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The cinematic Santri : Youth culture, tradition and technology in Muslim Indonesia

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Chapter 3

Pesantren, Cinema and the Reproduction of Tradition

Introduction

On an afternoon hanging out with a number of santri in the office of NU-Online, I happened to introduce my research to a santri who seemed to be one of the NU-Online regular visitors. When I told him that I was doing a research on santri making films in an NU-associated pesantren in West Java, he looked at me with surprise in his eyes, and then questioned me if there is any traditional santri who dares to engage with such a modern technology as film.

To a certain extent, his reaction was not odd. For beside film technology being a fundamentally modern phenomenon, doing film-related practices is something not entirely common among santri of the so-called traditional pesantren. Yet, I found his staggering questions as striking, because they assumed that santri are distanced from film-making practice. As a matter of fact, in many times during my research, people with no pesantren background have often questioned me about the supposed irreconcilability between “the ‘traditional’ santri” and “the ‘modern’ film-making practice”. Nevertheless, I always have kind of expected the coming of these typical questions from them, simply because of the widespread stereotypes surrounding, and associations of living in, a traditional pesantren with being essentially backward, rural and confined from the world out there. However, apparently, the stereotype that “a traditional santri is not engaged in such a modern practice as making film” also exists among the santri themselves.

The West Javanese pesantren I mentioned above is called Kidang Pesantren. This pesantren is in a Sundanese heartland, and was founded in the nineteenth century. The

pesantren is said to have held a strongly genealogical linkage with both the traditional center of Islam's Arab heartland, and the intellectual networks of Indonesia's traditional Muslim groups, especially the NU. However, since the last quarter of the twentieth century, and in response to the socio-political changes that challenged the pesantren's survivability, Kidang pesantren has transformed its educational system into what they've called the *Sistem Terpadu* (the Integrated System). With the new system of education, the Kidang people strive to integrate the Kidang's traditional learning of classical texts of Islam, with the modern *madrasah* curriculum of Gontor pesantren (which I discuss below), and the secular education that follows the standard of the state's national education.¹ After the implementation of the *Sistem Terpadu*, the Kidang santri have recently managed to attend to cinematic-related practices such as film-making and film screening as part of the tertiary learning activities in the pesantren. These transformations notwithstanding, the Kidang people refused to call their pesantren a 'modern one'. Conversely, they continue to identify themselves as 'traditional Muslims', and have shaped the "narrative of transformation" of their pesantren as part of their desire to safeguard traditional practices of Islam.

This chapter aims at examining the ways by which the Kidang people have turned their roads into film-making practices. In particular, it questions about the sociological transformations, key individuals, and religious discourses that are central in bringing forward cinematic practices into the Kidang ground. In the Introduction of this dissertation, I proposed to study the turn of the pesantren people into cinema through a focus on the compatibility of tradition and modernity. In this chapter, I will do so by focusing on the centrality of a specific pesantren's tradition, notably the so-called kitab kuning, along with the discourses that have historically been built around it, in instructing the pesantren people about how to creatively adapt and successfully deal with the transformations in and surrounding the pesantren world, including the film-making practices, ones that come with modernity. This way, this chapter is also intended to show that the stereotype I mentioned above does not essentially apply to the Kidang, and other pesantren people.

I draw my theoretical framework from scholars in the field of Islamic studies, anthropology, sociology, and others, who do not regard Western modernity as the only authentic patterns of modernization, and argue to think of modernity in terms of its creative, multiple, and alternative inflections in contexts other than the West - which in itself is far from being homogenous (Gaonkar 1999; Eisendstadt 2000; and Masud, Salvatore and van Bruinessen 2009). One significant strategy to hold this approach is by viewing modernity as a cultural project. That is to say that modernity always unfolds within a specific cultural context with its own understandings of personhood, social

1) Indonesian *madrasah* is best described as an Islamic school, which, unlike the traditional pesantren, classifies its students into different grades and teaches them a varying amount of general and Islamic subjects.

relations, virtues and the like, ones “that have been handed down to us” as tradition (Taylor 1999: 166-167). In line with this strategy and in order to grasp the culturally pluralistic dimensions of modernity, it is imperative for us to disentangle the notions of tradition from its negative connotations with socio-economic stagnation and blind dependence on unquestioned authority (Salvatore 2000: 5).

In this regard, I take a cue from MacIntyre (2007 [1981]: 222) who has conceived of tradition as a historical extension and social embodiment of a set of arguments, narratives, and practices that characteristically affect the ways in which individuals seek to implement their virtues. Seen this way, a traditional practice is conceptually related to a past (when it was instituted) and a future (how it is either strengthened or weakened in the future), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions) (Asad 1986: 14). Tradition, in other words, is not an “invention” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), but it is characteristically related to the worlds within which it originates and from which it springs (Kapferer 1988: 211). Seen this way, I argue that tradition has the potential to be “a modality of change” (Waldman 1986: 326), one with which individuals and societies are able to “get a grip on the modern world” and feel “at home in modernity” (Marshall Berman as cited in Chakrabarty 1999: 109).

This chapter is divided into three parts. I begin by exploring the historical changes of Kidang pesantren, especially focusing on the pesantren’s changing educational systems from a pesantren in the *Salafiyah* (traditional) system to a pesantren of *Sistem Terpadu*. As I will show, the focus on the historical changes of pesantren’s educational system allows me to identify the influx of a new type of santri in Kidang, along with their new activities not existent in the Kidang past, both of which played a significant role in bringing about cinematic practices to Kidang pesantren. In the second part, I explore the rise of cinematic practices in Kidang. I specifically focus on particular individuals who play a role in the realization of the pesantren’s film-making practices. The last part of the chapter discusses the centrality of the *kitab kuning*, for the pesantren’s transformations and its uptakes on cinematic practices. Here, I draw attention to the act of citing one particular Arabic quotation deemed to be originating in the pesantren’s centuries old tradition, popular among the Kidang women and men as a textual authorization (*dalil*) for their engagement with so-called modernity. I argue, such acts of referring to the *kitab kuning* owes to the prominence of texts among the pesantren people both as ritual and identity. Their interest in cinematic practices, by way of extension, revolves around the production and reconstruction of that textual tradition.

Historical changes of Kidang

Kidang’s long and strong tradition in Islamic learning, and its close affinity with the traditional “centres” of Islam are significant in the stories about Kidang pesantren in the past, either as I was told during my fieldwork or as they are written up in the pesantren’s

documents.² Most of these stories emphasize the year Kidang was founded, 1864, making it one of the oldest pesantren in Indonesia. They also focus on foregrounding Kidang's sources of Islamic teachings, especially ones that the Kidang members have for long inherited,³ and one that intellectually links them not only to Islam's heartland of Mecca and Egypt,⁴ but also to a larger network of Indonesia's traditional Islamic scholarship, notably that of NU.⁵ The focus in Kidang's historical narratives on tradition is a reflection of not only how Kidang wants to be seen by others as an institution of Islamic learning with considerable authority, but also the importance of tradition to the Kidang people in their engagement with change. It is for this reason that I start this chapter with Kidang's historical parts.

