from parents, formal education and friends (Coleman and Hendry 1999: 52). In this context of Islamic revivalism, young people have a passion to consume Islamic popular culture products in order to construct a new identity. To provide an original perspective, as well as a substantial contribution to scholarship in the field of cultural studies, I carried out fieldwork, as this approach has not been commonly applied in the study of popular culture. Heryanto (2008) confirms that ethnographic fieldwork has not been widely adopted or adequately appreciated in the study of Indonesian popular culture and elsewhere.

In discussing the issue of popular culture, I acknowledge that popular culture might be understood by many as a sub-culture for the masses, an evasion of socio-political activities, or a form of control of the masses by the elites of global capitalism. However, I agree with Possamai (2005: 20) that popular culture is a platform for contemporary life for many, if not all, people, as we live through and with it, despite the fact that popular culture is part of neo-liberal capitalism managed by global corporations. I am in line with Van Nieuwkerk (2008), who has noted that one trend in the contemporary scene of popular culture with regards to religion, particularly Islam, is the pietisation of art, or rather, in my research, the pietisation of popular culture. Possamai (2005: 20) argues that the relationship of religion and popular culture is not a simple relationship of cause and effect. I see that religious actors who engage in the practice of popular culture also engage in the shaping of popular culture, at least in the local context.
In this thesis, I argue that the identity of Indonesian Muslim young people is non-essentialist and evolving, as theorised by Hall (1996) and Woodward (1997). Indonesian Muslim young people are capable of constructing their own identity amidst the strong influence of two forms of Islamic popular culture that I investigate: Islamic films and Islamic self-help books. Although film is a powerful medium through which film directors and novel authors (whose works are adapted for the widescreen) can deliver Islamic messages to influence and to transform behaviours, Muslim young people see it less as a moral imperative than one of many references and sources of inspiration. Rather than imposing a particular ideology upon Indonesian Muslim young people, films serve to show, involve, engage, motivate and inform them about what is going on in life and society through the language of film, which is, at least in part, an entertainment by nature. Islamic self-help books could be categorised as a powerful tool to govern Muslim young people’s conduct. However, as with the response to Islamic films, the response of Muslim young people to their reading of Islamic self-help books does not represent total acceptance of the governing power of the books over their conduct. Various forms of Islamic popular culture have been important sites for creating the meaning of life for many young people. Yet they constitute only one among many cultural products and practices that Muslim young people consume in their daily life, including non-Islamic films, secular self-help books, and other Asian pop culture. Using a Foucauldian theoretical framework, I argue that through ‘modified appropriation’ of particular values offered by the films and the books, as well as other discourses and practices, Muslim young people constitute themselves as subjects. Therefore, a stable and unified Islamic identity that film directors and book authors might want to see among Muslim youngsters has not developed up until now. The identity of Indonesian Muslim young people is as modernised Muslims, an emerging identity whose distinctive features and elements are still yet to be found – by themselves, and by analysts as well – and, perhaps, will forever be in process of construction.

Current Studies of Popular Culture in Indonesia

For a long time, political themes such as nation-state building, modernisation, militarism, human rights abuses, corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts and, more recently, Islamic neo-fundamentalism and radicalism have dominated the study of Indonesia. Therefore, the works on mass media and popular culture – e.g. on television (Hobart 2006a and b; Hollander, d’Haenens and Bardoel 2009), cinema (Sen 1994; Clark 2008; Barker 2011), soap opera (Nilan 2001 and Ida 2006), female magazines (Nilan 2003a and Handajani 2005), youth language (Smith-Hefner 2007), teen literatures (Sutedja-Lim 2007), carnival and live

For decades, Islamic activists, as well as nationalists, in Indonesia and elsewhere have asserted that popular culture (generally associated with the West) subverts values and robs Muslims of their identity. However, hostility towards popular culture is not the only possible reaction from Muslims. Kraidy (2005 and 2006) and Kubala (2007) show that in some Muslim countries like Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon, there are many young people who regard it as a fascinating, new phenomenon. In these countries, some aspects of popular culture have been creatively adapted into Islam and warmly welcomed by many. Since Indonesia is not an exception to the global phenomenon, the prominence of popular culture in this big Muslim country should attract more attention from scholars.

Indonesia has been witnessing a major change in Islam during the last ten years or so. Islam is not merely a religion, since entrepreneurs are also transforming it into a popular brand for media, cultural and commercial products (Widodo 2008), which is seemingly an odd combination. The number of Islamic publications specifically designated for youth has exploded, and some Islamic-themed films, particularly the very famous Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love), have been very popular among young people as well as praised by educated Muslims, including top politicians. Therefore, Voll (2008: 268) has a point when he admits that scholars are still in the process of defining the relationship between popular culture and Islam, and that the relationship needs a thorough examination.

**Research Questions**

As previously noted, this research builds on the few previous studies of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia. The focus of this research is on how Islamic popular culture shapes or defines the identity of Indonesian Muslim young people and, complementarily, how Muslim young people in Indonesia make use of Islamic popular culture to establish their identity. The questions that the thesis endeavours to answer are:
Do Indonesian Muslim young people really prefer to consume Islamic popular culture rather than Western and Western-influenced popular culture? In what ways does Islamic popular culture influence their daily life?

How do Indonesian young people interpret Islamic popular culture? What meanings do they attach to this hybrid culture?

How do Indonesian young people interpret the versions of Islam they are taught about and popular culture they currently consume in everyday life?

What kinds of identity do Indonesian Muslim young people seek? How do they use Islamic popular culture to construct their own identity?

In what ways has the contestation between globalized popular culture and the wave of Islamisation taken place in Indonesia? How do Muslim young people situate themselves in that contest?

**Chapters of Thesis**

Chapter One deals with the theoretical aspects of the thesis. Here I consider theories of popular culture and critiques of popular culture. The chapter begins with definitions of popular culture that mostly describe popular culture as the culture of the lower class and associate it with the masses and inferiority. However, the development of technologies of mass production, distribution and duplication, and of communication and information, has allowed popular culture to grow in stature and influence. These technologies have eroded distinctions between high and low culture and enabled popular culture to become a hallmark of the twentieth century. The prominence of popular culture has not, however, stopped it being the subject of criticism. Many scholars think of it being mass-produced for nothing more than the entertainment of the uneducated masses and of having been constructed by global capitalism for profit and ideological manipulation (e.g. Adorno 1991, Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, Lowenthal 1957, MacDonald 1957). Some writers have recognised that even though popular culture may have been constructed by and for the people, many popular culture practices have been commodified and commercialised since its earliest development (Adorno 1991, MacDonald 1957, Marcuse 1964). Since popular culture has its roots in the ideological and economic formations of twentieth century Western societies and has been diffused to other societies through capitalism, many people associate popular culture with the Westernisation of other societies throughout the globe, which brings further criticism. A similar sense that popular culture is associated with the West can also be found in Indonesia, and there are many critiques of popular culture that see it as causing hedonism,
immorality and materialism. There is also a theory that popular culture, as is in the case of my research, enables young people to construct their own identity.

Chapter Two surveys briefly the existing literature on the resurgence of religion, especially Islam, as a global phenomenon. The emergence of what is called ‘Islamic popular culture’ can only be understood through this context. The chapter also reviews some theoretical frameworks of identity. Even though theories of personal identity as laid out by Erikson (1968) inform my thesis quite significantly, I focus more on politicised social identity, as described by Bradley (1996). In the thesis, I employ theories of identity proposed by Michel Foucault (1977), Stuart Hall (1996), Manuel Castells (1997) and Paula M.L. Moya (2006). These writers approached identities as non-essentialist and evolving entities.

Chapter Three describes the methodology of the thesis and the research process. The first section of the chapter explains the choice of qualitative research method as the research method and cultural studies as the approach. After that, I discuss textual analysis, interviewing, focus group discussion and observation as my methods to collect data and narrative analysis, as well as how these methods worked in the field. Finally, the chapter examines the rationale for Jakarta and Bandung as the research sites. In the last section of this chapter, I describe the categories I employed to select research participants, and who they were.

In Chapter Four, I deal with popular culture, young people and Islam in Indonesia. In the first section, I review the existing literature about the burgeoning of popular culture in Indonesia. It encompasses three major periods in Indonesian history: the Old Order (1945-1966), the New Order and the Reform era (post-1998). I observe how popular culture was differently treated by the regime in each historical period, and how popular culture media were developed under different cultural policies. Then I look at scholarly accounts of youth in general and in Indonesia as well. I acknowledge the significant differences between young people in Indonesia and young people in the West. Afterwards, I present my findings on how my informants engage with popular culture in their daily life. I also document how research participants live Islam in their everyday life. The aim of this chapter is to show how Indonesian Muslim young people can deal with both popular culture, which is often characterised as a product and practice of Western culture, and Islam, which has undergone resurgence among young people.
Chapter Five explores Islamic films, one of two forms of Islamic popular culture that I am examining. I start by defining religious film and framing the relationship between religion and film. Then the chapter captures some of the highlights in the history of Indonesian cinema and seeks to contextualise the genre of Islamic films within that history. The representation of Islam in Indonesian cinema is complex and limited compared to the frequency of production of films dealing with other genres, such as sex, romance, horror, and comedy. However, I demonstrate that Islamic films have been significant throughout the history of Indonesian cinema. Here I focus on the emergence of Islamic films in Indonesian cinema, particularly the prominence of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) and the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Praises to God) series. I show how they differ from previous Islamic films. I briefly analyse some issues addressed by the films and also discuss the films in terms of their role as a propagation tool to nurture certain Islamic values. I present how my informants respond to these as well.

Chapter Six sets out to discuss Islamic self-help books, the other media of Islamic popular culture that I investigate. Before clarifying what the self-help books are, firstly I define what an Islamic publication is. Then, I preview briefly the early history of Islamic publications. In the next section, I explore the beginning of Islamic publication for young people since it was initiated in the 1990s. Here, I also discuss the important role played by Muslim activists, in particular the FLP or *Forum Lingkar Pena* (the Pen Circle Forum). Since discussing Islamic self-help books would make no sense without discussing the genre of self-help books, I also look at the genre of self-help as it developed in America, as the first place where self-help books began their prominence. I discuss discourses that are displayed by the few Islamic self-help books that have been read by my informants. Afterwards, I discuss how Islamic self-help books construct and promote a particular Islamic identity to young readers. Here I employ governmentality, a Foucauldian approach, as a tool of analysis. Despite the strong influence of the books, I argue that Muslim young people were able to be active readers. I also present how they commented upon the books.

Chapter Seven focuses on the construction of Indonesian Muslim youth identities. In this chapter, I analyse the findings of my research using the theoretical frameworks of identity from Chapter One. I do so by focusing upon my informants’ thinking about their own identity in relation to the modern era in which they live and to the influence of Islam that they have learned from their social environment. From their statements, I also glean the importance of
media and technology in relating them to the global *ummah*\(^3\) and in shaping their experience when they have had to come to terms with modernity. Then I examine the characteristics of identity that the Islamic films and self-help books displayed and propagated. I also show how my informants responded to these issues. In the last section of this chapter, I link the discussion of the influence of films and self-help books and the responses of my informants to my theoretical stance that Muslim young people’s identities are non-essential and evolving.

In the last chapter, the Conclusion, I argue that the relationship of religion and popular culture is not a simple relationship of cause and effect. Religious figures who express themselves in popular culture are also engaged in shaping popular culture. Here, I restate my central argument that, using multiple perspectives of identity, Islamic films and self-help books help, rather than dictate, Indonesian Muslim young people to develop their own distinctive identities.

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\(^3\) *Ummah* is an Arabic word meaning ‘nation’ or ‘community’. It is commonly used to mean the collective community of Muslims.
CHAPTER ONE:

POPULAR CULTURE AND IDENTITY

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework of the thesis. Here I consider theories of popular culture and critiques of popular culture as well as theories of identity. I begin with definitions of popular culture. Some cultural theorists describe popular culture as a stark contrast to high culture as they do not differentiate between popular culture and low culture. They theorise that popular culture belongs to the masses, the lower class. Due to major cultural transformations during the twentieth century and before, popular culture has become the culture of all classes. Nevertheless, popular culture remains subject to many criticisms for numerous reasons.

The chapter also reviews some theoretical frameworks of identity. Even though Erikson’s (1968) work on individual identity informs my thesis, I also challenge Erikson’s conceptualisation, and focus more on identity as a social and political construct, as proposed by Bradley (1996). I employ theories of identity proposed by Michel Foucault (1977), Stuart Hall (1996), Manuel Castells (1997) and Paula M.L. Moya (2006). These writers approached identities as non-essentialist and evolving. In the theoretical survey, I find that there are two important notions that are influential in the discourses of identity, namely propagation/propaganda and governmentality. Hence, I also discuss these two notions.

Concepts and Theories of Popular Culture

One can argue that the twentieth century is the age of popular culture since this kind of culture is the dominant culture and has been consumed and practiced by many people across the globe throughout the century. During (2005:193) wrote that popular culture could be said to be the primary cultural expression of the modern era. However, it is best to make clear in the first instance what the meaning of popular culture is. Raymond Williams informs us that one of four meanings of popular culture is objects and/or practices that are well liked by many people. The other three are: inferior kinds of work; cultural items produced to be consumed; and objects and practices actually made by the people for themselves (Williams 1983: 237). The last definition refers to what Storey (2001: 10) called ‘folk culture’, the authentic culture of the people, the culture that is constructed by the people. It may also be
called the culture of everyday life or, more specifically, all everyday culture that is not regarded, or does not consider itself, as elite culture (During 2005).

Although popular culture can be simply defined as culture that is widely favoured by many people, in the very beginning, popular culture (some writers prefer to use the term mass culture) was another name for low culture, as opposed to high culture, or the real culture or Culture with a capital “C”. This Culture refers to the proper, correct ways to interact, dress, speak, worship and taste (Weaver 2005: 1). It is also said that Culture is organised around distinct moral-aesthetic principles (During 2005: 194). Another feature that marks this Culture is the difficulty of grasping it. A High Cultural form needs to be difficult to acquire, which shows that it is culturally worthwhile, esteemed and ranked exclusively as high culture (Storey 2001: 6). If Culture is difficult of access and understanding by all people, the minority who are able to understand, appreciate and appropriate the codes are privileged above others. The privileged elite status of this minority is emphasised by Eliot (1948: 35-36) – they are the only ones who can fulfil the role of transmitting and protecting civilisation. Meanwhile, the majority – often referred to as the “masses” – are the un-Cultured people. According to Goodall (1995), many writers in the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the masses as not born to rule. They cannot and should not lead themselves in their own way; they have to be guided by the minority. They may have their own culture but this culture did not have the same power and status as Culture. Swingewood (1977: 104) suggests that popular traditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – the material production of which was taken by modern popular culture as its social basis – were associated with lowliness and cheapness. Therefore, the term ‘low culture’ existed to accommodate any cultural forms and practices disqualified as high culture (Storey 2001: 6). It is ‘the rest’, which can only be defined after we have defined high culture. Thus, popular culture in this sense was an inferior culture.

Despite its inferiority in the face of Culture, popular culture was soon to come into power after the end of World War II, when the masses demanded that their interests be acknowledged, and claimed possession of culture, previously thought to be the domain of the minority. The demands of the masses captured the attention of a group of capitalists who then exploited popular culture for their own advantage. It was this exploitation of popular culture that enabled popular culture to become dominant. Goodall (1995) shows that some writings in the early 1900s had already predicted the emergence of popular culture as the main cultural feature in this century: they saw that the coming era, the modern era, would be
the era of the masses. Those writings were concerned about the development of the megalopolis, the decline of high culture, and the overrunning of the world by mass culture, owing to urbanisation and mechanisation.

Some causes of the florescence of popular culture have been identified. The first one is the advent of new technologies. They are technologies of communication and information (Weaver 2005) and technologies of mass production, distribution and duplication (Heryanto 2008). The emergence of these technologies was accompanied by the emergence of art forms dedicated to the making of profit (Swingewood 1977: 94). Modern forms of entertainment and new technologies mediated information dissemination and eroded distinctions between the noble Cultured people and the masses. Therefore, some writers identified popular culture with democracy and pluralism (Swingewood 1977: 94). Weaver (2005: 9-11) noted that this is one of several explanations behind the fall of Culture and the rise of popular culture. Radio, film and television were said to be the foundation of modern American and European culture, and their advance meant that people did not have to accept certain social codes in order to enjoy high culture practices. For example, ordinary people did not have to purchase expensive tickets to watch music and performances since radio, film and TV can deliver them to their homes.

The second cause of the rise of popular culture is the way mass communication forms were enhanced in America, despite the very important role of Europeans in creating those technologies. Americans have transformed cultural productions into new industries (e.g. stage actors turned into screen actors). Mass-produced Cultural symbols (e.g. classical music) were also redesigned to make them available in the market. Storey (2001: 9) notes that for some cultural critics, popular culture is a clearly American culture exported to many cultures, not just an imposed and impoverished culture. Yet, for Goodall (1995: 35), it is ironic, since American writers themselves have delivered critical statements, saying that Americanism is one of the villains – apart from modern technology and advertising – in modern society.

Another reason is that forms of popular culture can have aesthetic value as high as “high culture”. When a few creative people showed what could be created using popular culture forms, many people decided in favour of it. For example, the Beatles’ songs are now regarded by many pundits as having a quality as high as Mozart’s works, and Shakespeare’s works are considered the epitome of high culture even though they were a part of popular theatre in the nineteenth century. This notion is furthered by the increasingly blurred
boundary between high culture and popular culture (During 2005: 195). Many high culture institutions now pay significant attention to the works of popular culture, and in some cases, incorporate it.

However, some writers remain unimpressed by the development of popular culture, as it is thought to be massively produced for mass consumption (Storey 2001: 8), to do nothing but entertain the uneducated masses (Weaver 2005: 8), and as having been imposed by the capitalist culture industries for profit and ideological manipulation. Leavis (1930: 10) was one of the early writers to address the issue of the mindless consumer, when he stated that modern culture has become an entertainment industry geared to passive diversion. Just like Goebbels, the Nazi head of propaganda, media elites have scripted every act of life, formulated style, made images as blatant propaganda (Weaver 2005: 27), and manufactured opinion (Leavis 1930: 11; Swingewood 1977: 10). Even Voll (2008: 268), a contemporary writer, still perceives popular culture as the culture of the passive masses, the less educated and poorer classes. Inspired by the Marxist concept of culture – that it is industry that determines the quantity and quality of cultural development (Swingewood 1977: 26), and that it is the profit motives that govern cultural production (Adorno 1991: 99) – this theory contests the notion of popular culture as folk culture.

Swingewood (1977: 107) also wrote that even though popular culture may have many similarities with folk culture, the former is based on a concept of mass and a mode of commodity production, while folk culture is that which grows in smaller communities, sometimes by homogeneous people living in a rural area, and passed down from generation to generation. Hence, popular culture is quite different: it is organised around the market (During 2005: 194), created to make profit for the creators, and produced to deliver entertainment and hedonism for the consumers. Adorno (1991: 38) states that this is not unusual since in the world of commodities, all cultural goods are produced for, and aimed at, the market. This was the typical view of the Frankfurt School (Storey 1996:4). This school of thought perceived the idea of popular culture as ‘false consciousness’ (Goodall 1995: 37). They, particularly Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, analysed the burgeoning of popular culture with a neo-Marxist perspective. According to them, popular culture is constructed to deceive and lull people into accepting it, controlled and manipulated by media elites, and commanded by publishers and rulers of studios (Adorno 1991: 36). The Frankfurt School also argues that popular culture consumers are merely a passive and helpless mass, unable to resist media propaganda:
If the culture industry is measured not by its own substance and logic, but by its efficacy, by its position in reality and its explicit pretensions; if the focus of serious concern is with the efficacy to which it always appeals, the potential of its effect becomes twice as weighty. This potential, however, lies in the promotion and exploitation of the ego-weakness to which the powerless members of contemporary society, with its concentration of power, are condemned. Their consciousness is further developed retrogressively. It is no coincidence that cynical American film producers are heard to say that their pictures must take into consideration the level of eleven-year-olds. In doing so they would very much like to make adults into eleven-year olds. (Adorno 1991: 105)

Thus, in the view of the Frankfurt School, particularly Theodor Adorno, individuals are passive. They have been deprived of all power to react against the manipulation of consumer society.

There are some ways to induce passivity in consumers. The first one is by objectifying and standardising every cultural product. Popular culture might refer to creative cultural materials as aesthetic, and avant-garde arts constitute some forms of popular culture. Despite this, popular culture has also always borrowed industrial methods, through which it mass-produces objectified products (Adorno 1991: 79). Once a cultural material is objectified, standardisation of that culture is the consequence. Adorno exemplified this by pointing to the fact that once a musical pattern has proven successful, it is exploited and repeated and then its detail is exchanged with detail from another pattern. That leaves homogeneity among musical patterns. If cultural practices and goods are treated as commodities, not as spontaneous expressions of society, they will be evaluated by their respective exchange values within the market. Thus, as a commodity in the market, culture will be valued by whether it complies with a certain industrial standard, instead of by cultural uniqueness (Budiman 2002: 226). A unique culture is not that important in the market; homogeneity is much more desirable from the point of view of capitalist enterprise (Johnson 1987: 166). The homogeneity gives assurance to capitalists that a cultural product that has been accepted in one market will be accepted in another market. Even if the claim of uniqueness and irreplaceability is highly valued for cultural products and practices, as it is, for example, in the tourist industry, it has become a common standard for tourism in the era of mass culture to promote the uniqueness of cultural products and practices. Capitalists also tend to promote cultural materials that are, in the first instance, unique, rare, and relatively unreachable for many people. Such characteristics will make cultural materials become
highly valuable. Capitalists will seek any opportunity to claim any material that has a high value ‘cultural’, and will start to standardise it. When a cultural material has been standardised, people need to neither actively engage in its production nor critically appreciate it. They have to accept and enjoy it as what it is. Even if they want to look at alternatives, there will be nothing available in the market since everything is more or less similar.

The second element in the induction of passive consumption of popular culture is the nature of work under a capitalist regime: it leaves little energy for the search for ‘real’ culture. The workload under capitalism makes people too tired to engage with the world as it could be. For example, they will not listen to serious music that can please their creative and productive imagination. Instead, they turn to repetitive popular music that confirms the world as it is (Storey 2001: 91). This argument reveals the assumption that popular culture is aimed at those who do not have or are not able to have a deep interest in ‘serious’ culture.

Another way to turn society into a passive mass is to replace use value with exchange value (Adorno 1991: 39). Cultural goods, like other goods in the market, have their own price; thus forms of culture have to be tailored in order to satisfy the needs of consumers as perceived by producers. Use value enables people to assess and reflect upon cultural materials that they enjoy, and encourages them to be conscious citizens. Exchange value merely requires people to have enough money to purchase it and turn them into passive consumers. Adorno (1991: 38) explains further that the enjoyment in exchange value does not come from the ability to engage with popular culture, but rather from the ability to purchase access to the performance. The sense of passivity lies in the notion that it is the act of purchasing that causes the consumption of popular culture, rather than the need to evaluate the specific qualities of popular culture. Finally, immediacy also provides an impetus for passivity. The masses in the modern era have always demanded that they should be able to consume and have entertainment right now. Popular culture itself is committed to delivering such immediate pleasure (During 2005: 193). The immediacy of pleasure is thought to provide no benefit for enlightenment, contemplation, and critical engagement with the world.

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4 Adorno (1991: 40) also explains that the ability to purchase shows the social status or class the purchasers belong to. Sometimes, popular culture serves as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire to be able to consume popular culture.
Further Critiques of Popular Culture

In recent times, popular culture remains the object of criticism. Brummett (1994) has stated that popular culture is a part of the everyday knowledge and experiences of most people since it is the systems of meaning and artefacts shared by most people. Yet this definition has failed to acknowledge another feature: popular culture is not an entirely authentic culture. Ross (1989) reminds us that popular culture also covers a vast range of technologically advanced cultural products that are industrially produced for profit, and consumed and used for a variety of purposes. Although the separation between high and low culture, in which popular culture is equated with the latter, is currently becoming less important, popular culture has to be understood within a particular socio-economic context, i.e. the context of advanced capitalism, with its salient features of consumerism and the mass consumption of culture.

Linking with earlier discussion in this chapter of comparisons of folk culture and popular culture, Gramsci (1985) recognises that popular culture may be composed by the people and for the people. Nonetheless, he admits that eventually it can be reduced to commercial forms; popular culture has a clear linkage to capitalism. Tomlinson (1999) also has little doubt that a large proportion of cultural practices have become commodified. Since any cultural item can be popular culture, it is easy to conclude that everything can be commodified and commercialised. In this regards, Ritzer (2005) might say, any cultural symbol can be ‘McDonaldised’, referring to one icon of global capitalism. In order to appeal to the mass, a genre of popular culture has to be organised according to the principles of McDonald’s restaurants: efficiency, calculability, predictability and technological control. This association with capitalism means that popular culture can hardly be described as ‘by and for the people’; as well, this association subjects popular culture to critiques from every corner of the planet.

The linking of popular culture with capitalism makes it conform to the conventions of entertainment: time constraints, the need for drama, action and sexual titillation, the demand for a quick resolution, and the fear of offending sponsors (Japp, Meister, and Japp 2007). Were popular culture not so dominant today, those characteristics would not draw much criticism. Nevertheless, popular culture has already become the cultural reference of everyday life across race, gender, class, religion, and other categories. It has also begun to
take over the role of religion, oral tradition, literary classics, history, and philosophy (the last three used to be called high culture) as guidance for acting and behaving. On this point, Japp, Meister and Japp (2007) state that popular culture can be criticised for its lack of depth, richness and clear focus on ethical issues, that used to be provided by religion and high culture, as well as condemned for its market-driven nature. Many writers also charge that popular culture is formulaic, trivial and devoid of ethics. Bineham (2007: 28) asserts that one irony of popular culture is that most people believe that they are uninfluenced by artefacts of popular culture, despite the fact that most people are not only surrounded by numerous popular culture items but also buy many pop culture products. Some writers fear that this belief means that while most people are happily entertained by forms of popular culture, at the same time they are unconscious victims of global capitalism, or what Mills (2000: 171) called ‘cheerful robots’.

Some scholars look at another negative impact posed by global popular culture, particularly Western popular culture: its impact on the non-West. They argue that Western-style popular culture engenders the demise of national/local and traditional culture. Hamelink (in Lent 1995: 3) coined the term ‘cultural synchronisation’, which refers to the process in which cultural products go only in one direction, damaging the variety of cultural systems worldwide. Other scholars like Scrase, Holden and Baum (2003) question the fate of national/local and traditional culture under the threat of global popular culture. This threat cannot be detached from the global spread of economic liberalisation, which blurs the borders between countries, classes and groups. They point out that as the global economy rules the world, the flow of capital is speeding up and accelerating transmission of values and behaviours both within and across international boundaries.

In the case of Indonesia, its full reintegration into the international economy after the mid-1980s coincided with the global development of transnational communication technologies and created flows of televisual products and service, which the government was unable to control (Kitley 2000). Consequently, local knowledge and institutions have been undermined and devalued. The global popular culture economy encourages the deliberate imitation of the behaviours in Western film and television shows; such imitation can be seen in Indonesia in jeans wearing, disco attending, and alcohol drinking among urban youth (Lukens-Bull 2008). Indonesia’s case confirms Schiller’s statement (in Tomlinson 1999: 81) that all societies are being relentlessly incorporated into the global capitalist system.
As indicated previously, some people in non-Western societies equate the global spread of popular culture with Westernisation. Tomlinson (1999: 89) defines Westernisation as the spread of European languages and the consumer culture of Western capitalism to include styles of dress, eating habits, architectural and musical forms, the adoption of an urban lifestyle, a pattern of cultural experience dominated by the mass media and so forth. Johnson (1987: 167) also asserts that one characteristic of popular culture is its Westernness. Popular culture is a phenomenon that has its roots in the ideological and economic formations of twentieth century Western societies, and has been spread to other societies through capitalism, bringing many of the values and goals of the West to different cultures. Currently, Westernisation can be more specifically identified as Americanisation. In Indonesia and perhaps in other countries, the West is frequently portrayed and sensed as America. The strong presence of American popular culture is exemplified by the ‘Idol’ TV show franchise, since its content, forms, and symbols are recognisably American, notwithstanding it actually originated in the United Kingdom (Coutas 2008). Ritzer (2006) notes that the sense of Americanisation of the globe is profound and is evident in the fact that there are many people around the world who are not merely waging ‘war’ against McDonaldisation, but also against American-style consumerism.

Having surveyed criticism of global popular culture in general, I focus now on criticism in non-Western societies, as I doubt that the global wave of capitalism carrying Western popular culture practices will go through without contest. As pointed out by Chua (2000), in Asian nation-states like Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, there has long been a trope of anti-West sentiment in general and anti-Americanism in particular. In addition, Goodman (2003) posits a value orientation, wherein diverse localised ways of being are counter-posed against the simple idea or ideal of globalised marketization. He also presents other global contests such as decommodification, which is a radical refusal of marketization seeking not only to defend presently uncommodified zones, but also to decommodify presently privatised aspects of social life. Although Goodman’s propositions are quite interesting to consider, deliberately or not, he omits other interesting cases that contest or negotiate Western global popular culture. One such case is the re-emergence of religion in public life, and its unexpected alliance with popular culture. I will discuss this phenomenon later after I explore the criticism of popular culture in Muslim societies, more positive views on popular culture, and the revival of religion.
The burgeoning of popular culture and its effects in the Middle East are seen as signs of decadence and pernicious Western influence among Muslims (Johnson 1987: 172). Bayat (2007) notes how Islamists in those countries wage war against expressions of fun. What Bayat means by ‘fun’ – something that certainly is one characteristic of popular culture – is an array of joyful modes of conduct, such as playing games, music, joking, dancing, sport, fashion, etc. It may be expressed by individuals or collectively, in private or public, and take authentic or commodified forms, and is regularly associated with and identified by youth culture. Islamic fundamentalists have expressed their fury with fun, as they perceived that many of these popular culture practices are heavily influenced by Western culture. One example is the efforts of Islamist student unions in Egypt to ban film, dance, popular and classical music, and to close down beauty salons and video shops. Even something as popular and widespread as TV drama serials have been scorned by Islamic activists in Egypt because they are perceived to be influenced by the West (Johnson 1987: 172) and even as pornographic (Abu-Lughod 2002).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has banned dating, cinemas, concert halls, discos, clubs, theatres, and even the innocent joy of flying kites. When the Taliban of Afghanistan took power in 1996-2001, they not only banned music, television, painting, sculpture, dancing, acting, and the expression of beauty, but also forced women to wear the burqa and men to grow long beards (Bayat 2007). In Iran throughout the 1980s, conservative Islamists battled against what they called ‘Westoxification’ or pollution by Western ideas, and the targets of attack in the early days of the Islamic Revolution were the sites of Western-influenced culture: cinema, bars, clubs, and liquor outlets (Johnson 1987: 177). Beyond that decade, fun, playfulness, lightness and laughter are still condemned by scholars and clerics since these are seen as instances of immorality, laxity and waste. The effect is often to pit the mass of dissenting women and youth against the Islamic state.

Islamists have specified the corrupting effects of popular culture genres on Muslim societies. Music and singing are banned since they have emotional effects that are able to destroy public morals. Ultra-conservative groups in a few Muslim countries, i.e. Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabis, forbad the female voice as it was considered to distract men from their devotion to God. In the genre of image depiction, although initially it was only the Prophet Muhammad’s picture that was not allowed to be made, over time, all human images have come to be considered taboo, as only God is the creator of all beings in the entire universe, and it is thought the visual arts will lead to idolatry. Consequently, video music that
combines sound and image is widely condemned by fundamentalists, and this genre, as a whole, is widely associated with Western practices, such as the display of female bodies and overtly seductive dance moves of female singers and models (Kubala 2007). In addition, a hugely popular reality TV show broadcast in some Middle Eastern countries, ‘Star Academy’, was attacked by several Islamic leaders and political activists. However, it was not banned and continued to be aired, becoming, in the process, a politically contentious issue among Arab countries (Kraidy 2007).

Mass media, as the channel through which popular culture reaches the masses, has also drawn criticism. Johnson (1987: 172) asserts that one such criticism of media is its potential to limit the choices available to a population and thereby, to channel its values and tastes into the sphere of popular culture by default. The critiques of the media in Muslim societies come not only from the Islamists’ camp, but also from non-radical young people. Nilan (2003) found that Indonesian youth in general perceive some negative effects of the media. These perceptions included such things as the Westernising impact of media on youth, turning them into mindless consumers of popular culture, causing people to abandon tradition and religion, creating a taste for pornography and nudity among young people, and stimulating delinquency and crime. Mass media are also associated with the spread of non-Muslim popular cultural practices like Valentine’s Day, sexual promiscuity in the form of pre-marital sex and sexy fashions (Kailani 2010), and encouraging the consumption of alcohol and drugs.

**Popular Culture as a Site of Resistance**

I share some of the criticisms of popular culture that have been detailed in previous sections. I agree that popular culture has a market-driven nature and that capitalist agents have been commodifying and commercialising popular culture for no more than financial profit. However, I also see popular culture as having the potential to become a site of resistance. Here I discuss some theorists whose views are more positive. Liberal pluralist theorists like Daniel Bell and Edward Shills reject the totalitarian nature of mass culture and the notion of the oppressed masses. They offer a more optimistic insight by identifying mass culture with democracy and pluralism (Swingewood 1977: 18-23). Liberalists and pluralists celebrate the greater scope for human initiative, development and freedom engendered by the process of industrialisation and the advance of technology. Thus, popular culture is regarded as a democratic mass culture able to enhance social life, not impoverish it, as theorised by the
Frankfurt School. Capitalism indeed fools the masses, but also opens opportunities to generate a wide array of tastes, audiences, and consumers.

Fiske (1989: 30-31) also dismisses the claim that cultural consumption is an automatic and passive activity. He argues that many cultural industry products fail, despite extensive advertising, indicating that consumers are not passive. He agrees with the theory of folk culture that popular culture is made from within and below, not simply imposed from above and beyond by elites as conceptualised by mass cultural theorists. However, Fiske differs from both folk culture theorists and liberal-pluralists by acknowledging that popular culture may serve the economic interest of the elite. He affirms mass cultural theorists’ argument that it is created in association with the structures of dominance. His argument preceded Simon During’s theory (2005: 198) that popular culture may not be a spontaneous culture produced by community, but the product of commercial enterprises whose interest is to achieve profit, not quality. Yet, Fiske opposes those theorists’ perspective that popular culture merely serves the interest of elites. He proposes that it is made by subordinated people according to their own needs and by their own resources. Hegemonic forces may exert their control over popular culture production. Culture industries may seek to manipulate popular culture consumers. Despite this, popular culture is much more than a landscape of commercialisation and ideological manipulation (Storey 2001: 192). There will always be an element of popular culture that escapes or opposes them in one way or another.

I borrow Michel de Certeau’s perspective to discuss the possibility of viewing popular culture as a site of opposition. De Certeau (1984: 18) explains that ‘the establishment’ can institute the space to incorporate the subordinated ones and create their games in which the subordinated have to follow, patrolled by networks of meanings. In the case of popular culture, ‘the establishment’ refers to the capitalist class; the most dominant class in the production of popular culture, and ‘the subordinated’ refers to popular culture, its practitioners, and consumers. Capitalists have been able to incorporate many forms of popular culture. They have also imposed their logic of commodification and commercialisation on the realm of popular culture as well as made the way they engage with popular culture the standard for other classes. In spite of merely playing within the certain space and rules of the games, the subordinated are able to get along in a network already established within that space and get around the rules of the constraining space. De Certeau argues that despite the powerful control of that network, the space remains full of gaps, and
this circumstance releases an opportunity to act outside of the established system. This is what he calls ‘the arts of making’ in everyday life, wherein ordinary people can create something out of the forms instituted by the system. From de Certeau’s point of view, popular culture is essentially ‘an art of making’ in everyday life. It may be a part of the hegemonising forces, yet remains capable of playing and failing the establishment’s game, and manipulating the system. Popular culture may be used by the capitalists to dominate the world, yet its practitioners are able to manipulate the system offered by capitalism and hence, to play their own game.

The importance of popular culture in everyday life is also theorised by Henri Lefebvre (1991) in his work on the cultural construction of space. He acknowledges that capitalism may penetrate and modify everyday life in negative ways such as the degradation of life’s quality, alienation, disappointment and dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, in everyday life, apart from the controlled sector, there is the uncontrolled sector allowing human beings to escape from constraints. Lefebvre did not address the issue of popular culture explicitly. Nevertheless, he did mention one form of popular culture, Charlie Chaplin’s films, as offering a critique of everyday life that is strongly transformed by modern technologies, and confronting the established order. The critique points out that Chaplin’s films were clearly quite different from everyday experience with their exceptional, deviant, and abnormal elements.

Popular culture is always in process (Fiske 1989: 3); its meaning can never be fixed and stabilised since it is produced in social relations and in inter-textual relations. Fiske is opposed to Adorno’s view (1991: 76) that popular culture is always liquidating conflict, and believes that popular culture is always a culture of conflict since there is a struggle within and through it to construct social meanings that are in the interest of the subordinate. Fiske’s argument resembles Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Even though Gramsci (1971: 393) states that popular culture remains the culture of a restricted intellectual aristocracy, he also acknowledges that popular culture is also a site of struggle between the subordinate groups and the aristocrats, the dominant forces in society. Fiske extends this argument by stating that popular culture is not merely the culture that commodifies the expressions, interests, needs and dreams of people and makes them the victim of capitalism, as argued by the Frankfurt School and the wider mass cultural theorists. Popular culture also offers real benefits and rewards to subordinated and oppressed people, though these may be distributed unfairly (Fiske 1989: 214). During (2005: 199) mentions two benefits offered by popular culture. One of them is that its consumption is in itself a kind of public sphere.
participation. In the global world, more and more collective identities are formed through the consumption of popular culture, since preference of particular cultural form is closely linked to class, gender and ethnicity.

Popular culture is – contrary to the claim of the liberal pluralists – neither concerned to find any consensus on meaning nor interested in constructing social rituals in order to harmonise social differences. Fiske suggests that popular culture is the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination. In the case of television, popular culture is a semiotic battlefield in which audiences regularly engage in a conflict between incorporation and resistance (Fiske 1987: 78). Storey (2003: 192) agrees with Fiske, that popular culture can be employed to resist dominant understandings of the world. Therefore, popular culture can be regarded as working as a destabilising agent or as a redistributor of the balance of social power in favour of disempowered groups. In reply to the notion of immediate gratification, some popular culture works refuse to offer immediate pleasures and satisfactions (During 2005) in which they perform experiments, and express unusual and thoughtful feelings and messages, just like ‘high culture’. In the case of Islamic popular culture that I explore in this thesis, there is no consensus on meaning. Instead, there are competing ideas and discourses, particularly in relation to how popular culture has been utilised to form identity. Thus, in the next section, I turn to the discussion of theories of identity.

**Theoretical Frameworks of Identity**

To begin the discussion of theories of identity, I use Erikson’s work on personal identity as a foundation. Erikson (1968: 22) explains that, in psychology, identity formation involves a simultaneous process of reflection and observation, in which individuals judge themselves, as others judge and compare them to others and to certain categories or groups of people. Individuals also perceive others’ perceptions of them according to how they regard themselves in comparison to them and to relevant categories. This notion is akin to Cooley’s idea of the looking-glass self. Cooley (in Mir, 2006: 39) asserts that the idea of the self consists of the imagination of the appearance of the self to the others, the imagination of the self’s own judgement of the appearance, and the emergence of particular self-feeling as a result of the appearance. The importance of the external elements to the construction of identity is highlighted by Hoover, Marcia and Parris (1997: 21). They describe how identity formation is ‘a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities’.
However, their concept of identity is more or less centred on Erikson’s model, which relies heavily upon psychology and psychoanalysis. Erikson himself (1968: 24) admits the limitation of psychology and psychoanalysis, in that these disciplines lack an adequate conceptualisation of social issues, despite their acknowledgment that personal growth cannot be separated from societal changes. Contemporary writers, in particular from the postmodern camp, criticise Erikson’s identity theory as having excessive individualism, allowing limited personal agency, and being blind to its own context of development (Schachter 2005: 152). Therefore, to better grasp the issue of identity, it is useful to align with George Herbert Mead’s notion (1934: 25, 81, 128) of the individual as an active agent. In Mead’s analysis, individuals are not merely projecting themselves in the face of others, but also they are interacting with circumstances and external factors. Thus, identity emerges through social interaction.

Bradley (1996: 24-25) conceptualises three kinds of identity: personal, social, and cultural. She says personal identity refers to the construction of the self as a unique individual who evolves from highly individualised experiences. Bradley’s social identity resembles that of Cooley and Mead: it concerns how individuals locate themselves within the society in which they live, and the way individuals perceive each other. The third mode of identity, cultural identity, refers to how individuals sense their belonging to a particular culture. However, sociologist Manuel Castells seems not to distinguish between social and cultural identity, as identities are ways in which people give meaning to their lives. As identity is concerned with social actors, rather than individuals, its process of construction is based on a cultural attribute or set of cultural attributes (Castells 1997: 6). Before I look further at Castells’ theorisation of identity, which is very important in my thesis, I continue with Bradley’s conceptualisation. Bradley (1996: 25-26) also offers three categories of social identity: passive, active, and politicised. Passive identity derives from the sets of lived relationships in which individuals are engaged (based on ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, and so on), but Bradley says individuals do not act on these. Active identities are positive elements in individuals’ self-identification; individuals are conscious of these elements and they provide a foundation for action. Active identities can be derived from passive elements of identity, such as ‘race’ and ethnicity, insofar as individuals are conscious of them, particularly when these elements are being used in a negative way to define individuals. Politicised identity is an extension of active identities: individuals constantly conceive themselves in terms of a particular identity, and use identities as a constant base for their actions.
Although my thesis is based on Castells’ perspective of social identity and Bradley’s framework of politicised identity, I do not ignore the importance of the notion of personal and cultural identity. Calhoun (1994: 29) also speaks about the inextricable link between the politics of personal identity and the politics of collective identity. As I show in the thesis, both the personal experiences of my informants and their subscribing to the global resurgence of Islam had a significant influence on their consciously chosen Islamic identity. Conversely, it is impossible to assert that their identity is an entirely free individual choice given the waves of Islamisation in Indonesia and beyond. Their cultural identity – their sense of belonging to a particular culture – has also contributed to their identity as Indonesian Muslim youth.

Even though Erikson (1968) saw that identity formation is based on simultaneous observation and reflection, identity, in his thinking, and in Hoover, Marcia and Parris’s (1997) view, is, more or less, something stable and unified. For instance, when Erikson (1968: 212) wrote about identity diffusion, he defined it as ‘a split of self-images, a loss of centre and dispersion’. Thus, for him, identity is something that has a centre holding together a variety of self-images. Hoover, Marcia and Parris (1997: 19) also state that one of two elements of identity is ‘a sense of integrity’. For them, identity reflects a fixing of the self within the social world. This means that people identify themselves and are identified by others as having a certain status, position, value, or physical features in certain circumstances, and this identification would remain the same across time, as exemplified by believers in a religion, partisans of an ideology, and natives of a certain region. Michel Foucault, in his discussion of Nietzsche, dismissed the idea of the stability and unity of identity. To him, the attempt to support a sense of unified identity is a parody. Foucault’s genealogical analysis asserts not a forgotten identity ready to emerge to the surface, but rather ‘a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the power of synthesis’ (Foucault 1977: 161). Foucault (1977: 142,162) goes further to declare that the genealogical approach would not agree that the original identity and its roots are inviolable, but instead would assert that identity shall be disavowed. This is due to the very nature of knowledge that is made for cutting, not for understanding (Foucault 1984: 88). Rather than seeking stability and continuity of the existing theories, knowledge – or genealogy in Foucault’s writings – cuts through static conceptions by identifying ruptures, accidents and mutations. Borrowing Foucault’s analysis, I would say that identity is not a simple configuration in which various elements can be pieced together to form a coherent whole.

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5Foucault intended the term ‘genealogy’ to evoke Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals, particularly with its suggestion of the complexity of the origins of things. A Foucauldian genealogy reconceptualises the current order while rejecting what is accepted or problematizing it. The point of a genealogical analysis is to show that a given system of thought is the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends.
elements merely accentuate identity’s essential traits, its final meaning, or its initial and final values. In Foucault’s words (1977: 155), ‘it is a profusion of entangled events’.