The 'Salafiyah'

During my research, I was often told that Kidang pesantren had been identified as a 'Salafiyah pesantren'. Rooted in the Arabic verb *salafa* – the name *salafiyah* is the

- 2) The source for the historical information of Kidang is mainly based on my series of conversation with the grandson of the current leader of Kidang, Taufik, and on the pesantren's documents. The use of the latter documents has been consulted to and approved by Taufik. Other than these sources, I also significantly use information from the santri and other family members of the pesantren's. The pesantren's documents I consulted are mostly ones that are made for public and pesantren profile, such as brochures, photographs and drawings, and pesantren periodicals.
- 3) For instance, the founder of the pesantren, *Kyai Haji* (K.H.) Nawawi, was said to be a santri and son in law of K.H. Badruddin, who was reputed for his bright memory (*bafalan*) in *Fathul Wahab* (*Fath al-Wabbāb*), a classical text on Islamic Islamic jurisprudence written by a 15th/16th century Egyptian *ulama*, Zain al-Dīn a. Yahya Zakariyyā b. M. al-Anṣāry al-Sumaiky al-Shāfiy (GAL II, 122). The book is one of the most popular *fikih* (*fiqh*) texts in Indonesian pesantren, which is particularly studied by advanced-level santri (van Bruinessen 1990: 264).
- 4) For example, some later predecessors of the Kidang pesantren are said to have gone to Mecca and have lived there for years, during which they are said to have studied with, for example, Imam Bajuri, or Ibrāhīm b. M. al-Bāḡūry al-Shāfiy (d. 1783/1860) (GAL II: 639), an Egyptian born *ulama* whose works on Islamic jurisprudence (*fikih*) are widely popular in the pesantren world (Hurgronje, as cited in van Bruinessen 1990: f.236). The Bajuri's book that is studied in Kidang is "Hāṣiyyah al-Bāḡūry 'ala Ibn al-Qāsim al-Ġāzy", (also) a commentary on *fikih*. Yet, it was not sure for me how the son could interact with the Egyptian *shaykh*. So far, I could not find any reference that indicates the *shaykh's* visit to Mecca, nor any information that confirms the Kidang's predecessors' pilgrimage to Egypt. Yet, referring to Laffan's information (2003:128) that as early as 1850s, a relationship between the *bilād al-jāwah* (referring to what is now Indonesian archipelago) and the scholarly triangle of Mecca, Medina and Cairo had been established, it may be assumed that the Kidang's predecessors had traveled to Egypt in a time during their stay in Mecca.
- 5) The son of K.H. Nawawi, called K.H. Arifin, for instance, was said to have attended the pesantren of *Kyai* Kholil of Bangkalan in Madura, East Java, in which *Kyai* Hasyim Asy'ari had also studied. Both *Kyai* Hasyim and *Kyai* Kholil are popularly known for their decisive role in the 1926 establishment of NU, the basis organization for the traditionalist Muslims in the country.

English equivalent of “to precede” or “to be past” (Vehr 1974: 422).⁶ Yet, the noun subject form of *salaf* (p. *aslāf*), comparable to English “forefather” or “predecessor” (Vehr 1974: 423), is often related to what is amongst the pesantren men and women called *salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, which can be translated as ‘the venerable forefathers’. This term may also refer to the earlier generation of Muslims who have attained the highest authority of Islamic knowledge. To the extent that the name *salafiyah* is understood to have contained both meanings, it has not only an explicit association with the tradition(al) and the classic(al), but is also an explicit claim to a genealogical continuity with the authoritative people of the past.

Likewise, some scholars have pointed out that the formation of *Salafiyah* pesantren is distinguished on the basis of the traditional aspects of religious life and learning of the pesantren (see: Dhofier 2011 [1982]: 6-10; van Bruinessen 2015 [1994]: 86-89; Lukens-Bull 2005; Phol 2009: 103-106).⁷ From my own experience of being a santri, the schooling and everyday life activities in a *Salafiyah* pesantren, which foreground the holistic education of both intellectual and moral development of the santri, are carried out under the sole guidance of the *kyai*, the pesantren’s most central and highest authority. There is no classroom system, curriculum and management are based on *kyai*’s instructions only, and a state-recognized certificate is not offered.

Apart from the Qur’an, the focus of learning is mainly on a corpus of classical Arabic texts of Islam, i.e. the *kitab kuning*. The transmission of knowledge, called *ngaji* or *pengajian* (lit. learning), usually takes place in the pesantren’s mosque, during which both the *kyai* and santri sit together on the floor. In front of the gathered santri, the *kyai* will read the texts word by word, translate them into the local language, and often explain and interpret difficult parts of the texts. The santri, holding the same text as that of the *kyai*’s, will make some notes below the word of the texts that they do not know its meaning. This learning method is called *bandongan* (a collective learning). In an advanced class, however, the santri are often required to personally read the *kitab kuning* before the *kyai* who will test their understanding of the *kitab*. This method is called *sorogan* (a private learning).

The organization of a santri’s everyday life in *Salafiyah* pesantren, is self-governing, modest, and ascetic. As well as the santri (are instructed to) self-organize their daily affairs and perform the daily five-time prayers and other acts of worship and rituals on

6) Pesantren *Salafiyah* or *Salaf*, however, should not be confused with pesantren *Salafi*. Not only because they are different, but also because to the extent that pesantren *Salafi* promotes the teachings practices of Salafism, a ‘strand’ of Islam that derives from the works of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, the latter is in the opposite axis to the former. For the most recent account of pesantren *Salafi* in Indonesia, see Wahid (2014).

7) Because of its association with facets of the traditional, it is often opposed to another type of pesantren that applies modern systems of religious education, called pesantren *khalaf* (*khalafa* means “to succeed” or “to come after”).

a regular basis, they also share the food that they cook themselves, the thin carpet that they sleep on, the small room in which they store their few belongings, with their fellow santri. In my experience, this monastery-like way of life is created for certain purposes, as pointed out by Lukens-Bull (2005: 54), to train the santri to learn in practice the values of simplicity (*sederhana*), sincerity (*ikhlas*, or *iḥlās*), self-sufficiency (*kemandirian*), and, arguably, self-restraint (*kesabaran*, or *sabr*) and humbleness (*tawaduk*, or *tawāḍuʿ*).

A number of ritual practices observed at a *Salafiyah* pesantren are distinctive, in a way that they are not only close to Sufi tradition but are different from and at odds with those learned and practiced by, modernist Muslim groups for example. The clearest example of them is what is called *tablil* (*tablīl*). This is the practice of recitation of particular verses of the Qur'an that is coupled with repetitive chanting of Arabic phrases of *zikir* (*dīkr* means 'remembrance', here, of the God), and *selawat* (*ṣalāwah* means a 'prayer', here, for the prophet Muhammad). *Tablil* is usually reserved for the spirit of deceased Muslims, as well as, by extension, other human beings and other God's creatures.

In many cases, living in a *Salafiyah* pesantren is free of charge. If the santri has to pay, the amount of tuition fees is relatively low. Thus, it is common for the santri to carry out the domestic work for the *kyai*'s family and regulate his farms and agricultural works "in exchange" for the knowledge they learn from him. This way, although Muslim parents of any economic backgrounds are pleased to send their children to traditional pesantren, the majority of santri in a *Salafiyah* pesantren come from rural areas and lower class and less wealthy families. Moreover, in a pesantren of traditional system, santri may attend and leave the pesantren as they wish regardless of their ages and length of their studies in the pesantren. This is because the latter does neither 'administratively' register, nor regulate the duration of stay of the santri. Some santri would only leave their pesantren when they have reached the age of marriage, but many of them would move from one traditional pesantren to another in order to learn specific expertise of Islamic knowledge only studied in a particular pesantren. Additionally, a few santri living nearby would attend the pesantren's lessons only at night, and choose to stay in their homes during the day, for which they are nick-named santri *kalong* (a 'bat' santri). The loose arrangement like this has often resulted in the disparity of santri's age and length of study in a *Salafiyah* pesantren.

As far as I heard from my informants, Kidang has proved able to survive as a *Salafiyah* pesantren for a long time. And Kidang's graduates, as the pesantren's profile document claims, are widely spread across different regions of the Island especially in West Java, many establishing new pesantren and becoming the local's traditional, charismatic, religious leaders.

The 'Terpadu'

However, around the 1980s, Kidang had run into trouble in term of attracting new students, as the number of Kidang's new santri had slowly declined. By the late 1990s

it even slumped to its lowest curve. While reasons for the decline were many, the plummeting popularity of pesantren was not exclusive to Kidang. In fact, studies on Indonesian Islamic education suggest that over the course of the twentieth century, the stability and survival ability of Indonesian traditional pesantren was both challenged and shaken by external developments in society, which changed the national scene of Islamic education (see Lukens-Bull 2005: 62-65; Hefner 2009: 63-64; and Pohl 2009: 106-116).