Hall (1996: 3) furthers Foucault’s theory of identity by arguing that the concept of identity does not signify a stable core of the self that is unfolding from beginning to end through the course of history without significant changes. In contrast to conventional concepts of identity that put emphasis on unity and internal homogeneity as its foundation, Hall (1996: 5) and Bhabha (1994) argue that the unity and the homogeneity are constructed within the play of power and exclusion. Gilroy (1997: 310) adds that appeals to the homogenised notion of identity represent a retreat inward from the complex political, social, cultural and moral questions that are posed by the issues of identity. This kind of identity is what Woodward (1997:12) labels ‘essentialist identity’; there is only one clear, authentic set of characteristics, which is shared by all individuals who belong to a particular category. In the view of essentialists, identity is stable and relatively unchanging, given the experiences shared by members of certain groups (Mohanty, 2000:30). The opposite of the essentialist identity, the non-essentialist identity, focuses on differences, as well as common or shared characteristics (Woodward 1997: 12).

Hall (1990: 225) explains that identity is always constructed via memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. It is the unstable point of identification, which is made within and through discourses of history and culture. The construction of identity is always strategic and positional (Hall 1996: 10). Strategic refers to the notion that identity is about the process of becoming rather than being. Even if one talks about personal or self-identity, it is difficult to insist that identity is something fixed across time. Giddens (1991: 52) similarly argues that self-identity is routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. Nagata (2011: 48) also points out that people adjust identity according to time, place and context, without necessarily being conscious of these shifts or intending to deceive in doing so. Positionality means that identity is constructed in particular historical and institutional sites within particular discursive formations and practices. Thus, identity is not a fixed essence that lies outside history and culture. To understand its strategic and positional construction, one needs to think of identity as formed through not only similarity and continuity, but also through difference and rupture.

Continuing from Cooley and Mead, as well as Foucault, Hall, Bhabha, Gilroy, Mohanty, and Woodward, Moya (2006: 96-97) says that identities emerge from the dynamic interweaving
of how subjects consciously identify themselves and how others identify them; it makes identities non-essential and evolving entities. Moya (2006: 97) explains that there are two components of identities, which are linked to each other: ‘ascriptive’ and ‘subjective’ identities. Ascriptive elements of identities are imposed by society or other external forces upon individuals, and affect the way the others treat individuals. The ascriptive elements of identities are associated with various economic, political, social and cultural arrangements such as region, ‘race’, ethnicity, and gender, among other things. The second component of identities, subjective identities, is the individualised sense of the self. This element refers to how individuals experience and perceive their day-to-day life and to how individuals relate to each other (Moya 2006: 98). Moya (2006: 98), at first, seems to imply an essentialist approach to identity, for instance when she wrote about ‘our lived experience of being a more-or-less coherent self across time’. However, she adds that the relations between ascriptive and subjective elements of identity need to be grasped within a realist perspective upon identity. This perspective emphasises the dynamic relationship between the two elements; individuals will never be totally determined by the labels imposed by society, nor will individuals be entirely free of categories (Moya 2006: 99).

Having discussed theories of identity in terms of essentialism and non-essentialism, I now proceed to explicate model of the construction of identity as proposed by Manuel Castells. In this model there are three forms and origins of identity (Castells 1997: 7-8). The first one is legitimising identity, which is introduced by ruling institutions to prolong, rationalise and legitimise their power through the network of social actors. Then there is resistance identity, which is established when devalued and/or stigmatised social actors build resistance. Such resistance would be based on principles that are different from, and often opposed to, the principles of those who are in power. This is what Calhoun (1994: 17) labels ‘the emergence of identity politics’. The emergence of Islamism in Indonesia in the late New Order is a good example. Earlier, in the 1970s to 1980s, the New Order government had labelled any attempt to show Islamic aspirations in the political realm as a serious threat to nation and society, despite the fact that Muslims in Indonesia are the majority and members of the ruling elite are mostly Muslims. As a result, Islamic actors, starting from the 1980s, displayed their Islamic aspirations in mainly cultural realms, such as encouraging Muslim women to wear the veil and conducting da’wah (Islamic missionizing) activities in university campuses. Castells’ third form of identity is project identity, which is established by social actors who attempt to redefine their position within society, and to transform the social structure. For instance, based on any cultural materials available to them, including elements of popular culture,
Indonesian Muslim youths attempt to redefine themselves. There is much concern among parents, religious figures, scholars, and politicians that Indonesian youth will become too attracted to the lure of Westernisation; so there are attempts to Islamise young people. However, there is also a fear that Indonesian youth will become an easy target for Islamic radicalisation. Incorporating Islamic popular culture is a part of project identity where Indonesian Muslim youth try not to become either of the two extremes (Westernised or Islamised), as well as trying to contribute to the development of Indonesia.

In this thesis, I explore how Islamic popular culture producers attempt to construct a particular Islamic identity among Indonesian Muslim youth. In doing so, they propagate certain Islamic values through Islamic films and self-help books. I view the attempt as a form of governmentality or technique of governance, in the Foucauldian sense. Thus, in the next section, I discuss the notions of propaganda, which is closely associated with propagation, and governmentality, and how they contribute to the construction of identity.

**Propaganda, Governmentality, and Identity**

In general, propaganda is the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view. Propaganda has been used as a means to disseminate or to promote particular ideas (Jowett and Donnell 2012: 2). In this thesis, propaganda is the attempt to influence the opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values (Taylor, 1979: 28) and to induce the desired behaviour (Fraser 1962: 2). Propaganda usually draws upon certain cultural and social circumstances to evoke particular associations and responses (Taylor 1979: 22). In other words, propagandists use all the weapons that are available to them at a given time and in a given context. In the case of Islamic popular culture, the popular culture producers have used particular cultural circumstances and materials to deliver their ‘propaganda’ messages to the audience.

Propagandists tend to attempt to attract the emotions of members of an audience in order to influence the behaviour of their targets (Taylor 1979: 24-25; Fraser 1962: 7-10). Sometimes, propagandists use melodramatic elements to attract emotions, partly due to ‘the need of the propagandists to conceal their propaganda as much as possible’ (Lambert 1938: 71). Even when the Nazis were the ruling power in Germany, they did not want some of their forms of propaganda to be recognised as propaganda, as they wanted a more cultured and personal
approach, especially for the youth and the foreign press (Kris 1942: 53-54). Therefore, there was a need to conceal the propaganda. Taylor’s studies (1979: 23) have shown that propaganda is more effective if its origins and interests are concealed. If the propaganda is too obvious, individuals will be apathetic or hostile toward it (Lambert 1938: 13).

The concealment of propaganda strengthens the possibility of narrowing the perspective of members of audience. This is in sharp contrast to education that should broaden one’s perspective (Taylor 1979: 25). An education system transmits the values of society from which it originates, and a liberal education is (or should be) concerned with how to open people’s minds. Propaganda transmits the values selected by propagandists, and is concerned with how to ‘close’ people’s minds. Education should lead people to question the values upon which it is itself based, whereas propaganda will lead people to accept the values, without questioning them, and sometimes to make people act upon the acceptance (Brown 1963: 141-145). Accepting the existing values is a goal that one might also expect to achieve with governmentality.

Following a Foucauldian perspective, governmentality is the art of government, a strategy for governing citizens, a political technology by which society is governable. In the Foucauldian approach, government is, generally, understood not as state institutions but as the conduct of conduct, and refers to numerous forms, which are various in terms of time, method, subject, and scale (Burchell 1996: 19, Gordon 1991: 2). Foucault (1982: 224-225) states that there are four major types of technologies that humans use to understand and govern themselves. The four major types of technologies are technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of the self. The last category refers to how individuals act upon themselves. These technologies allow individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of actions on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being. These operations are conducted to transform individuals in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. It has to be noted that the happiness of individuals is not only a goal of government and the individual themselves, but is also an instrument, a result, a requirement for the survival and development of the state (Foucault 1981: 158). Therefore, technologies of the self are strongly linked to technologies of power. The latter determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to particular goals or to domination (Foucault

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6 Here, technology refers to all the ways in which individuals seek to improve themselves and their lives, and the aspirations and the norms that guide them (Rose 1999: 95).
7 Foucault (1982: 225) asserts that it is almost impossible to separate one technology from another.
Governmentality is the name Foucault attributed to the encounter between technologies of power and technologies of the self. One may think that the term ‘governmentality’ implies that Foucault placed more emphasis on technologies of power and the role of the state and government than on technologies of the self and the construction of individuals. However, Foucault (1978: 100, 1984: 19) states that governmentality refers to the totality of the practices of the self in which a particular regime of truth may define and constitute the strategies for individuals to be used in their relations, both with themselves and with others and society.

Miller and Rose (2008: 15) further Foucault’s argument by stating that ‘governmentality’ has two distinct aspects: rationalities of government and technologies. Here rationalities refer to how experiences are thought about and how things and persons are ordered under certain categories. Technologies are understood as a group of apparatuses, techniques, institutions or instruments that are necessary for the conduct of conduct. In order to become operable, rationalities need technologies to make them instrumental (Miller and Rose 2008: 16). Therefore, the study of governmentality is always concerned with how rationalities become linked to and embedded in the techniques to shape and reshape the conduct of individuals (Dean 2010: 27). Studies by Rose (1999) and Miller and Rose (2008) have shown how profound is the notion of governmentality in the modern/post-modern era, and how diverse are forms of governmentality – ranging from penal institutions, the Christian practice of confession, philanthropic organisations, trade unions, friendly societies, welfare services, and religious institutions, to ‘psy’ expertise (psychology, psychotherapy, psychiatry).

I follow Rose’s argument (1999) that psy knowledge is a form of governmentality. Psy knowledge mobilises various technologies to act upon and achieve particular goals in the conduct of human conduct. Therefore, in the light of Foucauldian thought, psy expertise is not merely a negative power, limiting and destroying subjectivities, but also a positive one, shaping and producing subjectivities. To understand the notion of subjectivity, I borrow Ortner’s theoretical framework (2006). Here subjectivity incorporates both modes of perception, affect, thought, desire and fear that animate acting subjects, and the cultural and social formations that shape, organise, and provoke those modes (Ortner 2006: 80). Ortner’s second form of subjectivity (the cultural and social formations that construct modes of perception, affect, thought, desire and fear) has the same role as Rose’s psy knowledge. Rose (1999: 3) states that psy knowledge has been employed by experts of subjectivity to ‘reengineer’ the modern human soul. Psy knowledge entails new ways of thinking and acting
upon personal beliefs, wishes, aspirations, ambitions, and social relations, and contributes to deconstruction of the existing order. Psy knowledge has been important in the modern/post-modern period, as it provides contemporary ways to be governed and by which individuals govern themselves (Rose 1999: 10).

Governmentality is not merely about managing the conduct of others. Techniques of governmentality do not only create subjectivity, but also identity. Foucault (1977: 211) in his discussion about governmentality suggested that ‘the conduct’ refers not only ‘to leading others’, but also to how ‘to conduct oneself’. Thus, governmentality also refers to self-government: the ways individuals attend to themselves, conduct themselves, and govern themselves (Clifford 2001: 101). Therefore, governmentality entails the process of what Foucault termed subjectivation.\(^8\) Clifford (2001: 99) provides a description of this: “a process of self-formation in which individuals construct an identity for themselves through an appropriation of certain values, practices, regimes, and modes of comportment”. Thus, governmentality, with its rationalities and technologies, also involves the notion of identity as it enables individuals or a group of individuals to form identity. Rationalities of government provide individuals with a certain way of thinking about their experiences and a particular way to organise or group things and persons. Technologies are needed to work the rationalities into practice, to enable individuals to use rationalities as their reference to construct identity.

Some theorists argue that the understanding of subjectivity is very close to the understanding of identity. For instance, Weedon (2004: 19) theorises that identity is the temporary ‘fixing’ of certain mode of subjectivity, while subjectivity is a set of an individual’s sense of conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desire. Other scholars regard the two terms as near-synonyms or use them almost interchangeably. However, there is still a difference between the two. I view identity as having broader coverage since it includes both the individual and the collective/group, whereas subjectivity refers to the level of the individual, even though it might be influenced by discourses and social dynamics. However, the notion of subjectivity, with its place in the complexity of the power matrix, does not neglect the

\(^8\)Foucault was consistently opposed to nineteenth century and phenomenological notions of a universal and timeless subject which was at the source of how one made sense of the world, and which was the foundation of all thought and action. The problem with this conception of the subject according to Foucault was that it fixed the status quo and attached people to specific identities that could never be changed. According to him, subject is the effect of power and disciplines.
importance of agency. Employing a Foucauldian approach, Mahmood (2005:17) argues that the processes and conditions that subordinate a subject are also the means by which a subject becomes a self-conscious identity and agent. Agency is always a part of the process of making and remaking society and culture, or what Giddens (1979:5) calls ‘structuration’. Even though agency is also a part of a matrix of power, it enables subjects to act to pursue their own projects, if not to resist webs of power (Ortner 2006: 146-147). However, as pointed out by Mahmood (2005: 29), the conceptualisation of agency is actually beyond the simplistic binary of complying with and resisting power, as there are many ways to establish relations between the subject and the (external) norm. This binary, as Parker said (2005: 64, 86), tends to neglect the important role of the subject and is not able to understand the complexity of human experiences in finding meaning and constructing identity.

In this thesis, Indonesian Muslim young people neither freely construct their own identity, nor do they accept the propagandistic messages of Islamic films, nor are they totally subjected to the techniques of governance by Islamic self-help books. Indonesian Muslim young people have vulnerabilities that are influenced by Westernisation and/or Islamisation; as well, they possess the ability to form their identity out of any cultural material available to them, including Islam and popular culture. The next chapter provides an understanding of the Islamic resurgence and its unexpected alliance with popular culture.
This chapter surveys briefly the existing literature on the resurgence of religion, especially Islam, as a global phenomenon. The chapter examines the unexpected global resurgence of religion in what scholars from many disciplines had predicted would be an age of secularism. The resurgence has brought an increasing trend to associate religious symbols with popular culture in all over the world. The emergence of what it called ‘Islamic popular culture’ can only be understood within this context. In this chapter, I see that the current trend of global Islamic popular culture establishes challenge to Western modernity, secularism, and traditional religious authorities.

The Revival of Religion and the Resurgence of Islam

Although, in general, it is accepted that the modern world is a secular one, relegating the role of religion into merely a spiritual realm and the private sphere, Jose Casanova (in Hasan 2009) notes that religions have revived in public life. Long before him, Berger (1977: 160) himself, who was one of secularisation theorists, had already warned that there are limits to secularisation, and that there are a number of indicators that the news of the demise of religion has been exaggerated. Parker and Hoon (2013) also proved that secularisation theory has been failed to identify the continuing interest in religion and the resurgence of religions in the contemporary era. The influence of religion in life might had been in decline, but Berger (1977: 162) saw signs of vigorous resurgence of religion in America, the site of capitalism, a place where one would have least expected the revivification of religion. There has been an increase in institutional participation in Christianity in America, starting from the early 1960s. Berger (1977: 152) asserts that it was younger people who became more active in the churches in large number. Although Berger did not mention the linkage between religion and mass-produced popular culture, at least it can be inferred that if popular culture, to some extent, is the culture of everyday life, religion can be a part of everyday life. Vice versa, popular culture may serve the interest of religion. Zubaida (1987) hints that if religion could provide a set of resources to fulfil particular goals such as health, wealth and happiness, popular culture can help religion to accomplish this task by constructing remedies from various elements.
The association of religion with popular culture is suggested by Ritzer (2005), who poses an interesting metaphor: ‘cathedrals of consumption’, to refer to new means of consumption (e.g. malls, superstores, airports, and cruise ships). In one way or another, the feeling that churchgoers have when they worship in a cathedral could have similarities with the feeling that consumers have when they engage in the practices of consumption. Possamai (2007: 45) points out that although these ‘cathedrals’ have a quasi-religious character, some religious groups are specifically following and promoting the consumerist aspect of these cathedrals, as in the case of Next Church in America. He goes further by stating that religion in postmodern times is definitely part of consumer culture, as all religious groups produce commodities or assign positive values, according to religious norms, to some commodities – for example, Muslim Cola or Islamic films – that can be bought by the religious consumer. The marrying of religion and popular culture leads to the development of a religious market (Roy 2004: 172) wherein commodities are meanings and symbols. Although Possamai admits that some groups resist certain aspects of religion’s full immersion in popular culture, it is a truism that for a group to spread its belief and values, it has to speak a language that a majority of people can understand: in this case, the language of consumption, which emphasises the individual. The emphasis on the individual has been a very significant feature of contemporary popular culture. Roy (2004: 29) observes that, as with popular culture agents, important religious figures have also used individual approaches to appeal to young people.

As has been noted by Van Nieuwkerk (2008), there has been an increasing trend in contemporary popular culture with regard to religion, particularly Islam, to pietise artistic expressions. In my context, I say that there is a pietisation of popular culture. Piety is such a powerful notion that it can radically transform the everyday world of the religious devotee. Since piety is about the construction of a distinctive lifestyle of religious tastes and preferences, we can posit that the pietisation of the everyday world would combine elements from various spheres to construct a new religious habit (Turner 2008: 3). The new religious habit would involve either a new emphasis on religious practices, or the invention of non-religious practices that adhere to religious values. Some Muslims who involve in the world of arts address the latter case, insofar as they consider the goal of art and entertainment to be moral improvement and the pietisation of the believers’ lifestyle (Schiellke 2008: 252). It is within this shift towards a spirit of piety that currently there is a stronger emphasis on artists in Muslim countries to help the Islamic revival and to create an Islamic alternative and ambience within the scene of contemporary popular culture. To gain a better understanding
of the shift towards a spirit of piety and the broader context of pietisation of arts, particularly in the context of Islam, I survey the history of the Islamic resurgence.

In this discussion of the Islamic resurgence, I would like to focus on the second wave of Islamic revivalism. The terms ‘revival’ and ‘resurgence’ are something of a problem, given that the role of religion in public life in many Muslim countries has never receded, but they are useful to show that Islam has changed and developed. I explore this issue after I recall the first wave of Islamic revivalism. According to Gole (2002: 174), the first phase started at the end of the 1970s and reached a peak with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This stage is marked by some characteristics: mass mobilisation, Islamic militancy, a quest for an Islamic collective identity, and the implementation of political and religious rules in Muslim countries. Other writers (Esposito 1983; Ahmad 1983; Kepel 2002) suggest that the first wave of Islamic revival was preceded by a long historical evolution, since Islamic revivalist movements have their roots deep in the history of the Muslim people. Esposito (1983) reckons that a major crisis in Islamic history was precipitated by the advent of colonialism, which played a significant role as a pretext for religious resurgence. The succumbing of the Islamic world to the West under colonialism during the nineteenth century challenged the very meaning of Muslim history and forced a major change toward modernisation as well as secularisation (Ahmad 1983). Nevertheless, during the colonialism period, religion remained influential in Muslim societies and became one of the sources of inspiration for anti-colonial, nationalist movements and independence struggles from North Africa to Indonesia. When World War II weakened Western colonial power, both nationalist and religious movements became stronger. The post-independence period saw the receding influence of Islam as Muslim nation-states opted to look to the Western model for their development efforts and in some countries, governments repressed Islamic movements (Kepel 2002). However, from the second half of the 1970s, the failure of Western-style modernisation re-awakened the call for Islam in Muslim nation-states (Ahmad 1983), as evident in Pakistani General Zia ul-Haq’s call for Islamic government following his coup d’état, the assassination of Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat, the prominence of Ikhwan al Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood) movement in Syria and Egypt, and the successful Iranian Islamic revolution. Since that period, the scope of Islamic resurgence has been worldwide as heads of Muslim governments and their opponents increasingly appealed to religion for their legitimacy and popular support, and resistance movements in Afghanistan, Kashmir, China and the Philippines made use of Islam as their most important ingredient (Esposito 1992: 11).
Even though Gole (2002), as cited above, mentions that Islamism first started at the end of the 1970s, the surge of Islamic revitalisation started long before. Perhaps even the very beginning of the Islamic tradition provided a basis for resurgence. Voll (1982: 32-33, 1991: 24) and Ahmad (1982: 222) suggest that the notion of Islamic resurgence lies in the principles of Islam to uphold Islamic values in the Muslim world: islah and tajdid (usually translated as reform and renewal). The term islah connotes a sense of moral reshaping as well as increasing the righteousness of the people. The term tajdid connotes renewing the faith of the Muslim community, as Muslims are seen as departing from the path defined by the Quran and the Sunnah, and some persons (called mujaddids) are needed to encourage a regeneration of authentic Islam (Voll 1982: 33). The existence of these two principles makes it possible to issue a call to reform Muslim societies on the basis of the established scriptures. Therefore, it is no wonder that since the ninth century, in many regions and in various forms, there have been many calls to return to a strict application of the Quran and the Sunnah. However, Haddad (1991: 4) noted that there is no consensus among Muslim societies all over the world to replicate the circumstances of prophetic times as many scholars try to redirect and reinterpret an Islam that is forward looking, creative and open to movements and changes.

Turning back to the discussion of the Islamic revival stage two, Gole (2002) characterises this period as marked by the decline of revolutionary fervour, because the ideological chorus has given way to multiple voices and Muslim identity is in the process of “normalisation”. Indeed, the phrase “second wave” does not suggest a completely different phase of Islamisation, but rather the growing consciousness of Muslims that Islam could not be contained solely in the ideological sphere and indeed required political activism, such as establishing Islamic political parties and implementing sharia laws. As noticed by Esposito (1991: 40) and Rosyad (2006: 3-4), the establishment of various Islamic institutions (banks, laws, social welfare services and educational institutions), the increasing attention to religious observance, the wearing of Islamic attire, the growing number of pilgrims, the revitalisation of Sufism, the emphasis on Islamic values, the proliferation of religious programming and publications, and so forth mark the resurgence of Islam throughout the Muslim world. Moreover, Muslims are beginning to blend into the urban lifestyle, follow global consumption patterns, use global communication networks and learn the rules of the market. As noted by Roy (1994: 3), even the proponents

9Tajdid and islah actually refer to making individual efforts to apply the Quran and the Sunnah to the existing conditions. Therefore, going back to the Quran and the Sunnah does not necessarily mean recreating the conditions of the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula when Islam was born. For further discussion, please see Voll (1982).
of Islamist movements in Iran, Lebanon, Algeria and Egypt were products of the modern world. The important figures of these movements were youngsters educated in the modern education system and their masses live with the values of the modern city.

The signs of modernity do not make Islamic identity disappear. Lewis (in Lukens-Bull 2005: 128) identifies this pattern as a kind of supermarket, where Muslims adopt whatever they find useful without adopting the values of the West, or as Roy (2004: 33) cleverly posits: one can use a Western syntax with an Islamic morphology. Those scholarly accounts are proven valid when Muslims in Middle Eastern countries use consumption patterns, communication tools and market strategies to produce the various brands of Muslim Cola to supplant Coca-Cola, one of the icons of capitalism. This case constitutes a challenge to the prevailing popular culture since popular culture and religion in the first instance appear to be alienated from and incompatible with each other. The surprising association of popular culture with religion tends to subvert and disrupt the sensibilities of secular modernists as well as Muslim traditionalists (Barendregt 2006: 171) and it shakes the established features of popular culture such as secularism and the embodiment of Western values.

The current wave of Islamism, which Mahmood (2005) aptly described as a piety movement, brings a challenge to both the imposed meaning of piety and the nature of popular culture. The new meaning of piety is significantly different from the conventional meaning of piety imposed by religious authorities (Eickelman and Anderson 1999): the latter insist that being pious is not something that can be publicly shown. If a pious person openly displays his/her piety in order to contrast with those who are impious, paradoxically he/she would lose his/her authenticity, since to show piety is to destroy it (Turner 2008). However, the current piety movements defy this notion by encouraging pious Muslims to express their faith and devotion to Allah and to follow their religious instructions overtly and comprehensively.

There are some reasons why Muslims now are far from shy to display their identity openly. Muthalib (1990) has indicated that Muslims began to look at Islam as more than a code governing moral conduct; instead, it is a comprehensive corpus of rules and guidelines that cater to all needs and requirements for Muslims. Faith is increasingly viewed as capable of guiding devout Muslims in all circumstances if only they are subscribed to it fully. Another point is the desire on the part of an increasing number of Muslims to identify themselves with the wider Muslim ummah or worldwide Islamic community. The need to foster and buttress the sense of unity and solidarity with fellow Muslims across nation-states is motivating this
inclination. From Muthalib’s assertion, it can be concluded that the types of approaches and orientations from some Islamic bodies and organisations also shape the contemporary pietisation or Islamic revitalisation. When these institutions have attempted to be effective in their activities and at the same time remain devout, it has led them to shift their ordinary mode of organisation to that of an Islamic movement. It is hard for adherents to express Islamic identity without being publicly known. Their expression of Muslim identity could not be contained in the political realm, where scholars would easily call it Islamisation or neo-fundamentalism, which according to Roy (2004) has to be differentiated from radicalism. Non-political expressions of Islam in public life, such as popular culture, deserve more attention.

Islamic Popular Culture Worldwide and in Indonesia

Nowadays, Islamic popular culture practices can be found almost everywhere in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and among Muslim communities in Europe and the United States. In Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco and Lebanon, Muslim heavy metal and hip-hop fans and artists have created a thriving underground music scene (LeVine 2008). Satellite music video channels in Arabian countries since 2000 have started to broadcast a new style of religious music video that combines lyrics in praise of God and the Prophet with Western style instrumental music, and a set of high-quality, commercially appealing images and storylines in contemporary settings (Kubala 2007). This new trend of commercial Islamic music video emphasises the dignity and humanity of Islam and its harmonious integration with a comfortable, middle-class modern lifestyle. One of the first people to introduce the genre of Islamic music videos to the Middle East was a Londoner, a young British Muslim of Azeri origin, Sami Yusuf. He has popularised the Islamic music video genre known as nasyid, or Islamic chants, where stunning images from throughout the Muslim world show Islam’s global scope, or where the singer expresses his love for, and gratitude to, his mother. His music videos embody the ideals of an Islamic popular culture producer that articulate his dedication to working for the benefit of Muslims worldwide. His creativity offers a new sensibility to the genre of video music that was previously vulgar, associated with raunchy music, and akin to porn. Meanwhile, in the USA, Islamic poetry performances by Brother Dash, and stand-up comedy by Shazia Mirza are enjoying critical acclaim, and were considered halal by the Great Ayatollah of Iraq (Van Nieuwkerk 2008). These instances and others like halal songs, Islamic movies or ‘clean cinema’ (no bed scenes, kissing, and alcohol drinking), Islamic boy bands, Islamically correct reality TV shows (Kraidy 2006), and Islamic
tourism prove that Islamic revivalism and the subsequent piety movements are not incompatible with contemporary popular culture.

In Indonesia, the collapse of the New Order regime, with the subsequent liberalisation of the media, was a prelude to the development of Islamic popular culture. The consequences of the liberalisation of the media— the dramatic expansion of the broadcasting sector, the establishment of private cable television stations, and the exploding number of new media – forced many media owners to focus on hot topics such as crime, mysticism, entertainment, and sex in order to survive the market competition. This radical change created a moral panic, especially among certain Muslim organisations and activists, who viewed media liberalisation as an offensive and immoral process of Westernisation and secularisation that threatened Islamic values (Widodo 2008). Thus, some concerned Muslims started to find a way to overcome this moral crisis. The second wave of Islamisation and the growth of the Muslim middle classes, along with greater displays of piety, inspired concerned Muslims to take control of popular cultural production.

The phenomenon of ‘jilbabisasi’ (wearing a veil) is one of the most visible signs of Islamisation in Indonesia. It expanded from the universities in the 1980s to the broader public sphere during the 1990s, encouraged by the New Order government itself (Hasan 2009), and enforced by a few local governments after the end of the New Order. It affirms the attempt to patrol and control Muslims’ adherence to pious acts and Islamic teachings (Hamdani 2007: 12) even at the expense of local tradition. In the case of ‘jilbabisasi’ in West Sumatra, Parker (2005) reports that Islamic preachers and most students saw the ‘jilbab’ as Islamic clothing, but heads of schools described it as ‘traditional dress’. Even in the public sphere where Islamic clothing is not mandatory, the appearance of women with the ‘jilbab’ has become common and has much to do with either a consumerist discourse of the veil that prevails among the middle classes or a politicised discourse of female members of the Indonesian Muslim Students Association and Prosperous Justice Party (Van Wichelen 2007: 98). Van Wichelen argues that the blending of Muslimness with Western influences can be put into the broader global framework of consumption. In other words, Islam has become part of an extensive consumer culture (Hasan 2009), and no longer can be merely portrayed as an opponent of globalisation.

Another example of Islamic consumption through commodification is Islamic tele-preaching (Muzakki 2008; Howell 2008): public sermons delivered by preachers via television programs,
which resemble Christian televangelism in America. The sense of commodification is indicated in this Islamic televangelism not only via the use of modern telecommunications but also through the obvious media appeal and sophisticated communication skills of the preachers who perform their sermons on TV, compared with those of conventional preachers with pesantren (traditional Islamic school) or university backgrounds (professor-preacher). It is no wonder that many of these new kinds of proselytisers come from backgrounds in film, music and other media, rather than Islamic schools (Hefner 2000: 125). However, at the same time, there is no doubt that they are very capable in communicating the Islamic lessons to the masses (Hasan 2009). This communication skill enables them to satisfy the need for religious edification and entertainment simultaneously (Millie 2009).

Since the ratings of Islamic TV shows are high, and attract many advertising sponsors, Islamic televangelism has become a new commodity that people can watch on almost any TV station. Islamic tele-preachers become celebrities, no different from movie stars and musicians. Some famous tele-preachers go further by setting up their own brand and business (Fealy 2008 and Millie 2009). There are numerous instances of this. Aa Gym (Abdullah Gymnastiar) runs a business empire encompassing mobile phone services, publishing, recordings, education, multi-level marketing, and syndicated radio programs as well. Other examples include the late Uje (Ustadz Jeffry al Buchori) who appeared regularly in television soap operas, sings his own CDs and has launched his own text messaging services. Yusuf Mansyur, who owns a special school of Qur’anic recitation, gives public sermons to executives, and has his own text messaging services, also deserves to be mentioned. Both figures are able to complement preaching skills and reputations with various Islamic business activities.

The success of tele-preachers has inspired many Muslims to develop their talents in Islam-related realms and to try their luck in competitions held either on air or off air. Muzakki (2010) noted that this is especially apparent in the holy month of Ramadan, when many festivals and competitions are held across many TV and radio stations, and in almost every city. These include da’i cilik (child preacher) competitions, patrol competitions (a traditional art performed especially during Ramadan as a wake-up call), the Muslim fashion festival, and Islamic boarding schools festival. In the da’i cilik competition, almost all participants mimic their elders’ preaching style, particularly those whose appearance on TV is prominent (Millie

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10 Elements of popular culture, ranging from TV, radio, Internet, and social media, made Uje’s sudden death in April 2013 attract the attention of millions of people in Indonesia, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.
All of these events are supported by commercial brands and the popularity of some Islamic TV shows surpasses all other TV programmes in Ramadan. This phenomenon clearly indicates a belief shared among TV producers that catering to the needs of Muslims in everyday life will grant them a financial gain. For talented Muslims, who participate in such events and TV shows, their involvement will guarantee them a high degree of success, religiously or commercially, or both.

I explain in the next chapter how I approached the topic of Islamic popular culture: the starting point, the methods that I employed, the analytical tools that I used, and the way I investigated it, as well as the reasons for choosing particular sites and subjects of research.
Qualitative Research and Cultural Studies

This is a qualitative research project that aims to provide a deep understanding of the social world of research participants, and to produce outputs which focus on the interpretation of social meaning (Snape and Spencer 2003: 18). Reflecting her own research, Chow (1998: 32) stated that qualitative research produces ‘rich, descriptive data’ to help the researcher understand the experiences of the people. Rich descriptive data bring rich descriptions of the social world (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 6) and allow the researcher to interpret it from many angles. However, the interpretive nature of qualitative research also shows the limitations of such research: the researcher relies on his/her own insight and judgement and so cannot be all knowing (Stokes 2003: 21). The situational constraints that shape and limit the research also characterise qualitative research, as addressed by Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 13). Qualitative research emphasises the socially and culturally constructed nature of reality, and there is a close relation between the researchers and who/what they study. It is the interpretive nature of qualitative research that allows the researcher and the social world to impact on each other. Therefore, as facts and values in qualitative research are not distinct, and researchers’ findings are influenced by the researchers’ own outlook, it is impossible to undertake value-free research. However, researchers can declare and be transparent and self-reflective about their own assumptions that have impact on their understanding, even though their understanding is also affected by research participants’ understanding.

This project is located within cultural studies, where the key questions are about meaning and the significance of the cultural at every level of social and cultural processes. Putting the research within the framework of cultural studies is important since, as argued by Frow and Morris (2003: 516), cultural studies has not merely been a response to the social and cultural transformations that have been happening for decades, but has also derived many of its themes, research priorities, polemics, theoretical emphases, and working methods from its engagement with the transformations. McRobbie (1992: 731) observes that many works of cultural studies have often merely focused on sophisticated theorisation of cultural transformations. However, she also argues that there was cultural studies work, e.g. work by the Birmingham School scholars, that employed ethnographic approaches as one of their
prime methodologies but this was sometimes overlooked by other scholars. These works have made social and cultural identities in the making their focus. Thus, there were actual encounters between cultural researchers and real world. Following her statement, we can conclude that there are some works on contemporary cultural studies that have explored the issues of identity. For the exploration of social and cultural transformations, flexible research methods are necessary (Gray 2003: 17) and, indeed, there is no single research method for cultural studies (Stokes 2003: 21). Therefore, I have employed several methods: interviewing, narrative analysis, focus group discussions, and participant observation. By deploying more than one research method, I can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of my object of analysis.

Even though my focus in this thesis is cultural texts in the form of Islamic films and self-help books, I supplement my textual analysis with analysis of how people respond to and interpret the texts. My main reason is that there is a scarcity in cultural studies of research that examines how cultural consumers interpret cultural products and practices. Within the area of Indonesian studies, studies of popular culture that employ ethnography are also rare. Heryanto (2008: 4) argues that this is mostly a matter of convenience: many products of popular culture are widely available in almost all areas of Indonesia, so it is very easy for popular culture researchers to focus their studies primarily on such items. However, I believe that convenience is only one among several reasons. Another reason is related to how people, particularly intellectuals, political leaders, or moral reformers, view popular culture. As has been described in Chapter One, popular culture has been equated with profit making, and seen as superficial, artificial, and as standardised culture. So, the elite, including scholars, often held the view that common people should ideally consume something more enlightening than popular culture (Strinati 1995: 41). This leads to the difficulty for popular culture studies of gaining more serious attention from academic circles. The emphasis on textual and literary analysis is another reason for the rarity of ethnographic works in cultural studies. McRobbie (1992: 721,730) indicates that within cultural studies there is a tendency to make cultural studies become literary and textual excursions, and this causes a major problem in cultural studies, which is the lack of studies of ‘real’ identities, the main subject of cultural studies. Cohen (1993: 123) also points out that there is a heavy reliance among popular culture researchers upon theoretical models based on textual sources that needs to be balanced by an ethnographical approach. Therefore, I employ methods that are usually associated with ethnographic works in an endeavour to cover the lack of ‘real identities’.

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Textual Analysis and Interviewing

Analysis of Islamic films and self-help books was one of my methods, as my primary concern in the research is the textual analysis of popular culture. Davis (2008: 56) points out that investigating cultural texts is important for finding the common codes, terms, ideologies, discourses and individuals that come to dominate cultural practices. In the analysis, I took as my object of analysis the entire text in selected Islamic films and books, focusing on the structure of the story in the films and the content in the books. In general, textual analysis requires a researcher to uncover the structure of culture and through that, the ideology of a culture (Stokes 2003: 67). From the analysis of films and books, I can unpack the ideological content of Islamic films and self-help books in order to achieve a critical view of the films and self-help books. In general, ideology refers to a set of conscious and unconscious ideas that constitute one's goals, expectations, and actions. In a Marxian sense, ideology is a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society. The most significant point in studying ideology is not the subjective beliefs held in the conscious ‘minds’ of individuals, but rather discourses that produce these beliefs, the material institutions and rituals in which individuals take part (Althusser 1971: 127-128). The purpose of uncovering the ideology underlying messages within the films and self-help books is to find the hidden meanings and values, which may not be explicit at first sight. As I had two different forms of popular culture to be analysed in this project, I analysed them differently. In analysing Islamic films, I borrowed the literature of film studies. I acknowledge that contemporary academic analysis within film studies puts more emphasis on aesthetic and technical practices, e.g. the staging of shots, cinematography, editing, and sound (Wright 2007: 19) than on narrative. However, as my research concerns not only films but also their audience, I focused my analysis of films on their narrative elements. In analysing Islamic self-help books, I borrowed the work of researchers of the self-help movements, especially those works that analyse the self-help genre using a Foucauldian approach.

My other method was interviewing, as my research project also needed people as sources of information and interviews enabled me to find out about people’s ideas, opinions and attitudes.11 Interviews provided an opportunity to investigate individual perspectives in detail, and to have an understanding of the personal context (Ritchie 2003). I used a kind of structured conversation in order to enable interviewees to feel confident and comfortable

11 I conducted the fieldwork with the approval of the UWA Human Research Ethics Office
about responding freely (Gray 2003: 95). I asked a few initial questions in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to talk freely when replying to the questions, and my next questions were partly determined by their answers. The in-depth interview permits the researcher to unearth reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs behind the interviewee’s answers (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003). Here research participants are seen as active meaning makers rather than passive information providers (Meyer 2008: 70), and I see interviewing as offering an opportunity to study the process of meaning production. The interviewees in this research were urban Muslim young adults in first to third year of undergraduate studies. One of the reasons for this selection was their age category, 18 to 21 years old. Although the general population in Indonesia, from almost all age groups, is keen to consume popular culture, people in the 18 to 21 year age bracket, particularly those who live in urban areas, are one of the most targeted by popular culture producers (alongside teenagers). Another reason is their status as higher education students. Even though they represent only around 2 per cent of the total population, numbering 4,787,785 (Badan Pusat Statistik 2012), they have a significant place in the history of the nation. As I explain in another chapter, university students are expected to be agents of social change, but they are also agents of popular culture as well as a target of Islamisation. To have a variety of information, I purposefully selected participants from various backgrounds, from ordinary to community-active youths. I used transcripts to look at the discourses they revealed in the interview.

Focus Group Discussions and Participant Observation

Another research method that I used was focus groups discussions (FGDs). The method was originally a market research tool (Meyer 2008:71) but currently enjoys popularity among social researchers. An FGD is an ideal way to study how different people think and feel about particular things, or to delve into the complexities of their opinions and attitudes (Stokes 2003:148). As with interviews, FGDs are an excellent tool through which to elicit consumers’ experiences, practices and attitudes, to capture the dynamics between cultural production and consumption, and to take into account the diversity of cultural consumers (Meyer 2008:85). However, this method is different from interviews with regard to the spontaneity in terms of language, emphasis and framework of understanding that arises as they reveal more of their own reference frame and respond to each other (Finch and Lewis 2003: 171). In my fieldwork, because I was obliged to explain the content of my research in detail before the students agreed to participate in the study, informants might have expected the kind of
questions that I would pose. Thus, they had sufficient time to prepare their answers, and their responses were less spontaneous and more self-controlled. When the FGDs were held, it was less likely that they were able to predict the circumstances and content, and as a result, they were more spontaneous and showed more dynamism in their responses, even though some of the issues raised in the FGDs had been addressed before in interviews. However, the spontaneity also made a few of them look uncomfortable, particularly when in the FGDs they did not meet with others that they knew before. Some of them had their opinions changed in the FGDs, but some other had their views accepted by the others.

Another feature of FGDs is that participants not only present their own views but also hear from other people; hence, data are generated by the interactions among them, and less influenced by the researcher (than in the interviews). The less structured the discussion, the less direct and interventionist the researcher becomes. Therefore, the perspectives revealed in the focus group are less influenced by interaction with the researcher than might be the case in individual interviews. In the course of group discussions, individual opinions may be refined, reshaped and moved to a more considered stage as they clarify with each other. Thus, focus groups provide a social context for research, an exploration of how people argue about a theme, and an opportunity to explore how ideas are formed, generated or moderated through discussions (Ritchie 2003). To properly examine how informants develop their arguments on common issues, Have (1990: 48) suggests that the researcher needs to record the discussions as unobtrusively as possible; thus, participants will give their ‘natural’ opinions (without being provoked or influenced by the researcher). However, in my fieldwork I found that there were a few informants who hid their real opinions when they discovered that the majority in the discussions did not share their opinions.

At first, I recorded interviews and focus group discussions by audio- and video-tape. However, noticing that the students appeared to be uncomfortable with the recording, I stopped recording and decided to take notes instead. Sometimes I could only take notes immediately after the interviews. After the interviews, I showed them what I had noted to ensure that what I had written was a reasonable representation of what they had said. To protect their privacy, I applied a protocol of confidentiality by assigning a pseudonym to each of them. The people who allowed me to take a full recording of our conversations were a film director, Hanung Bramantyo, and an Islamic book author, Irfan Hidayat. Bramantyo is a public figure who has been interviewed numerous times and Hidayat is a doctoral student in sociology who has experience in conducting research. I did not apply the protocol of confidentiality to them for the reason that they are public figures, their opinions are well
known by the public, and they did not advance any objection to their real names being revealed.

I intended to undertake two or three FGDs with five to eight participants in each group in each of my two sites, Jakarta and Bandung. However, the plan did not fully materialise. When I visited ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) in mid-December 2010 until March 2011, it was an exam period followed immediately by a semester break. As a result, I could only hold one FGD. Seven ITB students attended the discussion. Even in Jakarta, where I was able to conduct FGDs twice, the number of participants was only four and five. The participants who did not come reasoned that they had to work as private school teachers in the afternoons in order to cope with the high cost of living in Jakarta and those commitments clashed with the discussions, which were held in the afternoon. My limited time in Jakarta prevented me from arranging other FGDs. However, the discussions in Jakarta were more vibrant than I expected and, after the discussions, some participants revealed that they felt ‘illuminated’ by their intellectual encounters with each other.

To support information that I had from interviews and FGDs, I conducted participant observation at various events and at various sites. Apart from engaging in activities appropriate to the situation, the purpose of participant observation is to take a closer look at activities, people, and physical aspects of a situation (Spradley 1980:14), and often to contrast what people say with what people do. Due to some constraints – time being one of them – I could not engage with individual students in their daily activities. However, I did observe their public activities to gain a wider understanding of Muslim youths’ behaviour in public, to learn how they are involved in the practices of popular culture in everyday life, and to compare what they said with what they did. I observed the activities of Muslim youth in Nurul Iman Mosque at UNJ (State University of Jakarta) and Salman Mosque at ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology), including some pengajian (religious sermons) organised by the youth. I also went with them to some malls and bookshops in Jakarta and Bandung to have a look at how they consume and practise popular culture in daily life as well as how they communicate with each other. Public groupings of young people often provide highly condensed and embodied examples of interactions and experimentations with identity (Gray 2003:81). I also went to the Islamic Book Fair held in Jakarta in March 2011. Thousands of Muslim young people attended. I decided to use a mobile phone to take pictures and videos of activities in the mosques and of our ‘journey’ in the malls. The decision came after I realised that using a mobile phone to record activities in particular instances was, somehow,
more acceptable to people than using a camera. It was unfortunate that I lost the mobile phone during the journey back to my hometown. This prevented me from further analysing Muslim youths’ activities in public places to complement analysis of how they practise both Islam and popular culture.