In the period after Independence, the national system of education separated between general and religious educational institutions (state-run and private-driven alike), and has placed them respectively under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education and The Ministry of Religious Affairs.⁸ Pesantren are part of the latter. Yet, the state's educational system is developed along the lines of modern-secular systems of education, and the Indonesian government persisted bringing the pesantren educational system in close accordance with the state's secular approach (Pohl 2009: 93-94). From the 1950s onward, for example, the state has enacted a series of regulations that increasingly required the *Salafiyah* pesantren (and other Islamic schools) to include general sciences into their traditional curriculum. According to these regulations, only (Islamic) schools able to fulfill the obligation of devoting a certain percentage of their curriculum to general sciences are entitled to award their students with the state-recognized certificates, the required document for an entrance to university as well as for a range of economically interesting careers. Coinciding with it, it is reported that Muslim parents of different backgrounds did no longer expect their children to exclusively study Islamic sciences. Rather, they demand that the children also learn general sciences in order for them to gain social and economic success in the future (Azra, Afrianty and Hefner 2007: 172-198).

These external developments are influential on Kidang's vision. In fact, the Kidang people have been responding to them since an early stage onwards. Evidence for this is the persistent efforts by Kidang's leaders in developing Kidang's *Salafiyah* educational system. K.H. Izuddin was said to be the first Kidang's leader who carried forward a new change to Kidang. During his leadership from the late 1930s to 1980s, he established an elementary formal education system in Kidang, called *Madrasah Wajib Belajar* (or 'Islamic School of Compulsory Learning'), in which santri of Kidang were taught basic secular sciences. In the future, the school would become an elementary Islamic school (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) independent from Kidang's training system, despite still standing on pesantren ground. *Kyai* Muhammad, the successor of K.H. Izuddin, continued his older brother's effort. No sooner did he begin his leadership in 1986, he introduced into Kidang a large share of Gontor pesantren's modern educational system.

Gontor is one of the first pesantren that "mixes the study of classical and modern religious texts with general education and intensive study of Arabic and English"

8) This policy is largely a reminiscent of the colonial Dutch's educational system (Pohl 2009: 92).

(Hefner 2009: 26). Founded in early 19th century in a village called Gontor, Ponorogo, in East Java, it was initially a pesantren of the *Salafiyah* kind. Only from 1926 onwards, when the popularity of pesantren plummeted, the new generations of the pesantren family decided to reform their pesantren by combining the virtues of *Salafiyah*-pesantren systems with those of modern educational theory and practice (Castles 1966: 30). Inspiration for such reforms is said to be deriving from a reformist trend in Egypt and similar modernist experiments in India (van Bruinessen 2008: 223). While the use of English and Arabic is obligatory among Gontor students, central in Gontor's educational system is the concept of "24 hour curriculum". This means that student activities in the pesantren during the after-hours are part of the curriculum, which includes sport, music, arts, speech practice, writing exercise, scouts and other activities that contribute to the development of santri's personality and life skills (Hady 2012).

The introduction of Gontor's educational system into Kidang first started by the attendance of two of *Kyai* Muhammad's sons in Gontor pesantren. When these sons returned to Kidang by the late 1980s, they were asked to apply what they had learned from Gontor to the curriculum of their home pesantren. Yet, the adoption of Gontor's curriculum back then was still limited to the obligation of using Arabic and English for daily communication. As I was told, by early 1990s, the Kidang santri distinguished themselves by their fluency in spoken Arabic and English, especially if compared to other santri of the neighboring traditional pesantren. Indeed, many people of today's Kidang, especially when recalling the pesantren's past, have laid their claim on the adoption of Gontor's language curriculum to its positive influence during the early 1990s.

Nevertheless, by December 1996, the Kidang people suffered from a traumatic disaster. It begun when a senior santri of Kidang pesantren carried out a physical punishment on a santri *kalong* ('a bat santri', or those only attending the pesantren's lessons at night) after the latter had violated the pesantren's ethical discipline. The santri's father, who happened to be a police officer and was obnoxious against the pain-inducing punishment received by his son, brought the case into the town's police station. The son of *Kyai* Muhammad, who was taken to the station, was rumored to have been killed in police custody. In a way that was beyond the control of both the pesantren and police authorities, what was in the beginning an act of disciplining practice by the Kidang people broke into a mass riot and violent vandalism, involving religious and racial divides at grass root level that destroyed the town's economic activities.⁹

The riot seemed only exacerbating the already set in decline of Kidang. "After the 1996 incident", as one member of a Kidang family said, "almost all students left the pesantren, and by the late 1990s, only about ten students persisted to stay". Apparently,

9) News of the riot got national coverage (see Kompas, December 27th, 1996), and report of the riot by Tempo news online website is re-uploaded on one of the pesantren's blogs (see, Kerusuhan, 2011). Many have related the riot, however, with the political sabotage of the then ruling government's scenario (Hefner 2000: 192).

a situation of extreme decline like this has, time and again, forced the Kidang's leaders to make another major change for survival of their pesantren. Still under the command of *Kyai* Muhammad, the Kidang authorities eventually decided to 'refashion' the pesantren's *Salafiyah* system of education, by combining it with both the modern *madrasah* system of Gontor, and the 'secular' system of education sanctioned by the state, hoping thus to attract a wider audience of santri.

The modeling after Gontor's educational system in Kidang, which in the past was limited to the use of Arabic and English, is now broadened to include the development of santri's life skills through extra-curricular activities. Then the pesantren's didactic method is refined to aptly follow that of the modern graded system schools, along with its serious effort of persevering the own *Salafiyah* didactic method. The pesantren's teaching of classical texts, furthermore, is now combined with the general "secular" education that follows the standards of the state's national educational system, called *Sisdiknas* (*Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*). By 2001, the Kidang authorities established inside the pesantren complex the pesantren's junior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*, SMP); by 2004, the senior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Atas*, SMA); and by 2009, the joint program of an Islamic college. If in the past, the Kidang santri were allowed to leave the pesantren ground during day time, especially for pursuing their education at state-sanctioned schools outside the pesantren, all of them are now obliged to stay in the pesantren compounds under a strict 24/7 disciplinary surveillance (see Chapter Four).

The Kidang people called this new system of education *Sistem Terpadu* ('The Integrated System'), signifying the spirit of integrating several different educational systems into a single synthesis. *Sistem Terpadu*, nevertheless, is by no means specific to Kidang, since many other pesantren have created similar versions of it. In fact, the trend of *Sistem Terpadu* pursued by many Indonesian pesantren has been a subject of critics among those tending to pesantren tradition themselves. Opponents of this system are worried about the less desirable effect of, among others, the reducing amount of time used for training the students in mastering the classical religious texts, hence reducing the ability of pesantren to (re)produce the traditional *ulama*.¹⁰ Moreover, the term "*Sistem Terpadu*" itself is often confused with the rise of an integrated Islamic schools movement (*Sekolah Islam Terpadu*), one that tends to blend religious instructions into all subjects of the curriculum, established across urban and sub-urban areas, and informally tied with the Islamist PKS political party (Hefner 2009: 73).

According to the explanations of the Kidang authorities, however, the Kidang's *Sistem Terpadu* is never meant to diminish or replace the classical-*Salafiyah* religious materials in favor of both the modern 'Gontor' curriculum and the general 'secular' subjects. Conversely, they interpreted it as an effort to create a balanced synthesis

10) For an account of the recent trends and developments in pesantren education and the extent to which *Sistem Terpadu* is differently interpreted by various pesantren, see Phol (2009).

between the three curriculums of *Salafiyah*, Gontor and secular education of *Sisdiknas*.¹¹ This also means, that Kidang's *Sistem Terpadu* is significantly different from the similar system applied in the integrated-Islamic school movement associated with the Islamist PKS political party. This study does not focus on the extent to which the *Sistem Terpadu* is applied in Kidang, but many Kidang teachers firmly proclaimed that, "the three systems of education should be equally applied with a one hundred percent of commitment". Significantly, ever since Kidang transformed into a pesantren of a *Sistem Terpadu*, it did not only steadily grow in terms of student numbers, lodges and facilities of the pesantren, but it also has become attractive to a new kind of santri that before hardly came to Kidang.¹²

The new santri

In a significant way, the implementation of *Sistem Terpadu* has changed the kind of santri who attend Kidang pesantren. In the past, most of the Kidang santri were of rural backgrounds, who came to Kidang mainly for learning religious knowledge. Yet, Kidang's establishment of state-sanctioned high schools has attracted Muslim families who want their children to not only learn religious knowledge but also study secular education for the sake of their children's economic prosperity in the future. This has in turn resulted in the influx of santri who come from urban family backgrounds.