Research Sites

I went to two research sites, Jakarta and Bandung. I chose Jakarta because it is the national capital, and it is the place where a high level of consumption and globalised lifestyles is most visible. My research base in Jakarta was the UNJ (State University of Jakarta), located in Rawamangun in Central Jakarta. UNJ, despite its relatively big size in terms of the number of students, may not be categorised as a top university in Indonesia as yet. However, from what I heard prior to commencing the research, UNJ was becoming one of the few new centres of the ‘Islamisation movement’ among university students in Jakarta. This was not far from what I found. The campus has religious activities that attract many students. I selected this university also for the reason that it is in the heart of Jakarta, very close to many commercial sites. A friend of mine, a lecturer at UNJ, helped me to set up my research base. To have a variety of information, I asked him to help me find undergraduate students of first to third year from diverse disciplines. In line with my research theme, I also asked him to find students who have watched Islamic films and/or read Islamic self-help books. Then, he arranged a meeting with some students to provide me the opportunity to explain to them about my research and the consequences of participating in it. At the meeting, I asked them to confirm whether they had watched Islamic films and/or read Islamic self-help books before, and to confirm whether they were willing to participate in my research. I stressed that their participation is voluntary, not compulsory, and that their participation is entirely outside the university course and unit. I was lucky that all of them consumed one or both of the Islamic popular culture forms that I mentioned, and all were happy to be my informants. I collected their contact numbers and phoned them one by one to arrange personal interviews. Most of them chose to be interviewed at the Central Library, considering its location in the centre of UNJ Campus. One of them helped me to find a room in which to conduct an FGD when the Central Library was not available due to its closing time. My interview with the film director was also undertaken in Jakarta, at his headquarters in a busy suburb of South Jakarta. I gained access to him through a personal friend who was involved in the production of Fatahillah, an Islamic film in the 1990s, as an actress.
I chose Bandung because it was an important site of Islamic revivalism in Indonesia from the end of the 1970s. The Salman Mosque student movement began in Bandung. It initiated ‘jilbabisasi’\textsuperscript{12} in campuses and beyond (Hamdani 2007), and introduced campus-based Islamic proselytising (Rosyad 2006). A friend of mine, a teacher at a famous Islamic school in Bandung, introduced me, via e-mail, to an activist of Salman Mosque. After my first meeting with him in December 2010, the activist arranged a meeting with his fellow students in the Salman Mosque. I also asked him to find informants with the same requirements as in my research site in Jakarta: according to age and consumption of Islamic films and/or Islamic self-help books. As with UNJ students, after the meeting in which I explained my research project and the consequences of participating, I gained their voluntary consent to participate in my research and obtained their contact numbers. Then I rang them personally to arrange interviews. One of them chose to be interviewed with her friend, who was also on the list, and the friend also agreed to do so. Most interviews took place at Salman Mosque. Other interviews were conducted on campus and in their boarding houses.

I went to Bandung for a second time in the period December 2011 to January 2012. I did so because after the first visit I realised that there were a few leads that I had to follow up in Bandung. In the first visit, I had not had any informants from the Faculty of Arts and Design. As their focus and approach to knowledge and culture might be different to that of their science-oriented, fellow ITB students, I thought they might provide different responses. I was lucky that one of my friends in Perth has a daughter who studies Craft Design at ITB’s Faculty of Arts and Design. She introduced me to her fellow ITB students who agreed to participate in my research. It was in this second visit to Bandung that I met with the book author, Irfan Hidayat, and interviewed him at a café. Irfan Hidayat was a student of my friend at Unpad (University of Padjajaran). Overall, I had 38 student informants, 19 male and 19 female. Fifteen of them were students of UNJ, 22 were from ITB, and one person was an Unpad student. My informants came from lower to middle class backgrounds, as their parents work as farmers, schoolteachers, civil servants, traders, religious teachers, fishermen, etc.

The next chapter deals with how my informants engage with popular culture, as well as practise Islam, in their everyday life. Prior to that, in order to better understand young people in Indonesia, I present a review of the scholarly literature on young people. I also describe the development of popular culture in Indonesia that was consumed everyday by my informants.

\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{jilbab} is a veil, which covers the neck, head and chest of female Muslims. “Jilbabisasi” refers to the growing prevalence of the \textit{jilbab} among Indonesian Muslim women.
CHAPTER FOUR:
POPULAR CULTURE, ISLAM AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN INDONESIA

Introduction

This chapter deals with popular culture, youth and Islam in Indonesia. In the first instance, I review the existing literature about the florescence of popular culture in Indonesia. The review encompasses three major periods in Indonesian history: Old Order (1945-1967), New Order (1966-1998) and Reform (1998-now). I observe how the government in each historical period treated popular culture, and how different types of popular culture were developed under different cultural policies. Then, I briefly look at scholarly accounts of youth in general and in Indonesia. The prevalent discourse on youth in Indonesia tends to conceive that young people, as they are searching for identity, are vulnerable to the influence of modernity as well as religious resurgence. I show that my informants did not merely become a target, as they, in their daily life, actively engaged with both popular culture – which is often characterised as a product and practice of Western culture – and Islam, which has undergone resurgence among youth.

The Development of Popular Culture in Indonesia

In Indonesia, popular culture burgeoned dramatically after the end of the Old Order government in 1967. It was not until sustained industrialisation took place during the New Order that popular culture impacted dramatically upon the life world of most Indonesians.

13 The term ‘Old Order’ was created by the Suharto government (which officially took power in 1968) to make a clear-cut distinction between the Sukarno and Suharto regimes. During the Old Order period, Indonesia experimented with democracy but had neither the infrastructure nor the political culture to enable it to survive (Hilmy 2010: 74). From 1949 until 1959, Indonesia was a liberal democratic regime. Then, due to very complex political circumstances, Sukarno introduced the concept of ‘Guided Democracy’ that centred on him as the supreme leader of Indonesia. During the New Order period, Suharto did not make any effort to democratise Indonesia as his government only attempted to transform Indonesia from a struggling country to a more stable country in economic terms. However, Suharto’s government abused democracy and human rights and masked their authoritarianism with the concept of ‘Pancasila Democracy’. For further discussion on Pancasila democracy and Suharto’s government, please see McGlynn and Sulistyo (2007) and Bourchier (2010). It has been difficult for analysts to easily understand the dynamics of the system that came into being after the New Order (Mietzner and Aspinall 2010:1). In this period, important institutional democratic changes, such as political freedom and freedom of the press, have been implemented. However, many scholars argue that these changes were superficial, with the real core structures of power remaining unchanged. Indonesia remains crippled by severe structural problems, such as rampant corruption and weak law enforcement.
(Budiman 2002:84 and Fealy 2008), and helped to produce a new middle class (Anshori 2009). I am not suggesting that popular culture was not present in Indonesia before the New Order, but rather that the Old Order government, particularly in the period of Guided Democracy (1959-1965), imposed heavy restrictions upon Western popular culture. In that period, Sukarno, Indonesia’s first president, preached about the evils of rock and roll music and waged war on the Beatle’s music (Farram 2007:247). In the early 1960s, the Indonesian government forbade Hollywood movies for the reason that they were part of neo-colonialism and imperialism and would sway people away from revolution (Budiman 2002: 140, 186). The government wanted Indonesians to be inspired by traditional music and dance, as well as ‘nationalist music and patriotic movies’ (Farram 2007: 248). The retention and development of Indonesian culture – both on the local and national stages – were seen as very important to the development of the country. Consequently, Western-influenced popular culture was deemed a threat and impediment to the development of an Indonesian culture that the government wanted to build.

It is interesting to contrast the policies of the Old Order and the New Order on national culture and popular culture. According to Kladen (1987: 236-237), the Old Order government in the period of Guided Democracy, under the leadership of Sukarno, treated national culture as a tool to unite the very diverse country and to deny the influence of foreign culture, particularly that of Western popular culture, as well as to unite the country using a constructed national identity. President Sukarno attacked cowboy films, comic books, low

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14The Old Order government led by Sukarno is usually categorized into two periods: Constitutional Democracy and Guided Democracy. In the Constitutional Democracy period, Indonesia used the 1950 Constitution, which implemented parliamentary democracy, and accordingly the President had, mostly, a symbolic role. According to T. Jones (2005:96), the Constitution’s emphasis on freedom and what can be taken as individual rights reflect a liberal current, and it ran through the cultural policy in that period. In this period, cultural policy was structured to build Indonesia as an independent nation equal to other nations. However, the government was a facilitator rather than a leader of national culture. Therefore, Western cultural elements, as well as regional cultures, were considered to have contributed to the development of Indonesian national culture (Jones 2005: 99). In the Guided Democracy period, cultural policy was significantly different to that in the previous period. Sukarno abandoned the 1950 Constitution and reintroduced the 1945 Constitution, strengthening his presidential power and taking up a prime ministerial position. In this period, Sukarno’s ideas, which were reflected in his public speeches, dominated government policies, including in the cultural sphere. Sukarno wanted to unite Indonesians through the idea of revolution, even though he gave neither detailed plans nor specific direction (Jones 2005: 117). In the Guided Democracy period, Sukarno attacked Western culture more frequently than in the Constitutional Democracy period when his power was more limited. Sukarno’s attacks on the influence of Western culture in Indonesia reflect his insistence on the idea of revolution and increasing criticism of the role of Western countries (that he called the colonialist and imperialist bloc) in the international arena. The signs of American involvement in regional rebellions against the central government further infuriated him. In this period Sukarno also gave more recognition and attention to regional cultures, which were considered highly important in the building of national culture.

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quality novels, and Western clothing and hairstyles. He urged Indonesian youth to oppose cultural imperialism and to eschew Western popular music, in particular rock and roll (Farram 2007:249). Sukarno’s condemnation of Western culture was adopted as an official cultural policy although Sukarno never gave specific directions to his ministers. President Sukarno’s treatment of national culture in the Guided Democracy period implied what Kleden (1987: 233) has called a ‘nationalisation of culture’. National culture was used by the Old Order regime to unify local cultures in order to push out Western culture’s influence and penetration (Farram 2007: 247) and enhance national pride. In the New Order, led by President Suharto, national culture was used to control political opponents and repress intellectual criticism; Western popular culture was much more welcome, though not without criticism from some members of society. The way Suharto employed the national culture jargon resulted in a dual policy. On the one hand, there was ‘internationalisation of culture’, and the New Order government opened the door to the flow of goods, services, and particular ideas (especially modernisation theory and foreign, capital-based economic development strategy) from the West. On the other hand, the New Order government repressed dissenting political and intellectual opinions, through political-legal actions (e.g. jailing dissenting academicians) or violence-based actions (e.g. violently crushing student protests). It refused to allow the development of ideas that it considered would threaten national stability, thus forcing some intellectuals in Indonesia, particularly among state-influenced academic circles, to hide their critical thinking.

The New Order’s warm reception of Western-style popular culture was symbolised by, for instance, the release from jail of popular music group, Koes Bersaudara – a sort of Indonesian version of The Beatles. They had been sentenced without trial by the Old Order government as they had been seen as bringing in the corrupting influence and mental disease of the West (Budiman 2002: 140). Other examples were the active involvement of an Army unit in promoting popular music, and the emergence of new popular music groups and singers (Farram 2007: 265-267). In addition, the number of Indonesian movies rose, and numerous Hollywood movies were imported (Sen 1994: 49). However, films, advertising of consumer goods, and the mass media were tightly controlled. Ironically, while the New Order let in the flow of foreign capital and forms of popular culture, as well as Western ideas about economic liberalisation in the form of national development policy, they refused the other side of it, i.e. Western ideas about political liberalisation, as it considered that such ideas conflicted with Indonesian national culture. Despite the holding of general elections every five years, the New Order government did not accept a Western-style democratic culture that allows
criticism and respects human rights and civil liberties. It did not tolerate critiques of and protests against the government from the academic world. The New Order regime also banned artists who dared to make any implied criticism of their regime in their works (Farram 2007: 271). Critiques and protests were deemed inappropriate to what the New Order called Indonesian (or sometimes they used the term Eastern) culture, which was marked by social harmony, consensus, religious virtues and familial values (Heryanto and Mandal 2003: 5). These ideal characteristics were very much in line with Singapore’s promotion of what they called ‘Asian values’, especially when Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of modern Singapore, was in power from 1959 to 1990. Although Asian values implied a challenge to the West’s global hegemony, they were promoted by the most Westernised sections of Asian societies (Bruun and Jacobsen 2000:13). The discourses of Asian values also emerged at a time when some Asian countries were starting to enjoy economic prosperity (Jenco 2013: 237). Rather than genuinely promoting Asia as a distinctive social and cultural civilisation equal to the West, the promotion of Asian values by authoritarian governments was a response to pressures from Western media, intellectuals and political elites on the issues of human rights and democracy (Ghai 1998: 34).

Budiman (2002: 141-144) points out two key factors – among many – that influenced the blossoming of popular culture in Indonesia after the New Order era. The first one is a radical transformation of Sukarno’s slogan of ‘endless revolution’ into Suharto’s ‘never-ending industrialisation’. This marked a shift in Indonesian governance from political and ideological discourses in the Old Order period to industrial, economy-oriented national development in the New Order. The New Order’s policy heavily emphasised economic development and technological advance, and relied on the boom in international oil prices from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. Nevertheless, the regime increased foreign investment from the mid-1980s due to economic pressure after falling oil and commodity prices, the declining value of the rupiah, and global recession. These policies implied not only a flow of foreign capital to all parts of Indonesia, but also resulted in almost all aspects of the lives of Indonesians being influenced by the cultural values of industrial societies in Europe and USA. After a domestic satellite, Palapa, was launched in 1976, even government itself eventually realised – after some failed attempts to control access to foreign broadcasting – that Indonesian society could not be sealed off from transnational cultural processes, pressures and influences (Kitley

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15 There were some exceptions, as musical tapes and performances by Iwan Fals, a pop superstar, and his associates, and Rhoma Irama, a dangdut musician, were not banned during the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Murray 1991: 10-12). Their lyrics contained social comment on issues such as urban poverty, exploitative businessmen, the restlessness of the youth, opposition to materialism, and increasing inequality in society.
Satellite dishes started appearing in 1989 (Murray 1991: 3), and this meant that control over access to foreign broadcasting became difficult, if not impossible. In the New Order era, cultural influences from the West became much more powerful than they had been under the Old Order. The New Order’s economic development was not only bringing in foreign capital, experts and technicians, but also bringing foreign worldviews and life styles to within everyday reach of Indonesian people.

The second element in the blossoming of popular culture in the New Order is the development of the mass media, and modern mass communication technologies. In its earlier period (1966 to early 1970s), the New Order government allowed more freedom of expression than in its later period (late 1970s to 1990s). This can be seen in the increasing number of mass media channels and publications, which in turn promoted Western popular culture, as well as Asian popular culture (Japan, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea) from the early 1970s. Teen magazines, popular novels and Japanese comic books were enjoyed by many youth in urban areas from the end of the 1960s (Kailani 2010), although from the end of 1970s until its fall, the New Order began to restrict civil liberties, including the freedom of the press and expression. Handajani (2005: 87) mentioned that teen magazines which focus on current fashion, celebrity gossip, and music have been constructing codes of sociability which became cultural references for Indonesian youth, and thereby have taken an important role in constructing youth culture, which is a very significant part of popular culture (Budiman 2002: 172). During the New Order era, printed media have shifted from being an ideological tool for political groups to being an industry producing goods for the market (Sen and Hill 2000). It should be noted that in the beginning of the 1980s some printed mass media started attracting a large readership and global franchise media started appearing in Indonesian language editions by translating about 80 per cent of the original content and adding some local content for the rest (Laksmi and Haryanto 2007).

Apart from printed media, electronic media have also developed enormously. It was in the later years of the New Order period that Indonesian people witnessed the beginning of the private television era. Before that, following the establishment of a state TV channel in the 1960s, the launch of Indonesia’s first civilian satellite in the 1970s, and the subsequent appearance of (government-provided) television sets in nearly every village across the country, television was inseparable from the national development project (Hobart 2008: viii). When the New Order collapsed in 1998, there were five private stations. They, together with some radio stations and the Internet, contributed a significant portion to the reform
movement that led to the downfall of Suharto’s New Order regime. This was because these private stations enjoyed relatively more freedom than the state channel (Sen and Hill 2000). Ironically, three of the private TV channels were owned by members of Suharto’s family and associated cliques. Since their owners came from Suharto’s circles, private stations may have been expected by the regime to help in retaining centralised control over citizens. Kitley (2000: 16) concludes that the government introduced private channels to extend their hegemony from merely the politico-ideological sphere (national development and national culture) to the consumption sphere (driven by the dynamics of public demand and transnational flows). They had also tried to control the news by putting the state channel, TVRI, in the position of leading news-gathering coordinator. Yet, as Suharto’s government weakened in the late 1990s and critical voices became popular among the middle classes and youth, private channels found that it profitable to have some distance from the official government line.

Following the end of the New Order era, due to media liberalisation introduced by President Habibie and continued by Megawati, the late Abdurrahman Wahid, and the current Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the number of free-to-air TV stations has been increased to fourteen, excluding pay TV stations and local television networks that altogether climb up to more than fifty. Since the nature of a private station makes it ineligible for public subsidy and TV companies need to be economically viable, TV managements have to rely on commercial advertisements, making them a very important element within the neoliberal market economy. Television shows did not only contain information and entertainment, they also introduced cultural patterns, morality, and ethics of other societies from all over the world to their viewers (Budiman 2002: 176), in particular those that have a strong broadcast presence in global media. For example, Indonesians, since the era of private TV channels, have been introduced to Nobita, a character from Doraemon (a Japanese cartoon series) who – despite being lazy and unintelligent – can have everything he wants. The consumption of popular hairstyles, fashion, fast food, American family-style kitchens, Hollywood stars, Chinese martial arts, Taiwanese boy bands, Japanese rock groups, Korean TV shows, and so forth have become regular and much celebrated practices by Indonesian families in their everyday life. As I write this thesis, Korean TV stars are very popular among Indonesian Muslim youths. In the post-1998 era, the role of media as a popular culture agent has accelerated significantly.

Currently, the power of popular culture practitioners to influence the majority of people in Indonesia has encouraged important figures, including politicians, to try as much as they can
to be relevant, attractive and up to date in the eyes of society (Heryanto 2008:5). Back in the New Order period, political parties had used musicians and celebrities to try to win the masses. Indonesia’s current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Wiranto, one of his opponents in the 2004 Presidential election, repeatedly sang to the public during the election campaign to try to woo the masses. Other candidates also vied for media coverage and public support by performing either as singers or as readers of poetry (Lindsay 2007:67). During his presidency, in order to make up for his shortcomings of policy and failure in the handling of some cases, and to try to maintain his popularity, Yudhoyono has made a few musical albums in which several top musicians sang his compositions. Since the 2004 election, several top names in the world of music, TV, cinema, and fashion have aired their popular charm to campaign for either their preferred political parties or for themselves as candidates for parliament at local and national levels. Some artists also ran for local government elections, either as the head of government or as deputy. Some were not successful; some were, to the extent that they defeated the more politically experienced incumbents (Lindsay 2005: 41, Heryanto 2010: 186). Apart from the elites, the significance of popular culture in the Reform period is also evidenced by the fact that no other social institutions have been able to attract the public’s attention on the scale or with the intensity of the electronic media (Heryanto 2005: 5).

Many works on popular culture mention that young people are easy targets for consumption of popular culture. Indeed, popular culture producers have been always targeting the youth as their main consumers. In Indonesia, there are many consumer products that make young people as their market target. Forms of mass media, particularly films and advertisements, are also saturated with images of young people. However, one question emerges: are they passive objects of popular culture consumption? Such question could only be answered by, first, understand young people.

**Understanding Young People in Indonesia**

I have mentioned before the importance of the youth cohort to pop culture production and marketing. But before confirming this, I need to address a question on how to understand young people. Some scholars employ the concept of transition to understand where young people belong and how they live their life. Notable examples are Erikson (1968) and Eisenstadt (1963). They define ‘youth’ as that stage when people move from childhood to adulthood and ease their way out of the safe cocoon of the family. Henceforth they are in
the middle of the identity-making process. Atwater (1988: 12) argues that youth is a transitional period between adolescence and adulthood and that the category of youth belongs to a period of late adolescence that corresponds to the post high school and college years. Fornas and Bolin (1995) also define youth as a socially constructed category associated with the period between childhood and adulthood. Heinz (2009) uses the concept of transition as well, though he admits that there are multiple transitions and the borders between different phases of life have become increasingly fuzzy. Tanner and Arnett (2009: 39) offer a new category, ‘emerging adulthood’, which is a distinct period of development different from the periods of adolescence and adult. However, when they explain emerging adulthood as an extended period of development between adolescence and young adulthood, it is clear that they maintain the concept of transition as a central tenet to help them understand young people’s lives.

White and Wyn (2008: 10) argue that the concept of transition is not able to provide a deeper understanding of how social change has a big impact upon the meaning of youth and adulthood, and upon the pattern of everyday life. Long before, Mannheim (1943: 33) had suggested that the key to understanding young people cannot be found in their psychological and biological dimensions alone. He proposed the concept of generation to achieve a better understanding of the life of young people. The concept of generation not only refers to people who are in the same age and class in the same historical and cultural region. It also includes a concrete bond between members of a generation by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilisation (Mannheim 1952: 303-305). As the concept relies less on age as the defining feature of youth, it puts young people within particular historical conditions, and focuses on the meaning of social and cultural transformation to the young people (White and Wyn 2008: 10-11). It acknowledges significant, distinctive experiences that separate each generation as well as linking to each other. The concept of generation also stresses the importance of the impact of specific circumstances on young people and the ways young people construct their generation. The importance of the concept of generation is that it does not see generations as separate groupings, but rather shows inter-related groupings (Goodwin and O’Connor 2009: 29) and looks at the dynamics of young people’ relations with other generations in structures of social production (Naafs and White 2012: 3).

Robinson and Utomo’s discussion (2003) of young people in Indonesia and inter-generational relations is more in line with the notion of ‘generation’ than with ‘transition’. They wrote of
how different the inter-generational relation between young people and their parents in the past were, compared to the present. In the past, the parents had a very significant role in arranging their children’s lives, ranging from education, career choice, restrictions on mixing with the other sex, to dating and marriage (Robinson and Utomo 2003: 7). Currently modernisation and urbanisation have widened the gap between young people and their parents. Young people have less restriction now in selecting their education, career, lifestyle, dates, marriage partner, place to live, and so forth. Indeed, young people learn how to behave in the world from their relations with other generations that surround them and cannot learn appropriate behaviour from within their generation alone, as shown by Goodwin and O’Connor’s research (2009). However, many studies of Indonesian young people confirm that there is an increase in young people’s physical mobility, across all social classes and including both genders, which is often encouraged by parents, whether to seek job opportunities or further education (Naafs and White 2012: 12). Indonesian young people are part of the global population of young people whose exposure to new information and communication technologies enables them to become more interactive and less hierarchical in their social relations (Bayat and Herrera 2010: 10). They have an increasing opportunity to meet and communicate with new people and ideas (Smith-Hefner 2007: 189). Thus Indonesian young people today are more mobile, more educated, and more exposed to new ideas than previous generations of young people. Certainly traditions, as well as religion, remain one of the most determining factors when young people have to make decisions; and respect to parents still lingers. Yet, as my study shows, Indonesian young people are becoming more able to thread religion and traditions with elements of modernity that they acquire to construct their identity.

Young people in Indonesia are featured prominently within the discourses of politics and religion. Robinson and Utomo (2003: 5) noted that young people were associated with revolutionary forces that led to national independence and played an important role in the removal of President Sukarno in 1966-1967 and his successor, President Suharto, in 1998. Realising the political potential of young people’s movements, Suharto tried to limit them by banning overt political students’ political activism from campuses, and restricting student and young people’s activism to NGOs and religious organisations (Naafs and White 2012: 8). The Law on Young People No. 40/2009 formally introduced the notion of young people as both hope and risk to the Indonesian nation-state and society. Young people are expected to contribute to development programmes and at the same time are regarded as the potential perpetrators of drug abuses and crimes (Anon. 2009). The current resurgence of Islamic
radicalism also targets young people, especially university students, since the proponents of the radical movements believe that, as university students are the most important layer of Indonesian Muslim young people, they are agents of change to Islamise Indonesia (Hasan 2010: 53). The non-radical Muslim young people’s organisations have expanded their membership and visibility at higher education institutions across Indonesia (Smith-Heffner 2007: 189). Utomo and McDonald’s study (2009) also found that the growth in the number of young Indonesians who become members of Islamic youth groups is not only occurring at the higher education level, but also at the level of secondary school. Islamic groups target young people because they understand that young people are both hope and risk (an understanding they share with national official discourses). In the words of Naafs and White (2012: 7), young people are regarded as the vanguard of social change and as a threat to social stability. However, my research shows that, in the issue of identity construction, they are agents for Islamisation as well as agents of popular culture that is heavily associated with the West.

The issue of the construction of young people’s identity via their engagement with Islamic popular culture is the one that drives this research. As I have written earlier, early theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Eisenstaedt (1963) state that moving from childhood to adulthood defines young people; thus they are engaged in the process of identity construction. This quest leads young people to actively search for role models and sources of authority and to become people of influence. Extrapolating from Erikson’s theory, we can infer that Indonesian Muslim young people are vulnerable to the influence of popular culture and the appeal of religious revival. I have discussed earlier that I disagree with the model of young people as merely a transition between childhood and adulthood since I see young people as a distinctive generation. Young people are within an important and distinctive time and space. Willis’ work (1977) showed that young people in his study, working class ‘lads’ in England, were more than able to produce their own culture within larger contexts of social relations, economy, and politics. Following this theory, I do not characterise young Indonesian Muslim young persons as passive objects of Islamisation or Westernisation. My research, as shown below, acknowledges the powerful influence of popular culture and waves of Islamisation on young people. However, in the light of the theoretical framework of identity as project (Castells 1997: 8), Indonesian Muslim young people are capable of constructing their identities based on any cultural materials available to them, be that popular culture, religion, or both. In the following sections, I show how Indonesian Muslim young people engage with popular culture and Islam in their everyday life.
The Practice of Popular Culture in Young People’s Daily Life

All informants that I interviewed during the fieldwork acknowledged that popular culture is becoming more and more significant in their daily life. Susan, an Accounting student at UNJ said that “it increasingly colours our life (itu semakin lama semakin mewarnai kehidupan kita)”, and Okta, a Sociology student at UNJ told me: “popular culture gets stronger in everyday life (budaya pop makin lama makin menguat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari)”. Susan chose the word ‘colour’ to express her thoughts since she felt that without popular culture everyday life would be “dry (kering) and boring (original word)”. She added:

I cannot imagine the world without TV, music, Internet, phone, and magazines. It must be a miserable life! It is not even a life! I don’t know how people lived their life and survived when there was no phone, TV, radio, and print media.

After I asked Okta to explain to me what he meant by ‘getting stronger’, he said:

Popular culture affects us a lot. The way we interact and communicate each other is deeply influenced by the existence of the telephone. If we lose our mobile phone, it seems like a big disaster. The way we spend our spare time is affected by TV; if there is no TV, we don’t know what we can do.

Informants at ITB also acknowledged the very strong presence of popular culture in everyday life, to the extent that it could deflect young people from their faith. In the words of Haz, a student of Industrial Engineering, “It traps young people within the world of entertainment and makes them forget Allah (menjebak anak muda dalam dunia hura-hura dan membikin mereka lupa akan Allah)”. Aga of Geodesy\(^\text{16}\) stated:

It looks like popular culture changes our behaviour, not all of it, of course, but to some degree. It happens particularly to young people. It even hypnotises and makes young people forget their own identity.

The above statements not only confirm a study by Nilan (2003) that Indonesian young people clearly engage with popular culture, but also show that they have various opinions on it, ranging from embracing to condemning it.

Even though some of my informants were concerned about the products and practices of popular culture, all of the research participants were consuming popular culture in their daily life. Gea, of Computer Engineering at ITB, was an activist at a Salman Mosque-based young people’s organisation. Even though Gea believed that popular culture was mostly influenced by the West and therefore had many negative effects, she admitted that she liked to watch

\(^{16}\) Geodesy is the scientific discipline that deals with the measurement and representation of the Earth.
films, including Western films, particularly adventure and animated genres. When I asked her about this seeming contradiction between what she thought and what she did, she clarified:

Of course not everything from the West is negative. There are some good things we can learn. From adventure films, we can learn their spirit to explore the world and new ideas. From an animated series, like *Naruto* (a Japanese cartoon TV program), well, at least we can have fun: it is harmless entertainment compared to dumb, mindless, not so funny Indonesian *sinetron* (TV series)!

Given that some Islamists in Middle East and Iran have condemned ‘fun’, Gea’s assertion of ‘fun’ proved that Islamic groups have a variety of views in taking into account of ‘fun’. As Gea is an activist at Salman Mosque, it was appear that the Salman Mosque group belongs to the more moderate Islamic groups. Iin of Chemistry at ITB, who said that Western-inspired popular culture nurtured hedonism among young people, acknowledged that the enormous influence of popular culture was inevitable. She herself watched many Hollywood romantic comedy films, listened to Western pop music, and was crazy about mobile phone products and services. When I met Iin again during my second visit to Bandung, in January 2012, she told me that she had changed her mobile phone three times since our first meeting back in December 2010. This confirms Barendregt’s observation (2009: 76) that Indonesian Muslim young people have an enormous passion for mobile communication technology and it partially explains why Indonesia is one of the fastest growing markets worldwide in terms of mobile communication.

Puji, of Engineering at UNJ, who was an activist at the UNJ Islamic Study Forum, acknowledged the negative effects of Western popular culture. However, he liked to play online games, some of which are produced by Western companies. He said that online games allow gamers “to face many challenges and be more creative (*merasa banyak mendapat tantangan dan menjadi kreatif*)”. However Puji restricted himself to non-violent games, such as Journey, Chex Quest, and Barney’s Hide and Seek as well as Road Block Buster, an online game developed by an Islamic group. Puji’s fellow student, Ary, in Economics, preferred offline computer games to online games, and he watched Western and Asian (mostly Mandarin) films twice a week, at home (using VCD or DVD) or at a theatre. Ary did not mind playing relatively violent games as long as “there was not too much blood in it (*tidak terlalu berdarah-darah*)”. Another UNJ student, Susan, did not like to watch Indonesian TV programmes as she was a fan of non-Indonesian films, either Hollywood or Bollywood productions. Since her high school time, this *jilbab*-wearer had devoted special attention to Korean popular culture, ranging from food and shoes to music, film and TV series. Susan is only one of many Indonesian young people who have a craze for Korean
popular culture. The craze exemplifies Shim’s finding (2006) that ‘the wave of Korea’ was able to gain immense popularity in Southeast Asian countries, including the more religiously inclined societies like Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. This was at least partly due to its hybrid character and the vision of modernisation inherent within Korean popular culture. Across the differences of preference for different genres of popular culture, there is one shared form of consumption among all my research participants. Going to malls and other types of shopping centres is widely popular among my informants. All of them went to those places to just relax, to meet friends, or to purchase something at least twice a week. All of these examples are evidence that among Indonesian Muslim young people there is a rich diversity of popular culture practices, showing their passion for popular culture even though they could be critical about it.

The Practice of Islam in Young People’s Daily Life

Based on my informants’ own statements, I categorise their Islamic observance into two groups: devout and ordinary. Most of them (26 of 38 informants), said that they were devout Muslims. It was notable that all ITB students stated that they were devout Muslims. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that they were either “still far away from being a perfect Muslim (masih jauh dari kaffah)” or “trying to be a perfect Muslim (berusaha menjadi kaffah)”. One of the reasons why they felt that they were not yet perfect Muslims was expressed by Henny, a student of Chemical Engineering:

I practise the five mandatory prayers every day. I practise all five pillars of Islam, except the hajj. But I am still not a perfect Muslim. Being a perfect Muslim is very hard. Not only must one be able to do all the rituals, but also one must be able to perform one’s duty toward fellow Muslims, not only in Indonesia, but also all over the world. Someday I have to do that.

Mia, of Physics Engineering, had a different reason:

In the eyes of my family and some of my friends, I was a rebellious girl. When I was in high school, I often rebelled against teachers. I resisted my parents’ attempts to put me in a pesantren (Islamic boarding school), even though in the end, I went there for a year. After I started my studies at ITB, I realised that my behaviour was not Islamic. That’s why I joined a halaqah. However, I feel that I am still looking for who I am, what kind of a good Muslim I have to be. I mean, I am a devout Muslim; I practise the five mandatory prayers and all

\[37\] Halaqah is a small informal Islamic mentoring circle that meets regularly. In Indonesia, halaqah is considered by many as an important source of membership of the Tarbiyah Movement. The movement tries to cultivate Islamic values and practices among ordinary and non-practising Muslims and to transform the formal political structure according to Islamic teachings (Mahmudi 2006:51). See my discussion of the Tarbiyah Movement in Chapter Six.
other pillars of Islam but the hajj. But (I am) still far, far away from being a perfect Muslim. But I still don’t know what a perfect Muslim should be like.

Representing the group of ‘ordinary Muslims’, Re, of French Literature at UNJ, said:

Being a devout, not to mention perfect, Muslim is already hard. At the least, we have to be able to practise the five mandatory prayers every day. In a big city like Jakarta, although there is a mosque on every corner, sometimes it is still difficult to do that. The tight schedule and the traffic jams, which are common, often prevent us from doing that. We also need to take care of our own behaviour. People judge other people by their behaviour. But sometimes we cannot control ourselves. So as long as we haven’t been able to control ourselves, we cannot say we’re devout Muslims. I think I am a good Muslim, but I am still trying to be a devout Muslim.

Aga of Geodesy had a similar tone when I interviewed him:

Claiming to be a devout Muslim is a brave claim. It needs consistency in practising Islam in all aspects of life. Not just doing all five pillars of Islam, but also showing our good behaviour. We read that there are some corrupt people who have been on the hajj more than once. How could we say they were devout Muslims? A devout Muslim should be a good role model for society. I myself couldn’t make such a claim (that I am a devout Muslim). I still have many things to learn from my mentor, friends, and parents.

For some of my informants, it seems that being a good Muslim is not only about practising rituals, but also entails being a good role model for society and being able to control one's behaviour.

As religion is a compulsory subject to be studied in Indonesia across all levels of education from primary school to tertiary level, it is normal that all of my research participants mentioned teachers as their learning source for the study of Islam. Some of them added informal Islamic teachers (guru ngaji), a religious circle (majelis ta’lim), and pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as their sources of information. It is interesting to note that media and information and communication technologies (ICT) were also sources of learning. Fajri, of Management at UNJ, listed Islamic films and Islamic preaching on TV as her sources for learning about Islam, apart from pesantren and Islamic books. Mary, of the Physics Department at ITB, told me that the emergence of ICT mediates their attempts to get a variety of sources of information.

I realise that currently we have many advantages over past generations. Now, we have mobile phones and the Internet, which enable us to find many useful things for our daily life. Our seniors perhaps only depended on teachers, books, magazines, TV and radio for finding information.
For research participants, even though traditional sources of learning such as parents, teachers and preachers were still important, new technologies are new sources of information which are very valuable for them if they want to know how to be better Muslims.

The tremendous capability of information technology could make traditional sources of Islamic knowledge less powerful than before. Even if they still prefer to consult their mentors or *guru ngaji*, the students acknowledge that technology makes their communication much easier than before. Swidhi, of Mathematics at ITB, reflected her gratitude and amazement about this.

One time, when I had a problem and needed to consult with my Islamic teacher, initially I felt down because he was out of town. Because I really wanted to have an answer, I sent him text messages, and I got answers without waiting too long for his return. Thank God, we live in the modern world! When I think again about this experience, I realise how good this technology is!

Barendregt (2009: 81) has already observed the very positive attitude of Muslims users toward mobile technology and its impact on religious life. Bayat’s study (2010: 31) confirms that media technology is a powerful medium through which communication among individuals is established to form the identities of modern Muslim young people. Gole (2002: 184) mentions the prominent role of new media technologies in developing a sense among Muslim young people that becoming modern young people and keeping up with signs of modernity, such as gadgets and lifestyles, are very important. Bayat and Herrera (2010: 10) also argue that new information technologies have already changed the way Muslim young people learn, interact, and engage in social, political and cultural circumstances. Barendregt observed (2009: 81) that the Salafi women in Yogyakarta, a big city in Indonesia, who veil in a strict manner and refuse to communicate face-to-face with males, use mobile phones to interact with their male colleagues without abandoning their principles. It is through information technology that Indonesian Muslim young people learn, communicate and involve themselves in the global waves of Islamic resurgence in their keenness to become distinctive Muslims.

The significant role of ICT in Indonesian Muslim young people’s daily life makes them very aware of current issues concerning Islam at the global level. They realise how most media address terrorism, fundamentalism and radicalism when they discuss Islam. Dita, of Visual Arts at ITB, expressed her concern:

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18 The Salafi adhere strictly to Wahhabism, one of the strictest interpretations of Islam.
I was fortunate that in my boarding house, we subscribed to cable TV so we could access information from around the globe. Most news from the West about Islam was not good. They portrayed us, Muslims, as if we’re terrorists by nature. In a TV series that I watched when I had time, for example in an NCIS series,¹⁹ some terrorists who appeared were Arabic and it was assumed they were Muslims. Why did they never portray good Muslims as heroes?

Mary of Physics at ITB furthered this argument:

I think there was some kind of conspiracy among the Western media to corner Islam. And also, if there were violence in the name of Islam, we must question: who or what is behind it? Maybe the violence was designed by anti-Islamic forces.

Other informants agreed that the negative portrayal of Islam in the West was due to the unfair and unjust practices of Western media. Andi of Microbiology at ITB even said that this was “big lies, engineered by the West (kebohongan-kebohongan besar, rekayasa dari Barat)”. However, most of the research participants also believed that acts of terrorism were responsible for this negative picture. Kris of Interior Design at ITB commented:

There are some Muslims who do not understand the true nature of Islam, which is peaceful. They are the ones who are responsible for the negative images of Islam.

Rino of Microbiology at ITB added:

Islam is a really peaceful religion. The perpetrators of terrorism are not true Muslims. We can call them traitors of Islam! However, I must admit that sometimes the images of violence by Muslims were engineered by the West.

It is clear to me that for my informants, Islam has no place at all for terrorism and radicalism. Rani of Electronic Engineering said: “the radical groups do not understand the true nature of Islam which is peaceful (kelompok-kelompok radikal itu gak paham Islam yang sebetulnya damai)”. Didi of Social Sciences Education at UNJ said:

There is no relation between Islam and terrorism and radicalism. Radical groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front, should not be allowed to live here. The government should really eradicate groups like the NII movement that recruits university students to become terrorists.²⁰

¹⁹ NCIS series is a police TV drama series that features agents of NCIS, the (American) Naval Criminal Investigation Service, as its protagonists. The program is popular among Indonesians who enjoy access to satellite TV channels.

²⁰ NII is Negara Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic State), a political movement established in 1949 that attempted to transform the newly founded Indonesia into a theocratic state with Islam as its basic principle. In attempting to achieve its goal, NII took over a few regions from the control of the Indonesian government in the 1950s. For this reason NII was deemed a rebellious group. Although the Indonesian government have crushed the movement, it became a shadowy group and is believed to be still active across Java and Sumatra. There are many reports of hundreds of young people (some of them university students) being brainwashed and recruited (sometimes kidnapped) to become NII members. Once in the movement, members are obliged to recruit others and to raise money to fund NII’s struggle to achieve its primary goal: making Indonesia an Islamic state.
My observation of Salman Mosque at ITB and Nurul Iman Mosque at UNJ confirms this statement. There were many sermons in which the speakers (some of them senior university students) stated that true Muslims would not join terrorist groups, and urged members of the audience to stay away from the influence of Western popular culture. At this stage, we can see that the Indonesian Muslim young people in my study are developing a distinctive identity that belongs neither to the West nor to the radical Islamist camp.

The next chapter deals with the development of Islamic films and their place within the history of Indonesian cinema. I analyse some Islamic films that have had a significant influence on my informants, as well as present how the research participants interpret the films.
CHAPTER FIVE:
ISLAMIC FILMS AS A NEW APPROACH TO DA’WAH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

This chapter deals with Islamic films, one of two media of Islamic popular culture that I am examining in this thesis. I start by defining religious film and framing the relationship between religion and film. Then the chapter captures some of the highlights in the history of Indonesian cinema and locates Islamic films within that history. The frequency of Islamic film production is limited compared to the frequency of films dealing with other genres such as sex, romance, horror, and comedy. However, I demonstrate that Islamic films have been significant throughout the history of Indonesian cinema. Then I focus on the recent emergence of Islamic films in Indonesian cinema, particularly the prominence of Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love) and the Ketika Cinta Bertasbih (When Love Chants) series. I show how they differ from previous Islamic films. Even though before I started my fieldwork I already knew that it would be important to look at these films, this was not the prime reason for the inclusion of Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih in this chapter. The main reason I focus on these films is that almost all informants referred to Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih when I asked them which Islamic films they had seen.

In the discussion of the films, I briefly analyse some issues addressed by the films. I acknowledge that academic analysis within film studies usually puts more emphasis on aesthetic and technical practices, e.g. the staging of shots, cinematography, editing, and sound (Wright, 2007: 19) rather than on narrative. However, since I am mostly interested in Islamic films’ influence on identity construction, I limit my analysis of the films to their themes and narrative elements. I show how current Islamic films present the issues of gender and polygamy. I view the films as a means for propagating Islamic principles. I also take into account how informants respond to these films and consider in what ways informants use Islamic films to construct their identity.

21 Narrative means the recounting of events, whether real or fictitious, and refers to the strategies, codes, and conventions employed to organise a story (Hayward, 1996: 249).
In this chapter, I argue that young adults are not passive recipients as proposed by some popular culture theorists, including Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 80). Young people are not merely the object of ideologies injected by film-makers, and their responses to the films did not indicate unquestioning acceptance. I suggest that Muslim youth were very involved in interpreting the films, and did not passively accept whatever the films put on screen. They were often critical and spent considerable time discussing the films. Thus, it makes sense when Hall (1980: 120-125) argues that audiences are the active producers of meaning, rather than mere consumers.22 Turner (2009:198) amplifies Hall’s notion by theorising that the film text is not unitary in its meaning, but rather is a sort of battlefield for competing and contradicting ideas. Even though it is possible for a certain idea to emerge as the victor, there are always gaps, cracks, and divisions since young adults are actively engaged in film-viewing activities. A study by Nilan (2008: 53-55) found that the appearance of a popular Muslim historical figure in an animated film series, instead of generating unity among Muslims, triggered heated debate over which ethnicity he represented. In my research, Muslim youth agreed that Islamic films have the potential to deliver religious advice to viewers. However, they were divided over which film they considered more religious and which one they felt was better in terms of quality. They realised that a more religious film is not necessarily synonymous with high aesthetic quality. They also argued over whether the films were really anything more than entertainment, indicating that at least some of them did not entirely absorb the values that Islamic producers wished to nurture through the films.

Defining Religious Film

The relation between religion and film started with the beginnings of cinema itself. Lindvall (2009: 13) noted that it was a priest who, back in 1646, experimenting with mirrors and light, discovered a process whereby images could be projected onto the wall or on billows of smoke. Then, two hundred years later, an Episcopal priest and amateur chemist invented celluloid strips. Lindvall (2009: 14) points out that silent film, the earliest form of film, often had religious themes and content, whether they were created by Christians or not. This was due to their intent to attract viewers through their religious orientation. Initially, many Christians perceived films as an opportunity to preach about Christian teachings to a wider audience in an immediate and effective way. Christian groups attempted to make films, but failed to do so successfully due to their limited budgets and controversy among them about

22It has to be noted that current cultural studies work has moved beyond the passive/active audience paradigm.
Some of them argued over what should or should not be shown in a film (Quicke 2009: 34). Near the end of the silent film era, church leaders made efforts to censor films and to make them acceptable to Christian devotees.

Nevertheless, as Wright (2007: 4) notes, at least on one point, there is similarity between religion and film: both are able to produce narrative. According to Rudolf Otto (1950: 12), humans have the need to articulate thoughts and feelings in metaphorical and symbolic forms, and religion is the most appropriate medium through which to cater for those needs that are usually located within the depths of the soul. In general, a metaphor is a direct substitution of one idea or object for another and people generally use it to convey an idea. A symbol is a thing that is used to represent, stand for, or imply something else. Both can form parts of narrative. Metaphor is useful for developing a narrative because it has the ability to create mental pictures and images with a limited number of words. Symbol is also an important tool for developing a narrative for its ability to illuminate the narrative by creating depth and meaning. There are many religions in the world that are able to provide their followers a vast range of metaphors and symbols to narrate the existence of the Divine. It seems that film is able to match the need for metaphors and symbols as well, since its basic features are metaphors and symbols.

Based on Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion, Lyden (2003: 44-46) amplifies the reason for associating religion and films: in a similar way to religion, films provide visual and narrative symbols mediating worldviews and systems of values. Films consist of stories that potentially serve the same two functions of religion pointed out by Geertz (1973): ‘models of’ (worldview) and ‘models for’ (systems of values) reality. Films present a picture that asserts that the world is a certain way and may simultaneously claim that it should be that way. As with religion, films provide a sense that justice and order exist, even though some events remain unexplained or appear to be unfair. Thus, both religion and film are involved in the complex relationship between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’. Lyden (2003: 44) suggests other similarities between films and religion. Equipped with their ability to persuade their respective audiences, both encourage certain moods and motivations to act. These moods and motivations are based on religion’s conception of a general order of existence that includes the attempt of humans to manage their experience of chaos. Most viewers watch films to fulfil the need to experience a neater, better and more orderly world where there is punishment for vice and reward for virtue (Lyden 2003: 45).
Ida (2006: 9-11) proposes that media consumption can be viewed as cultural experience. While media may offer fantasies and imaginaries, it cannot be separated from daily life experiences; thus there is a strong connection between media practices and culture. Contemporary media technologies have been central in mediating social and cultural change and individual transformation. Studying how people consume media can lead to learning the dynamics of culture. Williams (1990: 31) concludes that the uses of media technologies are embedded in everyday life and the media are a new and central ‘social complex’ in the industrial capitalist world. Concerning media consumption, Ida’s theory is not the only theory with which I agree. I also share the view proposed by Lyden (2003: 46) that film viewing can be taken as religious experience. In explaining this notion, Lyden borrowed Geertz’s term, ‘aura of factuality’, to describe that there is a sense of religious ritual involved in film viewing, especially when the audience enters a darkened room with a large screen that draws all attention. Like religious ritual, the film-viewing experience is able to mobilize the emotions of viewers. Thus films have the power to influence their audiences. The experience of watching a film can also potentially involve a sense of communality. Sometimes people attend a film because of a friend’s invitation or recommendation and they discuss their experience in watching it.

The analysis of Islamic films is impossible without a clear definition and understanding of the characteristics of religious films in general and of Islamic films in particular. Lacey (2000: 136) states that the genre of a film is determined by the types of characters, setting, iconography, narrative, and theme. The film The Passion of Christ (2004), directed by Mel Gibson, is clearly a religious film, as it re-tells the story of the last twelve hours in the life of Jesus. It displays characteristics of religious films in the topic, theme and choice of characters, treatment of narrative, and iconography. In the same way, we could say that an Islamic film is characterised by, say, the utterance of the Islamic greeting, Assalamu’alaikum, the wearing of the jilbab (veil), the extended depiction of prayer, adzan (the call to prayer) and Qur’anic recitation, and the type of depicted characters (e.g. an Islamic preacher). However, I do not use all the points mentioned by Lacey to define the genre of religious film, and suggest that more profound elements are required to constitute an Islamic film.

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23 This means that religion deals with reality by asserting that its conceptions are not fictions, but are descriptive of (or sometimes normative for) the actual world.
24 Certainly religious rituals and films are not entirely comparable as they have different characteristics and different kinds of audiences.
Wright (2007) proposes a more meaningful list of characteristics of religious films: they have plots that draw upon religion; they are set in the context of religious communities; they use religion for character definition; they deal directly or indirectly with religious characters, texts, or locations; they use religious ideas to explore experiences, transformations, or conversions of characters; they address religious themes and concerns. Some religious films may rely on religious themes and teachings like forgiveness, redemption, sacrifice, and hospitality to develop narrative and characters. Others may deploy religious characters or communities to address more secular themes, such as love and marriage, class conflict, family drama, and anti-colonialism. I do not include iconography as one characteristic of religious film for the reason that a film can use icons associated with religion without being a religious film. I would not categorise a film that merely depicts veil wearing, the Islamic greeting, adzan and Qur’anic recitation without any other characteristics of religious films (theme, characters, narrative, community or places) as an Islamic film. An Islamic film may or may not have scenes with Islamic icons.25 I asked my informants to point out to me which films they categorised as ‘Islamic’, and how they defined them. I will detail their answers in another section, but it is sufficient to say at this point that the categories they employed resemble those in Wright’s theory.

Wright (2007: 2) mentions the film Raja Harishchandra (1913) as an example of an undoubtedly religious film. It was based on a Hindu epic (the Mahabharata) and is concerned with symbols of religion: temples and religious rituals and values. Irwansyah (2009) states the films 3 Do’a 3 Cinta (Three Prayers Three Loves, 2008), Mengaku Rasul (Claim to be a Prophet, 2008), and Nada dan Dakwah (Song and Proselytising, 1991) are a few examples of Islamic films because of their setting in pesantren (Islamic boarding school) communities. Albeit controversial, the film The Da Vinci Code (2006), directed by Ron Howard, is also arguably a religious film, as it relies on a Christian plot (the history of Christianity), sets (churches), characters (Catholic groups and Jesus’s descendant), and themes and concerns (finding the actual truth of Jesus’s life) to develop the story. Meanwhile, Jesus, The Spirit of God, one of the awardees in the 2007 Religion Today Film Festival (Religionfilm.com),26 could

25 Few people argue that the most successful Indonesian film to date, Laskar Pelangi (officially translated as Rainbow Troops), is an Islamic film. It portrays the important role of an Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah, in delivering basic education to a remote and impoverished area. Even though the film does not portray Islamic iconography, it conveys messages that are deemed highly important by Muslims: the importance of education and the fight against injustice.

26 Religion Today Film Festival is a brand name for the International Festival of Film and Religion, a film festival dedicated to dialogue between cinema and religions. Originating in Trento, Italy, it tries to promote a culture of dialogue and peace among religions, as well as to create opportunities for filmmakers and people of different cultures and religions working in the communications media to
be categorised as a Christian or Islamic film, or both, as it portrays the life of Jesus from a perspective accepted by Muslims (Jesus as a highly respected prophet, not the Son of God).

A Brief History of Indonesian Cinema

Pre New Order Periods
The earliest film produced in Indonesia was the 1926 *Loeteoeng Kasaroeng* (The Lost Monkey, made by a Dutch company), a Banyumas-Sundanese folktale about a prince who was magically transformed into a supernatural monkey (Heider 1991:56). The films made from that year until the 1940s were released by either Chinese or European companies, but some of them used traditional folklore (Sen 1994: 14). There was a significant change during the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945. In their attempt to get Indonesians to support their war against the Allied Forces, the Japanese Military Command banned Europeans and Chinese from making films and put Indonesians into the film industry. Despite the fact that films in this period were under Japanese scrutiny, and only propaganda films were allowed to be produced, it was a tremendous opportunity for Indonesian film-makers, for the Japanese had better knowledge of film-making techniques and superior production organisation than the Chinese producers (Sen 1994: 17). As the Japanese would not accept romantic or legend-based stories, they introduced films that communicated social and political issues. The Japanese gave the pioneers of post-Independence Indonesian cinema, notably Usmar Ismail, Djaduk Djajakusuma and Asrul Sani, the opportunity to develop their skills.27

The early period of Independence saw the return of Chinese film companies as well as the emergence of the aforementioned directors, and the setting up of the first native Indonesian film company, Perfini (Hanan 2010). The themes of these early Indonesian films ranged from revolutionary wars, political satire, traditional cultures, social conflicts, and theatre to *Mahabharata*-based stories. This era, particularly the 1950s-1960s, also saw the involvement of many significant writers, directors, and producers in ideological-political struggles between right and left in Indonesia. Two opposing cultural organisations, *Lekra* (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, Institute of People’s Culture) and *Lesbumi* (*Lembaga Seni dan Budaya Muslimin Indonesia*, Institute of Indonesian Muslim Arts and Culture) urged their members to make meet and share ideas. At the basis of the festival is the conviction that cinema can offer a good workshop for reciprocal learning between different cultures and their unique imaginations. In 2010, this festival worked with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to establish Faith Shorts, a short film competition for young film-makers across the world.

27Usmar Ismail was a West Sumatra-born writer-producer-director, Djaduk Djajakusuma was a Central Javanese actor turned director and writer, and Asrul Sani was a poet-writer-journalist-director from West Sumatra.
films and attack their opponents (Heider 1991: 17 and Said, 1991: 59-73). Lekra had a very close relationship with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and manifested Indonesian radical nationalist thought (Foulcher 1987:83). Lesbumi was established by Islamic values-based Partai NU (Nahdlatul Ulama Party), a political rival of the PKI.

The serious divisions in Indonesian cinema provoked by political tensions between the right and the left ceased after 1965. On 30 September 1965, allegedly Communist-supported factions of the army kidnapped and murdered some top army generals. Major General Suharto took over military command and after several months, he gained full authority in the name of the President to rule the state. In 1968, he himself became President. Suharto banned the Communist Party along with its cultural wing, Lekra. He sent his trusted military units to murder Communists district-by-district, as well as cultivating ‘a kill or be killed’ atmosphere that incited non-Communists to attack the Communists (Cribb 2002: 552). The sudden and dramatic political transformation, which signalled the emergence of the New Order period, had taken casualties in the world of cinema: almost all directors, technicians and artists associated with the Communists were arrested and jailed for many years, sometimes without trial, and virtually all copies of films produced by leftist directors were destroyed (Sen 1994: 49). The New Order government ruled that all aspects of cinema had to be overseen by the Department of Information; later on, this department was placed under the aegis of the Coordinating Minister of Politics and Security (Sen and Hill 2000: 139). The transformation also led to another change for the film industry: the return of American films to the Indonesian market.

**New Order Period**

Unlike the Old Order period, when the policy on culture was aimed at containing or curtailing the impact of foreign culture in order to protect national culture, the New Order government’s policy was to shape a national culture that championed harmony and stability in order to control political opponents and repress intellectual criticism. Suharto’s regime

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28 In the early 1960s, Indonesia was home to the largest and most powerful Communist political party outside the Soviet Union and China (Hill, 2008).

29 Sen (1994: 27-49) gives a detailed account of the clash between these two camps, not only in terms of political ideology, but also of political economy.

30 The Army has long been regarded as a fierce enemy of the Communist Party.

31 It is estimated that more than 500,000 Communists and suspected Communists were killed between 1965 and 1966 (Cribb 2001: 219).

32 Hundreds of American films were imported annually into Indonesia from 1950 to 1955. However, from 1956 to 1965 there was a strong anti-US film movement led by the Communists and radical nationalists and encouraged by the Sukarno government (Sen 1994: 24-25). In 1964, the movement successfully stopped American films from coming to Indonesia (Said 1991: 70).
treated films like all other media forms: they were required to support the government in maintaining security, harmony, and economic growth (Amin 2010: 16). Although the government did mention the need for censorship of sex and violence to protect national culture, the sex and violence censorship actually only took up a small portion of the policy (Sen 2006: 98). The biggest portion of the policy was oriented to maintaining social harmony by avoiding any reference to conflict and tension in Indonesia, and forbidding opinions that dissented from the government’s policies. The New Order government was also much more welcoming to foreign films than its predecessor was. It only censored imported films if they had excessive sex or violence. This comparative openness was due to its keenness to open up the Indonesian market to the flow of goods and services from the West. Although the number of Indonesian film productions reached 50 in 1971 and 122 in 1977 (Sen 1994: 57-61), the local film industry was still no match for imported films. In 1967, the number of imported films rose to about 400 and nearly doubled in 1969, and more than half of them were Hollywood films (Sen 2006: 98). Policing locally produced films while at the same time allowing many more foreign films to enter the Indonesian market was a hallmark of the New Order government.

Hanan (2010: 117) argues that there was a significant decline in the Indonesian film industry from the end of the 1980s to the 2000s. The number of Indonesian film productions fell from 115 in 1990 to 26, 22, 36, 32, and 3 in 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999 respectively (Sen 2006:102; Amin 2010: 22). Apart from the decreasing number of Indonesian films produced, the decline of the Indonesian film industry was also signified by the screening of Indonesian films primarily in small towns that had only one or two theatres and in the cheapest theatres in metropolitan areas. Meanwhile, imported films were screened in the expensive theatres, which catered for the expanding urban middle class (Sen, 1991: 73, Amin, 2010: 22). Hanan (2010: 117) points out that the decline was due to the introduction and vast development of commercial television stations and the control of a Suharto-related monopoly group over high-class theatres, which favoured Hollywood films. Moreover, 17 of the 36 films produced

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33 The 1977 Censorship Guidelines state: “As a consequence of our involvement in international communication, we cannot isolate ourselves from the influence of foreign culture entering Indonesia through film...” (Sen 2006: 98).
34 After 1974, due to some pressure, the government introduced a policy to reduce the import quota (Sen 1994: 59-61). Thus, in the 1980s only about 180 films were imported into Indonesia each year (Hanan 2010: 116).
35 Most luxurious cinemas are located at large malls and other integrated shopping centers. The price of top class cinema tickets ranges from US$2 to US$9 (Amin 2010: 23), while the lower class cinema tickets only cost around US$1.
in 1996 were cheap, sexually implicit films with the same casts, the same directors, and the same producers (Arief 2011).

The period of the 2000s saw the re-emergence of Indonesian films. The end of the New Order in 1998 also brought to an end the Department of Information, which had controlled the film industry. The number of films increased again to 11, 14, 15 and 87 in 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2008 respectively (Amin 2010: 22; Kompas.com). The rebirth was also represented by the appearance of a wide range of film activities in cities, particularly those with many universities (Sen 2006: 102), and the screening of Indonesian films at some luxurious cinemas that middle class audiences attended (Amin 2010: 22-23). The increase in film production was partly due to cheap and accessible digital technology. Despite the fact that the number of imported films was still higher than the number of Indonesian films, some national films attracted larger audiences than foreign productions. It was during this rebirth of Indonesian cinema that Islamic films began to be prominent.

Early Islamic Films

Heider’s work (1991) is an important scholarly contribution in portraying the prevalent genres in Indonesian cinema. However, he fails to recognise the importance of the Islamic film genre. Heider only identifies legend-related films, films of the Dutch colonial period, films of the Japanese period, revolutionary war films, sentimental films, and horror films as significant genres in Indonesian cinema. The Islamic genre did not even make his ‘other genres’ category. I agree with Hanan (2010) that the number of Islamic films is small compared with other genres, and that Islamic issues rarely dominate in non-Islamic genres. However, the quality and the contribution that this genre has made to Indonesian cinema should not be understated.

The first Islamic film in Indonesia was Usmar Ismail’s Dosa Tak Berampun (The Unforgiven Sin, 1951), the story of the return of a wayward father, many years after he had left his family, to find that his grown-up children find it difficult to forgive him. The main theme, forgiveness, an important concept in Islamic teachings, and the temporal setting, the end of Ramadan (the fasting month), is the reasons for categorising this film as an Islamic film. In 1959, Usmar Ismail’s younger colleague, the poet, intellectual and writer, Asrul Sani, produced Titian Serambut Dibelah Tudjuh (A Hair’s Breadth Bridge Divided into Seven; officially translated as Narrow Bridge), which was later remade by Chaerul Umam in 1982. The film reveals the diverse facets of Islamic society, in which conservative Islam was represented side by side
with modern Islam. Also, homosexuality was introduced in the scenes without using the standard clichés of Indonesian films. Another contribution came from Bachtiar Siagian, the prominent film director of the leftist Lekra: he produced Baja Membara (Burning Steel), a 1961 film with a strong Islamic theme (Sen 1994: 43). This film put Muslim characters in very strong roles in encouraging the spirit of national resistance against Japanese colonialism. Five years after Titian Serambut Dibelah Tudjuh, Asrul Sani made Tahuid (Belief in One God). It portrays the story of a hajj tour (pilgrimage to Mecca) where a doctor who repeatedly accompanies pilgrimage tours to Mecca but is unwilling to perform the hajj himself, eventually does so (Kepustakaan Tokoh Perfilman PNRI.go.id). The theme of hajj also dominated Usmar Ismail’s 1968 Ja Mualim (Yes, Captain). This film deals with the challenges faced by a Muslim who has just returned from his hajj tour and wants to preach about the proper way to conduct the hajj.

Sjuman Djaja, a young director who had been trained in Moscow, made Atheis (Atheist, 1971). It was based on a 1950s novel of the same title by Achdijat Kartamihardja. The film is set in the period just prior to and during the Japanese occupation and brings to the audience a central character who is disturbed by the new ideas entering Indonesia at that time: Marxism, free love, and a godless anarchism (Hanan 2010). In this story, Islamic elements are prominent as the main character identifies himself as a pious and devout Muslim and he makes Islam his central point of view in his dialogue with the new ideas and changing circumstances in Indonesia. The story also features how a traditional family with strong religion deals with secular aspects of modern life. Sjuman Djaja also intended to represent some aspects of Islam on the screen when he employed Buya Hamka, Indonesia’s foremost intellectual and Islamic scholar at that time, as his religious advisor for the film. The film depicts its Marxist character (not the protagonist, but still an important character in the film) in a positive manner: he is a courageous and forward thinker, particularly when discussing Dutch and Japanese colonialism. In this respect, the director must have been a brave one since many people equated Marxism with Communism, and it was only six years after the annihilation of the Communist movement.

36 Indonesian films usually treat homosexuality as peculiar.
37 It also prompted D.N Aidit, the chairperson of the Communist Party, to question the director, although this interrogation had no consequences for the film.
38 Hajj is one of the five most important duties for a Muslim.
39 At that time the hajj was not undertaken by many Muslims in Indonesia.
40 The New Order government prohibited the ideology and movement of Communism and any association with it, and declared it an enemy of the state.
Asrul Sani produced *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* (Under the Protection of the Ka'bah, 1977). The title had to be changed into *Para Perintis Kemerdekaan* (Pioneers of Independence). At that time, the only permitted Islamic party, the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development Party), used the Ka'bah as its official symbol. The government was very reluctant to allow the public display of Islamic identity and keen to marginalise political parties other than its own. This film was based on *Ayahku* (My Father), a biography written by Buya Hamka about his own father and was about anti-colonialism in West Sumatra during the 1920s, just before the abortive Communist Party-inspired uprising against the Dutch in 1927. However, the anti-colonial history merely serves as the background to another story, which is the story of the struggle of a young woman to achieve her rights within Islam. The film has a strong feminist and emancipationist theme, which is rarely seen in Islamic films (Hanan 2010). The feminist message emerges when the female character strongly resists the nusyuz law – under which a husband can ignore a wife’s right to maintenance if she is declared disobedient – to the extent that she almost commits apostasy by renouncing Islam in a mosque. The film climaxes when Muslim leaders progressively reinterpret the verses of the Qur’an that relate to the law in favour of the female protagonist.

The year 1977 also witnessed another Islamic film, *Al Kautsar* (The Great Comfort) by Chaerul Umam. The film depicts the attempts of young preachers to bring modernisation into the village and to save poor villagers from oppression by the landowners. It emphasises the notion that Muslims are not only in need of religious guidance, but also of technical knowledge to cope with modern life. Another director who contributed an important Islamic film was Teguh Karya, of Chinese Christian background. His 1979 epic, *November 1828*, was the first Indonesian film to become known abroad (Hanan 2010). He may not have intended it to belong to the Islamic genre, for it takes as its subject the Java War between Prince Diponegoro’s forces and the Dutch colonial forces, as well as the cultural conflict between the East (Java) and the West. However, the film overtly depicts Islam as unifying the villagers and their aristocratic leaders against Western imperialism. It highlights the notion of Islam as a force of resistance to the West. The portrayal of Islam as an important component of resistance to colonialism was also notable in Eros Djarot’s film, *Tjoet Nja’ Dhien* (character’s name; 1988). This was the first Indonesian film to be invited to the Cannes Film Festival. Cut Nya’ Dhien was a female guerrilla leader who resisted the Dutch in the strongly Islamic area of Aceh.

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41The Ka'bah is a sacred site for Muslims, one of the places Muslims must visit when they perform hajji.
Apart from these films, there are two sub-genres of Indonesian Islamic films: the supernatural and da’wah dangdut films. The former is exemplified by *Sunan Kalijaga* (name of character; 1983), the second most popular film at that time, and *Sembilan Wali* (Nine Islamic Saints, 1985). Both films deal with Islamic saints who introduced Islam to Java in the fifteenth century. These films placed great emphasis on the supernatural powers possessed by the heroes and the struggle between mainstream and peripheral Islamic schools. The latter sub-genre was established by Rhoma Irama, a dangdut superstar-turned-actor-and-preacher. While the inclusion of Islam in dangdut was not entirely new, it was Rhoma Irama who consciously and boldly inserted Islamic messages into his dangdut (Frederick 1982). His films combined typical love stories with the conflict between the rich and the poor and the use of popular music to preach about Islam. They expressed a social critique of the New Order government as its development programmes encouraged a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

**Islamic Films in the Post Reform Period**

Due to several reasons, the film industry declined in the 1990s and there were only very few Islamic films produced during the period. Among those Islamic films in the 1990s was *Fatahillah* that was produced in 1997. The appearance of the film coincided with the disappearance of sexually implicit films, which had dominated Indonesia cinema during the mid 1990s, and the resurgence of non-sex themed films (Arief 2011). However, due to the financial failure of *Fatahillah*, no one dared to make Islamic-themed films until 2003, when Dedy Mizwar, the lead actor in *Sunan Kalijaga*, made *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* (The End of The World is Nigh). He plainly wished his film to say something different about Islam: the stereotypical Islamic films during the 1980s had depicted Islam in terms of magic, miracles and the supernatural (Amin 2011). Mizwar wanted Islamic films to portray Islam as a reality of everyday life, and an everyday life that was not restricted to solely rural societies (as usually illustrated by older Islamic films). The story of *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* mainly revolves around the differences between religion and modern culture in daily life, with a plot of a

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*42* Dangdut is a highly rhythmic genre of Indonesian popular music, a mix of Indian, Arabian and Malay musical elements. It has also been subtly influenced by the British pop rock group Deep Purple. *Da’wah dangdut* films use *dangdut* in Islamic proselytising.

*43* Barker (2011: 67) notes that state interference, technological competition and market circumstances contributed to the serious decline of film production.

*44* Between 1985, when the film *Sembilan Kalijaga* was screened, and 2003, there were very few Islamic films being produced. *Nada dan Dakwah* (1991) and *Fatahillah* (1997) are two. Rhoma Irama made or starred in some films other than *Nada dan Dakwah* during the period, but they were less Islamic in tone than *Nada dan Dakwah*.

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Westernised rock musician falling in love with a pious girl, the daughter of a Muslim cleric. The film did not do well in the market, but it inspired other film-makers to resurrect the genre of Islamic films.

In 2004, Garin Nugroho, whose prominence was due to his aesthetically-based productions, made *Rindu Kami PadaMu* (Our Longing for You; officially translated as Of Love and Eggs), a film that is set in and around a mosque in a metropolitan city. In 2005, Nugroho and other directors co-directed *Serambi* (Veranda), a film that portrays the importance of Islam as a source of inspiration for three victims of the tsunami disaster in Aceh to move on from their miseries. After that year, film-makers started to produce films that were based on commercially successful Islamic novels. I will focus on *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love, 2008) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2 (*When Love Praises God*, 2009) since most of my research participants mentioned these films as their favourites.

*Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love): A New Style of Indonesian Islamic Film*

The film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) started the Islamic film boom in 2008. It had massive media coverage due to its association with the novel that had been the best-selling book of 2007. When it went to screen, the film attracted a record-breaking 3.6 million cinema-goers in Indonesia. It created a resounding buzz among the region’s Muslim communities for portrayal of moderate, compassionate Muslims and understanding of Islamic values. The main protagonist is Fachri bin Abdillah, a poor, intelligent student who wins a scholarship to complete his graduate degree at Egypt’s esteemed Al Azhar University. His background and educational experience resemble those of the author of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, Habiburahman El Shirazy (Hermawan 2008). Fachri embraces his life in Cairo, completing his studies while translating religious books to earn money with great enthusiasm. Marriage is the only goal he has yet to achieve. For Fachri, marriage is innocent and pure, and he does not believe in having a relationship with a girlfriend prior to marriage.

Before Fachri went to Egypt, only two women had been close to him – his mother and grandmother. During his time in Egypt, four distinctly different, beautiful women admire him. The first woman close to him in Egypt is Maria Girgis: a shy, open-minded Coptic-Christian neighbour who is attracted to the teachings of the Holy Al Quran. She finds that she has fallen in love with Fachri (a fact she only reveals in her diary). The second is Fachri’s campus mate, Nurul, the daughter of a renowned Indonesian Muslim cleric. Fachri feels himself unworthy, because his family background is much humbler than Nurul’s. Because of
this modesty, he ignores his initial feeling for her, leaving her confused and guessing. Noura is an abused Egyptian neighbour whom Fachri saves and helps to find her true family. She also develops strong romantic feelings for Fachri, but he simply feels sorry for her. Finally, there is Aisha, a German Turkish student in Cairo whose beautiful eyes haunt Fachri. Following an incident on the Metro, where Fachri defends her against narrow-minded bigoted Muslims, both immediately develop feelings for each other.

Ayat-Ayat Cinta is a stylishly portrayed Islamic love story – a tale of a virtuous Muslim protagonist who tries to overcome all obstacles in life while maintaining the ideals of Islam. As the story unfolds, the protagonist faces the daunting decisions he has to make while keeping his undying loyalty to the principles of Islamic teaching, as he ultimately makes the choice of a lifetime. Eventually, Fachri marries Aisha, but then Noura accuses him of raping her, and causes him to be thrown in jail. While Maria is the only one who can testify to Fachri’s innocence, she is dying of a heart attack after learning of Fachri’s marriage and being subjected to an attempted murder by the actual rapist of Noura. To give her a hope of life, but more importantly to free Fachri from the accusation, Aisha begs Fachri to take Maria as his second wife, as both Fachri and Aisha believe that Islamic principles do not allow the opposite sexes to touch each other unless they are a married couple. Fachri refuses at first, but since Maria’s condition is critical and she keeps calling his name, Fachri reluctantly agrees. Fachri’s touch enables Maria to revive from her coma; thus she is able to testify in court and Fachri is freed from jail. However, Maria’s condition gets better only for a while, and she passes away not long after.

Ayat-Ayat Cinta stands out for its Islamic theme and it fits Wright’s model (2000) as to what constitutes a religious film. The film represents Islamic ideas, rituals, communities, iconography and music, and relies on Islam for the development of narrative, theme, and character. It is also the first film in the history of Indonesian cinema to feature a fully veiled woman (Aisha) as a central character. Nevertheless, it is essentially a melodramatic love story. Hakim (2009) categorises it as belonging to an Islamic-romance sub-genre, a new sub-genre within the Islamic film genre, particularly in Indonesia. Because of realising the need for mass appeal in their venture, the producers of Ayat-Ayat Cinta were keen to emphasise that this film is about love, which is deemed universal. Many pundits recognised that what made Ayat-Ayat Cinta wildly popular was its recipe of packaging a manual for living in an Islamic way in a melodramatic love story. Despite its richly and markedly Islamic elements, in
many sections the film resembles Hollywood and Bollywood films, as well as *sinetron* (Indonesian television dramas).

![Figure 1. A scene from Ayat-Ayat Cinta](image)

For instance, the above picture shows the wedding scene of Fachri and Aisha, where *ijab-qabul*\(^4\) takes place in a chamber in the centre of a pond within a hall; people upstairs have sprinkled flowers all over the pond. The scene and the luxurious life of Fachri and Aisha bear a very strong resemblance to the wedding ceremonies and social settings in many Bollywood films. The ups and downs of the romantic story between Fachri and Aisha and Fachri and Maria also look like many an Indonesian TV soap opera. How Fachri falls from grace when he is accused of raping Noura, as well as how he emerges as a victor when the court frees him, could also be mistaken as scenes from a Hollywood film had the main characters in the film been Westerners. The sense of a romantic Hollywood film also appears when, serendipitously, the woman whom Fachri chooses as his wife is the one with whom he has fallen in love at their first meeting, not a complete stranger.

The film addresses two important issues: polygamy and tolerance. Polygamy is an issue that is talked about by filmgoers and scholars alike. Taking multiple wives is often cited as being in accord with Islamic principles, and some Muslims do practise it. However, this is a highly controversial issue; public figures face much criticism when they take second wives. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* portrays polygamy as a means to save Fachri from imprisonment since Maria – the

\(^4\)In an Islamic wedding ceremony, *ijab* (offer) - *qabul* (acceptance) is the main event since it is the main and actual pillar of the marriage contract. It signifies the mutual agreement and acceptance between the two parties to join in the marriage bond.
only one who can prove Fachri’s innocence – is dying and only Fachri’s physical touch can revive her. Islamic principles require a husband to be equal and fair to his wives, and, as seen in the film, it is almost impossible to achieve fairness. However, the view that Islam allows polygamy is only one interpretation of the Qur’an, as there are many approaches in interpreting the content of the Qur’an. One of the groups, the contextualist, thinks that polygamy is prohibited, as the verses concerning polygamy must be interpreted comprehensively and contextually (Nurmila 2007: 59). Some scholars who belong to the contextualist group state that those verses are actually not about polygamy being permitted, but rather about being just towards powerless widows and orphans as victims of war. The director of Ayat-Ayat Cinta also stated in a personal interview that he was against polygamy and that the interpretation that the film supports polygamy is not what he intended.

The other issue, tolerance, is sometimes overlooked by film-viewers. In the film, the teaching of Islam is presented in a positive and peaceful way, and Fachri and Aisha are portrayed as true Muslims who practise tolerance, patience, honesty, and sincerity. During one memorable scene, passengers on a crowded Cairo train refuse to give up their seats to an ailing elderly American woman due to their anger toward the United States. When Aisha defends her and gives the American her own seat, a passenger accuses Aisha of taking sides with the infidel, and attempts to attack her physically. However, Fachri saves the day, preaching that Islam is a religion of tolerance and one that extends a welcome to all foreigners. In an interview, Hanung Bramantyo said that he wanted to aim his message of tolerance in his films (not only Ayat-Ayat Cinta) at all Muslims, and non-Muslims as well, partly due to his concern about the existence of a small-but-vocal minority of hard-line, militant Muslims who want to see Islamic law implemented in the country.

As I have pointed out previously, Ayat-Ayat Cinta did very well in the market. Some Muslims went to see the film with their mosque congregation, as if watching this film was similar to attending a pengajian (sermon) – thus showing the communality that film-watching potentially creates. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono organised a special screening at a top-end cinema in Jakarta to which he invited more than 80 cabinet ministers, top officials, foreign diplomats, politicians, and journalists as one of many attempts to boost his own public image. While Islamist hardliners like HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) and MMI (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia or Indonesian Mujahidin Assembly)46 condemned the film as

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46*Hizbut Tahrir* (means Liberation Party) is a movement that was, originally, a transnational political party established in 1952 in Jerusalem by an imam of Palestinian descent. It aims to resume the Islamic way of life by establishing a transnational Islamic caliphate that executes the system of Islam.
misrepresenting Islam, due to a scene where Fachri and Aisha defend the American woman, other Islamists from more moderate camps such as from PKS or Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party) had a different idea. Some figures of PKS who had previously praised the novel version also embraced the film for its huge potential to spread Islamic ideology to a wider audience, especially the youth (Bev 2008).

Although the love story was the main reason audiences were lured to the cinema, it was the theme of polygamy that sparked a heated debate over the film. Leaders of PKS urged their members to view the film (Brenner 2011). As I suggested before, some Islamic leaders applauded Ayat-Ayat Cinta, for they believed the film strongly glorifies polygamy, and it helped them justify their actions in committing polygamy, though they often attracted public criticism. The sense that this film encourages polygamy was also shared by opponents of polygamy, and made them condemn it. Krishna, a spiritual activist, stated that, in general, Indonesians could not accept the polygamous marriage of Abdullah Gymnastiar – a popular preacher – and other public figures (Bev 2008). Gymnastiar, better known as Aa Gym, is a Muslim televangelist whose popularity reaches beyond the boundaries of class, race, gender and religion (he was also well liked by non-Muslims). Nevertheless, after taking a second wife, his ‘brand image’ was severely damaged (Hoesterey 2008). Thus, Krishna (2008) urged the viewing audience to be critical of the film. Bev (2008) commented that the film was a vehicle for marketing fundamentalism, as it romanticises polygamy, and is far from just an innocent love story. The novelist Ayu Utami also pointed out that the story of the film was as bland as ‘a Hollywood tale of the 1950s’ and asked if its treatment of polygamy was anything other than a happy ending film à la Islamists who support, and sometimes encourage, polygamy (Fitzpatrick 2008).

Ayat-Ayat Cinta is actually not very clear in addressing the issue of polygamy. The way Fachri takes a second wife may makes polygamy supporters happy, since it is Aisha who insists that Fachri marries Maria. However, he is practically forced to commit polygamy, since the situation is a life-or-death emergency. Maria, the only person who can save Fachri from execution, has slipped into an unconscious state, and the doctor says the only thing that will

In Indonesia, HTI was established in 1982. It considers itself a political party, even though it does not have any intention to compete in general elections. Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia was established in 2000 and supported by several Muslim leaders, including Abu Bakar Bashir, a radical cleric who has been jailed for supporting terrorist attacks in Indonesia. MMI aims to implement sharia and establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. For further information, please see Hilmy (2010: 109-122).

PKS is a relatively new Islamic party that has been quite influential in recent years. It was originally founded as PK or Partai Keadilan (Justice Party) on 20 July 1998. The party owes its support mainly to Muslim activists at secular university campuses all around the country.
resurrect her is Fachri’s ministration. However, the pious Fachri will not touch a woman unless she is his wife, and finally, very reluctantly he agrees to marry her. Then, in a scene that Heryanto (2011) describes as depicting the ‘Islamic kiss of sleeping beauty’, Maria regains consciousness after Fachri kisses her. Even though it is Aisha who determines that Fachri should take Maria to be her co-wife, and gives her own wedding ring as dowry, she cries as though heart-broken when the ceremony takes place.

The film version differs from the novel in depicting their polygamous union. It explores in detail how it is for Fachri, Aisha and Maria after he is freed from jail and they live a polygamous married life. It turns out that it is extremely difficult to be in such a relationship with jealousy and rivalry always in play. Fachri consults his yet-to-be-married friend, Syaiful, who speaks authoritatively concerning how being equal and fair to just one wife, is not an easy task, let alone two wives. If Bramantyo (and El Shirazy) wished to support polygamy, the story could have stopped when Aisha returns home from going away alone for a break and self-reflection. Instead, it extends to the death of Maria and clearly allows Fachri and Aisha to live a happily-ever-after marriage. That story makes one wonders how polygamy could lead to happiness. The difference between the novel and the film in portraying polygamy did not please the author, Habiburrahman El Shirazy, in the way Bramantyo presented polygamy as polemic (Barker 2011: 201).

By subtly making arguments against, rather than for, polygamy, Ayat-Ayat Cinta could be categorised as being in line with the 2006 film Berbagi Suami (Sharing Husbands; officially translated as Love for Share). That film fully explores the issues of polygamy by utilising irony and understatement (Heryanto 2011: 74). It follows some stories of polygamy committed by people of diverse background (a wealthy Muslim, a lower class Muslim, and a Chinese Christian), and none of them is depicted as having a happy polygamous union. Kurnia (2009: 6) wrote that the film Berbagi Suami should be ‘softly’ critiqued for being a manifestation of patriarchy by showing “how the main women characters negotiate their polygamous relationships”. I share Heryanto’s conclusion that Ayat-Ayat Cinta is actually more ambiguous in depicting the issue of polygamy than many people think. I argue that it does not oppose the concept of polygamy, but it does suggest that a polygamous marriage would never be a happy relationship. The film is located somewhere between a fundamentalist and a more liberal Islamic camp.

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48 The novel version does not describe the difficulty of Fachri’s polygamous marriage. Maria’s life ends three days after the end of Fachri’s trial.
Notwithstanding my sympathy for the film, I have some reservations. I share Hakim’s criticism (2009) that Ayat-Ayat Cinta maintains gender biases. None of the female characters occupies a significant place in the public arena—they occupy a lower position in the domestic sphere. The involvement of Nurul in the student organisation at Al Azhar is limited to a non-strategic post, and Aisha always obeys Fachri’s orders, notwithstanding her higher social status and the sensible reason for her initial objection. The film also shows that parents can arrange their children’s marriage, especially that of daughters, without their consent. In this sense, I can say that the film keeps the agency of women at a minimum level. The film also contains—at least in the first half of the story—didactic messages, both in scenes and in dialogues. It dictates that Muslims of the opposite sex should not touch each other apart from their own legal spouse and close family members, and a good Muslim should not date. If they want to have a partner, they should immediately marry and at a tender age if necessary. As in the film, in real life the principle of having early marriage for youth has been promoted by Muslim conservatives. They conceive it as a solution to a moral crisis among Muslim youth (Smith-Hefner 2005: 454-455). The film also teaches the viewing audience the importance of a Muslim husband disciplining his wife when the woman makes a mistake, and how to do it in a proper Islamic way.

The second half of the film departs from its earlier vulgar didactic tone and moves to a more subtle approach in narrating the issue of polygamy, in which the director actually resists rather than agrees with it. Nevertheless, his intention is somehow lost and the viewing audience, such as my research participants, perceived either that the film supports polygamy, or that its treatment of the issue of polygamy should not be taken seriously, as the film is merely an entertainment.

The message that Islam allows inter-religious marriage, which El Shirazy wanted to deliver (Hermawan 2008), did not reach film-goers. This failure is due to the way Bramantyo directed the film. He constructed a very heart-moving melodrama by mixing Hollywood and Bollywood elements, and colouring them all with Islamic elements to make the film an alternative to the waves of horror-superstition, slapstick comedy, and over sentimental dramas both on screen and on TV. Although (and perhaps because) his technical direction in delivering entertainment was superb, the viewing audiences only cared for its pleasing side and overlooked its ‘educating’ part. This echoes Rossiter’s statement (1998: 13) that when it comes to commercial feature films, the intention to change people’s thinking and behaviour is usually disclaimed. Even though they may have implied social messages, these films are
primarily for entertainment. Thus, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was trapped in its soap opera archetype, albeit it is of superior quality. Hakim (2009) also suggests that its *da’wah* messages become blurred due to the mixing of Islam and romance. Ironically, if there were a section of society other than some liberal and progressive intellectuals who were aware of enlightening-but-latent ideas in the film, it was the fundamentalists. They considered that the film propagates pluralism, to which they strongly object, and alleged that both the author and the director are ‘Zionist agents’ (Risalah Mujahidin 2008).

*Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Praises God): Propagating Islam to Young Adults

*Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 and 2 are films directed by Chaerul Umam and released in 2009, based on best-selling books in Indonesia authored by Habiburahman El Shirazy. Both are the first films officially labelled ‘*halal*’ (permissible according to Islamic law) by the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Clerics Association), and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 is the first Indonesian film made in Egypt.49 The male protagonist of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is Abdullah Khairul Azzam, an Al Azhar University student. The film portrays him as a hard worker, a firm and natural leader, and a very pious young man. The main female character is Anna Althafunissa, a Javanese girl, a book lover, an Al Azhar University postgraduate student, and the daughter of a renowned cleric. She is beautiful and intelligent, as proven by her skills in English, Arabic, and *Ushul Fiqh* (Islamic law). She dresses in an Islamic way by covering her head with a veil, which by no means prevents her from being fashionable. This character is significantly different to the character of Eliana Pramesthi Alam, the only daughter of the Indonesian Ambassador for Egypt. Eliana is beautiful, enthusiastic, and determined. She appears in Indonesian TV as a drama actor, and frequently writes in newspapers. In contrast to other female characters, she rarely considers religion in undertaking daily issues and only wears the veil near the end of the film. Azzam also has a best friend, Furqon, who is completely different from him, as he comes from a wealthy family. The postgraduate student of Cairo University is described as foresighted, rational, calculating, and confident. Having been raised in a family that highly regards competition, quality, prestige and status has made Furqon lavish; he loves to live in luxury.

49 Almost all novels written by El Shirazy take their setting in Egypt, as the author himself completed his education at Al Azhar University. Although *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* was intended to be filmed in Egypt, it did not materialise for budgeting reason. The director was forced by this circumstance to make the film in India and Indonesia. After the success of this film, the producers, who realised the potential financial gain of an Islamic film, committed a much higher budget for the next El Shirazy novel-based film. As a result, the director was able to shoot almost all scenes in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* 1 in Egypt.
The story of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* revolves around the struggle of Khairul Azzam to complete his study and find a wife as well. He requires nine years to complete his studies, because after his father died, he had to assume the responsibility of supporting his family by producing and selling *tempe* (fermented soybean) and *bakso* (beef ball soup), and being an occasional chef for the Indonesian Ambassador for Egypt. He attempts to marry Anna Althafunissa, also a student of Al Azhar whom he thought he had never met before (actually, he had accidentally helped her when she and her friend were in trouble), but she has already been proposed to by his best friend, Furqon. *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* touches more on entrepreneurship, and shows how fate plays a big part in Azzam's life. Although he has attained an overseas university degree, life does not become easy for Azzam when he returns to Indonesia after finally finishing his study at Al Azhar. As he cannot find a worthy job for an overseas graduate, he sets up his own business by selling *bakso* (beef ball soup) called *Bakso Cinta* (Beef Ball Soup of Love) after temporarily working as a courier. After many unsuccessful marriage proposals and a broken engagement, Azzam finally marries Anna, the girl whom he had carried in his heart.

The *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* films were commercially not as successful as *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, but the films, costing US$4 million, were popular among youth. *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* managed to attract an audience of around three million. While its sequel achieved fewer ticket sales, it gained considerable success at the Indonesian Film Awards in May 2010, and received awards for the Best Male Performance and Best Film. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* has more melodramatic elements befitting a love story than *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* does. Nevertheless, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* explores marriage issues in more detail, as well as offering explanations as to why marriage should be pursued through Islamic principles, why dating is not allowed, and as to why touching the opposite sex is forbidden. The film implies that even though Islamic-style marriage may look like an arranged match, it is not a forced marriage. A woman can reject a marriage proposal if she does not know her suitor beforehand or does not like him. Unlike *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* films are not merely about love and marriage. *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* portrays a common problem faced by most young adults in Indonesia: the difficulty of finding a good career. A university degree from overseas is not a guarantee of finding a good job.

**Comparing the Two Films**

Compared to the actors in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, all the leading actors in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* were newcomers with a relatively strong Islamic background. The exception was Alice Sofie
Norin, who plays Eliana. She had already starred in some TV dramas, and had not been involved in notable Islamic organisations or activities. Kholidil Asadil Alam, who plays Azzam, had been at an Islamic boarding school when he was a teenager, and was known to be involved in a few Islamic organisations. Oki Setiana Dewi, who portrays Anna, has a relatively similar background and wears a jilbab in her daily life. Watching their performances in the films, I suspect that the decision to select them and almost all other actors was based less on their acting capabilities than on their Islamic knowledge and associated skills, such as their ability to recite the Qur’an, to pray properly, and to speak in Arabic. Apparently, the film producers and the novel author realised that, in the words of Turner (2009: 139), the casting would have important repercussions on the effect the characters would exercise. If they hoped that the characters would embody the notion of devotion to Islam, and they wanted to propagate this notion to viewers, they would have to select cast members who possessed a significant degree of piety. It is quite a surprise to me that the Ketika Cinta Bertasbih films have received less attention from scholars. At the time of writing, there has been no journal article or book discussing these films. Reviews of the films can only be found in a few scattered newspapers. I suggest they deserve more attention. Even though they were also adapted from novels by El Shirazy, and Suryakusuma (2009) asserts that the films are little more than romance dramas in ‘Islamic wrapping’, like Ayat-Ayat Cinta, they are significantly different in many respects. While Bramantyo took liberties in some sections by departing from the novel (and incensed novel fans), Umam stayed true to the original novel by making an almost page-by-page adaptation, to the extent of making the two novels into two films. Although that may have pleased devotees of the novels, it has cost the films: the non-novel reader/audience, who feel that the films resemble a TV drama series, is quite dissatisfied.

Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih have other similarities apart from having been written by the same author and conveying the same Islamic principles. One is that both made some social comment. Ayat-Ayat Cinta transmits the messages of tolerance and pluralism, and subtly and critically addresses the issue of polygamy. The Ketika Cinta Bertasbih series presents the wealthy and more secular life of the ambassador and his daughter as lacking in morals and religious sensibility. The ability of commercial films to transmit social messages proves that motion pictures can highlight social issues and can speak to broader political, religious or social contexts. They can also dispel long-held misconceptions, as well as be a catalyst for social change.
The two films display differences other than the way the directors interpreted the original story, as I have explained before. The issue of polygamous marriage in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is peripheral compared to its treatment in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. The former had a different approach from the latter concerning this controversial issue. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* portrays polygamy as forced necessity, as it is the sole means to save Fachri from imprisonment, and it causes him problems in his life after jail. There is no character in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* who engages in polygamy, despite there is a statement that polygamy is allowed within Islam. When Anna is asked her opinion about polygamy, she compares it with *jengkol*; it is not forbidden to indulge, but many people simply do not like it. She says that it is all right if Furqon marries four women, but she will not be one of them. She wants to be like Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, whose husband, Sayyidina Ali, never took a second wife, and Siti Khadijah, the Prophet’s first wife, who was the Prophet’s only spouse for 28 years until she passed away.