Yet, the implementation of *Sistem Terpadu* requires santri to spend bigger amounts of money for their living and study costs, especially if compared to Kidang's santri's living cost in the past. For example, for reason of being time consumptive, today's santri are not allowed to cook their food themselves, but to buy their food from the pesantren-owned kitchens.¹³ Each santri now also has to have certain kinds of uniforms that they wear on different occasions, such as uniform for schools, uniform for religious activities,

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- 11) The Kidang people also interpreted the *Sistem Terpadu* as an effort for integrating all aspects of pesantren's management into one vision, called *Manajemen Terpadu*, or the integrated management. It means, despite the management of pesantren is now divided into several departments, the main leader of the pesantren remains *Kyai* Muhammad. For a clearing example, the establishment of general schools in Kidang has divided the pesantren's structural organization into several units of managerial offices. Each of them managed only a small part of pesantren's affairs. *Pak* Harun, the eldest son of *Kyai* Muhammad who went for his Islamic studies to a *Salafiyah* pesantren is in charge of the *Salafiyah* curriculum of Kidang. Meanwhile the other two sons who were sent to Gontor, *Pak* Zubair and *Pak* Hasan, were respectively stationed in the principal office of the pesantren's junior and senior high school. However, any decisions of their departments should be consulted to, and approved by the central leader of the pesantren, who is *Kyai* Muhammad.
 - 12) By the time I was doing my fieldwork, there were about 1.300 male and female santri living in Kidang.
 - 13) The implementation of three different curriculums in Kidang has pushed the Kidang's santri to use more amount of time for their study than that they used to take when the pesantren was still a *Salafiyah* kind. This means that the santri has to reduce their time that they used to spend for non-study purposes, including time for doing their little errands,

uniform for sport, uniform for extracurricular activities et cetera. These regulations mean that more money has to be paid for both the food and the clothing. With these additional costs, previously not existent in Kidang, lower-class Muslim parents would struggle to afford the cost of sending their children to Kidang of the *Sistem Terpadu*.

Significantly, despite there are still some Kidang santri who come from rural areas and belong to the lower classes in society, as far as I know, many of the santri in today's Kidang is coming from urban and middle class families. I remember, during the welcoming days of Kidang's new santri, the pesantren's square and driveway were full of cars belonging to santri's parents who came to drop off their children. Ibu Usman, a villager who helpfully prepared my food and other errands during my fieldwork, ironically described such situation as follows. "Most students of Kidang pesantren come from distant places and rich families. None of the nearby girls and boys attends the pesantren teachings, however much their parents wished them to be able to do so, because it is just too expensive to afford living in the pesantren". In short, the increasing prosperity in Kidang arises with the changing and multiplying backgrounds of santri's social class.

Religious practices and rituals of worships characteristic of *Salafiyah* pesantren and NU tradition, such as recitation of the *tablil* over the deceased relatives of the pesantren people and others, are still widely taught and practiced by today's santri of Kidang. Yet, the *Sistem Terpadu*, along with the dissociation of Kidang with any partisan-party politics, has attracted the interest of prospective students from Muslim family of non-NU backgrounds. It has also welcomed a handful amount of discourse and style of Islamic piety that is more akin to those of urban middle class Muslims, evidenced by the fine circulation of published works of, let's say, the FLP writers, inside the pesantren dormitories. Nevertheless, even members of the well-to-do pesantren families affiliated themselves with a variety of social and political Muslim organizations. To the best of my knowledge, as well as there are members of the pesantren family who personally involved in an NU-affiliated party politics, there are those whose religious views were close to, if not having an influence from the puritan-Islamist ideologies such as the *Tarbiyah* movement and PKS.

Still, the fluid coalescence of NU religious views and traditions with those of puritan-Islamist (urban) Muslim groups adopted by some of the Kidang people has to be related to the historical and socio-political contexts of the Sundanese Muslims living in *Priangan* regency, the regions from which majority of Kidang's prospective students originate.¹⁴ For one thing, the Sundanese Muslims of the *Priangan* regency generally are said to tend to adhere to a stricter interpretation of Islam than that that is hold by, for

such as cooking and washing their laundry.

14) Historically, *Priangan* referred to territories of the Hindu Sundanese Kingdom of Pakwan Pajajaran (now in West Java), which after the 1620s was annexed by the Islamic Javanese kingdom of Mataram (now in Central Java). Today, after multiple ruling administrations, it refers to the Sundanese speaking municipalities (*kabupaten* and *pemerintah kota*) of



Picture 3: Kidang's santriwati (female santri).



Picture 4: Kidang's santriwan (male santri).

instance, the Javanese Muslims (see Woodward 1999). During the formation periods of the country, crucially, many Sundanese Muslims in *Priangan* had taken an active participation in *Sarikat Islam*, a political movement associated with puritan-modernist Muslims (Noer 1980), and they had shown a considerable support for the establishment of an Islamic state of Indonesia (van Dijk 1981).¹⁵

The santri of today's Kidang are also mostly of one age group. The application of the reformed system requires santri to attend not only the pesantren's learning of the *kitab kuning*, but also the pesantren's general lessons in its high schools, either junior or senior one. This means, all santri in Kidang are "students" of (Kidang's) high school. The greater number of the Kidang santri, hence, would (have to) leave the pesantren once they received the high schools' diplomas, a few of them even left it after finishing their junior school grades. Only those who decide to serve as 'teacher on service' (*ustadz pengabdian*), and whose number is currently only a minority, would continue to study in the pesantren. Either way, the majority of santri in Kidang are still young and coming from a teenager category.

The transformation of Kidang pesantren from *Salafiyah* to *Sistem Terpadu* has changed the social backgrounds of santri who study in Kidang pesantren. Unlike in the past, the majority of Kidang santri are now teenagers who come from middle-class Muslim families. The influx of new santri to Kidang has in turn ushered in a number of modern activities that are new to the Kidang people, one of which relates to cinema.

The cinematic practices

This section explores the rise of cinematic practices in Kidang pesantren. I start from Kidang's Matapena: a writing community from which cinematic practices have emerged

the Southern West Java, which include Garut, Ciamis, Tasikmalaya, Bandung, Sumedang, Cianjur and Sukabumi (Iskandar 1991: 16).

15) van Dijk (1981), however, has demonstrated that the support for Islamist ideology of *Darul Islam* from Muslims of different parts in Indonesia were results of a variety of factors, including conflicts in the army, political tensions between center and local powers, changes in economic agraria, and last but not least religious emotions.

in Kidang pesantren. This start enables me to focus on the agency of certain individuals in introducing cinematic practices into their pesantren. It also allows me to find both the connection and disconnection of Kidang's cinematic practices with the wider cinematic rise of NU communities.

Kidang's Matapena

On every Thursday evening, just as the Friday holiday in Kidang was about to start, a group of santriwati (female santri) gather in one of the pesantren classrooms, or, sometimes, at the backyard of the pesantren's female area, for a creative-writing-and-literary-related-club meeting. In one of their gatherings that I attended in early March 2012, I found these female santri were rehearsing a play. As I was told beforehand, the play would be performed at an event of a literary-book discussion that they were going to organize the following week. After they finished the rehearsal, they gathered around their mentor, a senior santriwati whom they called *Ustadzah* Aisyah to discuss their preparation for the upcoming literary-related event.

After a while, they moved to discuss the problems they had struggled with when writing a piece of creative literary work such as a short story. Commenting upon their problems, I noticed, Aisyah gave her advices very patiently, often by sharing her own writing experience. Some time, toward the end of her explanations, seemingly with the purpose to motivate her younger peer santriwati for writing much harder, she often mentioned some Arabic proverbs, one of which is '*man jadda wajada*', which means, "those who work diligently will prevail". As she mentioned the proverb, the attentive santriwati suddenly broke into a noise of excitement. As I would learn later, these young and motivated girls apparently have studied the Arabic proverb in other Kidang classrooms, as part of the pesantren's curriculum. Yet, the excitement was less caused by the familiarity of the proverb to the santriwati, than by the fact that a pesantren-themed film that was about to be released in the Indonesian mainstream cinema had similarly highlighted the use of the proverb throughout the film's trailer. I noticed that these female santri suddenly turned their talks into the film's scheduled release, and to their excitement to watch the film in any possible ways. And just before the meeting parted, they watched the film's trailer from Aisyah's laptop.