The sense of female agency in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is stronger than in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, as none of the female characters in the latter performs an active role. MacLeod (1992: 534) suggests that women, albeit they usually play a subordinate role, play an active role that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimisation/acceptance. Women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist or protest, sometimes at the same time. Anna of the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* series accepts the principle of polygamy and does not have any doubt that it is in accordance with Islamic teaching. Yet she shows her resistance to being a possible co-wife. Not taking multiple wives is only a number of requirements she advances to her suitor. The other ones are being pious, possessing a good knowledge of religion, having an equal status (formal education and socio-economic background) to her, and being a lovable person (with regard to physical features, manner, and body smell). In this regard, she has a strong agency as she does not merely accept or reject the marriage proposal. She also performs an active role in intellectual communities, as she gives speeches in some scholarly/literary discussions. Aisha of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* has the potential to become an active woman. However, she does not have any involvement regarding her marriage, an issue that is ultimately decided by her uncle and a Muslim cleric, and she obeys virtually all her husband’s decisions in their daily family life. Her agency appears briefly when she defends an elder American woman who is insulted by an Egyptian male and when she asks her husband to take a second wife.

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50 *Jengkol* is a species in the pea family that is native to Southeast Asia. Despite its strong stinky smell, the beans are a popular food in Indonesia.
Despite Anna having a more active role than Aisha, it is hard to describe Anna as a liberated woman. In the last scenes, her father decides whom she has to marry for a second time without asking her agreement (unlike her previous marriage). When her father comes to a decision over the man Anna has to marry, he is not only performing his parental role, but also performing his religious leadership role. Although the man the father chooses is Azzam, whose mutual love with Anna has been maintained in secrecy from her father, it is most likely that she will accept whoever he is. The power of the parent in the final scenes resembles what Thorne (1982: 13) describes as the situation in Europe before the era of industrialisation, when parents played a strong role in selecting mates for their children. Thus, these scenes show that the film neutralises its earlier glimpse of female agency. At least the notion of female agency has to be conceived not merely as individual achievement and autonomy but also as part of a broader vision of religious piety and moral community (Smith-Hefner 2005: 459) that requires women not to disobey religious authority. The possibility for active female agency in the film is also being challenged by the role played by Azzam’s mother. Her character is similar to mothers in Iranian cinema who are loyal, obedient, forgiving and self-sacrificing (Derayeh 2010: 152), as well as mothers in Indonesian films. As a single mother, Azzam’s mother has proven her ability to take care of four children for many years. In spite of this, and Azzam’s absence for nine years, Azzam – the only male in their family – has always assumed the role of the head of family, not the mother.

Another difference is the ideological direction toward which the films are heading. As the story progresses, Ayat-Ayat Cinta reveals the uncomfortable experience of polygyny. This resonates with a more liberal Islamic thought that polygyny is not an ideal type of marriage. Meanwhile, in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, as the story progresses in the second part of the series, characters show their adherence to more conservative Islamic principles. All marriages are pursued without dating and Anna’s father arranges for her to marry a man without her permission. This vision is remarkable considering that all the Islamic films that Umam made before Ketika Cinta Bertasbih revealed his vision of Islam as a religion that strongly supports social transformation. Al Kautsar (1977) and Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh (1982) displayed his idea that Islam is an agent of liberation, and depicted gently and intelligently the real problems of society and how Islam inspires its adherents to overcome problems without making Islam an exclusivist religion. Nada dan Dakwah (1991) and Fatahillah (1997) situated Islam as the moral force and inspiration for social change. As a result of these films, Umam was once labelled a director of high quality films (Kasturi 2010). Ketika Cinta Bertasbih
showed lesser film-making skills, and presented a different, less socially transformative Islam than he showed in previous films.

In *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, Umam treats Islam as an exclusive religion with all sorts of formal intrusions into the individual’s private life and without significant concern for social transformation. The narratives and scenes of the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* films present a dogmatic, narrow-minded, totally institutionalised, and orthodox version of Islam. The narratives are based on an assumption that being Islamic means strictly following sharia conventions. The presentation that every marriage has to be pursued through Islamic laws and the idea that Muslims cannot put their own feelings before the law is an example of it. Kasturi (2010) notes that the director prohibited scenes that did not comply with sharia. For instance, a woman has to wear the veil in every circumstance: even when shots are taken in a bedroom, she must not take it off. This is hard to justify from the standpoint of realistic depiction. Muzakki (2008) has commented that contemporary Islamic films offer something different to didactic messages widely available in the preaching market by presenting Islamic values in a more digestible way. However, this is not the case with *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* since the films contain many ‘dos and don’ts’. The heavy line of Islamic teaching and didactic messages within the films imply that Chaerul Umam’s current vision resonates with a growing tendency towards conservative religious institutionalisation in Indonesia. Umam’s transition from a contextual and emancipating view of Islam to a more textual and conservative view is notable in comparison to other film-makers. For instance, the late Asrul Sani, a director, scriptwriter and poet with whom Umam often collaborated, showed consistency in having a view of Islam as an inspiration for social transformation and a spiritual source for struggles against colonialism. Hanung Bramantyo, who, before *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, had never directed an Islamic film, after *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* produced films such as *Sang Pencerah* (The Enlightener) and *Tanda Tanya* (Question Mark) that present a more modern, liberal interpretation of Islam.

Some Islamic directors and authors intend their works to propagate Islamic teachings to young viewers but the viewers do not realise their intention. Islamic directors and novel authors may attempt to conceal their propagation by various means, including by utilising melodramatic elements and thus, playing upon their viewers’ emotions. However, Crawford and Rossiter’s study (2006: 355) found that young people are familiar with the evangelising purpose of film directors. In their research, young people wondered what the films would be
like had they been made by other directors, or if they were given freedom to recast the story according to their own interests and styles.

Islamic Propagation and Islamic Films

Most, if not all, contemporary Islamic films in Indonesia are adaptations of successful novels. Habiburahman El Shirazy is an author whose novels have been made into films more often than other authors. Film and novel are clearly two different media, but Beja (1979: 3) argues that the novel and film are, actually, two forms of a single art, the art of narrative literature, as both recount stories. Although Giddings, Selby and Wensley (1990: 2-9) pointed out several differences between film and the novel, they also state that the two media influence and, to some extent, replicate one another’s method in narrating stories. Some experts assert that the better the novel, the less successful the film adaption, and that the majority of viewers of film adoptions are not familiar with the original novels (Giddings, Selby and Wensley 1990: 21). Despite these differences between novel and films, Indonesian film producers and directors remained confident that successful novels can be transformed into cinema. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look into the reasons film directors translate novels onto the wide screen as well as the reasons the book authors permit adaption of their novels.

Novel authors sometimes allow their novels to be translated into films because there is enough evidence to show that a film adaptation would lead to a renewal of interest in the book itself. Andre, an assistant manager at a giant bookstore in Bandung, and Hendri, the owner of an Islamic bookstore in Jakarta, told me that, after the screening of Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, the sale of their novel versions increased more than twice. Giddings, Selby and Wensley (1990: 20-24) have detailed possible reasons why screen adoptions of novels are undertaken by film producers and directors, despite some problems. One reason is that a great deal of information can be conveyed almost instantly by presenting a character or event on screen. Fischer (in Kozloviz 2000: 32) also argues that films can say some things that books cannot. If one would like to disseminate certain values to a wider audience and to have more immediate effects in the real world, a film would be, arguably, a better choice than a novel. Because of its visual appeal, cinema can act on the emotions of an audience, and is less demanding and easier to comprehend than the written word. As particular values are generated out of, or enabled their existence by a particular ideology, the introduction of particular values to an audience would mean the introduction of an ideology
behind the values.\textsuperscript{51} Here the emotions serve to strengthen the introduction of the ideology. Thus, in one sense, a film would be a perfect medium to propagandise ideology.

Jowett and O’Donnell (2012: 110) argue that, of all media, cinema has the greatest capacity to influence an audience through its emotional appeal, inducing audiences to identify with the characters and actions on the screen. Blumer (1933: 176) also argues that, if somebody wants to nurture certain schemes of moral conduct, film – in particular films that are centred on religious themes – is one of the most effective media in inducing intentions to follow such schemes of moral conduct. Lambert (1938: 61) also wrote that the cinema is the most powerful propagandist medium. In his work, Taylor (1979: 20-25) showed some traits of propaganda films: a connection between the film-maker’s intentions and their intended results, concealment of the real intentions of propaganda, and manipulation of significant symbols or emotions.

Islamic films also displayed some of the characteristics of propaganda films. One is that there is a connection between the intentions of film-makers and/or authors whose works are adapted into films and their intended results, which are to exert influence and connect propagandists to audience, regardless of whether the intentions are achieved. Habiburahman El Shirazy, whose novels were made into the wide screen version, admitted that he consciously intended to propagat ‘the correct Islam’ (Hermawan 2008). In an interview with an Islamic magazine, Chaerul Umam, the director of \textit{Ketika Cinta Bertasbih}, asserted that liberalism had started to develop among Indonesian directors, as proven by the release of a few controversial religious films, and he feared that their films could influence their audience to become Westernised (Hidayatullah.com). That was the reason for him to direct films again after twelve years of absence.\textsuperscript{52} He insisted that Islamic films should be able to portray issues from an Islamic point of view and to provide Islamic solutions to the issues. Chaerul Umam said that concerned Muslims should make propaganda of their own to counter the effect of liberal Islamic films.

In Indonesia, Islamic films employ romance to attract young people since romance is one of a few hallmarks of the period of youth (Webster 2010: 100). The ‘real’ message of Islamic films, Islamising the youth audience, may remain attractive to Muslim youth activists as

\textsuperscript{51}Ideology produces sets of coherent values or encompasses different sets of values that may be ‘bound together’ logically and consistently (Converse 2006: 8).

\textsuperscript{52}After Chaerul Umam made \textit{Fatahillah}, an Islamic film, in 1997 and before he directed \textit{Ketika Cinta Bertasbih} in 2009, he made several Islamic drama TV series.
indicated by my informants’ statements in Chapter Four. The message may or may not be appealing to non-activist Muslims. Nevertheless, film producers, more often than not, do not want to take a financial risk by funding films that are not attractive enough to a wider audience. Therefore, the strategy of concealment by employing romance is a perfect strategy for both Islamic-oriented film-makers and money-concerned film producers. Film-makers want their messages to reach a wider audience (not only Muslim activists) and film producers, at the very least, do not want a ‘financial flop’. Blumer (1933: 56) states that it was usual that films from a particular genre copy the approach of films from another genre. Ideologically oriented films may dress their ideological content in romantic garb and present intimate detail in the manner of melodrama. The strong presence of romance in Islamic films strengthens Webster’s observation (2010: 82, 283) that many forms of contemporary popular culture in Indonesia are saturated with themes of love and romance as evident in the extensive use of words like *hati* (heart), *cinta* (love), *sayang* (affection), *romantis* (romantic) in magazines, TV, film, radio, billboard, live performance, etc. Even though an Islamic film would never have explicitly romantic scenes between unmarried people of the opposite sex, one cannot deny the strong elements of love and romance in Islamic films. In interview, Hanung Bramantyo, the director of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love), said that he deliberately aimed his film at a specific market: young people. Bramantyo also said that contemporary young people tend to more easily accept religious teachings than young people in earlier generations. Henceforth, messages in films should be delivered in as appealing a way as possible.

Islamic films have noticeably presented protagonists in the films as bearing true Islamic characteristics. In the films, there is no variety in the Islam except good Muslims versus bad people, who are sometimes Muslims too. Thus, the films did not correspond to real life Indonesian Muslim society, which has much more variety than the society presented in the films. In everyday life, the values within society are not only from Islam, whereas in film, everything should be in accord with the film-makers’ interpretation of Islam. The films did not offer room for another interpretation of Islam.

In Islamic films, directors and producers were keen to mix Islamic messages and melodramatic elements. I describe in the next section how my informants were really attracted to Islamic films due to the films’ ability to draw their emotions. Producers obviously want to attract viewers as much as possible, and their motivation was financial gain. This may not be the case for the directors or for the authors of Islamic novels. They employ, or
allow the use of, melodramatic elements because they feel that their ‘propagandistic’ messages would only reach religious and non-religiously-oriented viewers if the films were crafted as appealingly as possible.

Having said that Islamic films displayed some of the traits of propaganda films does not mean the films in Indonesia are propagandistic in the same manner as the German and Russian propaganda films of the 1940s; nor is the mediascape in contemporary Indonesia similar to the authoritarian context of the German and Russian propaganda films. The most fundamental difference is captured by using the term ‘propagation’ rather than ‘propaganda’ as the key word to explain Islamic films. The very nature of propaganda is authoritarian, while propagation is persuasive. Propaganda forces people how to behave and to act, offering no alternatives either in the medium itself or in the surrounding ideology, society and state; propagation persuasively shapes attitudes (Bauer and Gaskell 1999: 164-165). The propaganda films produced in Russia and Germany were part of an organised campaign on behalf of a recognised propaganda agency, which was the state. The regimes in German and Russia at that time were authoritarian, unlike the regime in Indonesia, which is a democratic one.

Islamic films in Indonesia were neither part of a recognised propaganda agency nor part of systematic, integrated or structurally-concerted efforts to insert a particular Islamic ideology into society. They were not developed by religious groups as part of a mission, but rather by a few concerned individuals. This was evident in the production of Ketika Cinta Bertasbih and Ayat-Ayat Cinta. Although the films were directed by Muslims and most were based on Islamic novels written by a recognised Muslim author, they were produced by commercial companies that produced many more non-Islamic films than Islamic ones. Ketika Cinta Bertasbih films had substantial support from Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia. Yet it was SinemArt, one of the biggest film production houses in Indonesia that was founded by a non-Muslim and mostly produced non-religious films, which produced the films, which altogether costed 20 billion rupiah (Okezone.com). The cost production of Ketika Cinta Bertasbih was also covered by numerous product advertisements. Ayat-Ayat Cinta has been celebrated by some Islamic leaders and regarded as the most successful in the genre of Islamic films. The film, which was reported as having costed around 10 billion rupiah, was also produced and funded by non-Muslim film producers and businessmen. I suspect that producers took into account what Fealy (2008: 16) called ‘the new spiritual marketplace’ in Indonesia, in which a growing number of Muslims choose to
consume Islamic products. In addition, Islamic films were a field of ‘battle’ where directors and producers each have their own agenda, and have different, sometimes conflicting, interests. In contrast, propaganda films usually have, more or less, a coherent motive in their production.

It has been noted above that young people are always considered a soft target for popular culture agents, especially cinema. Blumer (1933: 30) noted that since its early years, film has provided youth with patterns for everyday life. His research showed that many films portrayed forms of civilised life in a vivid fashion and, in doing so, provided models of conduct for young people who aspire to such a life. Blumer (1933: 36) went further, stating that model conduct presented by films may be imitated in real life, helping young people in their adjustment to wider society and to satisfy their aspirations to be popular and sophisticated. Although, initially, young people may only learn the manner and dress of characters in film, they would, eventually, make efforts to emulate the conduct and ethics of the characters (Blumer 1933: 42). Blumer’s characterisation of youth is in line with the Eriksonian perspective that assumes that youth is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. In this thesis, I agree more with the generational approach than the transitional approach. The generational perspective puts young people within particular historical conditions, and focuses on the meaning of social and cultural transformation to the youth, rather than relying on age as the defining feature of youth (White and Wyn 2008: 10-11). Regardless of my preference for the generational perspective, Blumer’s study remains useful in this thesis. He found that, for some young men and women, the life of modern youth as it is displayed on wide screen is not only an ideal type of life, but also the proper type of life (Blumer 1933: 151). Crawford and Rossiter (2006: 322) also state that commercial feature films can serve as source material drawn on by the youth in their construction of meaning and identity. Writing from the generational perspective, White and Wyn (2008: 204-207) argue that popular culture is not only becoming a cultural reference point. Various forms of popular culture become part of the cultural identity of young people. Thus, Islamic films, although a means for propagation, can provide codes of conduct and serve as media to introduce to young people a new identity that corresponds to modernity.

Informants’ Views of Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih

Of all research participants I met during fieldwork, only three, Anggi of Geology at ITB, Lili of Management of Education at UNJ, and Bambang of Mathematics (ITB), had doubts that Ayat-
Ayat Cinta is a religious film. They said it is a drama-romance film. All other informants thought the film is clearly a religious film. Rino, a 22-year-old student of Biology at ITB, explained that Ayat-Ayat Cinta is a very important Islamic film because:

It was the first ever-Indonesian film to portray modern Muslims on screen. It marked the emergence of the face of Islam within Indonesian cinema. We know, after this movie, there were many Islamic films flooding the cinemas, which is a good thing.

He explained that the characters in this film, unlike in other (non-religious) films, displayed overt Islamic attributes. When he was asked about the meaning of ‘modern Muslims’, he quickly replied, “Just like us, young men, living in the modern world with contemporary problems”. Another informant, Alam, a first year French Literature student at UNJ, said to me:

I really admired Ayat-Ayat Cinta. The film was so good; perhaps this was the best Indonesian film I ever watched. It contained many Islamic messages that young people need to comprehend.

Meanwhile, Rani, a 19-year-old student of Electronic Engineering at ITB, admitted that she only watched the film because it was required by her high school teacher to review any Indonesian film. Yet the film impressed her a lot, and she watched it twice. She recounted her experience:

I had to thank my teacher. This is a true Islamic film. The story has messages on how to be a true Muslim youth. Had he not assigned me that task [film reviewing], I would never have watched it.

Therefore, it is clear to me that the film has been identified by some Muslim youth as belonging to the Islamic genre and is relevant to them.

Lili, a 20-year-old student, who did not regard Ayat-Ayat Cinta as an Islamic film, said to me:

No, I do not think it is an Islamic film. It is an entertainment, a love story between a man and a woman with all the challenges they must face. However, this is a very good one, much better than sinetron (TV drama). Their acting was more convincing than sinetron actors’ performance.

Lili and some others even acknowledged that Ayat-Ayat Cinta entertained them more than Ketika Cinta Bertasbih did. Lili described her feeling after watching the films:

Watching KCB was almost the same as attending a pengajian (public sermon). While watching AAC was really something enjoyable.

Her view represents a view that the film is, actually, a melodramatic film. It confirms Heryanto’s argument (2011) that Ayat-Ayat Cinta is, essentially, a love story crafted with good film-making skills, albeit not without some criticism, and that makes the film appealing to most Indonesian Muslim young adults. Therefore, it is not surprising that an important
message Bramantyo wanted to convey, the principle of tolerance within Islam, failed to reach
the general audience.

Most informants felt that the film deviated from the original (novel) version. Anggi, a third-
year ITB student of Geology, told me her opinion about the film:

I had a huge expectation before watching it since I had read the novel. However, the film
version was a big disappointment to me. The exotic beauty of Egypt, as written by Kang
Abik [the popular name of the author], did not show up on screen. It looks like Egypt is
merely dust and dirt. Also, how could Egyptian characters be played by Indonesians? They
talk in Indonesian and really sound like Indonesians.

The choice of actors was another point of dissatisfaction to those informants who happened
to be fans of the novel. It is a bit ironic since the need to pull in the younger crowd was the
reason to employ popular actors. Fedi Nuril, a model and musician, plays the pious Fachri;
Rianti Cartwright, a former popular MTV VJ and model, appears as the burqa-clad German of
Turkish descent, Aisha; and Carissa Putri, a successful soap drama artist and model, portrays
the beautiful Maria Girgis. While there was no objection to the casting of Carissa Putri as
Maria (probably because the character is a Coptic-Christian), criticism was directed to the
choice of Fedi Nuril and Rianti Cartwright.

My informants questioned why an actor who, in a previous film, had performed a kissing
scene, something that does not adhere to Islamic principles, performed the devout Fachri and
why an actor who - despite her Muslim background - had never worn the veil played the fully
veiled Aisha. One of my informants, Swidhi, a Mathematics student at ITB, expressed her
concern:

Why did the director pick un-Islamic stars to play those characters? We have seen how
pious they were in the film and were convinced that they were pious too in reality.
However, when we learnt about their real life, we were disappointed. Look at Fedi who
played Fachri. In his previous film, he did a kissing scene! And Rianti? We thought she would
become more Islamic after her role as Aisha. But it did not happen. She ended her
relationship with a Muslim, and then married a Christian in a church. I bet she has
converted.

VJ is an abbreviation for video jockey. It refers to an announcer who introduces and plays videos on
commercial music television such as the United States' station, MTV. In many countries, the American
channel is in the centre of an ongoing debate over the cultural and moral influence of music and
television on young people and society. MTV channel has been received in Indonesia through satellite
since the mid 1990s. A private Indonesian TV station also aired some of MTV's programmes from the
end of 1990s to the mid of 2000s.
The questioning of ‘un-Islamic stars’ playing Islamic characters is an example of what Turner (2009:151) has theorised as an expectation for screen characters to offer wish fulfilment. Informants had a high expectation that the main characters in Islamic films would be ‘real’, not just playing a part on screen. Thus, the actors must possess similarity with the characters. The questioning also represents a growing belief that Islam should pervade all aspects of life, including in films that portray ideal Muslims. They were also dissatisfied with the performance of Fachri on screen: they said he was “weak and uncertain, completely different to the one in the novel”. The novel’s fans questioned even the choice of the director. Bramantyo shares a similar background with his actors and almost all his crew; none has special credentials from Islamic institutions, activities, or educational experiences (Heryanto 2011). The exception was El Shirazy – an alumnus of Al Azhar University – who plays a cleric in the film.

Informants also criticised the film on the grounds that some scenes were inappropriate according to Islamic teaching. For instance, before Fachri met Aisha, he had a close relationship with Maria. Although they never touch each other, they were portrayed as usually in close proximity. Bambang, a Mathematic student at ITB, argued that Islam would never allow a man and woman who were non-muhrim (family members) to be in close physical proximity. Furthermore, Bambang explained to me:

> When people, especially Muslims, of the opposite sex meet, they should not deliberately look each other straight in the eyes if they are not a married couple, and the on-screen Fachri and Aisha do not conform to this principle. I suspect the director did not really understand this principle. He should have studied in Egypt at least three months before taking shots.

Bambang said that he watched the film with his family, including an uncle, a lecturer at an IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri or State Islamic Institute) who once went to Al Azhar for a six-month course, and the uncle was very dissatisfied after watching the film. The comments made by Bambang represent a view that film should be a model for reality, as it should set the standards for public morality.

Hanung Bramantyo, the director, had some replies to criticisms such as those above. In our conversation, he admitted that he did try to shoot the film in Egypt to comply with the depiction of Egypt as written in the novel. Unfortunately, there was a financial constraint when his Egyptian counterpart asked for more money, and the producers decided not to increase the budget. Despite this and other difficulties, Bramantyo managed to shoot the film in India, as he thought the place was quite similar to Cairo. The scenes of a traditional
market were staged in Semarang, Central Java, and the courtroom scenes were filmed at a cathedral in Jakarta. Despite Bramantyo’s efforts, I could not agree more with my informants that he was not able to live up to the expectations of being able to capture the nuances of Egypt. In relation to the selection of Fedi Nuril as Fachri, Bramantyo said that he and El Shirazy toured to various pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) to find a pious, knowledgeable and good-looking Islamic student to portray Fachri. They failed to find such a candidate, and, as a result, they were forced to hold an audition with professional actors. Bramantyo selected Fedi Nuril. He did not want to make this character completely adhere to the depiction in the novel. Bramantyo felt the novel’s character was just too perfect and impossible to find in everyday life. He wanted to make Fachri 'more human', and for him Fedi Nuril was a perfect candidate for the imperfect Fachri. Thus, if one thinks that Fachri is too good to be true, he or she may not have read the novel yet. The character of Fachri in the novel is more like an angel than the one in the film, who is depicted as more fragile, weaker, doubtful, and sometimes losing his confidence.

Many Indonesian youth saw Ayat-Ayat Cinta as offering fresh entertainment, free from the sex, violence and superstition that had previously dominated Indonesian cinema. Informants regarded the characters of Fachri and Aisha as ideal role models for youth. For them, it did not matter whether the film belongs to the Islamic genre. For instance, Irawati (22 years old) of Microbiology at ITB, stated:

I do not really care if that film is not an Islamic film. Fachri is a cool Muslim. He is really like us, from a moderate background. He shows what a good Muslim youth should look like. Fachri is young but pious and smart, and neither radical nor liberal. My older sister also said to me that she wants to be like Aisha, smart, pious, and determined to live by the principles of Islam.

A Christian student at ITB, Henry, also praised the characters as offering good role models for Indonesian youth.

I know some people took it as an Islamic film, but I did not really care about that. I watched it with my Muslim friends. We never saw films portraying good role models as AAC did. Fachri is a very good example for Indonesian young people: pious but open-minded and modern.

Their comments, which are representative of other informants’ views, echo Turner’s point (2009: 151) that heroes and heroines of films offer a kind of wish fulfilment, and the adoration for them is the expression of a wish that they may unconsciously want to fulfil. Thus, I can conclude that Fachri and Aisha offer an attractive blend of piety and modernity,
since in these on-screen characters, Muslim young adults found the embodiment of the identities to which they aspired.

Unlike *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1 and 2* were identified as Islamic films by all research participants. Ree, of French Literature at UNJ, described how the film contained plenty of Islamic symbols, rituals, and lessons.

It was obvious for my friends and me that this was a real Islamic film. You can see it in the piety of its characters. They pray five times, read the Qur’an, and obey Islamic lessons. They maintain their sincerity and good behaviour, no matter how hard the problems they face. Almost all women there wear the veil. They show to us how to be a good Muslim.

She explained that it did not mean that she had never had lessons on how to be a good Muslim before, but rather the film embodies Islamic teachings taught to her before she went to university. Irawati said that she watched the film with colleagues, since many of their seniors at the Salman Mosque Youth Group recommended it.

This is a film you don’t want to miss. It gives examples of what a good Muslim should look like. Maybe you already know about characters of good Muslims by reading the book and listening to clerics, but if you see it on screen, you will be surer about it.

Andi, a 22-year-old student in the Biology Department at the same campus recounted his experience of how *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1* reminded him about the true Islamic way:

The story was really touching. I even cried at that time because when I was at high school, I committed many wrongdoings, and the film made me realise that those were sins. Since then, my life has been changed. Now, I am fully committed to Islam.

For my research participants, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is a catalyst for self-reflection and for perfecting their understanding of Islam, as a film can have more impact in delivering lessons than books and traditional face-to-face sermons.

The above account conveys how *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* serves as ‘a model for reality’ or an ethos as proposed by Lyden (2003: 45). Some research participants conceived the film as acting in the interest of Islam to show young Muslims how to be good Muslims. A comment by Gani, a student of Economics at Unpad, exemplifies this:

If young people want to know what Muslims look like and how Muslims live their life, they should watch this film. It can guide us to be better Muslims.

Another comment by Okta, a sociology student at UNJ, reveals that for other participants the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* series also served as a model of reality.

These films were not only showing that this is what Muslims should be doing, but also how they are actually doing it, and what can happen to them in real life. You can look at Azzam. His character is something we can easily find in our daily life. He is not out of reach.
The views of these films as both reflection of real life and guide for a good life are two of the reference points guiding my informants as they compared *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*. Another one is whether the films adhere to their respective novel versions.

When I asked my informants’ opinions of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, they always compared it to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, and some of them considered the former the better film. They deemed Chaerul Umam’s films better and ‘more Islamic’ than Bramantyo’s film in many respects. Most informants agreed that despite Bramantyo’s ability to deliver a melodramatic love story, he failed to deliver the panoramic beauty of Egypt on screen, and Umam did what Bramantyo did not. Umam gave to the audience the picturesque views that the readers of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* dream about. The importance of having scenes filmed in Egypt is not solely due to adherence to the novel version. Mia of the Physics Department at ITB said that for her Egypt signifies Islamic modern civilisation, as well as a place where Islamic scholarship is well maintained:

> When I read the novel, I imagined that Egypt is a beautiful, modern city (sic), as modern as Paris. Cairo is where the University of Al Azhar is located. We know that Al Azhar is the best place to go if we want to learn Islam from the best Muslim scholars.

The reference to Egypt is profound, both in the film (as well as in its novel version) and in my informants’ comments on the film. Their admiration for Egypt is well understood given that Egypt has long been important to Islamic movements in Indonesia. Egypt, particularly Cairo, has been a centre of Islamic learning for Indonesian Muslims since the beginning of the twentieth century. For South East Asian Muslims, not only Indonesians, Cairo has been more important than Mecca as a favourite destination to study Islam (Formichi 2010: 127). Indonesian Muslim scholars who initiated Islamic revivalism in Indonesia were heavily influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim scholars imported Islamist ideas from the Middle East, including Egypt, which addressed new ways of thinking about the relationships among Islam, politics and society (Bubalo and Fealy 2005: 16). Thus, Egypt was considered by many as a source of inspiration for building an Islamic civilisation. I also regard my informants’ admiration as a sign that there is a desire among Muslim youth to see an Islamic civilisation as modern as the West.

There was another issue, aside from the adherence to the original version and the portrayal of Egypt in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* that made the film ‘Islamic’. In *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, the film-maker directed and crafted every scene in accordance with Islamic principles where members of the cast had to be Muslims, and every scene needed to follow the principles of *sharia* (Kasturi 2010). However, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* had a kissing scene and an implied sex
scene, although it was not really shown. Some informants felt embarrassed that such scenes existed in a supposedly Islamic film.

My informants evaluated how Azzam and Anna behaved as more closely adhering to Islamic values than Fachri and Aisha, and more real. Didi, a first year student of Social Science Education at UNJ, compared the characters of Fachri and Azzam:

It is not that Fachri is not Islamic. It is just that Azzam is more determined to apply Islamic principles in his life. Fachri, from what I can see, is not sure, for example, when he has to commit polygamy. It is permissible by Islam. Why does he have to be doubtful? It is different to Azzam. When his beautiful female friend wants to give him a French kiss, he strongly objects to it. It is incorrect according to Islam.

Meanwhile, Gea, a computer-engineering student at ITB, saw a better character in Anna as compared to Aisha:

Aisha is a good and devout Muslim, and she wears a burqa, not just a jilbab. However, she is not shown as being as pious as Anna. Aisha has doubts concerning Fachri’s love and innocence; that is why she is jealous and goes away alone after Fachri takes Maria as his second wife. She could not accept Maria. It is not a good thing to be done by a pious Muslim woman. Aisha also dares to stare at Fachri when they have not been married yet. A fully veiled woman should not do this. Anna is more consistent in adhering to Islamic principles than Aisha is.

Moreover, in line with the principle that films can be a model of reality, characters in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih are counted as ‘more real’ and down to earth than in Ayat-Ayat Cinta. Okta, a student of sociology at UNJ, said to me:

I think Fachri is not believable. How could he attract the attention of four beautiful women and manage to marry two of them and one of them is rich? Azzam is more real than Fachri. He is handsome, pious, diligent, and smart, but his marriage proposals are rejected four times. Anna and Eliana are also more real than Aisha. Aisha is beautiful, devout, intelligent, kind and rich. How many women like her can you find in daily life? Anna is a pretty, smart and pious girl but she is not as rich as Aisha. Eliana is smart, beautiful, and rich, but she is not a pious woman.

The notion that pious characters have to be played by film stars who are pious not only in the films, but also in everyday life outside the movies, and that film characters have to be as close as possible to real people in everyday life, do matter for my informants. Turner (2009:141) says that film stars must have some representativeness, some recognisable elements, which viewers can use to link the film with their experiences or aspirations. My research participants could not recognise the existence of a character like Fachri in everyday life and could not accept that an actor who was not pious performed as a pious character. They
wanted characters who are both down to earth and actors who are devout in their real life. Informants demanded film stars that can link the real with the ideal, the audience with ideal Muslim youth.

The similarity of the film-viewing experience to religious experience, as put forward by Lyden (2009), is evident in my research. Films such as Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih encourage certain moods and motivations among Muslim youths. After watching both films, Yulia felt that she would have to do the right things according to Islam, and Mary of Physics at ITB said, ‘I need to improve my understanding of Islam and apply it in my life.’ This is in accordance with Lyden’s theory (2003: 42-44) that films, as a set of symbols, both visual and narrative, establish moods and motivations. Moods indicate emotional reactions to certain situations and this was visible when informants reacted quickly after they watched the films. The motivations inculcated by the films inclined film viewers to intend to do certain things, such as improving their understanding of Islam and practising Islam in daily life.

Some informants did not intend to actually do the things they had seen done in the films. Alam, Okta, Rino and Bambang told me that they did not want to engage in polygamy as in Ayat-Ayat Cinta. The film did not present polygyny as ideal, but the film presented it in a positive manner and, perhaps, made the idea of polygamy attracts the interest of Muslim males. Nevertheless, in the words of Rino, who wanted to marry in 2012, “Engaging in a polygamous marriage is a very big thing that I could never imagine I will be ready for.” Yet, as stated by Lyden (2003: 97), film tends to express some of the hopes of the target audience. I found such hopes in a statement by Ian, of Marine Science at ITB, “Azzam is an inspirational leader and a very pious person that we should be. I hope a person like him could be found in
reality. And every Muslim youth should be like him.” Almost all informants who had watched the films had memorised some dialogue from the films, such as ‘Patience and ikhlas...that is Islam’ (from *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*). The experience of watching both films was communal, as proposed by Lyden (2003: 47). The students watched the films in groups and discussed the films, both among the group who had attended, and afterwards, even though they did not remember exactly what has been said by the films’ characters after they watched it.

Although to most informants, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* played an important role in emphasising the importance of Islam for their life, a few research participants deemed the films inadequate in transmitting the messages of Islam to all young people. Rendy, of the Information System and Technology Department at ITB, pointed out some weaknesses of the films:

> Those films are important to ‘Islamise’ cinema since sex, horror and violence themes have preoccupied Indonesian cinema. However, if the author, director and producer of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* wanted the film to transmit Islamic lessons to the youth, their intentions were not realised. The films were clearly designated for those who are just about to move forward to be adults. The ones, who need those [Islamic films] much more, are teenagers, and currently there is no teenage Islamic film. The films are also not useful for those who want to have a deeper knowledge of Islam. The films are just for people who only have a limited knowledge. Those who want to further study about Islam should read books and discuss them with established ustadz.

His statement was somewhat true, as all current Islamic films for young people depict the story of characters who are university student age (around 20 years old and above), and transmit only basic knowledge of Islam. None of the films centred upon a narrative about secondary school students, nor were they delivering a higher level of Islamic knowledge, which would be necessary for people who are already well versed in Islam. Rendy’s statement also signalled the desire to see Islamic films reach all ages, as well as the acknowledgement that film can be a powerful tool to educate people about religion.

Some of my research informants showed awareness of the propagating mission of Islamic films. Ary, a student of Economics at UNJ thought that apart from their entertainment function, Islamic films are part of a *da’wah* mission:

> Many people would think that the films are merely entertainment. But, in my opinion, they have a sort of mission to teach young people some basic knowledge of Islam; especially in the films of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*. Almost everybody involved in the production has a significant Islamic background and the story was written by someone who has been
educated in Al Azhar. The love story in the films merely served to deliver their Islamic messages.

Another research participant, Angga, explained to me why he felt that the directors and producers of Islamic films, particularly of the Ketika Cinta Bertasbih series, were actually making religious films, but with an entertainment flavour, not the other way around:

If we read the novels, we can feel that they teach us how important it is to apply Islamic principles in our daily life. Because the director of Ketika Cinta Bertasbih really adhered to the novels, we can also have the same feeling when we watch the movies. The basic story is about how a Muslim youth faces many challenges when he applies Islamic principles to daily life, and, no matter what the challenge is, he can overcome it. I think the author of the novel included the love story only to attract the reader’s attention in order to deliver Islamic teachings.

Although a few other informants regarded the films as merely entertainment, I do not have any doubt that my informants were capable of identifying the potential propagation of the films.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I reiterate Turner’s point (2009:198) that a film text is not unitary in its meaning, but rather is a sort of battlefield for competing and contradicting ideas. Even though it is possible for a certain idea to emerge as a victor, there are always interstices, hiatuses and tensions. Islamic authors, and film directors and producers, aimed to disseminate Islamic messages to young viewers. Islamic films have become a means for the propagation of Islamic values. In the propagation endeavour, Islamic films employ romantic elements to attract the attention of Muslim young people. All my research participants agree that Ketika Cinta Bertasbih is ‘more Islamic’ than Ayat-Ayat Cinta, yet not all of them like it more than Ayat-Ayat Cinta. Some of them said that the latter touches their heart and engages with their emotions much more than the Ketika Cinta Bertasbih films do. Some others felt that watching the story of Azzam was similar to their experience of attending a sermon, which was ‘not fun’, notwithstanding their acknowledgment that it was good for them. Even within the circle of Islamic film production, there are ideological differences between directors. Therefore, the intention of Islamic film-makers to educate young Muslims to be good Muslims in accord with the wave of Islamisation is not as successful as some of them may expect. The next chapter discusses the case of Islamic self-help books, which are also a means for the propagation of Islamic values.
CHAPTER SIX:

ISLAMIC SELF-HELP BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed Islamic films, one of the two genres of Islamic popular culture that I am looking at in this thesis. In this chapter, I deal with Islamic self-help books for young people. Islamic self-help books are a hybrid of Islamic publications and self-help books. Firstly I discuss the two parent genres. I define what Islamic publications are and survey self-help books as a sub-genre. Then I show how Islamic publications have played an important role in the history of publishing in Indonesia, and how they reflect the history of Indonesia itself. I focus on the prominence of Islamic publishing from the end of the 1990s until now. After a short survey of some Islamic publishing houses, I explore the beginning of Islamic publications for young people in the 1990s. I also discuss the important role played by Muslim activists, in particular the FLP or Forum Lingkar Pena.

The genre of self-help books came from the United States, and many scholars argue that the self-help genre portrays the distinctive character of American culture. Hence, I explore the genre of self-help, personal development, self-improvement, or success advice in America. I show the remarkable similarity between some discourses of American self-help books and discourses of Islamic self-improvement books in Indonesia. I discuss discourses displayed in a few Islamic self-help books that have been read by my informants. The discourses resonate with an Islamic ideology addressed by the contemporary Islamic movement in Indonesia. Then, I argue why governmentality, a Foucauldian term, is appropriate to explain the phenomenon of self-help books, particularly those with an Islamic tone. I conduct a brief textual analysis of Islamic self-help books that reveals how such books potentially govern the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of readers, without necessarily saying that the authors personally and consciously want to govern Indonesian Muslim young people. However, I find that the analysis can only partially understand the potential relationship between self-help books and governmentality. I undertake a further analysis to explore the extent to which self-help advice translates into the actions and conduct of readers, or how self-help discourses govern the readers’ thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The extended analysis is needed in order to know how Islamic self-help books reshape the identity of the readers and how readers deal with the governing power of the books. However, in portraying how my
informants commented on the books, I argue that Muslim young people are not passive readers.

**Defining the Genre of Islamic Publications**

Research by the leading Islamic newspaper, *Republika*, and The Asia Foundation, defined the Islamic press as the press in which journalism practices serve Muslim interests, both material and ethical (Swastika 2003). Hill (1991: 125) suggests that the term ‘Islamic publications’ refers to media that professionally cover Islamic activities, explicitly convey an Islamic mission, or overtly display Islamic content. Laksmi and Haryanto (2007) categorise Islamic publications as one of the ‘alternative media’ that flourish in post New Order Indonesia. It is not entirely clear why they put Islamic publications within a broad, miscellaneous category that also houses Left-oriented book publishing, community-based radio and gender-oriented journals. It seems that Islamic printed media have been grouped as such because during the early and middle phases of the New Order period, Islamic voices were repressed, and the views of the authoritarian-militaristic government dominated the mediascape at that time. In a similar vein, Hill (1991) brought Islamic publications under the broad umbrella of the ‘marginal presses’, along with the student press, regional press, English-language publications, and Chinese-language publications. Nonetheless, he admits the potential of the Islamic media to play a greater and more important role in the near future, which is something one does notice currently. After the fall of the Suharto government, previously marginalised Islamic publications were revitalised and redesigned, and new ones established, with a great diversity of content. I will briefly explore the history of the Indonesian press to show the importance of the genre of Islamic publications.

**Islamic Publications in Indonesia**

**Islamic Publications in Early Years**

The turn of the twentieth century saw the appearance of Islamic publications in the Netherlands East Indies (later to become known as Indonesia). Almost at the same time, Egyptian Muslim thinkers developed their Islamic reform ideas and spread them all over the world (Irawanto 2011: 68). There was a kind of relation between the two events, as the establishment of the *Jami’at Khair* (Association for Good) movement in Java was inspired by the ideas of Islamic reformers from Egypt. The followers of *Jami’at Khair* founded some

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54 During the late phases of the New Order period (i.e. during the 1990s), Suharto initiated a rapprochement with Muslim leaders when he felt that the Army was no longer in his full control.
important Islamic organisations in Indonesia: *Muhammadiyah, Syarikat Dagang Islam* (Association of Islamic Traders) which later became *Syarikat Islam* (Islamic Association), *Persatuan Islam* (Islamic Union) and *Jong Islamieten Bond* (Young Muslims’ Association). Each of these organisations had their own publication departments that produced newspapers, periodicals and brochures to propagate their ideas about religion as well as social affairs. The *Syarikat Islam* – which was founded by Tirto Adisuryo, among others – had some publications, for example *Sarotomo* in Yogyakarta, *Oetoesan Hindia* (The Courier of the Indies) in Batavia and *Al Islam* in Surakarta (Lee 1971: 8). These publications appeared from the 1920s to the 1940s. Many journalists and publishers were at the same time members of political associations or social organisations (Kimman 1981: 84).

The first Islamic publication was *Al Munir* (1911). This fortnightly magazine was established by Muslim scholars from West Sumatra, such as Karim Amrullah and Abdullah Ahmad, whose influence went beyond West Sumatra. However, it only lasted for five years (Irawanto 2011: 69). The emergence of *Al Munir* encouraged the development of publishing houses in Sumatra, particularly in Padang, Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh and Medan (Adam 1995: 126-158). Although they started as publishers of educational texts, including books for Islamic instruction, they also printed and sold local stories that contained criticism of colonialism (Kimman 1981: 95). Kimman (1981: 97) argues that the Islamic elements contributed to the early development of the publishing industry in Sumatra in the 1920s as well as on the other side of the Strait of Malacca (in Kelantan and Singapore). The Islamic press was partly established to encourage the spread of modern Islamic thinking. It was also part of the resistance against colonialism. The Dutch government in the East Indies was repressing the nationalist indigenous media by enacting laws and regulations to censor publications, and banning them if necessary.

The Japanese Occupation (1942 – 1945) offered an opportunity – no matter how limited – to Indonesian journalists to develop their journalistic skills (Hill 1991). Due to the need to banish Dutch influences, and the fact that the Japanese language was very difficult, the Japanese military government gave training to indigenous media crews and installed Indonesian as the official language. However, due to their uncompromising nationalistic

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55 It should be noted that before *Al Munir*, in 1795, Sayyid Othman, an Arab merchant in Batavia, published *Al Juab*, a newspaper using the Malay language written with Arab characters (Kimman 1981:92). The content of this newspaper was mostly Islamic essays.

56 Although the magazine had a nationalist tone, the Muslim scholars also tried to combine the notion of modernisation with religious fervour from Mecca in order to stop all kinds of traditional customs (Kimman 1981:95-97).
tone, many Islamic publications were prohibited during this period. The survivors from the Japanese period, for instance *Atjeh Sinbun* (Aceh Herald), *Kiblat* (Prayer Direction), *Adil* (Justice), *Al Muslimun* (The Muslims) and *Soeara Muhammadiyah* (The Voice of Muhammadiyah), were those that dealt with issues of Islamic law (Irawanto 2011), rather than political ideology, let alone nationalism.

Peeters (1998) argues that most Islamic publications after Independence were produced by Sumatrans who came to Java in the 1940s – 1950s. For instance, the first postcolonial Islamic publisher, *Tintamas*, was founded in 1946 by Muhammad Zain Djambek from Bukittinggi, who had previously set up a wide range of business activities. Another Sumatran, Bahartahah, established N.V. Al Maarif in 1949 in Bandung. While these two persons were of entrepreneurial background, Abdul Manaf Zamzami of South Aceh, the founder of *Bulan Bintang* (Crescent and Star), was a journalist at the *Atjeh Sinbun* and received training in journalism in Singapore. Even though *Atjeh Sinbun* was directly under the control of the Acehnese branch of the Japanese Information Service, its relationship with the Japanese had been uneasy and they were among the first Indonesian media to report the defeat of Japan. After his brief political career as a member of the Central National Indonesia Committee and subsequently the new national parliament, Zamzami continued his journalistic interests by publishing Islamic books.

*Bulan Bintang*'s first postcolonial Islamic book was *Islam dan Sosialisme* (Islam and Socialism), launched in 1951 and written by H.O.S Tjokroaminoto, the central figure in an Islamic nationalist party, the PSII or *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Association Party). However, five years later, Zamzami grew close to another Islamic party, *Masyumi* or *Majelis Syura Muslimin* Indonesia (Consultative Assembly of Indonesian Muslims). In collaboration with another Sumatran, Muhammad Natsir, the *Masyumi* leader, he opened an Islamic bookshop, N.V. Tamaddun, which soon became an important Islamic institution. The banning of *Masyumi* due to its alleged association with a separatist movement in 1958 did not end Zamzami’s partnership with Natsir: when the latter formed DDII or *Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Proselytization Council), Zamzami joined him.

**The Emergence of Contemporary Islamic Publishing Houses**

The DDII was certainly not a publishing house, but its influence over the burgeoning Islamic publishing industry after the 1980s should not be neglected. The repression of Islamic symbols and organisations during the New Order period made DDII inclined to focus on
da’wah activities rather than politics, although its chief founder, Natsir, stated that da’wah serves as a tool to engage in political activities (Hefner 1997). It was in the interest of da’wah that DDII published a magazine titled Media Dakwah (Islamic Preaching Media). Initially, Media Dakwah was disseminated only among DDII preachers, activists, and supporters, as it was only used to circulate speeches and statements from DDII leaders. There were several factors that prompted DDII leaders and activists to change Media Dakwah’s format and design. They included the banning of several newspapers in the aftermath of the anti-Japan riot in Jakarta on 15 January 1974 – including Harian Abadi that used to voice the interests of former Masyumi members – and the success of non-religious and Christian-owned printed media like Kompas, Suara Pembaharuan and Tempo. DDII’s view was that this ban was a sign of the New Order’s conspiracy against Muslims.

Media Dakwah became a news magazine with a blatantly Islamic preaching mission. It became known for its blend of reportage and use of literal Islamic language, and its frequent exposés of ‘Christianisation’ and moral decline within society, particularly among the young people. Liddle (1996) observed that the editors of Media Dakwah listed Christians, the West (in particular the United States), Jews, and some liberal-modernist Indonesian Muslim thinkers (including the late Nurcholish Madjid and Indonesian fourth president Abdurrahman Wahid) as enemies of Islam. The editors also defined and promoted their prescriptions for how Muslims should practise their religion, and the best form of government for Muslims. They promoted the idea of the Islamic state, notwithstanding the fact that the subject of an Islamic state was taboo during the New Order era. The magazine presents a totalising, unitary Islamic ideology that has never attempted to portray diverse voices of Muslims and never intended to do so. During my fieldwork, I found that Media Dakwah was a template for some contemporary Islamic publications.

Another important Islamic publication is Republika, a daily newspaper founded by the politically moderate (or perhaps the less political) ICMI or Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association). ICMI was set up by Suharto in 1990, and chaired by Professor B.J. Habibie, whose Islamic credentials for the position were questioned. He was generally considered Suharto’s favourite minister at the time. Since the establishment of ICMI itself was a sign of Suharto’s rapprochement with Muslim communities, it was understandable that it was very easy to gain official permission to launch Republika. Hill (1994: 126) reports that the name Republika was given – or at least suggested – by none other than the President himself, indicating it possessed many more advantages
than other less-well-connected Islamic media organisations. Although Republika is quite acceptable to non-Muslims, the intention of ICMI was to produce a quality, explicitly Islamic newspaper equal to Kompas and Tempo. It covers ‘secular’ events and issues (unlike Media Dakwah) but with consciously Islamic values.

Republika clearly aimed at a readership consisting of the Muslim upper and middle classes, recognising that in the New Order era, many people belonging to these classes were not attracted to the kind of Islam offered by Media Dakwah and the like, but indeed wished to have a better political and economic system. ICMI also realised that previous Islamic media failed in the market for their lack of editorial cohesion, poor management, and inefficiency in marketing and distribution. These concerns, among others, made ICMI – which had some government officials in its upper ranks – bring some liberal intellectuals, Islamic experts, freethinking professors, independent-minded journalists and successful businesspersons from various backgrounds to the Republika board of editors and management (Hill 1994: 126-127; Hefner 1997; Watson 2006: 189). ICMI also co-sponsored the journal Ulumul Qur’an (Qur’anic Sciences) with the Institute for Religion and Philosophy Study. Ulumul Qur’an is a journal that has been touted as one of the most courageously experimental Islamic journals in the Muslim world (Hefner 1997) for its engagement with Western philosophy, feminism, pluralism, democracy and human rights, as well as Islamic philosophy. Nevertheless, the prominence of ICMI was not without dissenting opinion. The highly respected leader of NU at that time, Abdurrahman Wahid, criticised it as encouraging Muslims to be exclusive and as being part of Suharto’s political move to win the support of Muslims for his authoritarian government (Hefner 1997: 192).

The publishing house of Mizan has a similar background to Republika in that its founders were inspired by successful non-Islamic publishing houses – notably the Christian-owned Gramedia group, which publishes Kompas – but wanted to provide diverse Islamic ideas and a more balanced portrait of Muslim society. The influence of Salman Mosque of ITB – one of the places where I conducted my research – in the development of Mizan should not be overlooked. Salman Mosque was built at the end of the 1960s, and managed by an independent foundation whose members are mostly academic staff of ITB. Salman Mosque started to become not only a mosque, but also an Islamic movement when its activists introduced LMD or Latihan Mujahid Da’wah (Preacher Training) (Rosyad 2006: 33). The

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57 NU or Nahdlatul Ulama (The Awakening of The Islamic Scholars) is the biggest Muslim organisation in Indonesia. The self-proclaimed traditionalist Muslim organisation claims to have around forty million members.
training attracted many university students from other universities in Bandung as well as from other cities, such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Medan. Later, the students from other cities developed Islamic activities in their own campuses, similar to those introduced by Salman Mosque activists. After Salman Mosque became one of the starting points for Islamic revival among university students in the mid-1970s, there was a need to disseminate ideas and to establish networking with other campuses, and Salman Mosque student activists fulfilled this need by pioneering Pustaka, an Islamic student journal (Peeters 1998). The experience with Pustaka made one of its early editors, Haidar Bagir, who later joined the Republika editorial board, set up his own media business with the help of his former college fellows and his uncle, Ali Abdullah. Ali Abdullah was the owner of Al Maarif, the largest Islamic publisher in Indonesia at that time.

The success of Mizan, which was officially launched in 1983, eclipsed other competitors, including Al Maarif (Peeters 1998). The first book published by Mizan, Dialog Sunni-Syiah (The Dialogue of Sunni-Shia), received special attention from Muslim thinkers, since it reflected the growing interest in Shiism in Indonesia due to the Iranian Islamic Revolution. It delivered the ideas of Shia with an air of modernity. Mizan made an early impact by publishing new ideas from Indonesian Muslim modernist intellectuals who had engaged in the discourses of Islam during the 1980s and 1990s. It gave a clear image of Mizan as the publishing house whose potential market was the Muslim middle and upper classes, in particular academics. Watson (2005) notes that if we compare Mizan in the early period to the 2000s, we see that the later period saw the production of more diverse Islamic thought. More than half of its books are now not on Islamic issues, with the most successful being those related to education and family, and those of the self-help, self-improvement, success advice, or personal development genre.

Another book publisher worthy of mention is the Paramadina group, that also established a university (Paramadina University). The late Nurcholish Majid, a prominent Islamic thinker, founded the group in the later years of the 1980s. Paramadina’s books clearly reflect their liberal position. Their books mostly address Majid’s and his disciples’ thoughts, and discuss issues of relationship between Islam, modernity, and pluralism. Even though Paramadina’s books were well known among student activists in the 1990s, currently its books are not as popular as Mizan’s books. Nowadays, the name Paramadina is more associated with their tasawuf courses and the university, rather than being known as a publishing house.

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58 Most Indonesian Muslims belong to the Sunni tradition.
The success of Mizan, with its targeted audience, imaginative covers, magazine-quality print, and meticulous attention to editing, catalysed other media companies to develop Islamic print media that catered to perceived gaps in the Muslim market, though these competitors do not always share the middle ground Islamic ideology displayed by Mizan. One such publisher is Gema Insani Press, which promotes the works of many writers who oppose more moderate Islamic views, let alone liberal ideas (Watson 2005). They also publish books other than books that focus on textual and puritanical Islamic teaching – books on subjects such as computing, technical knowledge, management and professional behaviour. The strong appearance of Islamic publications in late twentieth and early twenty first century Indonesia is a significant feature of contemporary Indonesian society, with Islam becoming a major point of reference, although it has to be noted that rather than presenting a single face, Islamic publications portray diverse views.

Islamic Publications for Young People
Permata and Kailani (2010: 78) report that since the 1970s, Indonesian youth culture based on Western popular culture was promoted by teen magazines, popular novels and comics. Media for youth portrayed the problems and socio-cultural transformations experienced by urban youth, as well as issues of sexual desire, fashion, celebrities and film and music. Muslim activists regarded the emergence of Western-influenced media for youth as encouraging Western values and practices such as pre-marital sex, sexy fashions, drinking culture, and hedonism. Therefore, they started to produce Islamic popular culture in the form of nasyid music, magazines, books, comics, novels, and short stories as a means of da’wah in order to educate Muslim adolescents about Islamic teachings (Arnez 2009: 45; Kailani 2010: 79).

The first Islamic magazine for Indonesian young females was Annida (Peaceful Calling) that started publication in 1991. Before the appearance of Annida, during the period of the 1980s, non-Islamic magazines such as Hai, Gadis, Aneka and Anita were already widely circulated among young people.

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59 The name Annida itself was inspired by a verse from Al Qur’an: Call to your God’s way with a peaceful manner (Majalahannida.multiply.com).
60 According to Handajani (2005: 69-70), most of the young people’s magazines in Indonesia are for girls. Hai (Hi) is the only magazine for young males in Indonesia. It is similar in content to these girls’ magazines in that both are comparatively secular, but Handajani sees significant gendered differences between the girls’ magazines and Hai. Other magazines that have a significant number of young male readers specialise in particular genres: sport, technology, and cars/bikes.
Figure 3. Samples of Hai, Gadis, Aneka, and Anita

The teen magazine phenomenon worried some Muslims, who assumed that these magazines encouraged Indonesian young people to adopt a Western lifestyle, including sexy clothing and the practice of pre-marital sex (Kailani 2009:61). Started as a magazine for Muslim families, in its second volume, Annida became a magazine for Muslim women, with the tagline ‘Seruan Wanita Soleh’ (The Call of Pious Women) (Majalahannida.multiply.com). Two years after its establishment, Annida joined with an Islamic publishing house, Ummi Group Media. Then it focused on Islamic stories, and in 2000, it became a Muslim teenagers’ magazine, with the tagline, ‘Sahabat Remaja Berbagi Cerita’ (Teens’ Friend for Sharing

61 Currently Annida is only published in an online version. It has a print version, but only prints it on demand, citing as its reason that it wants to ‘go green’.

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Stories) which later changed to ‘Cerdas, Gaul, Syari’i’ (Smart, Trendy, Devout) (Annida-online.com). Thus, Annida was to provide young female Muslims with distinctively Islamic reading and to transmit da’wah messages.

Thus, Annida was to provide young female Muslims with distinctively Islamic reading and to transmit da’wah messages.

Now, Annida has another tagline, ‘Inspirasi Tak Bertepi’ (Never Ending Inspiration)

As far as I know, there is no self-titled Islamic young male magazine in Indonesia. However, there are a few Islamic magazines for young people that appear gender-neutral, but whose content is primarily for men, such as Elfato, Hero Magz and Al Qarim. The magazines have limited availability as they can only be found in Islamic bookstores and Islamic centres.
Early on, *Annida* was not really attractive to young people, but later on it became popular among young Muslim women. Currently, *Annida* always uses codes of contemporary young people sociability, particularly cool and trendy language (*bahasa gaul*), with terms like ‘*telmi*’ (*telat mikir* or slower thinking) and *jorki* (*jorok* or dirty). Kailani (2009: 63) argues that *Annida* is different to other young people’s magazines in that it combines Indonesian young people’s language with Arabic terms like ‘*jaiz*’ (*jaga izzah* or *jaga wibawa* or keep your dignity), ‘*syar’i and trendy*’ (devout and trendy), and ‘*haraki*’ (movement). The use of young people-friendly language and the moderate tone of the magazine separate *Annida* from Islamic hard-line magazines, such as *Sabili*, *Suara Hidayatullah*, and *Media Dakwah*.

The development of *Annida* has also been helped by the involvement of some Muslim activists, including Helvy Tiana Rosa and Asma Nadia. They founded Forum Lingkar Pena (Pen Circle Forum), an organisation that was very active in encouraging the production of Islamic literature and nurturing young Muslim writers. Apart from developing Islamic magazines, Muslim activists are also heavily involved in the development of Islamic teen reading that is dubbed ‘Islamic chick-lit’. Arnez (2009: 26) states that this genre refers to works that overtly display a didactic purpose, urging their readers to live according to Islamic principles, to stay away from wrongdoing, and to protect their souls from sin. Like Islamic magazines, Islamic novels and short stories employ friendly, colloquial language mixed with religious symbols. Their characters are models of modesty, chastity and benevolence. These Islamic novels are hugely popular. For example, the novel of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (*Verses of Love*) has been re-printed more than forty times (as of April 2012) since its initial publication in 2004, and more than one million copies have been sold.

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64 In an interview, Irfan, another founder of *Forum Lingkar Pena* and its former chairman, stated that the Forum was founded to nurture young Muslim writers, and to spread *da’wah* all over the country through writing. It is no wonder that Islamic teaching has become one of the main elements in FLP’s training. Unlike most literary communities, but similar to social/political organisations, it has a rigid and hierarchical structure, and branches in all provinces in Indonesia as well as in other countries, where there are a good number of Muslim Indonesian students such as in Egypt, USA, Japan, and Australia. FLP members have been able to capture a good market among modern Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, traditional Islamic boarding schools have generated their own literary communities, such as *Komunitas Mata Pena* (Eyes of the Pen Community).
Other novels like *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Chants) volume 1 and 2 (which became films) enjoyed a substantial readership as well. The author of these novels is Habiburahman El Shirazy, an alumnus of Al Azhar University and a former head of the branch of FLP or ForumLingkar Penai Egypt. The appearance of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* triggered the publication of numerous Islamic novels, such as *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman with a Turban, 2005), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Inside the Prayer Chamber of Love, 2007), *Kutemukan Engkau di Setiap Tahajudku* (I Found You in Every Midnight Prayer, 2007), *Misteri Subuh* (The Mystery of Morning Prayer, 2008) and *Kalam Cinta dari Tuhan* (The Word of Love from God, 2009). I have noticed that the novels were well received by young people in urban areas, as well as in rural areas, including among traditional pesantren (Islamic boarding school) students.

In Indonesia, it is usual that the different media are significantly interwoven and this is the case with Islamic literature and magazines too. Forum Lingkar Pena recommends its members publish their works not only on their own (if the work is a novel), in literary journals, and in collections of short stories, but also in Islamic magazines, including *Annida* and its Muslim female adult counterpart, *Ummi*.\(^6\) Helvy Tiana Rosa also invited readers of *Annida* to join with FLP if they wanted to develop their writing skills and to express their love of Islam. Muslim activists of FLP also established *Girliezone*, another Muslim young people’s magazine (Kailani, 2010: 84). Even though it does not use an Arabic name like *Annida* and it belongs to a different publisher, *Girliezone*’s cover and content are very similar to those of its predecessor.

\(^6\) *Ummi* has a mission to foster three gender constructions: devout women, mothers as agents of education, and obedient wives (Hamdani, 2007: 112).
Another female Muslim magazine, *Muslimah*, firstly appeared in 2002. Hamdani (2007: 112) states that even though *Muslimah* emerged because of commercial imperatives, its editor-in-chief stated that this magazine is an aspect of da’wah. *Ummi* and *Muslimah* feature Islamic short stories, and a few of these stories have been re-published as novels, either by the same publishing house or by others.

*Muslimah* belongs to Variapop Group, a media group that is owned by a Malaysian entrepreneur who also publishes a Muslim female magazine in Malaysia with the same title. The group also owns *Paras* (Appearance), a magazine that is similar to *Ummi*, and targets well-heeled adult female Muslims, and *Hidayah* (Blessing), an Islamic magazine that contains mystery and supernatural stories. It was rumoured that the Variapop Group also owned *Tabloid Pop*, a semi-porn magazine.
Sucessful Islamic novels like Ayat-Ayat Cinta, Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, Dalam Mihrab Cinta and Perempuan Berkalung Sorban have made their way into the cinema. The stories of Ketika Cinta Bertasbih also appeared on TV screen as sinetron (TV soap opera series) during 2009-10. Thus, Muslim activists have displayed their strong intention to promote Islam to young people through various media.

Islamic publications for young people, especially Islamic self-help books, have been trying to become distinctive publications. While the Islamic young people’s magazines, novels and short stories attempt to appeal as widely as possible to young people, their distinctive trait is adherence to Islamic teaching principles. For instance, the writers neither raise sexual relationships as a topic nor depict the attractiveness of female bodies. Similar characteristics can be found in the genre of Islamic self-help or personal development books. Even though these books address common problems faced by general adolescents (not only Muslims), they provide suggestions based on Islam and advise young people to be good Muslims in contemporary Indonesia (Kailani 2010: 85). Most self-help books share a similar style in their covers, with da’wah comics. Both Islamic self-help books and Islamic comic book publishers design covers that are as cool and trendy as possible. The style of the covers of Islamic personal development books and comic book illustrations resembles manga (Japanese comics).

![Figure 9. Samples of Indonesian Islamic comic books](image-url)
Figure 10. Sample of *manga* portraying a female character.

Seorang suster dapat menutup tubuhnya dari kepala hingga ujung kaki dalam rangka mengabdi pada Tuhannya. Tapi, jika seorang muslim melakukan yang sama, mengapa dia harus mengalami tekanan?

Figure 11. Sample of an Islamic comic portraying a Muslim female character. It says: A nun can cover her body from head to toe to serve her God. If a female Muslim does the same thing, why does she have to experience pressure?

Indonesian youth are already familiar with this comic genre. Similar to self-help books, the *da’wah* comics combine their illustrations with psychological advice blended with Islamic teachings that directly address problems experienced by young people.67

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67The development of Indonesian Islamic comic books can be traced back to as early as the 1960s (Soenarto 2009: 27). Soenarto (2009: 36) says that as there was no training in graphic design in those days, many comic illustrators were simply copying visuals from American superhero comic books, and
Self-Help Books in America and Islamic Self-Help Books in Indonesia

According to Campbell and Smith (2003: 177), in many cases, the term ‘self-help’ has been used as a synonym for ‘bibliotherapy’. In general, self-help books provide accounts of behavioural disorders in everyday terms, provide identification and empathy, generate hope and insight, and offer concrete advice and techniques to solve or ameliorate problems (Norcross 2000: 370). Wilson and Cash (2000: 120) argue that, every year, millions of people look to these books for advice, insight, and inspiration in solving their personal and interpersonal problems. They also state that the florescence of self-help and personal development books encouraging readers to ‘do it yourself’ began in the 1970s. Since then, such books have enjoyed a large readership in the USA, where the genre of self-help, personal development, self-improvement books, or success manuals is enormous. Despite their popularity, self-help books have been heavily criticised for their fundamental flaw of translating values from the world of industry to the intimate world of the private sphere (McGee 2005: 176). The values of industry, such as maximising profit, might not be appropriate for inter-personal relationships within family or between friends. Self-help books also offer their readers individual solutions when their problems are often social, economic, and political in origin (McGee 2005: 182). Since self-help book writers appear to assume that the self is increasingly isolated and that self-help is a largely individual effort, they deny their readers the opportunity to understand that their problems or losses are part of systematic social injustice. Thus, for example, within the discourse of self-help books, poverty is the result of the laziness and stupidity of individuals, and self-help books are there to help people not be lazy or stupid any more.

McGee (2005: 11) noted that the genre is a sector of the publishing industry in America that expanded dramatically in the final decade of the twentieth century. The themes of self-help books range from popular psychology, motivational training, and management advice, to personal success in business. Yet most of the books are similar in structure and convention, and many are similar in subject matter as well (Eaton 1981: 32 and Hilkey 1997: 13). Many of the books introduce their authors personally, and use certain conventions, such as the first person pronoun for the author and the second person for the reader, rhetorical questions,

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it was no wonder that in some comics, the facial features and muscled bodies of the prophets resembled those of Superman. *Manga*, which were translated into Indonesian and became very popular in Indonesia, also had a significant influence: after the 1990s, comic illustrators shifted their art style to that of Japanese comic books (Soenarto 2009: 65-66).

*Bibliotherapy, or reading for therapy, has been used as a therapeutic method since Ancient Greece to provide information, generate insight, stimulate discussion, create awareness and provide solutions (Campbell and Smith 2003: 178).*
exclamations and slang. These tactics are used to make readers accept that the authors know the problem well, but of course also know the solution better than the readers do; they also appear to establish a personal relationship between the author and the reader. McGee (2005:18) points out that almost all self-help books in her study define their readers as inadequate and offer themselves as the solution.

My brief literature survey found that many scholars associate these books with mental health and psychological issues rather than with morality and religion. Although McGee (2005: 5) argues that a tradition of writing self-improvement advice can be traced back to the introduction of Johannes Gutenberg’s Bible in 1456, the genre of self-help books actually came from the USA, with the 1870 publication of what Hilkey (1997: 3) calls ‘success manuals’, which were didactic, book-length works of non-fiction that promised to show how to find success in life. According to Lichterman (1992: 421), Hilkey (1997: 48), and McGee (2005: 17), self-help literature displays the distinctive character of American culture: self-invention, endless possibility, and personal material success. Simonds (1992: 4) argues that these cultural characteristics grew out of seventeenth century Puritan notions of self-improvement, Christian goodness, and otherworldly rewards. In times of despair, Americans turn to self-help books for inspiration, for specific advice on how to conduct their lives, and for reassurance in the face of major transformations (McGee, 2005: 17). Philip (2007: 3) notes that the self-help book genre is only one of many media producing self-help discourses; the others range from audiotapes, CD/VCDs, TV programmes, to government policy. Self-help book writers usually seek their sources from psychologists, as psychologists have increasingly assumed the vocation of guiding people in virtually all areas, from education to economic behaviour (Illouz 2008:51).

Although many writers link self-help advice with mental health and psychological issues, Johnson and Johnson (1998) found that explicitly religious mental health professionals recommended overtly religious self-help books to their clients. Hilkey (1997: 14) states that the link between self-help books and religion is so close that the success manuals are like the most serious and popular of all books, the Bible. Woodstock (2002: 48-49) adds that many self-help books have long been written by religious authorities, particularly in the form of a sub-genre of self-help literature, psycho-religious self-help books. Anker (1999) also wrote of how religious leaders advocate religiously themed self-help writings as one way to resist the challenge of secularism. Thus, the ‘triumph’ of secular, professional, mental health-based, self-help literature over the religious based-self-help manuals was only partial and short-lived.
In the light of the resurgence of religious fundamentalism in many parts of the world, traditional religious and moral values remain interwoven and highly influential in the genre of self-help books.

Some writers have criticised self-help books for being gender biased in their approach. Hilkey (1997: 3) states that success manuals that flourished in America from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century equated success with manhood. Self-improvement book writers depicted manhood not only as the means to success, but also as the success itself (Hilkey 1997: 5). Thus, the books not only excluded women but also implicitly associated failure with women. Failure to reach success became the loss of manhood. McGee (2005: 12-13) also acknowledges that self-improvement literature during the nineteenth century relied on the privileged positions afforded to men. The books tied the image of personal success to characteristics associated with masculinity: independence, strength, dominance, invulnerability, muscular vigour, and self-control over emotion (McGee 2005: 13). In a similar vein, Illouz (2008: 77) says that until the beginning of the twentieth century, American corporations required their employees to show impersonal self-control in a way that has always been viewed as typically male. This in turn discriminated against women, in making their ‘emotional’ style seem hysterical, and hence, unprofessional. However, the gender gap, in terms of emotional control, has been narrowing since the twentieth century, as managers have had to revise conservative definitions of masculinity, and incorporate so-called ‘feminine’ attributes, such as controlling negative emotions, paying attention to emotions, and listening to others sympathetically (Illouz 2008: 77-78). McGee (2005: 39-40) adds that within the genre of self-improvement, the notion that success in a career was relevant to women came from the 1960s, with the publication of Helen Gurley Brown’s Sex and the Single Life in 1962, and Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique in 1963. However, Simonds’ study of self-help literature in America (1992: 174-177) suggests that even though some contemporary self-help texts promised to help women, instead of urging social transformation, they ultimately ended up blaming women for their own problems as well as men’s problems.

McGee (2005: 59) discovered that there are two distinct traditions within the genre of self-help books or self-improvement literature: privileging emotion, as proposed by Anthony Robbins, and heralding the superiority of reason, planning and time management, as addressed by Stephen Covey. The works of both authors are widely known in Indonesia.
In Indonesia, the works of Robbins have been translated and published by some lesser-known publishing houses, such as Visi Media and Karisma. Covey’s Indonesian-version books have been published by giant publishing house, Gramedia. Most Islamic personal development literature I encountered was more in line with Covey’s main theme than Robbins’ approach. In Covey’s books, the central principle is developing a personal mission statement, and based on one’s mission, one navigates one’s course through the changing landscape of daily life (McGee 2005: 65). In implementing the mission statement, there is only one way: to structure every moment of the waking day. The self in Covey’s works is deeply embedded in a social world, always attempting to step outside of any immediate conflict in order to have ‘win-win solutions’ (McGee 2005: 69). I will show later how the Islamic self-improvement books resemble those of Stephen Covey.

The tenets of American self-help books are shared by almost all Islamic self-help books that I read. As with non-religious self-improvement books, Islamic personal development books emphasise how to make the self into a better person, and give practical and simple tips on life’s problems. Some self-improvement books provide advice to readers on how to be a successful person not only in their everyday life, but also in business activities. The sub-genre of success manuals in business also appears in the genre of Islamic self-help books. There are many Islamic self-help books that reveal how Muslims can achieve fortune in business without sacrificing their faith, and it is often because of their devotion to Islam that they will be able to succeed. During my fieldwork, I noted that, as was the case with general success manuals, manuals for success in business for Muslims were also on sale during Islamic
motivational speeches or seminars touring cities. Most of them were written by the speech-makers.

Currently, a visit to practically any bookstore in Indonesia would reveal an extensive section devoted to self-help books, many of them from America. Yet the shelves of the self-help section do not merely contain non-religious, Indonesian translations of American books. Rather, many of the books convey practical knowledge with religious teachings, or address day-to-day problems through religious guidance. One such title is the *La Tahzan* (Don’t be Sad) series, written by popular Saudi Arabian author, Aidh bin Abdullah al Qarni. Indonesia also does not lack of its own self-help writers. As with personal development literature in America, some Indonesian self-help writers, like Tung Desem Waringin, Mario Teguh, and Gde Prama, do not explicitly address religious teachings; instead, they offer universal moral values. Others offer visibly Islamic values. One example is Abdullah Gymnastiar, better known as Aa Gym (Aa literally means older brother), whose books, tele-preaching, and personality have attracted Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Hoesterey (2009) has labelled him not only as a self-help writer, but also as a self-help guru since his self-help advice has been marketed by numerous media, ranging from books, public sermons, motivational trainings and his regular column in newspapers, to radio and TV stations.

When I went on fieldwork, I attended the Islamic Book Fair held in March 2011 at Senayan Sports Hall Complex in Jakarta. The annual event was organized by IKAPI or Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia (Indonesian Publishers Association). The event had 80 exhibitors and was attended by at least 650,000 people.
Figure 13. Some stalls at the Islamic Book Fair

Similar fairs take place in other major cities across the country. Similar to last year, the 2011 book fair also hosted talk shows, book launchings, seminars, public sermons, and the screening of new Islamic films.
The 2011 event added an Islamic science festival to its agenda, with Professor Johannes Surya, Indonesia’s leading scientist, as its chief judge. One of the Islamic Science Festival organisers said to me that the fact that a non-Muslim led the judging panel of the Islamic Science Festival proved the inclusiveness of Islam.
Thus, as some informants told me, the burgeoning of Islamic book publishing, as exemplified by the Islamic Book Fair, should be considered as showing that Islam is not an exclusive religion, but rather the other way around, that Islam is rahmatan lil ‘alam (a blessing to the universe). Nevertheless, I argue that whether the growing number of Islamic books is a sign of inclusiveness or vice versa is better indicated by the discourses and ideologies revealed by the content of those books.

The books available in the festival had a wide range of themes, depending on the ideologies of their publishers. During my brief survey at the time, it was very easy to spot titles like *Beginilah Nabi Berwudhu* (This Is How the Prophet Cleaned His Body before Prayer), *Sunnah-Sunnah Yang Dilupakan* (The Prophet’s Forgotten Sayings and Actions), *Bagaimana Menerapkan Hukum Allah* (How to Implement God’s Laws) and *Dengan Al Qur’an Masuk Islamlah Mereka* (With The Qur’an One Can Enter Islam). All were published by one of the many new publishing houses, Darus Sunnah, but similar titles can be found in the lists of other Islamic publishers. Browsing through their summaries, introductions or conclusions, I concluded that the books delivered practical knowledge on how to implement Islamic principles properly in everyday life, precisely as the Prophet practised it. The themes of books published by prominent Islamic publishing house, Mizan, were much more diverse. They had Al Qur’an editions with exclusive covers, books of Islamic prayers and law as well as autobiographies of public figures such as former Indonesian president B.J Habibie and translated books such as *Masa Depan Islam* (The Future of Islam) written by John L. Esposito. Mizan has also published books on more secular, non-Islamic topics, ranging from health, education, politics, management, and tourism to biographies of American personalities like Justin Bieber and the late Steve Jobs.

FLP or Forum Lingkar Pena also had its own publications, and the themes were not only on Islam, but also on friendship, including titles such as *Best Friends Forever, Three Girls and Little Miss Perfect*, and on courtship, such as *Love in Rainy Days, A Message of Love and Facebook on Love*. Another important Islamic publisher present in the festival was LKiS or Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial (Institute for The Study of Islam and Society). It was established by university students in Yogyakarta in 1993 and was known as the publisher of progressive, left leaning Islamic books and ideologically linked to the ideas of former head of NU, Abdurrahman Wahid. Their list of books at the festival included *Kiri Islam* (The Left Wing

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69 Currently the Lingkar Pena (Pen Circle) Publishing House joins with the Mizan Group, a bigger Islamic media group.
70 These are their original titles (in English).
of Islam), *Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (Violence against Women), *Memilih Monogami: Pembacaan atas Al Qur’an dan Hadits Nabi* (Choosing Monogamy: The Reading of the Qur’an and the Sayings of the Prophet), and *Sejarah Berdarah Sekte Salafi dan Wahabi* (The Bloody History of Salafi and Wahabi Sects). Their books represent an orientation that puts them in opposition to fundamentalist-oriented publishers, and provide readers with an alternative reading of Islamic teachings. However, almost none of my informants were familiar with LKiS books, as the publisher had no specific titles for young people and my informants were more inclined to read books published by ForumLingkar Pena and the like. A friend of mine, a former member of LKiS, told me that he was once advised by a bookstore manager in Bandung that due to their content, LKiS’ books would not attract a good readership in this city.\(^{71}\)

Even though I found many new Islamic self-help books at the fair, I chose to analyse only those books my informants were currently reading or had read in the past. I did not have sufficient time and space to investigate how and in what period the genre of self-help books started to appear in Indonesia. However, I noted that the influx of advice books into bookstores in Indonesia started in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, there are no scholarly accounts of the ideological orientation of religious self-help books in Indonesia, and no research into whether consumers prefer religious self-help books to secular ones and, if so, how they employ those books to construct their identity. Even a proper study of the ‘secular’ self-help genre in Indonesia has yet to be undertaken.

**Discourses and Ideology of Islamic Self-Help Books**

In personal conversations with informants who read Islamic self-help books, I asked what titles they had purchased or borrowed from bookstalls. I bought some of those books, if such titles were still available on the market, and when they were not, I copied or borrowed them. Ranging across all the books I read, there were some prominent over-arching discourses that I explore in this section. I discovered an ideological similarity between what was revealed in the books and the ideology of a wider cultural-political movement called ‘Jamaah Tarbiyah’.

**Themes of Islamic Self-Help Books**

How a person can transform their self and be reborn as a better person ready for any challenge in the future is one of the recurrent themes found in Islamic self-help books.  

\(^{71}\) Recently, LKiS increased their effort to distribute their books in Bandung by being involved in book fairs held in the city, including in the Bandung Islamic Book Festival in May 2013.
my readings of Islamic self-help books, the discourse of transformation of the self was exemplified by *Change Now: Jurus Duahysat Muslim Huebat!* (Change Now: A Great Movement from A Great Muslim), published in 2010 by the Era Muslim group. The writer, Rahman Hanifan, suggests that Muslim young people leave behind any past wrongdoings and turn over a new leaf.

The author writes that as the contemporary period has always been marked by change and young people are the owners of the future, young people need to be alert and to make changes in their lives accordingly. As life is a kind of journey, everyone needs to have a direction. If young people wish to have success, they have to wake up from their ‘sleep’, transform their selves and do their best. If people want to live their life properly, they must know the purpose of their life and direct their life accordingly. The Al Qur’an has already spoken about the purpose of life for Muslims, and the Holy Book must, in the author’s words, guide any transformation they undertake.

![Figure 16. Cover of Change Now!](image)

The style of this picture resembles that of *manga* (Japanese comics). However, a blurred image of a mosque in the background signals to readers that what is inside is not a Japanese comic, but an Islamic book. The writing throughout the book clearly employs terms from *bahasa gaul* (cool language). These include such terms as *gw* (me), *loe* (you), *BeTe* (bad mood), *doi* (honey or cool guy; depending on the context), *geto* (indeed or just like that;
It is an example of how contemporary young people use standard language. They improvise on standard Indonesian to make a language as if it is their own.

According to Smith-Hefner (2003), bahasa gaul is a speech variety associated with Indonesian young people. It is based on Indonesia’s national language but at the same time borrows words from informal Indonesian speech forms and English. It expresses the particular concerns, preoccupations and aspirations of urban Indonesian young people. I argue that currently the use of bahasa gaul transcends speech, as so many books and magazines catering to young people and (mostly) authored by young people employ bahasa gaul in their writing. It is also important to note that bahasa gaul in Islamic self-help books also incorporates Arabic terms such as Insya Allah (God’s permission) and iqab (penalty), and sometimes mixes Arabic with Indonesian informal language like alhamdulillah banget (very thankful to God). The mixing of Indonesian with Arabic as well as English is one of many proofs that Indonesian young people’s culture has become inextricably linked with Western modernity (as symbolised by English language) and, at the same time, with the waves of Islamic resurgence.


If we go back to what the writer wrote in the back cover, he used two terms: huebat and duahsyat. In correct Indonesian, the writer should have written hebat and dahsyat (both mean great). However, Hanifan chose to add ‘u’ to the two words to strengthen the notion of hebat and dahsyat.
This book speaks about how humans, especially young people, are designed to be the ‘person of the future’ by God. The book concludes that young people should never stop trying to improve themselves. The author differentiates a ‘person of the past’ from a ‘person of the future’. The former is regarded as average, mediocre and always blaming other people when they encounter any difficulty. The latter has long-term goals for life, never complains about other people, maintains positive expectations about the future, and, most importantly, always tries to develop themselves. The writer exhorts young readers not to waste their time, to be positive about everything they encounter, and to make a simple plan that is easy to execute as a first step before making and executing a more complex plan. The notion of time management and careful steps bears a striking resemblance to Steven Covey’s time management system that specifies detailed instructions on how to schedule one’s time according to one’s specific roles and values (McGee 2005: 153). The notions that a ‘person of the past’ would blame other people and a ‘person of the future’ would look at him/herself whenever they encounter difficulties and disadvantages is akin to Simonds’ assertion (1992: 45) that many self-help books in America encourage self-blame.

Another discourse expressed in Islamic personal development books is how to be a distinctive and better Muslim. An Islamic self-help book written by Fadlan Al Ikhwani in 2009, *Let’s Go! Muslim Muda Berani Beda* (Let’s Go! Young Muslims Dare to be Different), conveys the discourse of encouraging every Muslim young person to be a distinctive person.

![Figure 18. Cover of Let’s Go!](image-url)
With a stylish front cover illustrating a young Muslim male skateboarding – a symbol of a Western lifestyle – in a mosque area, the writer overtly targets young readers. According to the writer, Fadlan Al Ikhwani, young people are full of energy and enthusiasm; it would be such a waste if these qualities could not be used for good. He suggests that being a different person is synonymous with being better than other persons. The writer also adds that to become a different person, Muslim young people must spend their spare time doing something useful for themselves and for their religion. The book recommends that Muslim young people commit to ‘small steps’ to make themselves better people, and different from others. Such steps could range from performing their prayers at least 5 times a day, making a plan and following it consistently, being systematic, and wearing the full veil (if a woman), to managing stress. The suggestion of such steps resembles Stephen Covey’s approach (1989: 169) that encourages his readers to ‘begin with the end in mind’ and introduces time management techniques that are based on a distinction between urgent/important and not-urgent/unimportant activities. The book not only uses Covey’s approach, it also quotes John Naisbitt’s Megatrend 2000 to argue that throughout the world, there is a tendency for ‘the loss of the soul’. The author states that God gave Muslims guidance on how to respond to this loss: praying as much as possible in every moment of spare time, not only when we need God’s answer to problems. It is as if the author has deployed Western discourses to reaffirm Islamic teaching.

The discourse of becoming a distinctive and better person has been furthered by a book titled Be PeDe, Please! (Be Confident, Please!). The book, written in 2010 by Fachmy Casofa, was published by one of the most popular Islamic publishing houses, Gema Insani Press.
From its front cover, where the physical features of the character once again resemble those of manga, one would not be surprised to know that the book was intended for female Muslim readers. Comparing Be PeDe, Please! with Let’s Go, one notices that a conventional gender bias has been maintained by the authors. The latter depicts a Muslim male in a sporting activity signifying males always being in an active role. The former depicts a female Muslim in a sitting pose as if a female is always demurely passive. The writer of Be PeDe, Please!, a male, suggests that the most worthy man to be loved by a Muslim woman is one who has dedicated his life to da’wah, since such a man would be able to guide her to being a better Muslim. This positions men as above – as better and more knowledgeable Muslims – than women. He advises readers that to be a distinctive and better person, a Muslim female should take care of her physical appearance, and that, for him, a fully veiled Muslim woman is certainly a distinctive and better person than an unveiled woman.

The book Beauty is Easy (2008) by Widiyah also makes beautifying the self a very important part of making a female Muslim distinctive.
The book describes how women could (or rather should) have beautiful eyes, hair, lips, skin, and hands, and make their body slimmer. The writer maintains that efforts to beautify parts of the body have to be understood as metaphors for efforts to beautify ‘inner parts’. For instance, she asserts that beautiful eyes can show an inner beauty and a great spirit, for others can recognise personality by looking through the eyes. Hence, it is important to keep eyes from looking at something useless, and not to use them for committing wrongdoings such as flirting. The book exemplifies what Carla Jones (2010: 92) calls the rise of the idea of ‘spiritual beauty’ that has been promoted by Islamic lifestyle and fashion media directed at pious Muslim women. This idea has gained popularity among Indonesian young people. The idea of ‘spiritual beauty’ is regarded as having a deeper meaning and being more compelling than its projected opposite, ‘secular beauty’ (Jones, C. 2010: 105).

**Islamic Self-Help Books and Governmentality**

If Islamic films can be categorised as a means for propagating Islamic values, can Islamic self-help books also be similarly categorised? Although I have suggested earlier that film is a better tool for propagating values than books, books can still have an important role in shaping and reshaping ideology. Jowett and Donnell (2012: 109) note that books have a significant role in the propagation and the construction of ideas and attitudes. They also recognise that, in many cases, the influence of books is beyond their actual readership, as contemporary media technology picks up and magnifies propagandistic messages made by books.
Here, I discuss self-help books as a technique of ‘governmentality’, a Foucauldian perspective, which I explored in Chapter One. Rimke (2000: 63) and Hazleden (2003: 414) argue that self-help advice contained in many media is a kind of governmentality that employs the ‘psy’ disciplines. It takes advantage of not only worldwide fascination with that body of knowledge, but also of the emergence of the global cultural trend of ‘psy’ expertise, as has been studied by Rose (1999). Through a plethora of media, including books, audio tapes, CDs, DVDs, newspapers, websites, radio, and TV, the ‘psy’ disciplines prescribe ways to shape and align ideals and aspirations of individuals and to align individuals with wider objectives such as consumption, marketability, efficiency, morality and social order. Hazleden (2003: 424-425) points out that self-help books present a “therapeutic discourse” that aims to construct an individual who commands technologies of the self, such as self-knowledge, self-determination and self-discipline. Nonetheless, self-help techniques provided by literature are a form of governance through which apparatuses of knowledge prescribe particular ways of life and living for all readers. Rimke (2000: 73) argues that all humans experience psychological problems at various levels, but with enough guidance offered by the self-help literature, they should be able to overcome their own problems. Eventually, the self-help literature promises, the techniques should produce citizens who are congruous with the society in which they live. Personal development literature also insists on the importance of technologies of the self to be learned by all individuals, as these are the best things for the self, as well as for the wider society.

Secular self-help books have been considered as a form of governmentality. Most of them constitute the self as the primary, sometimes the sole, site of therapeutic transformations on which the readers are enjoined to work (Hazleden 2003: 416). Self-nurturance is the work to be performed by readers in order to create a new pattern of behaviour and more disciplined emotional responses. Self-help books, in general, tell the readers that even one’s own moral compass is to be directed internally (Woodstock 2009: 176). Since secular self-help books in Western societies are in line with rationalities promoted in Western liberal democracies (Rimke 2000; Hazleden 2003), the individual is exalted over the social and there is no reference to an Ultimate Being (God). Even though the supremacy of self-knowledge can be seen in religious self-help books as well, the books always make clear that one cannot control the self without faith and without the guidance provided by religious authorities. Unlike the secular self-help books, religious self-help books identify the disjunction between readers and

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73 Rimke (2000: 63) describes the psy disciplines as possessing cultural authority as a form of expert knowledge. Thus, self-help is a logical extension of ‘psy’-oriented modern culture.
God as a pernicious problem; worldly complaints about the gulf are merely a consequence of the individual’s failure to bridge the gulf through faith (Woodstock 2002: 49). In religious self-improvement books, the call for self-reliance has been extended to include reliance on God: without faith, everything else is meaningless (Simonds 1992: 151). In Indonesia, self-help discourses summon both transnational pop psychology, that embraces self-love and self-nurturance, and Islamic doctrine, that shows the Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate moral exemplar of civic virtue and the model for Muslim cosmopolitanism (Hoesterey 2012: 39-41). Islamic self-help discourses in Indonesia have integrated Western psychology, stripped of its secular garb, with teachings from the Qur’an and stories of the Prophet (Hoesterey 2009: 54). Thus, Islamic self-help books have differences to secular self-help books, as well as similarities.

I follow Rose’s identification (1996) of four main human technologies of self-help discourses that are associated with psy expertise. They are: categorising subjectivities, measuring subjectivities, establishing ethical authority, and techniques of the self. I briefly draw on these categories to look at how psy expertise is employed in some Islamic self-help books.

Categorising subjectivities concerns the ways in which readers are clearly categorised. Some books utilise pop psychology terms, while others use overtly religious terms. The book *Upgrade Yourself* (2007) introduces the terms ‘quitter’, ‘camper’ and ‘climber’, and links these with individual achievement. The quitter is a person who always wants to relax and does not care about what s/he has to achieve. This category encompasses anyone who is lazy and is not willing to develop him/herself. The camper refers to the average person who wants to work, but not too hard, and does not want to achieve something better. The term climber describes a person who always wants to develop the self, who never stops learning and always wants to be better. Other examples of categorising subjectivities can be found in the books *Change Now!* (2010) and *Let’s Go!* (2009). The books extensively contrast *beriman* (the faithful) to *kafir* (infidel) to distance true Muslim young people from false ones. The faithful are the ones with ultimate commitment to God, while the infidels are the ones who do not show commitment to God. The infidels might be nominally Muslim, but they do not perform basic acts in Islam: prayers, alms giving, and fasting during the Ramadan month. The books do not mention the other two basic principles: *syahadat* (the declaration of faith inAllah and trust in the Prophet Muhammad) and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) as, presumably, the former is very hard to witness (people would only see the declaration when non-Muslims convert to Islam) and the later requires significant financial capacity to perform it.
Measuring subjectivities, the second technology used in Islamic self-help books, is closely linked to the first. It concerns how the readers are encouraged to measure and value their own behaviour, to see whether they belong to a certain category. Throughout the books, Muslim self-help authors describe both the messages of the Qur’an and Hadith and the findings of scientific studies. These descriptions are related to some aspect of personal success, health, or wellbeing. There are many examples, but here is one:

The Prophet has promised that if one wakes up at midnight to pray, one will be much fresher in the morning, be healthier than ever, and have the spirit to face any challenge during the day. This has been proven by research conducted by Mohammad Sholeh, a lecturer at Surabaya State Islamic Institute, for his doctorate in Medicine at the University of Surabaya. His research found that a Muslim who does the midnight prayer routinely and properly will be free from infection and cancer.