These female santri are members of Kidang's Matapena, the pesantren's literary club (*klub sastra*) that is a branch of the similarly named community in Yogyakarta (Chapter Two). Established in late 2010 by Aisyah and Taufik, it is an 'extracurricular club' (*ekskul*) that serves to accommodate the interests of the Kidang santri, and to develop their potential for producing literary-related work and activities. Similar to its center in Yogyakarta, the programs of Kidang's Matapena mainly consists of the regular member's meetings, in addition to its occasional 'non-member-friendly' discussions and workshops, in which participants learned the skills of how to produce, for example, poems, short stories, and a drama performance.



Picutre 5: Members of Kidang Matapena watching the trailer of *Negeri Lima Menara* film.

Unlike the central Matapena club in Yogyakarta, Kidang's Matapena has included film-related activities, such as film screening and film-making as part of its main programs. In mid-2011, for instance, it produced a 90-minute film of everyday life stories that characteristically happened in the Kidang's dormitories. The film entitled "*Hidup Sekali Hiduplah Yang Berarti*" ('We Live Only Once, Live it Meaningfully', or *Hidup*, Dir. Aisyah). The launch of the film was held at the main yard of the pesantren complex in the presence of the Kidang's *kyai*, the Kidang's santri and many invited audience members from the nearby local high schools. Kidang Matapena also invited Ahmad Fuadi as the main speaker. Fuadi is a Gontor-graduated-santri writer, whose best-selling pesantren-themed novel, entitled *Negeri Lima Menara* (Land of the Five Towers, N5M), was still in its filming stage and was yet to create interest amongst the Kidang santri. On this occasion, Fuadi was invited to share his writing experience and to speak about his upcoming film.

Hidup was followed by more films from Kidang. Two years later, members of Kidang's Matapena produced "*Intensif*" (The Intensive Class), this time, a full feature film that tells a story of a group of Kidang's female santri who are able to transform her life experience in Kidang into a new spirit for their successful life in the future.

Throughout the later chapters of this dissertation, I will discuss their film texts and practices in details. At this point, however, it suffices to state that through Kidang's Matapena, the Kidang santri have organized various forms of cinematic-related activities,

ranging from film-making, open-air film screening, film-based drama performance, and film discussions inside their pesantren quarters. They also promoted their cinematic work and activities through their Internet-based social media channels and sold the DVDs of their films inside, but not limited to, the pesantren market circuits. In contrast to the complicit relation between santri or perhaps between many Muslims elsewhere and film, the Kidang santri seemed to have a strong interest in cinematic practices.

It is obvious that the establishment of Kidang's Matapena, which has been central to the uptake of cinematic practices among the Kidang people, lend its credence to the institutional changes of and within the pesantren – both in terms of its educational systems and its santri's social backgrounds. However, the fact that Taufik and Aisyah have played a leading role in the establishment of Kidang's Matapena in general, and of Kidang's cinematic practices in particular, also suggests that our exploration of the rise of cinematic practices in Kidang should be related to the role of particular individuals in such processes. For this reason, I will dedicate the following subsections to further explore the biographical accounts of both Taufik and Aisyah. By doing this, I aim to shed light on the extent to which both Aisyah and Taufik have been, to borrow Hafez's term (2011), 'a desiring subject' for film-related practices.¹⁶

Taufik

Taufik is the grandson of *Kyai* Muhammad. Born in 1987, he first studied Islam with his father in Kidang, and right after finishing his junior high school in 2002, went to study in pesantren Gontor for five years. Returning home from Gontor, he went to a nearby secular university for his bachelor's degree in English education. Since early school age, Taufik has excelled in Arabic and English, and has always been interested in reading and writing. According to my interlocutors in Kidang nevertheless, Taufik is less conversant in religious knowledge from the classical texts of Islam (the *kitab kuning*), especially if compared to other pesantren families who graduated from a traditional '*Salaftiyah*' pesantren. He has started blogging since junior high school, and during his study in Gontor he was active in the pesantren's library and journalistic activities.

Finding that writing provides him a way to comment upon his surrounding world, Taufik has always shown great concern with literacy-related activities, and he has written articles on various topics, many of which are available on his blogs.¹⁷ Some of his writings relate to issues of Islamic education, particularly the development of Islamic educational system and integration of Islamic and non-Islamic sciences. His views on

16) Hafez uses this term to refer to a state of becoming in which individuals strive to create their subject positions predicated upon a complex range of their own understanding of themselves and of the world around them (2011).

17) Taufik has at least two blog addresses: one is <https://syahrizzaky.wordpress.com>, containing of his English-language writings, and the other is <https://islamiced.wordpress.com> consisting mostly of his writings on issues of Islamic education. This is not to mention his articles published via the pesantren's website.

these issues, as he told me, are very much influenced by the Malaysian conservative Muslim thinker, Naquib al-Attas, who seemingly is his favorite writer. Nevertheless, Taufik is knowledgeable as well about Islamic thoughts of more liberal thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid, despite his sometime rather critical stance towards him. His knowledge of Islamic thought is related to his study in Gontor during which he was exposed to Gontor's massive collection of Islamic books written by various Muslim thinkers. As such, it has made him not only an open minded, but also somewhat outspoken and critical person, especially when seen from the perspective of the *kyai*-centered model of the pesantren's authority.

From 2007 onwards, Taufik started to devote himself to help developing his parents' pesantren, particularly in bringing forward the application of Gontor's language curriculum in this pesantren. However, his critical ideas and thoughts often stunned some of the older *kyai* in Kidang. One day, I heard from him that one of the oldest *kyai* furiously left a pesantren's meeting in which he questioned the *kyai* for a particular idea on how to better develop the implementation of the *Sistem Terpadu* in Kidang. Despite his sharp criticism, nevertheless, Taufik's innovative ideas, without overlooking his interlocutor's efforts, is significant, as he established a journalistic extra-curricular activity in Kidang, called *NahLab* (*Nahdlatut-Thullab*, 'the awakening of the student'). Through it, he taught the Kidang santri a bevy of basic theories and skills of journalism, and gave them a direct experience in publishing their journalistic reports and works. As far as I am concerned, the santri working in *NahLab* had managed carrying out some journalistic workshops for the Kidang santri, as well as publishing a number of newsletters, bulletins and magazines, all of which contained of the Kidang santri's writings.¹⁸

Later, finding that santri's interest and potentials in writing-related activities are not limited to just journalism, but that they also include literary work, Taufik came up with an idea of founding a literary community. For this reason, he asked the help from *Ustadzah* Aisyah whose interest in creative writing has surpassed that of all people in Kidang, an exploration I will elaborate below.

Aisyah

Aisyah was born in 1991, in a remote village in the *Priangan* regency, in a middle-class family. Her father was a small local businessman (*wiraswasta*), and her mother worked as a petty trader. She first attended Kidang pesantren in mid-2004, after finishing her elementary school. She has loved music, film, literary work and creative writing since

18) As far as I am concerned, journalistic activities in Kidang are mainly aimed at developing vocational skills of the santri for their future careers. However, considering the fact that Kidang's journalistic writings tended to spread pesantren's religious teachings and values, and the similar journalistic practices are also popular in other pesantren across the country (Aziz 2011), I argue for their potential to be a hotbed for a new generation of NU journalist, which in turn can steer the already existing NU's websites, journals, et cetara. This assumption, however, still needs to be explored for a further research.

childhood. She recalls that when she was in elementary school, she managed to write a few short stories, and win school level competitions in singing and poetry reading. When entering the second grade of Kidang's junior high school, she joined *Tazakka*, the pesantren's *Mading ckskul* activity, and was appointed as the *Mading*'s chief editor.¹⁹ From then on, she developed her writing skills either at her own initiative or through the pesantren's literary-related programs and activities. Her skill at writing has gained her many trophies in writing competitions at various levels, from local to national.