(Al Ikhwani 2009: 26)

In this example, Al Ikhwani provides the reader with information about how important the midnight prayer can be for readers. The prayer will not only enable one to belong to the category of true, virtuous, pious Muslims but also make him/her healthier, physically and psychologically. In Al Ikhwani’s book, the technology of measuring subjectivities consists of measuring the piety by encouraging the readers to undertake the prayer conduct timely and properly. The prayer conduct is significant to measure piety because it activates (and indexes) piety. The piety itself is an important aspect of Muslim readers’ subjectivity. The technology of measuring subjectivities is a part of what Rose (1996: 26) describes, following Foucault, as normalising or objectifying judgements.

The third technology used in Islamic self-help books, establishing ethical authority, relates to the way Muslim self-help authors’ advice is rendered not only technically authoritative and legitimate, but also ethical. The books offer their readers advice on a range of issues, including personal relationships, self-confidence, family matters, and love. When offering such advice, some writers present themselves as the neutral bearer of knowledge, either scientific or religious. They state literally that they do not want to prescribe what the readers should do as they just want to present scientific findings and religious messages, and let the readers make up their own minds about what is best for them. For instance, Hanifan (2010: 14) writes:

In this book, I do not want to tell you that you should be doing that or this. I just want to *ngobrol* (have an informal chat) about change. I share with you what I know from reading
some articles, books, and, of course, the Qur'an and Hadith. What you do with that depends on your own interests.

In this example, the author portrays himself as an expert, creating distance between himself and the reader in order to establish ethical authority. By merely encouraging readers to use the information from some recognised sources, he sets himself above them and “allows” them to determine what is most appropriate for them.

Other writers choose to convince their readers that their messages stem from their personal experiences, though they use both religious lessons and scholarly knowledge to describe their own personal journeys of redemption. For example, Widiyah (2009) wrote her own story about how she and her family managed to recover after her father’s company went bankrupt, due to betrayal by her father’s friend, and they had to sell almost everything they possessed to cover the debts. They had advice from their Islamic mentors and were motivated by the personal success stories of some famous public figures. She shares with the readers the lessons she learnt: that total submission to God will cool the soul and, subsequently, will encourage the readers’ to be much more creative in finding the way out of their problems.

The personal writing style of personal development books is in line with Simonds’ finding (1992: 121): current self-help literature has almost entirely departed from the purely professional and rather cold narrative style that characterised most self-help books before the 1980s. Woodstock (2009: 328) points out that personal experience, based on successful individual transformation, is one of the most central of the self-help authors’ claims to knowledge and ability to help readers. The claim allows authors to establish ethical authority. In turn, the ethical authority of self-help authors encourages readers to compare their own experiences with that of the authors, and to make a judgement about whether or not the lessons the authors learned would be valuable for them as well. To sum up, the technology allows Muslim self-help authors to present their advice as ethical, insofar as it is based on the best interests of the readers.

Muslim self-help writers promote various “technologies of the self”, Rose’s fourth technology, as a means to directly govern the individual’s conduct. All Muslim self-help books encourage the readers to attend to all the rituals required by Islam, including the ones that are not compulsory, such as the *dhuhoa* (pre-midday) and *tahajud* (midnight) prayers. In her book, Widiyah (2009) promotes some technologies of the self, notably being careful in whatever we say and how we should speak. Respect for the self would come out of what we say and how we say it. Another writer, Casofa (2010), states that a good female Muslim must
be mindful of her appearance and attitude. The good appearance and attitude of a female Muslim will impress other people. This will produce respect for the female Muslim. The emphasising of female appearance in many self-help books reveals gender bias approach by the authors. It is also in line with Simond’s observation (1992: 177) that self-help writers, who are often women themselves, usually maintain the prevalent patriarchal social structure. Hakim (2007), Al Ikhwan (2009), and Hanifan (2010) call upon the readers to improve themselves by making detailed plans for their lives. These plans must begin with basic and simple things, such as never give up, believe in yourself, improve the quality and the quantity of religious ritual, and beikhlas (sincere, but more profoundly, totally submit to God). In this example, psycho-religious expertise is grafted onto the individual’s ethical practices, so that the personal practice of a Muslim, such as praying, becomes the object of psycho-religious knowledge.

**Islamic Self-Help Books: A Cultural Wing of the Jemaah Tarbiyah Movement?**

I argue that the development of Islamic personal development books is part of a socio-religious movement in Indonesia called ‘Jemaah Tarbiyah’, encompassing not merely cultural and religious areas, but also the political sphere. It refers to activities in non IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, State Islamic Institute) or STAIN (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri, State Islamic College) higher education institutions where students organised extra-curricular subjects of Islamic studies, focussed on rituals, ethics, theology, law and politics. According to Jung (2009: 202), ‘tarbiyah’ (literally means education) refers to the entire process of education that should lead a person to be transformed to being a better Muslim. The word also represents a political agenda to build an Islamic society via an evolutionary process: nurturing individuals, forming families and then building a new generation of Muslims (Permata, 2010: 13). Kailani (2010: 72) argues that Jemaah Tarbiyah originated from da’wah activities conducted by the DDII or Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Proselytization Council), but it was modelled after Ikhwanul Muslimin, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt that was founded by Hasan Al Banna. The direct link of the Jemaah Tarbiyah movement in Indonesia to Ikhwanul Muslimin in Egypt is evident in the importance

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74 Syamsuri (2009: 99) argues that Ikhwanul Muslimin is one of the largest proselytising organisations in the world. It was founded in 1928, with a mere one hundred members in its early years, but currently it has followers in all the Arabian countries as well as in North Africa. Currently, it is also the largest political opposition organisation in many Arab states. The founder, Al Banna, was one of the first internationally influential figures who advocated Indonesian independence. In the 2011 parliamentary election in Egypt, the Freedom and Justice Party that was established by Ikhwanul Muslimin won the majority. In 2012, the Chairman of the Party, a leading member of Ikhwanul Muslimin, Muhammad Morsi, won the presidential election. Some of my informants, who are campus mosque activists, praised Morsi’s victory and condemned Egypt military coup d’état in July 2013.
of the thinking of Al Banna in the Jemaah Tarbiyah, including the great emphasis on personal piety and the forming of small groups of Muslim cadres (Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason 2008: 52-53). The linkage between Ikhwanul Muslim and Jemaah Tarbiyah is also clear, as the leaders of DDII were very active in disseminating the idea of ‘Islam kaffah’ (comprehensive Islam)\textsuperscript{75} a la Ikhwanul Muslimin, which became very popular among young Muslim activists on campus. Even though members of Jemaah Tarbiyah did not declare their links to Ikhwanul Muslimin, their Islamic training and religious orientation are very similar and they did not deny their association with Ikhwanul Muslimin (Machmudi 2006: 136).

The tarbiyah movement consists of liqa (small study groups) of campus-based, young, Muslim activists (Jung 2009: 201).\textsuperscript{76} It started as a largely clandestine organisation during the 1980s, but started to bring its activities into the open in the 1990s (Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason 2008: 53-54). Its activists founded Nurul Fikri, an organisation that offers study assistance to high school students in preparation for their enrolment test to gain entrance to university (Permata 2008: 25-26). Both Permata (2006: 26) and Jung (2009: 202) argue that after publicising their activities and recruiting more followers through Nurul Fikri and through Islamic magazines such as Sabili, Ummi, Saksi, and Tarbawi, young activists of tarbiyah started to flourish in and, to some extent, to dominate campuses by establishing KAMMI or Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (The Action Union of Indonesian Muslim Students).\textsuperscript{77} After 1994, to nurture political awareness among its members, Jemaah Tarbiyah held political education programmes by involving some notable scholars like Arbi Sanit and Deliar Noer (Jung 2009: 202).

When the Reform took place in Indonesia, former student activists affiliated to the tarbiyah movement, some of them holding university degrees from Western countries, established a new Islamic political party, the PK or Partai Keadilan (Justice Party) in 1998, which later

\textsuperscript{75}According to hardline Islamic groups, the term “Islam kaffah” refers to an obligation for Muslims to form Islamic government or an Islamic caliphate. However, to moderate groups, it refers to an obligation to obey legitimate government wherever they live.

\textsuperscript{76}Liqa is a small study group, consisting of 5 – 7 people; each group is supervised by a murrabbi (mentor). They study Islam together, and help each other, both in campus activities and in other aspects of each other’s lives.

\textsuperscript{77}KAMMI started as small groups in cities across Java in the 1990s, when I was an undergraduate student (1993-1999). I noticed that they had become larger by 1999, when I was in charge of the student legislative body. Three years later, I returned to campus as a lecturer and found that KAMMI members had occupied strategic positions on campus student bodies, including the head of the student executive body. Similar stories occurred in many campuses in Indonesia. I witnessed that KAMMI also played a very important part during the student rallies across the country during January – March 1998. President Suharto eventually stepped down after 32 years in power, although, in reality, this was more a result of political plots than of people power.
changed its name to PKS or Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party) in 2002 (Permata 2008: 26, 2010: 16-17; Jung 2009: 203). The PK and PKS enjoyed a sensational debut on the Indonesian political scene, as they were able to rank within the top ten political parties in three successive general elections: 1999, 2004 and 2009. PKS’ overt Islamic identity sparked controversy, and many political observers have commented that the party is part of a grand movement to promote a more literal understanding of Islam; some fear that in the end it will attempt to introduce sharia (Islamic law), something which is considered to contradict the plurality of Indonesian society. In contrast to other parties like PKB or Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party) and PAN or Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party), which – at least officially – did not have any relationship with the two biggest Muslim organisations in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah, PKS did not break its relationship with Jemaah Tarbiyah. One of the reasons is that Jemaah Tarbiyah is not a formal organisation, it is a movement, so nobody can actually establish any official link between the two, and at the same time, one cannot officially forbid any such association. Another factor is, as Jung (2009: 215) states, PKS needs to maintain its connection to young Muslim activists to maintain its sources of recruitment.

The tarbiyah movement has been not limited to the political sphere, as it also developed within the cultural arena. This is evident in the establishment of the literary organisation, FLP or Forum Lingkar Pena (Pen Circle Forum), as discussed above. It was founded by Helvy Tiana Rosa, Asma Nadia, and Mutmainah in 1997, with the aim of fostering interest among young Muslims in reading and writing (Arnez 2009: 48-49). In a conversation with Arnez (2009:51), Helvy Tiana Rosa stated that their activities were part of da’wah, spreading Islamic teachings through writing. Arnez (2009: 53-54) shows that the FLP has a strong link to PKS: the political party website has disseminated information about FLP’s publications and several blogs of FLP members admit that FLP was a wing of the PKS in the cultural sphere. Helvy Tiana Rosa and Izzatul Jannah (another founder of FLP) have pursued their political careers in PKS (Kailani 2008: 69). FLP’s ability to establish branches all over the country was due to the availability of the Jemaah Tarbiyah network that has been established since the 1990s. The connection between Islamic self-help books and the tarbiyah movement is quite strong, since many

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78 Shihab and Nugroho (2009: 235) wrote that in its official documentation, the party made a clear reference to the Masyumi party whose banning by President Sukarno prompted its leaders to form DDII. I have mentioned earlier that DDII members were very active in developing Jemaah Tarbiyah.
79 I have observed that actually only in a few cases were the PKS involved in the drafting of sharia-related local regulations. I agree with Jung (2002: 210) and Machmudi (2006: 191-201) that the PKS tends to let other parties initiate ‘Islamisation’, but they support in the background.
80 PKB and PAN were established by the late Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais respectively. Wahid was the head of NU, and Rais was the leader of Muhammadiyah.
Islamic personal development writers were nurtured by FLP over the years. For example, one of the most successful writers in the Islamic personal development genre, Salim A. Fillah, in a personal conversation, described how much he owed the FLP, in particular Helvy Tiana Rosa, as FLP helped him a lot in developing his writing skills and connecting him to some publishing houses. He also acknowledged that his connection with some former members of KAMMI enabled him to visit Perth for a month during Ramadan of 2011. Another writer from FLP, Rahman Hanifan, thanked his friends in the PKS in his acknowledgments page of Change Now (2009: 5).

The ideological links between the Islamic self-help books and the tarbiyah movement are also evident in the themes and language used in the books. The books are devoted to awakening individual religious awareness, rather than to pursuing issues in the jurisprudential sphere, thus their themes resemble the concerns of the tarbiyah movement. Machmudi (2006: 167) points out that the distinctive characteristics of the tarbiyah movement are its commitment above all to the totality of Islam, encompassing all aspects of human life, and its heavy emphasis on religious awareness. In responding to the issue of sharia, which the PKS has been accused of promoting, the party has worked to make sharia more applicable to everyday life and used the term da’wah instead of sharia. Certainly they have not abandoned sharia, but they have tried to avoid using that term. Similarly, Islamic personal development books address how to spiritualise all profane activities within the realm of Islamic values. The writings of Islamic self-help books emphasise individual virtue and purity, the practise of sharia in daily life (without necessarily saying it is sharia), and relating it to basic needs. The terms Islamic self-help book authors use in their works for mentioning colleagues are ikhwan (male) and akhwat (female): these terms are also used by PKS and other Jemaah Tarbiyah members (Machmudi 2006; Kailani 2009 and 2010). Whether the tarbiyah movement will succeed in developing sharia among young people through Islamic personal development books remains to be seen, and it is to the readers’ responses that I now turn. Certainly not all Muslim young people read these books, and of course some young people just like to read fiction, whether of the Islamic genre or otherwise.
Informants’ Responses to Islamic Self-Help Books

One of my informants, Fadli of Mathematics Education at UNJ, expressed his admiration for *Change Now*, one of the Islamic self-help books:

At first, I did not really care about this book. I thought that it would not be different from other teenage books. But when I browsed through it casually, I found it very interesting. It reminded me that a young man is an agent of change. Since I read it, I realized that we have a lot of opportunity and are full of fresh ideas. Why don’t we use these for the sake of ourselves and for other people? I noticed many Muslim young people look bored and disoriented. They have to wake up and change themselves, then together we can change the world. Otherwise, our crisis will be worsening, and we don’t want that to happen. The book should make us really recognise the importance of Islam to us. So, I really think young people must read this book and others alike it.

In his statement, Fadli shifted from using ‘saya’ (I) to ‘kita’ (we) and then ‘mereka’ (they). When he used ‘we’, it seems that he wanted to include his interlocutor into his discourse that young Muslims have a big potential as agents of change. However, then he shifted from ‘we’ to ‘they’ to distance good Muslims who have already woken up to change the world from not-so-good Muslims who have not yet been woken up.

From Fadli’s statement, it seems that the writer and the reader, Hanifan and Fadli, share the idea of ‘spiritual reform’: the idea that there are contemporary problems (‘our crisis’) facing Indonesia and that these will be worsened by unethical individual practices. When I asked Fadli about what kind of crisis he meant, he explained:

What I meant was that economic crisis. Poverty is everywhere and unemployment is rising.

But one of the main causes of economic crisis is moral crisis.

He spoke at length about how the practice of corruption, as part of the moral crisis, weakened the fundamentals of the economy in Indonesia. The antidote proposed by Islamic self-help gurus for economic and moral crisis in Indonesia is the reinvigoration of Islam by individuals (Rudnyckyj 2006: 3). As Fadli said, “If Muslims really follow the teachings of Islam, there will be no corruption and we can be much better in many aspects”. As noted for the self-help genre generally, there is an emphasis on the individual, when many problems in Indonesia, such as political instability and the earlier monetary crisis are large and abstract and it is difficult for most Indonesians to understand such complex phenomena. The idea that structural crises are rooted in morality makes them more understandable (Rudnyckyj 2006: 3), and potentially more amenable to the action of the individual. The emphasis on the individual is also a sign of the paramount importance of the self in the contemporary world.
Here the idea of spiritual reform that featured in the book *Change Now!* and in Fadli’s statement does not look far removed from the neo-liberal discourse of the self that has been addressed by American self-help books.

The theme of ‘change’ indicates that the self has to be conceived of as always evolving, or, in the words of Giddens (1991: 68), ‘we are of not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’. As I have noted above, Fadli also used the ‘we’ and ‘they’ instead of merely ‘I’. I asked him why he did not always use ‘I’ since the writer addressed the book to the individual by employing the word *loe* (you, singular) rather than *kalian* (you, plural). After a brief pause, he replied:

“No, I think he (the writer) actually meant all Muslims, because Islam always reminds us, that Muslims are brothers, whoever and wherever we are. So, if we find something good for Muslims, why not share it with other Muslims?”

Nilan (2008: 47) suggests that Indonesian young people derive pleasure from belonging to, and following, their siblings, cousins, and friends. This is also in line with what Hazleden (2003: 425) said about self-help books. He noted that these books permit and require a notion of social obligation, in that self-improvement is the right thing to take on, not only for the sake of oneself, but also for others and for wider society. In line with Stephen Covey’s discourse of self-embedded-in-a-social-world, the writer of the book *Change Now* may see this book as an effective way to introduce to Muslim young people the importance of reforming their selves as a collective, not as individuals, and transforming the world. However, looking at the discourses within the book *Change Now*, the importance of the collective is less than that of the individual. The attempts to harmonise the relationships between the individual and the collective merely serve to minimise or avoid conflict, not to pursue societal goals. After all, the focus of *Change Now* is on the self and its main discourse is how to advance the self, not society.

Yulia of UNJ, who is also a reader of *Change Now*, prefers *Upgrade Yourself*, because the latter is aimed at young adults, rather than teenagers.

I thought *Change Now* was not appropriate for university students like me. *Change Now* was just too ‘teeny’, too simple, and I didn’t really like the front cover as well as the content, as it was only for men. *Upgrade Yourself* is really for young people who are not teenagers anymore, but not yet adults either. Yes, the cover portrays a female, but the content is not just about women. It speaks about how young people need to realise that they are the

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81 I realise that the use of individual terms by a book’s author is mostly to make the messages of the book more personal, and hence, more appealing. However, I wanted to explore what my informant thought about the notion of the self in personal development books.
creatures of God, designated as future leaders. Thus, we have to assume our responsibility to help other people. The writer really encouraged us not to give up, to do everything with fun, keep our optimism, and always try to improve ourselves. I agree with the author that Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison and Michael Jackson are good examples as well as the Prophet and his companions.

Yulia’s reaffirmation of the stories of Western personalities in the book and hence, her reference to the West as good examples, seemed at odds with her criticism of a Western lifestyle. I asked her about why she agreed with the author of the book using examples of Western celebrities. She denied that the author only presented Western popular figures as examples—a point on which she was, on the whole, accurate.

No, the book does not only mention Western celebrities. He also narrates the stories of the Prophet’s companions. Why does he also tell the stories of Western celebrities? Well, I think it is because the book is intended not just for young Muslims who are already well versed about the Prophet and his companions. It is also for young Muslims who are not yet well informed about them, but more acquainted with a Western life-style. It is a clever strategy. And also, we have to admit, not everything that comes from the West is bad; in some cases, the West showed us something good. For example, how to be modern people in the global world.

As Nilan (2006) has observed, Muslim young people in Indonesia already practise a kind of hybrid culture where they eschew Western practices of rampant hedonism and free sex, but embrace the Western spirit of progress.

I asked an informant, Daryo, a student of Computer Science at ITB, why he felt that he needed to read the book Let’s Go. He said that, when he first encountered the book in his first year of undergraduate studies, he asked himself a question: “Is it important to be different? Muslims all over the world have been instructed by God to keep solidarity. Why do young Muslims have to be different?” He recounted the answers he found after reading the book:

“No, I understand, a good Muslim has to differentiate himself from a bad Muslim. The bad Muslim is one who is lazy, static, and pessimistic. Perhaps, people would say that those characteristics are not something extraordinary. If so, then a good Muslim has to be an extraordinary person. Why? Because we are young people, we are blessed with energy and spirit. Youth is the perfect time to start a change for the betterment of Muslim people, for a better world!”

Daryo considered the book extraordinary because it touched upon many daily problems experienced by young people. He valued Islamic self-help books more than Islamic stories, be they short stories or novels, because, in line with Simonds’ finding (1992: 45), the former
dealt with ‘reality’ as opposed to ‘the make-believe’ worlds offered by the latter. One of the most important daily life problems for him concerned love. As many forms of popular culture, ranging from TV programs, cinema, radio, magazines, through to advertisements, talk about love between men and women, he wondered how Islam viewed the issue. He found that love between the two sexes is not forbidden, and falling in love is natural. A good Muslim only needs to ensure that talking about love “makes our minds healthy (menyehatkan otak dan pikiran kita)”. To make the issue “healthy”, a good Muslim should pursue a love affair through the most appropriate channel for Muslims: marriage. Daryo thought that marriage was the most realistic answer to young Muslims’, or rather his, problems with love. Explaining why he thought that marriage as proposed by the book was the realistic answer, he noted:

Well, Muslims cannot date, can we? Going out with the girl we love will encourage us to do wrongdoings, sinful things. If we love someone, the best way to express our love while keeping us to our faith is proposing to her immediately. If she refuses, go... look for someone else. If we don’t want to lose her, according to this book, we can ask an ustadz (Islamic teacher) to propose to her on behalf of us, and go to her parents. I will do that. Please, pray for me.

Daryo’s answer seems to confirm Simonds’ statement (1992: 96) that the activity of reading self-help books is constructive, in the sense that it builds a realistic response to problems.

Anne, a student of Arabic Literature at UNJ, who has read Beauty is Easy, remarked that she well understands that inner beauty is an attribute people value more than outer (physical) appearance. Hence, a woman cannot abandon what she called ‘a common perception’ that being a female means being a beautiful human being:

I agree with the writer that maintaining our inner self is more important than going to a beauty parlour. It is better to be a pious and good woman though not so beautiful than to be a beautiful but evil woman. However, it is common for society to perceive women for our physicality at first sight. People in general, and our families, always expect us to be, at least, not a boring person, in terms of appearance. Of course not every woman is beautiful and attractive, but if we are well dressed people will be happy to see us. And I myself do not feel very comfortable if I meet someone without make-up and a proper dress. The book also stated that making other people happy would make us a beautiful person. I agree with the writer that beautifying ourselves is not really for us, but for others, to make them happy. If they’re happy, we’re happy too.

Anne’s fascination with the book confirms C. Jones’ observation (2010: 102) that Indonesian Muslim women are enthusiastic about the possibility of seeing themselves as both pious and attractive. Nonetheless, the book Beauty is Easy hardly leaves the impression that spiritual
efforts to beautify the self are more important than physical ones. Mia, of Physics Engineering at ITB, who also read the book *Beauty is Easy*, said that both ‘spiritual beauty’ and physical beauty are very important for Muslim women. This is her reason: “As a Muslim, we must show our piety; as a female, we must show our beauty”. Mia also said:

> It is a natural thing that women should take care of their physical appearance and be feminine. Those who do not conform to that norm, for example, a female smoker, would look odd.

Therefore, religious self-help books buttress the gender status quo; they can and often do reinforce patriarchal forms of social relations.

For some informants, Islamic self-help books were useful for two reasons. First, they served as templates for daily life, especially for Muslim young people in urban areas who, as they themselves admitted, felt they needed religious guidance. These young people saw Islamic personal development books as perfect guidance. Adam, a student of UNJ’s Department of Education in Social Sciences, recounted his experience when reading Islamic self-help books for the first time:

> I used to read novels and comics when I was in high school. Then I realised they gave me nothing – they are rubbish. It was quite embarrassing that I ever read them. Then fortunately, one of my seniors in UNJ introduced me to these good books to read. It gave a much better direction. Sometimes I cried when the books reminded me of how sinful I was. Of course, guidance from my mentors and ustaz is very important, but the books provided me with a simpler picture of how to implement Islam in daily life.

However, when I investigated this reason more, it appeared that the feeling of the need for religious guidance and the decision to read self-help books had not been self-determined. When I asked Adam and other informants why they thought they need religious guidance, most of them said they had been told so by either their parents, their Islamic mentors in high school, their informal Islamic teacher, or their senior colleagues in university. Lili of UNJ said that she felt that need after she attended a public sermon. Her reason for attending the sermon was actually only that she wanted to see Ustadz Jefri Al Bukhori, a good-looking actor and very popular preacher among Indonesian young people, who delivered the sermon. The decision to read self-help books was mostly based on recommendations from friends. The second reason of why Indonesian Muslim young people view the books as useful is that these books pose as a counter-balance to ‘secular’ self-help books. Here are remarks that support this insight:

> I read many secular books like *Chicken Soup for the Soul for Teenagers*. However, when I entered this campus I found that many friends of mine read other kinds of books: Islamic
self-help books. Then, after I read them, I found that they are much better than *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. *Chicken Soup* books only talked about love. Had they talked about love for our parents, it would be fine. However, they talked about male and female relationships as if that’s all that love was about. Islamic books I read mentioned the highest level of love, which is for Allah. Maybe we cannot have rewards here [in this world], but there will be in the hereafter. There were a lot of secular self-help books when I was in high school. Islamic books were also available, actually, but I have to admit, they were not too attractive to young readers. Now, *alhamduillah*, there are many Islamic self-help books available in bookstores, supermarkets and rental bookstalls. I really hope that they can counter-balance the secular self-help books and magazines that are introducing a Western lifestyle.

This view was echoed by Kris, a student of the Business and Management School at ITB, who, after she came to ITB, joined Karisma or Keluarga Remaja Islam Salman (Salman Mosque Muslim Adolescent Association), a Salman Mosque based-organisation. As she had not been a member of Unit Kerohanian Islam (Islamic Unit) when she was at high school, her reading of Islamic personal development books constituted one of several reasons that prompted her to join Karisma.

### The ‘Modified Appropriation’ of the Messages of Self-Help Books

Despite the apparent strong influence of Islamic self-help books to young people, they appropriated the messages of the books with some modifications. Their modified appropriation of the books can be explained with governmentality, a Foucauldian approach. Based on Clifford’s interpretation of Foucault’s works (2001: 101), governmentality refers to self-government: the ways individuals attend to themselves, conduct themselves, and govern themselves. In Chapter One, I have discussed how governmentality does not only shape and reshape subjectivity, but also identity. The discussion of how governmentality relates to identity, in this thesis, is more relevant than how it relates to subjectivity. Subjectivity refers to the more interior life of the individuals. Identity, partially, refers to how others ascribe certain categories to individuals. Governmentality relates to identity since governmentality also entails the process of what Foucault termed subjectivation. This process is the process to construct identity. In this process, individuals construct a particular identity for themselves through an appropriation of certain values, practices, regimes, and modes of comportment (Clifford 2001: 99). Here, Indonesian Muslim young people construct their identity by

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82 *Karisma* was the expansion of *Program Pembinaan Remaja* (Young People’s Education Program) offered by Salman Mosque activists. It was inspired by the success of the 1970s LMD or *Latihan Mujahid Dakwah* (Preacher Management Training) and the 1980s SII or *Studi Islam Intensif* (Intensive Islamic Study) that were both aimed at providing university students with Islamic mentoring groups. *Karisma* offered similar activities to junior and senior high school students (Rosyad 2006: 34).
appropriating certain ideas from Islamic self-help books, a form of governmentality. The author of the books may ascribe certain categories, offer advices, and encourage their Muslim readers to act upon themselves based on the categories and their advices. However my informants did not accept them all.

The advices that the books offered were often only partially remembered and accepted by readers. This partial acceptance was evident in the fact that most research participants struggled when I asked them to explain to me the detailed content of a particular book they liked. Yulia, after I showed her the book, *Change Now*, could only tell me the general theme:

> Of course, I read it until *khatam* (the end).\(^3\) I don’t remember the specific content of this book. But in general, this book is about the importance of change in our life. If we don’t change, we’re going to be swept away by the waves of change in this world. We also need to change because Muslims need to improve themselves in order to get God’s blessing.

Other informants had difficulty summarising even the general themes of the books. To help their memories, I presented them with some books that they said they had read. For instance, I showed Fandi the books *Change Now* and *Let’s Go*. After some moments of looking at the titles and skipping through the content, he could only make a brief statement:

> Now I can remember a bit about these books. I read these some months ago. It looks like the books are about the importance of improving ourselves.

Another informant, Bijak, had a difficulty in mentioning the books she remembered as being highly valuable for her:

> I read some of them, I can assure you... But I cannot remember which one was really important to me. They only left me with a little impression. They’re only suitable for high school students, not university students.

None of my informants said that Islamic self-help books for young adults are unimportant books. However, Islamic self-help reading, at least in the sub-genre of young adult literature, matters little for some of them. My informants did not precisely and entirely show the kind of Islamic identity the book authors wanted their readers to display.

Dean (2010: 43) argues that governmentality elicits, promotes, fosters, and attributes various capacities, qualities, and statuses to particular agents. Islamic self-help books have a partial success in terms of how Indonesian Muslim young adults experience themselves through capacities, quality, and statuses as elicited, promoted, fostered, and attributed by the books. The literature tells the young people to practise religious-cum-rational decision-making in

\(^3\)*Khatam* is an Arabic word usually used to describe when a Muslim has completed the reading of the Qur’an. Thus, there is a sense that the informant treated the self-help book as if it were a religious book.
their life (capacity), to be better and distinctive young people (quality), and to be part of the global ummah (status). Yulia’s comment below is an example of the common feeling among some of my informants that the books gave them an identity as Muslim young people:

Some of the books were really inspiring to me. After I read the books, I felt that I became a new Muslim. I thought I became more rational but I was still guided by Islamic teachings. And, now, I am also aware that there are other Muslims in the world who need our attention, particularly in Palestine and Kashmir. So, yes, in this sense, the books gave me the identity that makes me a better person.

Kris also confirmed literally that the books give him an identity as a Muslim young person. The books provide him with an unambiguous, clear direction about what he can and cannot do as a Muslim young adult:

Before I read this kind of book, I had no clear direction as a Muslim. Of course, I had had Islamic lessons at school, as well as from an informal Islamic teacher (guru ngaji) my parents sent me to. I could understand what they taught me, but it just did not really connect to my daily life. The books enlightened me while still connecting me to the reality of everyday life. I felt that, after reading the books, I gained my identity (identitas saya) as a Muslim. It is not only me. Some friends of mine also felt the same.

It looks as though Islamic self-help books were sometimes successful in transforming the readers and in producing Islamic subjects. However, as I have stated before, this was only a partial success. As with the response to Islamic films, the response of Muslim young people does not represent total acceptance of the governing power of the books over their conduct. Some books clearly directed the readers not to waste their time doing things that non-religious young people do in their daily life, and instead, to spend their spare time wisely by undertaking additional prayer and further religious studies. However, informants like Yulia, Kris, Daryo, Adam and others, who were fans of the self-help books, apparently did not follow that advice. They admitted that they frequented shopping malls, went to movie theatres to watch Western popular films, attended fan-meetings with famous artists, and got together with friends at popular open public spaces.

Some of my informants were critical of the books. They suggested that self-help books are mass-marketed commodities with repetitious messages. Okta said, “Some authors just try to emulate others, like Ustadz Jefri Al Bukhori, who has become successful with this kind of book”. San commented, “Some of the books have been written merely to be a hit on the market”. Ian also had a critical view: “If we took a number of these kinds of books and lined them up and took others, I don’t think we would find anything really new”. My informants’ statements refer to a phenomenon that is widely called ‘the commodification of Islam’. It
refers to the turning of Islam and its symbols into a commodity capable of being brought and sold for profit, and challenges the boundary between the sacred and the profane (Fealy 2008: 16-17). However, Hasan (2009: 242) contends that religious commodification should not be confused with commercialisation, as it is not only selling products, but also selling ideology. My informants’ comments are also more or less in line with McGee’s argument (2005: 22) that the reinvention of the self through self-help discourses and practices is perfectly suited to the advance of global capitalism, wherein individuals become a site of ongoing and tireless capitalist production. As Simonds succinctly wrote (1992: 114), capitalism promotes a focus on the self as a product that has to be reinvented with the aid of purchases, such as self-help books.

There is a hint that only a few points from the books that are truly important for my respondents’ daily lives. Here is Mia’s comment:

We might only get maybe one or two sentences out of one of these books, which really apply to us in a way so that we can say, ‘A-ha, this is it!’ And if we can apply this to our life, we’ve learned a great thing.

In this regard, Mia’s statement signals that the appropriation of self-help books among Indonesian Muslim young people complies with one of the common messages of the books that young people must select elements of Western culture that are good for them (harus menyeleksi mana yang baik mana yang tidak dari budaya Barat). Apparently, my informants apply the principle of selection not only to Western culture, but also to Islamic self-help books. If the selection of Western culture applied for its perceived negative effects, the selection of Islamic self-help books messages applied for its usefulness to their everyday life.

Simonds (1992: 112) also commented that self-help books often exemplify people’s desire to find easy answers to complicated problems. Irwan’s comment resembled Simonds’ statement: “I think the readers of this kind of book are simply looking for shortcuts that I don’t think exist”. Other informants, such as Fandi and Bijak, felt that the books sometimes were too simplistic or designed to be mostly for teenagers, not young adults. Fandi, a Geology student at ITB who had read five or six Islamic self-help books, said that he wanted ‘answers’ on a higher level, a more philosophical one, which were not provided by the books. Fandi’s desire for more sophisticated Islamic readings reflects a tendency among members of middle class who do not want merely to be entertained emotionally, but also to be stimulated cognitively.
Other informants argued that there are limitations to Islamic self-help books. Fandi, felt that while such books were certainly useful for mentoring teenagers, this was not the case for young adults:

Yes, I read some of them. Of course, I wouldn’t say they’re useless. But isn’t it already too late to wake them up (to the realization that they’re Muslims)? Young adults like us, university students, already have our own perspectives and attitudes. We need to read books that are more serious. For example, *Sirrah Nabawiyah* [The Stories of the Prophet]. Indeed, not all of us like to read those books, but here we have a mentoring programme and *ustadz*. They are clearly much better sources to teach about Islam than those kinds of books (the self-help genre). These books are only useful for teenagers from junior to high school, not for us.

He suggested that conventional methods of Islamic teaching were much better channels of delivery for university students than personal development books. Another informant belonging to the Management Department at UNJ, Bijak, valued Islamic self-help books less than other Islamic books. The former lacked depth, in her view; they were only for those whose with limited Islamic knowledge:

Sure, I read them. But I think people who already have a relatively good understanding of Islam would not find them very interesting. They, including myself, need to read books that are more serious. However, those kinds of books can be handy when we conduct our mentoring programme. This programme is addressed to our little brothers and sisters [high school students], so from these books we can give them more practical and easy-to-understand guidance. They could not easily understand books concerning Islamic law, for example. But the self-help books are very practical and help them a lot.

To these university students, the self-help books were mainly useful for high-school students who were the targets of the *Karisma* mentoring programmes. Self-help books, according to Bijak, would also be useful for first-year undergraduate students.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how Islamic self-help books in Indonesia resemble Japanese comic books in their covers and replicate American self-help books in their content, though mixing with Islamic teachings to produce a hybrid. The discourse of the self-help books resonates with the increasingly prominent contemporary Islamic movement in Indonesia. The movement, to which many Islamic self-help writers belong, promotes the application of *sharia* in the daily life of Indonesian Muslims, particularly young people, without necessarily labelling it as *sharia*. The publication of Islamic self-help books – many of which have been
written by FLP members—serves the movement’s purpose of performing *da’wah* through writing.

In the light of the approaches of Giddens (1979) and Ortner (2006), we can conclude that Indonesian Muslim young people are not totally subjected to the power of soul governance of the Islamic self-help books. Young people do not entirely conform to the books’ prescriptions for young people’s identity. In Giddens’ terminology (1979: 5), Indonesian Muslim young people are social agents who have knowledge about the social system in which they belong and act to not only reproduce the system, but also modify the system according to their needs. Lichterman (1992) has conducted one of the few studies undertaken on the readership of self-help books. It was found that readers engage with such discourses with ambivalence, adopting the advice given in the books loosely, tentatively, and without enduring conviction (Lichterman 1992: 422-426). This was also the case with my informants. Through a strategy that I call modified appropriation, they did not deny the importance of the books as easily digestible material for those who need them, nor abandon them; what they did do, was adapt the advice from the books into their lives loosely and selectively. Generally, they thought that their self-help reading had helped them to improvise ways of improving their daily life. The next chapter discusses the significance of Islamic popular culture, in particular films and self-help books, in constructing the identity of Indonesian Muslim young people.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
THE INFLUENCE OF FILMS AND SELF-HELP BOOKS
IN THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIM YOUTH

Introduction

In previous chapters, I have discussed Islamic films and self-help books, their discourses and ideologies, and how my informants interpreted them. This chapter deals with how my research participants identify themselves and the influence of the two forms of Islamic popular culture on their identity construction.

Identity, Islamic Resurgence, and Media Technology

In my research, informants who watched Islamic films and/or read Islamic self-help books, identify themselves as modern Muslims. Even though most of them use the teachings of Islam as their main guidance in daily life, they do not feel that they belong to any neo-fundamentalist camp. This is exemplified by a statement from Susan of Accounting at UNJ:

I consider myself a devout Muslim; at least, that is what I am trying to be. I make Islam the most important point of reference in my life. Whenever I have to make a decision, I turn to Islamic teachings. But I am not a radical Muslim. I do not agree with people who commit terror and say that it is *jihad* (sacred war). It is not *jihad* at all. I also do not like groups like the FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) that make so many disturbances in the name of Islam.

Iin, of the Chemical Department at ITB, who was a passionate consumer of gadgets, also identified herself as a devout Muslim. But she felt that she had not yet gone far enough to be categorised as ‘a very good Muslim’.

I am a devout Muslim. I pray five times every day, fast during Ramadan and sometimes in other months, give alms, and, hopefully, one day I can go to Mecca to perform the hajj. But I am not yet a very good Muslim. Sometimes, I forget to do *shalat sunnah* (non-mandatory praying) due to my study commitments. I should have better time management. A good Muslim should also help fellow Muslims in many things. This is something I haven’t done yet.

By identifying her own weaknesses, it seems that Iin has put self-reflection as one of the signs of a good Muslim as well as a modern young people. In the words of Giddens (1991: 35), self-reflexivity is a characteristic of all humans who live in the modern world and is an intrinsic component of modernity.
I found that Indonesian Muslim youth were aware of the categorisation of neo-fundamentalism being put forward by Western media and intellectuals to conceptualise the increasing sense of Islamisation in Indonesia. Yet they felt free of such labelling, as they perceived themselves as neither radical Muslims nor Westernised youths. Aga, a student of Geodesy at ITB, explained to me about such labelling and his rejection of that label:

> From what I read, I know that some Western people would think that the appearance of the signs of Islam everywhere in Indonesia means the emergence of what they called neo-fundamentalism. If they do really think that, they are ignorant. They do not see that Indonesians have always been a religious society. This is quite annoying. But we should not be bothered by their opinions. Other Western people might think, because some Indonesians choose to live their lives like Western youth, it means Indonesians are being Westernised. Well, perhaps it is partly true. But, from what I see, there are still many young men who adhere to their religion.

Muslim youth could not be said to be uninfluenced by the global waves of Islamisation as one of their point of references in constructing their identity. Hasan (2010: 52) argues that the Islamisation of Indonesian university students that started in the 1990s coincided with the spread of global Islamic revival messages, which revolved around the slogan ‘Islam *huwwa il-hal*’ (Islam is the solution). Haz, of Industrial Engineering at ITB, stated that all over the world there is a resurgence of Islam, and this resurgence makes many young people aware of the importance of Islam.

When you look at a country like Turkey, for example, although it is a secular state, young people there are very Islamic. In Malaysia, Muslim youth prefer to listen to *nasyid* (Islamic chants) than to Western songs. Those are good things since non-Islamic culture could make young people forget about Allah. So, if in Indonesia, Muslim young people start to choose Islamic pop culture, it has to be praised; Islamic-nuanced popular culture can give us ‘spiritual freshness’ (*kesegaran rohani*). Of course, as contemporary young people, we cannot get away from modern progress that is, indeed, promoted by the West. It is compulsory for Muslims to advance our knowledge, to pursue a good career and to develop our beloved country. But we cannot turn away from Islam.

My informants’ comments reflect awareness that the outsiders, in particular the West, may ascribe a particular identity to Muslim societies. However, they realised that Muslim youth should be able to construct their own identity. It reminds me of Moya’s theory (2006: 97) that, as there are subjective components of identities as well as ascriptive components, identities emerge from the dynamic interweaving of how others identify subjects and how subject identity them. Thus, it makes Indonesian Muslim young people identity non-essential and evolving. An understanding of this identity needs a realist perspective.
A realist perspective upon identity as proposed by Moya (2006: 98) would suggest that the double identity, as both Muslim and modern youth, should not be reduced to, and should not be reducible to any single category. Yet, there are signs that the identity of Muslim young people in Indonesia is not merely a double identity, but also a hybrid identity. A double identity suggests that they are able to become both modern and Muslim. Even though the basic meaning of ‘hybridity’ – the cross breeding of species – is relatively similar to ‘double’, Indonesian Muslim youth identity is more than double as it offers a new kind of identity. Bhabha (1990: 211) remarks that hybridity is the ‘third space’ that enables other positions to emerge. The identity of Indonesian Muslim young people suggests the emergence of a new modernity among Muslims: that becoming modern pious youths amidst the wave of Westernised globalisation and the surge of Islamic revivalism is possible. Besley (2009: 199) wrote that contemporary youth find their identities in the globalised marketplace, rather than in traditional sources such as the family, church, school that comprise a locality. In my thesis, young people find their identities in the Islamised popular culture which is linked to another kind of globalization, the globalised Islamic resurgence. The existence of this hybrid identity also resonates with Brenner’s argument (2011: 229) that, among Indonesian Muslim youngsters, there is a search for an alternative to the dry, didactic tones of Islam that have been offered up in the media. They also seek an alternative to the heavily Westernised lifestyle that have been the most common fare in youth-oriented media.

I argue that the process of constructing Islamic identity among contemporary Indonesian Muslim youths can be categorised as ‘project identity’ (Castells 1997: 7-8; as discussed in Chapter 1) in terms of how this process encourages agency. This kind of identity is established by social actors who attempt to redefine their position within society, and to transform the social structure. In this thesis, based on their new cultural references, including Islamic films and Islamic self-help books, we have seen how Indonesian Muslim youth attempt to redefine themselves amidst two contrasting trends: Westernisation and Islamisation. There are many concerns among parents, religious figures, scholars, and politicians that Indonesian youth are beings educed by the lure of Westernisation – so there are many efforts to Islamise young people. However, there is also a fear that Indonesian youth can too easily become a target for Islamic radicalisation. The way Indonesian Muslim young people incorporate elements of inspiration provided by Islamic films and self-help books is a part of project identity where Indonesian Muslim youths try not to become either of the two extremes (Westernised or Islamist young people). The endeavour of Indonesian Muslim young people may not go as far as transforming social structures, as suggested by
Castells’ theory. Yet, their modified appropriation of the values in Islamic films and self-help books is a challenge to the prevalent discourses that locate young people as mere objects of popular culture and as easy targets for Islamisation. The challenge to the prevalent discourses is evident in how my informants selectively adopt Islamic values, in their keenness to display their identity as Muslims through consumption of Islamic symbols, and in their awareness of the significance to display their identity.

As I mentioned earlier, when I asked my informants about why it is so important to show their identity as Muslims, most of them referred to the emergence of the global *ummah*. What they meant by this is the increasing consciousness of being Muslim all over the world. In the words of Gea, of Computer Engineering at ITB, Muslims all over the world ‘share relatively similar experiences’. Fajri, of Biology at UNJ, furthered this statement by highlighting the importance of showing to the world the identity of being Muslim. She asserted that:

> I read that the works of great Muslim scholars in the past have greatly contributed to the progress of modern civilisation. That’s why we don’t have to be hesitant and reluctant to let other people know that we are Muslims. We have to be proud! And as young Muslims, we have to take the initiative in developing an Islamic identity. It’s more important if you live in another country where Muslims are a minority. You must want people there to respect you as Muslims, right? Otherwise, you wouldn’t get what you need as a Muslim. Now, Muslims all over the world start to present their Muslim-ness. In the past, not many people were brave enough to do so.