Additionally, her hobby of music also became more focused in Kidang, as she was involved in Al-Faiza, the pesantren's *nasyid* girl band.²⁰ Here, she also started dedicating her time to making photography, and later film-making, in DIY spirit and using similar creativity. By 2010, Aisyah who won the 2005 Kidang's best female santri of the year, started to blog on her various sites, in which she put most of her creative writing, including articles with her own thoughts, reports of her traveling, and her own photography, not to mention writings related to her daily activities in Kidang's Matapena community.²¹

It was only when she came to Kidang that she began to develop the ways she looked at her creative-writing activities as more than just a hobby. She told me that during her study in the pesantren, her interest in creative writing and literary work only got intensified since the Islamic boarding school had created for her and for other santri a wider access to new sources of fiction readings. In particular, she still recalled her excitement when she first encountered *Annida*, an Islamic teen-lit magazine, which she borrowed from her senior-santri fellows, when she was still in junior school. The magazine, published in close partnership with *Forum Lingkar Pena* and very popular in the 2000s, is one of the oldest and biggest Islamic teen-lit magazines in Indonesia, that caters to urban young Muslim readership, particularly, of middle-class families. According to Arnez (2009), the magazine is aimed at fashioning and promoting new ways of being cool but pious (*gaül tapi syar'i*) young Muslims in the modern world. In particular, it encourages its teenaged readers to behave and keep their lifestyle in accordance with Islamic values, for example, by wearing a wide head-covering (*jilbab besar*) for women and disapproving of any form of dating relationship (*pacaran*) before marriage.

19) An abbreviation of *Majalah Dinding* ('Wall Magazine'), *Mading* is a common extra-curricular activity in many Indonesian high schools, which publishes student's writings and other creative works such as drawing and photography, by using a board that is laced on wall as its medium. Interestingly, despite the popularity of Facebook wall today, Kidang's Wall Magazine activity still widely persisted among the Kidang people, at least, by the time this fieldwork was being conducted.

20) Generally speaking, *nasyid* is not very popular among the NU-affiliated pesantren people, despite there is always a few exception in some of them. Kidang is one of such exception, perhaps because of the santri's urban and middle-class backgrounds, as I have explained above.

21) Look for instance, <http://lenasayati.blogspot.co.id>.

Aisyah's gluttonous consumption of *Annida* appeared to have introduced her to other FLP writers and their published works. In an interview (Crew 2011: 38), she once professed that the *Annida* magazine and its editors had a significant influence on her writing. In particular, she admired the work of Bang Iyus, a prolific FLP writer and an editor of *Annida*, who also wrote the film script of *Sang Murabbi*, a film that was produced by PKS (Imanda 2013). It was perhaps el-Shirazy's celebrated FLP's novel *Ayat Ayat Cinta* that principally changed the "color" of her writings. She said it this way:

"When reading it, I was suddenly overwhelmed. Even after reading it, I sort of got enlightened; I got something new. I gained extraordinary benefits from a mere piece of writing. I then got motivated. Why didn't I take my writing hobby as a field of *dakwah* (propagation of Islam), just like his? So that I did not write of, and for nothing, but for "*berdakwah*" (or spreading Islamic teachings)."

Before her reading *Ayat Ayat Cinta*, the short stories that Aisyah used to write were mostly romantic. After she read the novel, however, she began to write stories which conveyed the moral values of Islam. Now, if she wrote a love story, for instance, she would make it sure that the story did not contain any suggestion for its readers to practices regarded forbidden in Islam such as *pacaran* (dating). Topics of her writings are now primarily about friendships.

Likewise, Muslim scholars from the pesantren tradition have also influenced Aisyah's writing activism. When I asked her why she decided to commit herself to writing, she cited a phrase she recognized as originating from Imam Al-Ghazali, a great Muslim scholar from the medieval period of Islam. His work, especially *Ihya Ulumuddin* (*Ihyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*), is widely read across Indonesian pesantren. The cited phrase reads, "If you are not a king, be a writer." She then told me that the citation from Al-Ghazali's had fascinated her and had made her to think about the benefits of being a writer, and hence motivating her to keep writing and to be a writer. In this sense, as some of her writings implicitly say, her musical activities and creativity, as well as that of her writing and later film-making, are one of her ways to improve her quality of being a devout Muslim woman.²²

When graduating from Kidang's senior high school in 2010, Aisyah had planned to leave the pesantren in order to pursue her bachelor's degree at university. Her desired major of study was International Relations or Communication. Yet, as she told me, one of the Kidang's leaders approached her to offer a position of *ustadzah pengabdian* (lit, 'teacher on service'), tasked mainly to help the pesantren develop the santri's language and literary programs and activities. After failing an exam for an entrance to university, she decided to accept Kidang's offer, and soon afterwards, together with *kyai* Muhammad's grandson, she established Kidang's Matapena, through which her dream of becoming a film director was finally realized. Pace her story, I need to mention that

22) See for example her writing entitled "Menjadi Wanita Solehah" ('On Becoming a Pious Female Muslim'), uploaded in the following link. <http://lenasayati.blogspot.co.id/2010/10/menjadi-wanita-shaliha.html>.

while staying at Kidang, I often heard rumors that Aisyah and Taufik were in a romantic relationship. I never spoke with them about these rumours, but, they got married in the period after I had finished my research there.

Desiring subjects'

The biographical accounts of Aisyah and Taufik, along with their writing (and film) activism reflect that the coming of cinematic practices into the Kidang ground is largely enabled by the individual experience and agency of certain Muslim subjects. Both of the pair's interest and obtained knowledge in literary and film work, and their leadership skills and spirit of activism, have constituted "the capacities and required skills" that allow them "to undertake particular kinds of moral actions" (Mahmood, 2012: 29), or the quality of their agency. The privilege that Taufik held as the *kyai*'s grandson, which enabled him to an access to elite authorities of the pesantren, furthermore, seems to have strengthened his agency. In short, Kidang's cinematic uptake is founded on the agency of Taufik and Aisyah.

However, Aisyah's childhood dream to be a film director, her personal attachment to the 'Islamic' film and literary discourses, and her romantic relationship with the grandson of the pesantren's *kyai*, all demonstrate that cinematic activism of the santri might have been closely related to a combination of varied desires: personal and societal, general and private.

In *Islam of Her Own* (2011), Sherine Hafiz argues that desire and subjecthood are always heterogeneous, discontinuous and inconsistent, because they are often produced in and through daily negotiations of the Muslim subjects within the larger contexts of sociocultural changes in society. Desire, Hafiz adds, is a result of "incomplete, contradictory, and unpredictable fields of power relations" (p. 16). The santri, with regard to their agency in bringing forward cinematic practices into their pesantren, are desiring subjects. They come to cinematic practices for a bevy of desires that they wished to realize upon a complex range of their understanding of themselves and the world around them. As I will furthermore make explicit in Chapter 5 and 6, the cinematic skills and vision that Aisyah has come to acquire often bear witness to her personal desire as a female subject, who tries to negotiate, and often challenge, the relations of power strongly embedded in the patriarchal culture of the pesantren compounds.

Dis/connection with the NU's film discourse

The affiliation of Kidang's cinematic practices with the literary community of Yogyakarta's Matapena reveals an obvious connection between Kidang's turn to cinema with the *budaya tanding* discourse of the cinematic santri I discussed in Chapter 1. In relation to this, Aisyah also told me that her decision to affiliate Kidang's literary community with Yogyakarta's Matapena is because of their common grounds in pesantren tradition.

However, the influence of literary works of the FLP writers among the Kidang santri is also strong. Aisyah's films are heavily influenced by films and novels such as *Ayat Ayat Cinta*. This in turn may stir us to question about the consistency of the Kidang cinematic santri with the NU's film discourse.

To explain this, I borrow the description about the Kidang santri, used by Sundari, one of my santri interlocutors who happened to be the leader of Yogyakarta's Matapena. She stated, Aisyah and many of her peers in Kidang pesantren are close to the prototypical urban middle-class Muslims. This means, they can be easily connected to the literary works by the FLP writers, which according to Arnez, arguably promote Islamic piety discourses well accepted among educated middle-class and urban Muslims (2009). I argue, thus, the popularity of the FLP writers among the Kidang people, reveals a wide variety of santri NU-Style film discourses that exist within the provision of the NU communities.

The popularity of FLP writings among the Kidang santri reminds me of the term "hybrid santri", introduced by Carool Kersten (2015). Kersten used it to refer to the "hybridity" of the *Kaum Muda* NU (the young members of NU) of the post-Suharto era regarding their avid consumption of critical thoughts from "Arab-Islamic scholars and intellectuals" and from "postmodern philosophy and postcolonial theory developed in Western academe" (p. 65). While doing so, these young members of NU do not necessarily feel less-NU than their counterparts.

Connecting it with the case of the Kidang cinematic santri, I argue, the scope of hybridity of the "*Kaum Muda NU*" can still be broadened. It may also include the Kidang santri who consume texts that are produced by the Islamist Muslim writers and intellectuals, i.e. the FLP books. For one thing, by reading these books, the Kidang santri do not necessarily feel less-NU than their counterparts, provided that they are still strict adherents to NU tradition, which I will explore in the following section.

Tradition that matters

So far, this chapter has argued that the coming of cinematic practices into Kidang is enabled by, firstly, the changes of pesantren's educational systems from *Salafiyah* to *Sistem Terpadu*. This in turn has invited, secondly, the influx of urban middle-class santri who actively utilize popular culture such as music and film as part of their everyday life expressions as Muslims. Thirdly, it is also inspired by the agency and creative work of charismatic individuals such as Taufik and Aisyah. However, during my stay in Kidang, especially when discussing Kidang's transformations, (and not to mention Kidang's active engagement in film-making practices), the Kidang men and women would always cite an Arabic quotation which reads, *al-muḥāfaḍzah 'ala al-qadīm al-ṣālih wa al-aḥd bi al-ḡadīd al-aṣlah*. Literally, it means, "preserving the old that is good, and embracing the new that is better". To them, the quote functions as a maxim that justifies their take on modernization and cinematic practices.

In his book *A Peaceful Jihad*, Lukens-Bull (2005) argues that the above maxim has empowered pesantren people to shift the discussion of modernity from changes in institutions to matters of the heart and mind and thus enabling them to “(re)invent” modernity in an image of their own (p. 11 and 129). This quote, however, does not explain why this Arabic quotation, out of a myriad of Islamic texts available in Islam has become so central to the pesantren people in regard to their negotiation with modernity. In relation to Kidang, we have to ask what is so specific in this maxim that many people in Kidang need to cite it when justifying their turn to cinematic practices? And more importantly, what does the act of citing the maxim among the santri tell us about their preferred cinematic practices?

In the section below, I will try to make clear the significance of the maxim and the act of citing it for the santri’s uptakes on cinema. Thus I will attend to, firstly, the ways the maxim can be related to Kidang’s tradition in referring to Islamic classical texts for their religious guidance, and secondly, the ways the Kidang people have appreciated the maxim in their everyday lives. The focus on the social practice of citing the maxim allows me to describe the centrality of pesantren’s tradition, notably *kitab kuning*, for the pesantren’s transformations and its santri’s pathway to cinematic practices.

Origin of the maxim

The origin of the mentioned maxim has never been determined. Growing up as santri myself, I have heard the maxim uttered on many occasions, and in a variety of contexts. I had assumed that the maxim was either derived from the texts of *kaidah fikih* (*qawāid al-fiqhiyyah*, basic rules of Islamic jurisprudence) or inspired by the *ushul fikih* texts (*uṣūl al-fiqh*, principles of Islamic jurisprudence).²³ However, when, for the purpose of this research I checked several pesantren books of *fikih* (*fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence) and *ushul fikih* categories, I didn’t find a similar quotation in any of them. And while majority of the Kidang santri I asked asserted that the maxim was from the *usul fikih* texts, none of them was able to specify, like I do, the scriptural sources from which the quotation was either taken or inspired.

Few of my santri interlocutors in either Kidang or other pesantren, though, were sure enough to claim that the maxim was authored by an older generation of the pesantren *ulama*. They said that it was a result of an *ijtihad* (*iğtihād*, intellectual struggle for an interpretation of Islamic law) conducted by earlier generations of NU *ulama*, in response to challenges of reform coming from the modernist Muslim groups like Muhammadiyah. They also told me that formulation of the maxim was inspired by the established rules of the *kaidah fikih* that the pesantren people learnt from the classical texts of Islam. Still none of them was able to mention any definite names of

23) While *kaidah fikih* is a science in Islamic jurisprudence that studies the basic parameters of Islamic jurisprudence, that is called *fikih* (*fiqh*), *ushul fikih* studies the roots of Islamic jurisprudence: that is, on the legitimized sources of Islamic law, such as the Qur’an, *Hadis* (*Hadīth*), *ijma* (*ijmāʿ*), and *qiyas* (*qiyās*).

both the scriptural sources of the maxim and the pesantren scholars who authored it.

One may interpret the lack of clarity of the maxim's origin indicates its fabrication. I would, however, propose an alternative reading that goes beyond the question of whether such claim was true or not true, and that it draws instead upon a set of scriptural practices that have not only structured the very basis of the religious tradition of the santri, but also helped them to forge a "an affinal connection" (Spyer 2000: 32) with the larger, longer-established, and elsewhere tradition of Islam.²⁴ In order to come to this alternative reading I first need to show the prominent position of textual tradition among the pesantren people, before exploring how such a textual tradition has historically shaped their practice of citing the Arabic quotation for their uptakes on cinematic practices.

Kitab kuning: ritual and identity

Islam is a scripture-centered religion. The Qur'an and the *Hadis*, believed by Muslims respectively to be the speech of God and reports of the prophetic tradition of Muhammad by those close to him, are the two central scriptures of Islam, and thus, occupy significant roles in Muslim's everyday lives. Not only have they been used as the major source of textual authority upon which Muslim's belief, rituals and conducts are predicated, but they have also been treated with great care and respect in every Muslim society. As the intellectual disciplines of Islamic scholarship evolved, these two central texts have been developed through their derivative texts, such as interpretation of the Qur'an, commentary of the *Hadis* collections, basic texts in jurisprudence, morality and mysticism along with their commentaries, collection of prayers and invocations, biographical accounts of the Prophet and the Muslim saints. Among a large number of Muslim communities, the role of these derivative and secondary texts is no less significant than that of the Qur'an and the *Hadis* (see for instance Lambek 1990; Messick 1993; and Bowen 1993).

These religious texts are of central importance in the lives of the santri. As I have stated earlier, after finishing learning the recitation of the Qur'an, the santri are instructed to study the *kitab kuning*, mostly in the form of commentaries of older original texts (*matan*, or *matn*) that originate from the medieval period of Islamic history. According to van Bruinessen (1990: 236), no less than 900 titles of *kitab kuning* were studied in Indonesian pesantren across different times and places.²⁵ Out of the nine-hundred *kitab kuning*, almost five-hundred of them were written and translated by Southeast Asian *ulama*, with the majority of them being of Indonesian origins. While

24) Spyer uses this term to explain the ways by which the Barakai islanders in the Aru's backshore imagined the claim of their genealogical connection with the Malay elsewhere.

25) Out of these numbers, van Bruinessen (1990: 228-9) has classified the pesantren's *kitab kuning* into the following categories: *fikih* and *ushul fikih* (Islamic jurisprudence and its principles), *akidah* (doctrine of Islam), *ilmu nahwu*, *shorof* and *balaghah* (traditional Arabic grammar), *kumpulan hadis* (hadith collections), *tasawuf* and *akhlak* (mysticism

most of the Indonesian *ulama* composed their *kitab kuning* in Arabic language, some of them also wrote the books in local Indonesian languages such as Malay, Javanese and Sundanese. The most popular author of the *kitab kuning* is Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani, the Indonesian born *ulama* whose works mostly are commentaries of the influential *kitab kuning* written by the *ulama* of Islam's traditional heartlands, particularly, those in Mecca. This is also to mention that some works by al-Bantani were printed in Egypt, Mecca, Beirut, and Cyprus (al-Ğābi 2005), indicating the possible use of some of his works beyond Southeast Asia.