Fajri’s statement shows that for Muslim youth, regardless of their place, it is important to form a distinctive identity as Muslims. In Muslim majority countries, young people shape their own identities, form communities, and take action around social issues; in Europe and North America, Muslim youth also form identities at least partly as a response to belonging to a minority group in the context of public debates and policies (Herrera and Bayat 2010: 358-360). There are many reports about the increase in the number of Muslim converts in some non-Muslim countries, the increase in the number of mosques, the rapid spread of books on Islam all over the world, the reception by the global market system of Islamic financial institutions, the increase in the number of those who wear Muslim dress, both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries, and so forth (Hilmy 2010: 225). The increase is due to how Muslims all over the world can easily access global information via media technologies.
I discussed in Chapter Four that one of the reasons Indonesian Muslim youth are so well informed about the global phenomenon of Islamic identity is the availability of numerous media technologies. An informant, Ian of Marine Science at ITB, said:

My mentor from the third grade said that in the West a lot of people converted to Islam. This is not something I only know about from other people. I read it myself in some websites. It is strange if we, Indonesian Muslims, who live in a country where Muslims are the majority, do not embrace Islam thoroughly and apply it in every aspect in our life.

The importance of media technology in helping Muslim youth to develop their Islamic sensibility was also described by Fajri of UNJ. Earlier, in the paragraph above, she spoke about the need to assert Islamic identity. I queried whether Fajri’s notion of maintaining Islamic identity means that Muslim youth merely inherit knowledge about Islam from their parents. When I asked her about this, she replied:

We do not just learn from our parents. I myself also learn from other people, including seniors and preachers. Sometimes, their answers to some questions still did not satisfy me. In that case, I tried to find the answer in books, or in the Internet. Of course, I did not take the answer for granted. I would discuss it further with my friends, seniors, or ustadz (Islamic teacher).

Fajri’s answer implies that Muslim youth are not passive. It also confirms Naafs’ statement (2010: 353) that, by utilising new technologies, Indonesian Muslim young people actively search for alternatives in the process of negotiating how to be young and Muslim in contemporary Indonesia.

One important feature of being a good young Muslim is the importance of having particular ‘Islamic manners’. Puji of Economics at UNJ told me that a good Muslim must possess certain characteristics, as exemplified by the characters in Islamic films:

If we want to know whether he or she is a good Muslim or not, just have a look at how they behave. He or she should always remain calm and answer any questions with smile. If there’s any issue, he or she must respond to it gently, just like Fachri and Aisha in Ayat-Ayat Cinta or Furqon and Anna in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih.

Furthermore Puji explained that when he was at high school, he was far from calm and could be quick to anger, especially whenever there was an issue that he deemed offensive to Islam.

When there were issues I felt offensive to Islam, I would respond angrily. Islam is my religion, how would I not defend it? But now, I can keep my head clear and cool on any Islamic issues. Being angry will not solve any problems.

Even though his transformation to being much cooler started by attending Islamic lessons in the Salman Mosque, he felt that the characters in Islamic films were very compelling and helped to reshape his emotional responses. All other informants who watched the films felt
that the manners of the characters in the Islamic films were role models for Muslim youngsters in Indonesia. However, as I described in Chapter Five, even though characters in Islamic films can be good role models for Muslim young people, some of my research participants felt that they were too perfect and in reality, people like that could not exist. In the case of Islamic self-help books, authors also tried to convince their readers that one must possess Islamic manners as described in their books. My informants who read those books agreed that the books offered them a detailed description of a ‘true Muslim’. However, some of them felt that the descriptions in the books were ‘too ideal’, and hence, not really applicable in everyday life. Mia’s statement is an example of this:

I agree that the books offer us a description of the characters of good Muslims. However, I felt that they’re not that real. It’s too difficult to apply them in our life.

Okta stated that Muslim young people do not really need to read the books if they want to be good Muslims:

Yes, the books offer us good advice. But, I don’t think we need them to be good Muslims. As long as we know what is good for us, what is not good for us, follow a basic Islamic rule, that’s enough!

My research participants’ responses confirm my view that despite Muslim young people’s acknowledgment of the importance of having Islamic manners, they did not think the examples of Islamic manners in the films and books were applicable in their daily lives.

What is the term that best captures the response of Muslim youngsters to Islamic identity propagation by Islamic films? Bayat (2010: 36) introduced the term ‘subversive accommodation’ to describe the utilisation of the prevailing norms and institutions by Muslim youth in Iran to accommodate their claims. In doing so, they redefined and subverted codes and norms that constrained them in asserting their youthfulness. Certainly, the context within which the term ‘subversive accommodation’ was coined by Bayat is different to the context of my research. In Bayat’s study, the norms and institutions are authorities limiting the youth from freely expressing their identity. In attempting to construct their youthfulness, young people in Iran did not challenge the existing structural and cultural barriers, but rather accepted and, at the same time, modified them. For example, the young in Iran turned a highly religious occasion for Shia followers, the ritual of Muharram (the mourning of the death of Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad), into an evening of glamour, fun and sociability (Bayat 2010: 36). In my research, the informants had relatively similar responses to Islamic films. They did not challenge a version of interpretation (that has been revealed in the films) that Islam supports polygamous relationships. However, they did not follow all values that have been offered by Islamic films.

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Even though Islamic films and self-help books propagate a particular Islamic ideology and offer moral prescriptions to the youth, there is no obligation on the part of youth to adhere. For my informants, the intention of the authors of Islamic novels and film directors to propagate Islamic principles is crystal clear and my informants could sense their powerful messages. As I discuss in the previous chapter, in particular when I investigate Islamic self-help books, I call my informants’ response ‘modified appropriation’: they accepted and appropriated some of the messages, but modified others. A common expression among my informants was: “Kita sendiri yang harus memilih mana yang tepat mana yang enggak” (We ourselves must choose which is appropriate for us and which is not). For instance, my informants agreed on the importance of veil-wearing for women, but some argued that the most important part to be covered is the heart, not the body. Although they accepted that courtship should be pursued according to the principles of Islamic teaching, no one wanted to marry solely based on piety. Most of them have a boy/girlfriend, something that is explicitly prohibited, according to the films they watched. They were learning, or, at least, were keen to learn, Arabic, but are motivated by the trendiness of Arabic, not by religious imperative as in the films.

There is one question that needs to be answered at this point: did young Muslims take for granted the kind of identity and the version of Islam promoted by Islamic films and the self-help books? To what extent were they affected by the films and the self-help books, or were they affected at all? My research proved that while Islamic films and self-help books promoted a particular Islamic identity and Muslim youth made them into an important reference against which to construct their own identity, the identity that my informants currently construct is not exactly the same as that propagated by the films and the self-help books.

Identity and Modified Appropriation

There are some particular characteristics of Islamic identity displayed in the films, particularly in Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, as well as in the books. First, in the films, all female Muslim characters wear the veil, except Eliana in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, who only takes up the veil in the last scene. In the self-help books, when the cover portrays a Muslim female, she always wears the veil. When the books mention Muslim women, there is always a suggestion that wearing the veil is one of the criteria for being a good Muslim woman. The films and the books reinforce the prevalent idea that being a female Muslim entails wearing
Almost all research participants agree that a female Muslim should cover her body and, in the contemporary Islamic setting, that means wearing the veil. The practice of wearing the veil is popular among university students, and this is not a surprise given that it was university students who started the phenomenon of veiling in Indonesia in the 1990s (Van Wichelen 2007: 97). However, an informant, Ary, of UNJ, told me that ‘menjilbabai hati lebih penting daripada menjilbabai tubuh’ (veiling the heart is more important than veiling the body). In his reply to my further question of what he meant by ‘veiling the heart’, Ary said that someone would be valued as a good person on the basis of his/her kindness much more than on the basis of what he/she wears. Kindness will be reflected in attitude, behaviour, disposition, character and manner. Ary said that if a veiled woman could not behave modestly, then a non-veiled woman who behaves modestly is a better one. Anne, also of UNJ, pointed out another interpretation of the Qur’an: that actually what Islam meant was not exactly that one must wear a tight veil, but instead one should wear modest dress, which depends on circumstance and culture. Her statement resembles Hamdani’s argument (2007: 76) that the standard of modesty in the case of Islamic attire is different from one culture to another, even though the idea of covering certain parts of the body might be universal. Although Anne wore the veil, she did not think that she stood on higher moral ground than her non-veiled fellow Muslims.

A second characteristic of Islamic identity is that all aspects of life should be dedicated to the worship of God. All actions by a good Muslim should be directed toward the Almighty, including private aspects, such as love and marriage. Therefore, the conduct of love and marriage should be pursued through religious guidance. I explained in Chapter Five how the films show the audience how to pursue a proper relationship between man and woman by Islamic principles. All informants agree that their entire life should be dedicated to worshipping God. Smith-Hefner’s study (2006: 147) found that although currently many Indonesian youth postpone marriage, they have not abandoned marriage and still plan to marry, since marriage remains a religious, as well as a social, imperative. Yet, my research participants did not apply all principles introduced in the films. Some of the participants did

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Some Muslim thinkers debate the notion that a female Muslim must wear the veil. According to a renowned Indonesian Muslim thinker, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, in a personal conversation, the Qur’an actually says that all Muslims (not only women) must wear modest dress according to local norms. In the Arab Peninsula during the period of the Prophet Muhammad, the veil was a modest dress for women, and also the most appropriate dress in regard to the circumstances of the desert. It is fine if a non-Arab woman chooses to wear the veil as long as it is a voluntary act, not a decision enforced by others. Other Muslim scholars agree that veiling is a continuation of regional customs, practised by women in Arabia during the early period of Islam, that has mistakenly become enshrined as a religious edict (Mahmood 2005: 51).
not apply the principle of avoiding physically touching people of the opposite sex; none of them wanted to marry without dating. Haz said to me that since he joined Islamic unit at high school, he has greeted his female colleagues by putting his hands in front of his chest, instead of shaking hands, a move which caused confusion for his friends the first time he did it. Although he knew the principle before he watched an Islamic film, he felt that this principle was justified by the films of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, as none of the characters physically touched the opposite sex if they were not family members. However, he thought that knowing his partner before marriage was better than an arranged marriage:

> I would be more comfortable if I could marry a girl I knew before marriage. It would be strange to marry someone I didn’t really know just because she looks like a sholehah (pious) girl. Of course, piety is one of the requirements I will be looking for in a wife in the future. But, in order to know whether she is really pious, I would have to know her in daily life.

Inquiring about the process of getting to know his potential wife, I asked, "Could that be called ‘pacaran’ (dating)?", and he replied, ‘It’s up to other people to call that. But I wouldn’t call it that.’ Another informant, Susan, an Accounting student of UNJ, who also agreed with courtship by Islamic principles, was more relaxed than Haz:

> Yes, getting close to the one we love is dating, but in an Islamic way. No kissing or anything beyond that. But holding hands is not a dangerous thing, I guess. The important thing is, like what Aa Gym said, *jagalah hati* (keep your heart pure). As long as we can keep faith in our heart, we’re not going to be pulled toward sinful acts.

In fact, most of my informants have boy/girlfriends, and they live their life in much the same manner as their more ‘secular’ colleagues, such as having lunch and dinner together, going to the cinema, and hanging out in the malls with their ‘pacar’ (boy/girlfriend). Although Okta, Susan, Yuli, Mia, Bambang and Swidhi admired the characters in Islamic films, they shared their stories with me about how they spent their spare time with their opposite sex friends. When I asked further questions, such as what are the differences between dating a la Islam and non-Islamic dating, Susan said that Islamic dating would start by meeting family members. For example, before she and her boyfriend went out for the first time, her boyfriend met with her aunt with whom she lived in Jakarta. Bambang had a different idea about what makes Islamic courtship differ to non-Islamic courtship:

> I think my courtship is in accord with Islamic teachings because I date her [my girlfriend] not only because of her physical appearance, but also because of her piety. We met when we

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85 Aa Gym was a very famous Islamic preacher and management guru who popularised the term ‘*jagalah hati*’ (keep your heart pure). The term became more popular when, in 2006, he created a song with the same title which was performed by Snada, a popular *nasyid* (Islamic vocal music) group.

86 Smith-Hefner (2006) argues that, for Indonesian university students, sex before marriage is widely considered morally unacceptable and sinful. Utomo’s study (2002: 216) also found out that, among Muslim young people, only very few agreed that sexual interaction is acceptable while dating.
attended a Ramadan pesantren kilat [an informal Islamic class held during Ramadan only]. She is a very pious and very kind girl. That a girl can be very Islamic even though her friends and families are not so, was very interesting to me and made me fall in love. Nevertheless, for me, their experiences were not that different to their ‘not-so-Islamic’ friends. Dating in an Islamic way, as proposed by Susan and Bambang, is a way to deal with both romance and religion; getting together with the loved one and implementing God’s guidance at the same time.

Having said that most research participants chose to have boy/girlfriends, I should also mention that some of them began to think about early marriage after they watched the films and read the books. As I discussed in another chapter, the two Islamic films I discussed, Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, introduced to Muslim youth the principle that it was better to have an early marriage than a girl/boyfriend. Although the character of Furqon in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih marries only after he has graduated from university and has a decent income, the film holds the same principle as Ayat-Ayat Cinta: that religion only allows a relationship between a man and a woman within a legal marital status. My UNJ informant, Didi, admitted that he and his girlfriend discussed the possibility of marrying at an early age:

We had this idea shortly after we watched Ayat-Ayat Cinta and Ketika Cinta Bertasbih. Actually, it was not the first time that we realised that Islam does not allow pacaran (dating). We had heard that before, back when we were at high school. However, the films reminded us how important that principle is. Then, almost immediately, I thought “Hey, why don’t we marry right now?” My girlfriend argued that we must be sure that we are ready before making a decision. I said to her that we can nikah siri if we do not want our study interrupted.

Currently, Didi remains in his undergraduate studies, and has updated his status on Facebook as married, but he has yet to publish his wedding photos, something many Facebook users do when they actually marry. He confirmed positively when I asked whether he was ‘nikah siri’. Mia and Swidhi also stated that their Islamic film-watching experience influenced their intention to have an early marriage, though, until now, it is yet to be realised. Another informant, Rino, said that most, if not all, of his ITB fellows agree that it is better for Muslim young people to marry than to have a girl/boyfriend and the films have had a certain impact on this:

In Indonesia, every marriage of Muslims should be registered at the Office of Religious Affairs, while non-Muslims should go to the Civil Court. Menikah siri (literally means ‘secret marriage’) is not a registered marriage, and is not legal according to official rules. However, it is legal according to religious rules because Islam only requires the presence of an ustadz (Islamic preacher) to legalise the marriage and the parents or guardians of both sides to be witnesses.
Dating can only bring us to sin. It has been clearly stated by Islam. I think every Muslim would agree with that. However, some of them, particularly my junior colleagues, only understand this after they watch Islamic films like *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*.

Here the films serve as a reminder for Muslims that marriage is an important step in their lives that can prevent them from falling into sin. Islamic self-help books also suggest the readers choose marriage rather than dating. For instance, Al Bukhori (2006: 6-9) asks readers to avoid dating as it opens an opportunity for youth to engage in sexual intercourse that would harm their future, particularly for young women. The point relating to the issue of identity is actually not the early marriage itself, but rather the significance of applying Islamic principles in life. This was what was being said by one of my ITB informants, Rino: “the willingness to apply Islamic principles is the thing that differentiates the real Muslim from the others”. Having an early marriage instead of dating is one of many signs that a Muslim has applied Islamic principles.

Being a good Muslim youth also requires preference for Islamic symbols and taste over non-Islamic ones. Apart from the wearing of Islamic attire, this is also shown in the Islamic films by the use of Arabic terms at every available opportunity. My research participants showed how they were affected by Islamic films in this matter. In daily conversation with fellow Muslims, other informants at ITB also used Arabic terms, such as: *ahlan wa sahlan* (welcome), *afwan* (apologise), *antum* (you; male), *ukhti* (sister/female friend), and *akhi* (brother/male friend). Some of them admitted the influence of Islamic films in the use of these terms.

Looking at the history of Islamic movements among students, it is reasonable to say that the use of Arabic terms has been popularised since the end of the 1980s, when Islamic activities on campus began to take shape (Rosyad 2006: 23). The trend among Indonesian Muslim youth to prefer the use of Arabic terms is similar to that found by Marie N. LeBlanc for Muslim youth in Ivory Coast. Muslim youth there adopted the ‘Arabised’ version of Islam in which the centrality of the Arabic language was one of the most important features (LeBlanc 2000: 93). At ITB, one of the best higher education institutions in Indonesia, where the organisation and courses are modelled after Western universities, there is a significant number of students mastering Arabic, or, at least, considering it as the most important language to be learnt, apart from English. To cater for the need to learn Arabic, the Salman Mosque at ITB provides an Arabic Language Course held once a week. It usually attracts

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88 The emphasis on women signifies that the prevalent gender biased approach on the issue of sexuality remains strong among some Muslims, as virginity is considered as more important for women than for men.

89 This is not a good sign for legal efforts to upward the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18 for women.
hundreds of participants who are not only ITB students (including my informants), but also students of other universities, as well as high schools.\textsuperscript{90} Salman Mosque also provides a Classical Islamic Books Study Program, a course intended as a follow-up to the Arabic language course. According to one of the tutors, in 2011, this course attracted many new ITB students. It is no wonder that there is a strong interest in learning Arabic: the Salman Mosque of ITB has long been considered one of the most influential institutions in the Islamic youth resurgence in Indonesia (Rosyad 2006: 33).

Fajri, one of the few students who had mastered Arabic in UNJ, and the only one among my UNJ informants, told me about the importance of learning Arabic: ‘We learn English to deal with the world; we learn Arabic to gain advantage in the akhirat (hereafter)’. Rendy of ITB had a different opinion:

As Islam not only deals with the hereafter, but also with worldly affairs, learning Arabic is a must. We should have Islamic knowledge by reading the Qur’an and Hadith themselves, not the translation and interpretation of these books. How can we read those if we don’t know the language?

He furthered his argument by saying that by learning Arabic, Muslims will know the content of the Qur’an and Hadith, and that will help them significantly in their attempts to “to put the ‘true Islam into practice in daily life (mempraktekkan Islam yang sebenar-benarnya secara kaffah dalam kehidupan sehariar)”. According to Rendy, it is the true and perfect practice of Islam that will bring Muslims to Heaven with the Qur’an and Hadith as the road and Arabic as the vehicle to ride along the road. Although Fajri, Rendy and other informants already knew Arabic before they watched Islamic films, they thought that the films made youthful viewers realise that speaking in Arabic is as fancy as speaking in English.\textsuperscript{91} The notion that speaking in Arabic is something cool made educated urban Muslim youth different to their peers who live in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). Most santri (Islamic boarding school students) live in pesantren located in rural areas and learn Arabic, as it is compulsory in the everyday life of any pesantren.

\textsuperscript{90}Nurul Irfan Mosque at UNJ also offers an Arabic language course, but the number of its participants is still less than 50. This is understandable given that the ‘Islamisation’ movement in UNJ has only begun recently. To attract interest in learning Arabic, starting from 2010, the student organisation of UNJ Arabic Department holds an annual Arabic language competition which tests participants’ ability in speaking, reading and writing Arabic, as well as in reciting the Qur’an.

\textsuperscript{91} The film that they referred to as inspiring youths to learn Arabic is Ketika Cinta Bertasbih. In contrast, almost all dialogue in Ayat-Ayat Cintais in Indonesian, although the characters are supposedly speaking Arabic. Recently, the Arabic term ‘man jadda wa jadda’ (whoever is fully committed will succeed), a Prophet’s saying, has become widely popular among Muslim youth due to the success of the film Negeri Lima Menara (The Country of Five Towers, 2012). This film, also a translation of a successful novel, is about graduates of pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding schools) in a largely rural area who succeed in pursuing their dreams in big cities and overseas.
Another participant, Iin, also told me that before she watched the films, she would say ‘terimakasih’ (thank you). After she watched Ayat-Ayat Cinta, she used Arabic terms like ‘jazakallah’ or ‘syukran’ rather than Indonesian terms. Her close friend, Mary, had already used Arabic terms before the films. However, after seeing the film, she felt more confident and became more consistent in using the terms. She explained to me the reason why she preferred to employ Arabic terms:

We Muslims all over the world are brothers and sisters. If we don’t acknowledge and respect each other, that would be a disaster. This was clearly stated in the Qur’an. The most effective and efficient way to relate to each other as fellow Muslims is by using Arabic, as it is the language used by Allah to deliver His messages through the Qur’an. Initially, some of my friends did not realise this. Fortunately, thanks to the films, in particular Ketika Cinta Bertasbih, they became aware, and now they speak Arabic, of course, at the appropriate times.

Mary’s words confirm White’s argument (1997: 186) that religious film watching inspires viewers to link film and life experiences, to reflect upon their own life experiences, and, quite often, to change their behaviour. Here, as in the case of the piety movement in Egypt, behaviour, including the use of language, is at the core of the enforcement of Islamic norms by Islamic groups (Mahmood 2005: 24). However, other research participants did not really agree with the idea of being expert in Arabic. This attitude is exemplified by Putri:

Of course, we need to understand what Al Qur’an says to us. We also have to know the stories of the Prophet in order to learn his words and deeds. But it doesn’t mean that all of us have to be really knowledgeable in Arabic. Understanding common words that are used in Al Qur’an is enough. It’s a personal choice.

Therefore, there were only some of my research participants who agreed that learning Arabic is a must for Muslims.

Conclusion

My informants, who watched Islamic films and/or read Islamic self-help books, practise a modern lifestyle and use the messages of global Islamisation as one of their point of references in everyday life. Their self-identification as modern Muslims does not mean that they belong to the neo-fundamentalist camp. Nor do they feel like Westernised youth. Using a realist perspective on identity as proposed by Moya, we can see the identities of urban Muslim youth as hybrid identities, suggesting a new modernity among Muslims. Employing Castells’ theorisation of identity, I regard the process of constructing identities among urban Indonesian Muslim youths as project identity as they attempt to redefine themselves amidst
Westernisation and Islamisation. Their attempts to construct their identities have been significantly aided by the advance of new media technologies, about which they are knowledgeable. For some of them, Islamic films and Islamic self-help books are also very helpful as they show them how to behave as good Muslims.

I use the term “modified appropriation” to describe how urban Muslim youth accepted and appropriated some of the messages delivered by film-makers and book authors, but modified others. This is evident in their responses to the veil-wearing issue, Islamic-style courtship and marriage, and the importance of learning and using Arabic, which the films and self-help books they watch and/or read encourage. Urban Muslim youth accepted that these practices are important not only for piety but also for an identity as Muslim, yet they had varying interpretations and did not really practice them.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the appearance of Islamic popular culture, particularly Islamic films and Islamic self-help books, in Indonesia, and the construction of new identities among Indonesian Muslim young adults. The alliance of Islam with popular culture is perhaps unexpected, as popular culture has been considered a product of Western civilisation, and thus to be incompatible with Islam. However, in the Introduction I showed the co-existence of both the global resurgence of certain Islamic aspirations and the more widespread use of popular culture all over the world, globalising the religion of Islam as well as Islamising global popular culture. Following Possamai (2005: 20), I argued that the relationship of religion and popular culture is not a simple relationship of cause and effect. Religious figures who express themselves in popular culture are also engaged in shaping popular culture. In my thesis, this is in the form of using Islamic films and self-help books to back up and express their version of Islam. At other times, popular culture can shape religion, at least in how the messages are delivered. In this thesis, this shaping of religion by popular culture appears in the form of how young people become attracted to some Islamic teachings, for example, on marriage, through the examples set up by the films.

For young people in Indonesia, living an Islamic lifestyle by consuming Islamic symbols and practising Islamic popular culture is trendy and desirable. I follow Weintraub (2011: 4) and Eickelman and Anderson’s suggestion (1999: 1) that popular culture has been an important factor in the global resurgence of Islam. Popular culture is also significant in linking Muslims around the globe, based on their common interest and in order to develop an Islam-based politics of identity. Considering the important role played by popular culture in shaping the nature of Islam in Indonesia, it is remarkable that scholarly works that address the association of popular culture with Islam in Indonesia, along with the dramatic change in Muslim identity, are still quite rare. In this thesis, rather than examining Islamic popular culture in general, I chose to focus on Islamic films and self-help books. In the course of my research journey, I realised that, up to now, only a few scholars of Indonesia studies have researched Islamic films and there is very little research focusing on self-help books in Indonesia.

I covered three areas of research: popular culture, Islamisation and the construction of identity among youth. I am in line with Possamai (2005: 20), who argues that popular culture is a platform for contemporary life for many, if not all, people, as we live through and with it, despite the fact that popular culture is part of neo-liberal capitalism managed by global
corporations. The resurgence of religion in the contemporary world paved the way for the emergence of a phenomenon that Van Nieuwkerk (2008) calls the ‘pietisation of popular arts’ – or in my research, the pietisation of popular culture. During my fieldwork research, my informants – university students in Jakarta and Bandung – exhibited their passion for popular culture practices and products. They recognised the strong and colourful presence of popular culture in their everyday life. Research participants displayed their passion for consuming numerous forms of popular culture with an Islamic ethos. They also criticised Westernised popular culture for nurturing hedonism among the youth and deflecting them from their faith. However, I did not see that consuming Islamic pop culture stops them liking non-Islamic popular culture, Western and other Asian popular culture alike. Research participants who praised the emergence of Islamic popular culture also remain fans of select Western and other Asian popular culture, such as from Korea and Japan.

In Chapter Four, I have explored how my informants engaged with popular culture, how they practised Islam in their daily life, and the ways in which they understand themselves. I showed that, among Indonesian Muslim young people, there is a rich diversity of popular culture practices. They displayed their passion for popular culture even though they could be critical about it. With regard to Islamisation, I learned that my informants categorised themselves as either devout or ordinary. While most of them viewed themselves as devout Muslims, none said they were perfect. Devout or ordinary, they describe a good Muslim as someone who practises all Islamic rituals, is a good role model for others, and is able to control his/her own behaviour. I also learned how important is the role played by new information and communication technologies in shaping Indonesian youths’ knowledge of Islam. Through these technologies, they became more than aware of current issues about Islam at the global level, and realised how most Western media refer to terrorism, fundamentalism and radicalism when discussing Islam. My informants – while they criticised the way Western media portray Islam – distanced themselves from radical groups. They viewed acts of terrorism and radicalism in the name of Islam as betraying true Muslims. They criticised groups such as FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) or NII (Indonesian Islamic State) who recruited some of their fellow students, particularly in Bandung, to join their movements. Their stance toward Westernisation and Islamic radicalism shows that Indonesian Muslim young people, in particular my informants, attempt to have their own identities that are different from those of radicalised Muslims and of Westernised youth.
Since my thesis focussed on Islamic films and Islamic self-help books, I have discussed how the emergence of Islamic films and Islamic self-help books has influenced the identity formation process among Indonesian Muslim young adults. I argue that films and books help, rather than dictate, young people to develop their own distinctive identity, being new sources of authority apart from parents, formal education and friends (Coleman and Hendry 1999: 52). In this context of Islamic revivalism, young people have a passion for consuming Islamic popular culture products in order to construct new identities. I follow Hall and Woodward’s argument that these new identities are non-essentialist and evolving. The identities of Indonesian Muslim youth can also be understood using the realist approach of identity as offered by Moya (2006: 96-98). Using this perspective, I can say that my informants are not subject to external actors who want to put them in certain categories. However, this does not also mean that they have total freedom to determine their own identities. Traditional sources such as parents, senior colleagues, school teachers, guru ngaji, majelis ta’lim (religious reading circle), and pesantren remain important in their identity construction as Indonesian Muslim youth.

In Chapter Five, I have investigated Islamic films in Indonesia that, while limited in number, have been significant in terms of how they represent the dynamics of Islam and Muslim society in Indonesia. Islamic films in the earlier period (the 1950s to 1980s) were mostly set in rural areas. They displayed a wide variety of themes, ranging from philosophical discussions, revolutionary struggle, modernisation, gender issues, and supernatural, to preaching through music. Some of them offered a moderate vision of Islam transforming society, with Islam being subtly portrayed. The themes of Islamic films in the 2000s are mostly urban-based and are about romance and love, with overt Islamism and a more conservative tone. Some members of public deemed the few Islamic films with a more moderate, liberal tone as controversial films. This reflects the current resurgence of Islam in Indonesia which tends to display an outward piety and social conservatism.

I used Lyden’s theorisation of film (2003: 45) as a model for (ethos) and model of (reflection) society to analyse my informants’ response to Islamic films. Some of my informants stated that the films can provide guidance on how to be better Muslims. They felt that the films established particular moods and motivations. Moods refer to emotional reactions to certain situations as was visible when informants reacted quickly after they watched the films. The motivations inculcated by Islamic films inclined film viewers to doing certain things such as improving their understanding of Islam and practising Islam in daily life. Others believed that
the films reflect the everyday life of Muslims. This was evident when one of my informants mentioned that the unhappiness of a polygamous marriage in everyday life is reflected in the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, when this film depicts how uncomfortable the experience of polygyny was for the characters. In discussing how my informants perceived Islamic films, I also agree with Turner (2009: 198) that the film text is not unitary in its meaning, but rather is a sort of a battlefield for competing and contradicting ideas. Even though it is possible for a certain idea to emerge as a victor, there are always gaps, cracks, and divisions. Islamic authors, film directors and producers intended to propagate certain Islamic messages to young viewers through their productions. Their intentions were not fully realised. All my research participants agreed that *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is ‘more Islamic’ than *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, but not all of them like it more than *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*. Some of them said that the latter touched their heart and pulled their emotions much more than the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* films did. Some others felt that watching the story of Azzam, the main character in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, was similar to their experience of attending a sermon, which was ‘not fun’ – notwithstanding their acknowledgment that it was necessary for them. Even within the circle of Islamic film productions, there is an ideological difference between directors. Some Islamic films adhere to more conservative Islamic principles, but others tend to resonate with more liberal Islamic thoughts. In general, my informants did not intend to do in real life the things they had seen done in the films, though they did not object to the values that Islamic films nurtured. Therefore, the intention of Islamic film-makers to educate young Muslims to be good Muslims in accord with the waves of Islamisation has not been as successful as some of them may have expected.

In Chapter Six, I have examined the emergence of Islamic self-help books in Indonesia and how Indonesian Muslim young people perceive them. The florescence of Islamic publications in late twentieth and early twenty-first century Indonesia is a significant feature of contemporary Indonesian society, with Islam becoming a major point of reference, though it has to be noted that rather than presenting a single face, Islamic publications portray diverse views. I show how Islamic self-help books in Indonesia replicate American self-help books in their content and resemble Japanese comic books in their covers. The tenets of American self-help books are shared by almost all Islamic self-help books that I read. As with non-religious self-improvement books, Islamic personal development books emphasise how to make the self into a better person, and give practical and simple tips on life’s problems. Some self-improvement books provide advice to readers on how to be a successful person not only in their everyday life, but also in business activities. The sub-genre of success
manuals in business has also appeared within the genre of Islamic self-help books. There are many Islamic self-help books that reveal how Muslims can achieve fortune in business without scarifying their faith.

The discourses of the Islamic self-help books resonate not only with the American self-help books but also with the tarbiyah movement, the increasingly prominent contemporary Islamic movement in Indonesia to which many Islamic self-help writers belong. To develop the skills of Muslim writers and to foster interest among young Muslims in reading and writing as well as to spread Islamic teachings through writing, early Islamic self-help writers established a literary organisation, FLP. The ideological links between Islamic self-help books and the tarbiyah movement are also evident in the themes and language used in the books. The books are devoted to awakening individual religious awareness, rather than pursuing issues in the theological or jurisprudential spheres, thus resembling the concerns of the tarbiyah movement. The movement promotes the application of sharia in the daily life of Indonesian Muslims, particularly the youth, without necessarily labelling it as sharia. Even though the tarbiyah movement has a ‘legal political wing’, apparently they do not have to formally move towards imposing Islamic law in Indonesia. For them, doing da’wah through cultural means is more important than enforcing Islamic law or proposing an Islamic state.

The publication of Islamic self-help books – many of which were written by FLP members – may serve the movement’s purpose by doing da’wah through writing. Some of my informants showed their admiration of self-help books: the books have become one of their sources for the study of Islam, to remind them of their duties as Muslims, and to counter the influence of Western lifestyles. However, other informants criticised the books for being ‘too light’ for young adults; the books were more intended for teenagers. They consider that methods that are more conventional are still needed if young Muslims seriously want to improve their knowledge of Islam.

With regard to the influence of Islamic films and self-help books, what kinds of identity do Indonesian urban Muslim young people seek? This is the question that I have looked at in Chapter Seven. I have mentioned elsewhere that, according to Castells (1997), within the framework of identity as a project, participants of the project construct identity based on any cultural materials available to them, including Islamic popular culture. Although film is a powerful medium through which messages can be delivered, in order to influence and to transform behaviours, and self-help books are a technique of governmentality that constructs subjects, Muslim youth saw these two forms of popular culture less as moral authorities than
as references and sources of inspiration. Rather than imposing a particular ideology on Indonesian Muslim youth, Islamic films and self-help books serve to show, involve, engage, motivate and inform Indonesian Muslim youth about a model of a particular version of Islam.

As a result, a stable and unified Islamic identity that film directors and self-help book authors might want to see among Muslim youngsters does not exist. Indonesian urban Muslim youth identities are non-essentialist identities (Woodward 1997), which are constantly being created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual (Giddens 1991). Islamic films and self-help books constitute one among many popular culture products that Muslim youths consume in their daily life, ranging from books that are more philosophical, conventional religious sermons, non-Islamic films, and other Asian pop culture, to Western popular culture. Using a Foucauldian perspective, we can say that, through modified appropriation of particular values offered by Islamic films and self-help books, as well as by other discourses and practices, Muslim youth constitute themselves as modern Islamic subjects. However, the distinctive components of this subjecthood are yet to be fixed and, perhaps, will be forever ‘in process’ as Muslim young people search for and construct their identities.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

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INFORMATION SHEET

This is to introduce a PhD student at The University of Western Australia. His name is Hariyadi. The title of his PhD project is:

Islamic Popular Culture and the New Identity of Indonesian Muslims: Investigating the Consumption of Islamic Popular Culture among Indonesian Muslim Youths

**Purposes and Description of Project**

The main purpose of this PhD research project is to gain an insight into the emerging phenomenon of Islamic popular culture in contemporary Indonesia. Hariyadi will focus on Islamic movies and guidance literature/self-help books. The project aims to explore how Islamic popular culture shapes the identity of Indonesian Muslim youth and how Muslim youth in Indonesia make use of Islamic popular culture to establish their identity. The study will explore the emergence of a new identity of Indonesian Muslim youths, as they want to be modern and pious at the same time.

He will carry out fieldwork among university students in three research sites in Indonesia: Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta. The results will be submitted as a doctoral thesis to the University of Western Australia, and may be used in research papers published in journals and chapters in books.
Methods

Hariyadi will be asking you to participate in individual in-depth interviews lasting about one hour. He would like you to choose the place where you feel comfortable. He might also ask you to participate in a move-watching and focus group discussion event. This will consist of a group of 5 – 8 students watching and discussing a movie. The discussion will take up to one hour.

Hariyadi would like to talk with you individually and possibly collectively (with other students in the focus group), about the following main issues:

- How and why you watch Islamic movies and read self-help books with Islamic content
- The Islamic teachings that you have been taught about and how you value them and/or put them into practice
- Your insight into Islamic popular culture (movies and self-help books), how it influences your daily life, and how it is related to what you feel and/or think as an Indonesian Muslim

While there are a variety of potential questions, you will be welcome to focus on the things that interest you most.

Consent

If, after the details of this project have been explained, you agree to participate, please fill in the attached Participant Consent Form. Hariyadi will ask whether your interview can be recorded so your responses can be transcribed accurately, but you have the right to decline this request and he will take notes instead. He will also ask your permission to take pictures and video recording during the focus group discussion. If you or anybody else in that group would prefer not to be recorded, he will be happy to go ahead and take notes. You will be free at any time to withdraw consent to participate without prejudice in any way. You need give neither reason nor justification for such a decision. In such cases, any record of your involvement will be destroyed, unless otherwise agreed by you. If you agree to participate, Hariyadi will treat any information you provide as strictly confidential. You will not be identified by name, nor will your university or community. All the information you provide will be anonymous and confidential. You will be identified by a pseudonym, unless you want to use your own name/details.
Further Questions

If you have any queries about this project or are unclear about any of its aspects, please do not hesitate to contact Hariyadi (081215949486) or the Chief Investigator for more information.

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
**APPENDIX 2**

**PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET (INDONESIAN VERSION)**

**SURAT KETERANGAN**

Surat ini memperkenalkan seorang mahasiswa program doktor di The University of Western Australia. Namanya adalah Hariyadi. Judul proyek penelitian doktoralnya adalah:

**Budaya Populer Islam dan Identitas Baru Muslim Indonesia: Kajian terhadap Konsumsi Budaya Populer Islam di antara Kaum Muda Muslim Indonesia**

**Tujuan dan Deskripsi Proyek**


Hariyadi akan melakukan kerja lapang di antara para mahasiswa di tiga tempat penelitian di Indonesia: Jakarta, Bandung dan Yogyakarta. Hasilnya akan diserahkan sebagai tesis doktoral ke The University of Western Australia, dan akan digunakan pula sebagai bahan makalah penelitian yang akan dipublikasikan di jurnal-jurnal dan buku-buku.

**Metode**

Hariyadi akan berbincang dengan anda baik secara individual, maupun secara kolektif (dengan mahasiswa lainnya dalam kelompok terfokus), tentang isu-isu utama berikut ini:

- Mengapa dan bagaimana anda menonton film-film keislaman dan buku-buku panduan dengan isi keislaman
- Pelajaran-pelajaran keislaman yang telah diberikan pada anda serta bagaimana anda menilainya dan mempraktikannya
- Pandangan anda mengenai budaya populer Islam (film dan buku panduan), bagaimana pengaruhnya terhadap kehidupan sehari-hari anda, dan bagaimana kaitannya dengan apa yang anda rasakan dan pikirkan sebagai Muslim Indonesia

Meskipun ada berbagai macam pertanyaan, anda dipersilahkan untuk berfokus pada hal-hal yang paling anda minati.

**Persetujuan**

Jika, setelah rincian proyek ini telah dijelaskan, anda setuju untuk berpartisipasi, mohon isi Lembar Persetujuan yang terlampir.


Keterangan Tambahan

Jika anda memiliki pertanyaan-pertanyaan lain mengenai proyek ini atau tidak jelas mengenainyanya, silahkan hubungi Hariyadi (+62-8121594986) atau Kepala Peneliti(Pembimbing Utama) untuk keterangan selengkapnya.

Persetujuan untuk melaksanakan penelitian ini telah diberikan oleh The University of Western Australia, sesuai dengan prosedur pengujian kelayakan penelitian secara etis. Setiap orang yang mempertimbangkan untuk berpartisipasi dalam proyek penelitian ini, atau telah setuju untuk berpartisipasi, dipersilahkan untuk mengajukan setiap pertanyaan kepada peneliti kapanpun saja.

Sebagai tambahan keterangan, setiap orang yang tidak puas dengan tanggapan dari peneliti dapat mengungkit isu mengenai etika penelitian, dan dapat mengajukan pengaduan tentang proyek penelitian ini dengan menghubungi Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia pada nomer telepon (+61-8) 6488 3703 atau dengan mengirim e-mail ke hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. Semua peserta penelitian berhak memiliki satu salinan dari Surat Keterangan dan/atau Lembar Persetujuan Partisipasi yang terkait dengan proyek penelitian ini.
APPENDIX 3
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
FOR PARTICIPATION, AUDIO AND VISUAL RECORDING

I (the participant) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice.

I understand that all identifiable (attributable) information that I provide is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the researcher in any form that may identify me, unless required to by law. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, the purpose of collecting the data, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research.

I do / do not (please circle one option) give my permission to the researcher to record the interview.

I do / do not (please circle one option) give my permission to the researcher to visually record the focus group discussion.

I agree that the information gathered from me for the study may be published for academic purposes provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

_______________________              __________________
Participant                               Date

(Please note that as this document is not a contract between parties, it is not necessary that the researcher sign it. Nor is it necessary to have a witness.)

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. Hariyadi can be contacted on (+62) 8121594986.
In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (+61-8) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au

All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
APPENDIX 4

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (INDONESIAN VERSION)

LEMBAR PERSETUJUAN
PARTISIPASI PENELITIAN

Saya (peserta penelitian) telah membaca keterangan yang disediakan dan setiap pertanyaan yang saya ajukan telah dijawab secara memuaskan. Saya setuju untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan ini serta menyadari bahwa saya dapat menarik diri kapanpun dan tanpa prasangka apapun.

Saya memahami bahwa semua keterangan yang saya berikan akan diperlakukan secara sangat rahasia dan tidak akan dikeluarkan oleh peneliti dalam bentuk yang membuat saya dapat diidentifikasi, kecuali diwajibkan oleh hukum. Saya telah diberi penjelasan tentang data apa saja yang dikumpulkan, tujuan pengumpulan data, dan apa yang akan dilakukan dengan data tersebut setelah selesai penelitian.

Saya setuju / tidak setuju (silahkan pilih salah satu) untuk direkam oleh peneliti selama wawancara.

Saya setuju / tidak setuju (silahkan pilih salah satu) untuk direkam secara visual oleh peneliti selama diskusi kelompok terfokus.

Saya setuju bahwa informasi yang dikumpulkan dari saya untuk kajian ini dapat saja diterbitkan untuk tujuan akademis dengan syarat tidak dicantumkan nama saya.

_______________________                 __________________
Peserta                                 Tanggal

(Harap diperhatikan bahwa dokumen ini bukanlah kontrak, sehingga tidak diperlukan tandatangan dari peneliti ataupun kehadiran seorang saksi)

Persetujuan untuk melaksanakan penelitian ini telah diberikan oleh The University of Western Australia, sesuai dengan prosedur pengujian kelayakan penelitian secara etis. Setiap orang yang mempertimbangkan untuk berpartisipasi dalam proyek penelitian ini, atau telah setuju untuk berpartisipasi, dipersilahkan untuk mengajukan setiap pertanyaan kepada peneliti kapanpun saja.

Sebagai tambahan keterangan, setiap orang yang tidak puas dengan tanggapan dari peneliti dapat mengungkit isu mengenai etika penelitian, dan dapat mengajukan pengaduan tentang proyek penelitian ini dengan menghubungi Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia pada nomer telepon (+61-8) 6488 3703 atau dengan mengirim e-mail ke hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. Semua peserta penelitian berhak memiliki satu salinan dari Surat Keterangan dan/atau Lembar Persetujuan Partisipasi yang terkait dengan proyek penelitian ini.
APPENDIX 5
INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Name/Age/Origin :
- Year/Discipline :

1. Do you think popular culture is increasingly important in everyday life? Which one do you mostly consume?

2. Do you think Islamic popular culture is increasingly important?

3. Have you ever or recently consumed any form of Islamic popular culture? How much time do you spend each week doing those?

4. Do you prefer to consume Islamic popular culture rather than Western popular culture?

5. Have you ever seen an Islamic movie? Did you have any specific reason to watch it?

6. Have you ever read Islamic self-help/personal development book?

7. How did you learn about Islamic teachings?

8. How do you define your own Islamic observances?

9. How important is Islam in your everyday life? How do you put it into practice?

10. How do you think and/or feel about the current Islamic resurgence?

11. How significant is Islamic popular culture in your daily life? Does it guide your everyday life?

12. Do you think that in the Islamic movies and the Islamic self-help books read you can identify the ideal Muslim youth?

13. What do you think about the current state of Indonesian Muslim youth?
14. What are the ideals of Indonesian Muslim youth? What should they be like?
APPENDIX 6
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

1. What are your opinions about the importance of popular culture in everyday life?
2. Do you agree that globalization of popular culture is associated with Westernisation? Please give your reason!
3. Do you think that the emergence of Islamic popular culture is an alternative to Westernised globalisation or it is just an attempt by capitalists to explore a new market?
4. To what extent is Islamic popular culture different from Westernised popular culture?
5. What are your comments on the surge of Islamisation in Indonesia?
6. Is it a good sign that the mass media nowadays embrace Islamic symbols e.g. by airing religious soap opera TV shows, and some popular culture agents (actors, musicians, directors) address religious issues?
7. Do you think pious Muslims should openly display their piety in public by consuming Islamic popular culture?
8. Do you think that, by consuming Islamic popular culture, Muslims will be more pious?
9. What are your opinions about the increasing number of Islamic movies? Do you think that these kinds of movies can inspire Muslim youths to adhere more faithfully to Islamic values?
10. What is your thinking about Islamic self-help books/guidance literature available in the market? For what are they useful?
11. Do you think Islamic movies and self-help books address Muslim youth’s daily life issues? If so, in what ways are they good references for Muslim youths?
12. What are your opinions about the current state of Indonesian Muslim youth? What are the ideals of Indonesian Muslim youth? What should they be like? How can they contribute to the nation?