The statistical figure of both the numbers and authors of the *kitab kuning* reflects (1) a "textual domination" (Messick 1993) in the pesantren community, (2) an intellectual respect for an earlier generation of *ulama*, and, most importantly, (3) a genealogical link of religious tradition of the pesantren people to that of Islam's traditional heartland via the intellectual routes and connections of, among others, their learning of the *kitab kuning*.²⁶ To the extent that Islam requires its believers to be able to read Arabic and to the extent that *kitab kuning* is an intellectual product of, and originated from, the medieval *ulama* of the traditional heartlands of Islam, the *kitab kuning* texts hold an implicit claim to both authenticity and authority of "the word of the fathers" (Bakhtin 1981: 342f). That is to say that the turn of the pesantren people to the texts of *kitab kuning* as one of the fundamental sources of their religious knowledge reveals that the significance of the latter for the former has been, to use Bakhtin's term again, "the authoritative discourse" (*Ibid*), the discourse upon which the creation of authority and authenticity of the texts is predicated.²⁷ In other words, the *kitab kuning* tradition has provided the pesantren people with an authorizing power to the Islam that their communities have understood and practiced, some time, but not necessarily, vis-à-vis the understanding and living of Islam by the other Muslim groups.

and morality), *doa*, *wirid*, and *mujarobat* (collections of prayers and invocations, and Islamic magic), and *mawlid* and *manaqib* (texts in praise of the prophets and saints). Yet, according to him, over the last century or so, there have been significant changes in the kinds of *kitab kuning* popularly studied in pesantren across Indonesia. Interest in the Qur'an and *Hadis* texts has increased, while the interest in *fikih* texts steadily remained as the most popular science in the pesantren world. A new subject called *usul fikih* has been recently added to, and obligatory subject in almost all pesantren. All in all, there has been an increasing popularity amongst the pesantren people of, to borrow Messick's term (1993: 152), the "*shari'a* text" category, referring to the authoritative body of written materials that represents the core of Islamic knowledge, upon which Muslim individuals carefully predicate, but is not limited to, the acceptability of their deeds and actions.

- 26) Not to mention the fourth, that is, *kitab kuning* is ultimately rooted in the Middle East and yet the majority of texts that is used is of local produce.
- 27) According to Bakhtin, "the authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with the past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers." (1981: 342f).



Picture 6: Santri of Kidang studying the *kitab kuning*.

This brings us to the second meaning of *kitab kuning*, that is as an identity (van Bruinessen 1990: 227). In *A New Anthropology of Islam*, Bowen (2012: 52) has pointed out that an assumed correct performance of rituals by Muslims may become an index of their affiliations with, for example, a particular religious group. On another note, what on the part of the Kidang people has come to be called “the intellectual tradition of *kitab kuning*” has been discursively purported as the repository of religious knowledge upon which the orthodoxy of their ritual performance is both predicated and scrutinized by them. Analogically, thus, if the central ritual of *shalat* opens for its worshipers the possibility of an “indexing practice”, the usage of the scripture on which the worshiper’s knowledge of the ‘right’ ritual of *shalat* is grounded may have concluded the similar possibility.

Keeping in mind the significance of textual tradition among the pesantren people, the practice of citing the above-mentioned maxim and of associating it with *kitab kuning* texts are not discontinuous with the pesantren’s histories. In contrast, their capacity to refer to the maxim and to make a claim that it is originated from *kitab kuning* texts is creatively rooted and honed within the pesantren’s historical scholarship of learning and interpreting the foundational texts of Islam, from which they get authority and significance, i.e. tradition that is discursive (see Asad 1986). This relates to Kapferer’s statement (1988: 211) that “no tradition is constructed or invented and discontinuous with history”. Old traditions may “decay” (MacIntyre 2007 [1981]: 222) and new traditions are appearing: yet, “many of the things that human beings fashion contain

aspects of the world from which they spring or to which they refer” (Kapferer, Ibid). Tradition, in other words, contains an aspect that is reflexive, dynamic and adaptable to the present, hence it can become modern. In relation to it, I will explore below how the maxim has been interpreted by the Kidang people in their daily life experiences, as “a particular way of dwelling in modernity” (Chakrabarty 1999: 144).

Tradition that is modern

One morning, when I was at the office of Kidang pesantren, I happened to sit with Pak Zubair, the son of *Kyai* Muhammad. As we started our conversation, I took the liberty to ask him about the meanings of the Arabic quotation, particularly in the context of Kidang pesantren. His answers to my questions, as I will show, unfold the ways the Kidang people always linked the Arabic quotation with the *kitab kuning*. In my field notes, I summarized our conversation as follows:

I asked him about the meaning of the quotation “*al-muḥāfaḍa ‘ala al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa aḥḍu bi al-ḡadīd al-aṣlah*”. According to him, if he were to relate it with the educational transformations in Kidang, he would argue that the word “*al-qadīm*” referred to the tradition(s) of pesantren (*tradisi-tradisi* pesantren), such as the values of modesty (*kesederbanaan*), self-acceptance (*keikhlasan*) and humbleness (*tawaduk*). These values, he told me, had to be preserved by the Kidang people for they were “the old traditions that were good”. And then, he related the word “*al-ḡadīd al-aṣlah*” to the ways by which the Kidang men and women could better organize the pesantren’s educational system. He thus picked up the implementation of classroom system in Kidang as an example of how to better organize his pesantren. And he further told me that what was more important (between the latter and the former) was actually about the better organization and management of pesantren. He then cited an Arabic text from the Hadith, implying the importance of good management.

Responding to Pak Zubair’s explanation, I then asked him whether *kitab kuning* belonged to the old or the new tradition. He answered as follows:

Kitab kuning could not be simply called *tradisional* (traditional). This is because *kitab kuning* is an intellectual work, which required great roles of rational thinking. In the *fikih* texts for instance, he mentioned a number of them such as Safinah, Bajuri and Tanah_, santri learnt about diversity of intellectual *ijtihad* from the old generations of *ulama*, which could not be easily surpassed by those of the latter generation. So, according to him, if one regarded *kitab kuning* as not ‘moderen’, he or she might do not know yet about it”.

Many people in Kidang shared an argument similar to Pak Zubair’s. They mostly relate “the old that is good” with their *Salafiyah* tradition, and “the new that is better” to innovation that could help them better maintain their *Salafiyah* tradition through facing the challenges of the modern world. Yet, the majority of santri in Kidang, whom I asked to mention an example of the Kidang tradition, would refer to the *kitab kuning* in the first place. As such it does not necessarily mean that Zubair’s answer I mentioned above is exceptional, though. santri have been called by many as *tradisional* people in a way that being traditional is associated with condescending meanings, such as old-

fashioned, rural and backward. Taking this context into consideration, Zubair was never denying the fact that the *kitab kuning* is part of the pesantren's many traditions. He was only rejecting the stereotypical meanings that are infused into the *tradisional* santri. Seen from this context, Zubair's assertive answer to defend the modernity of *kitab kuning*, therefore, is understandable.

Furthermore, the Kidang people are also concerned about how they should apply this quotation in practice. When talking about Kidang's transformation, Taufik said that people in Kidang were currently more open to changes and new practices, compared to their predecessors in the past. Yet, he told me that the higher authorities of Kidang always kept warning him to be "not overly occupied with taking up innovations, without preserving the old (*tradisi*) that is good."²⁸ As such, Taufik was warned that the act of taking up the 'new but better' tradition (*al-ğadid al-aşlah*) should be accompanied with an equal effort of preserving their old but good tradition (*al-qadim al-salih*). In other words, before any transformation is allowed to take place in Kidang, they first have to make sure that what they have already had from the past time is well preserved. In this sense, all in all, the cultural practice of the maxim reflects a particular, let's say conservative way in which the santri are able to deal with the irresistible changes, by extension, dealing with modernity.

I will end this section by returning to one of the questions I posted in the beginning of the section, that is, "what does the act of quoting the maxim among the santri tell us about their cinematic practices?" I argue, it is telling us about the role of a pesantren tradition, notably the *kitab kuning*, for the introduction of cinematic practices into Kidang pesantren. In other words, it is the santri's historical engagement with the *kitab kuning* that has enabled them to authorize their cinematic practices according to "the wisdom of centuries of Muslim scholars before them" (Lukens-Bull, 2005: 69). Yet, paradoxically, to the extent that cinematic practices are seen as an ethical practice, their turn to cinema, as I will show in the next chapters, is essentially directed to preserve the domination of textual '*kitab kuning*' tradition in the pesantren world through the visual medium. Here tradition appears not only as a means to transformation, but also an end of that transformation.

Conclusion: cinematic practices and the reproduction of tradition

Anthropologist Talal Asad (1986) suggests that Islam is best viewed as a discursive tradition, that is to say, a set of historically evolving practices and forms of reasoning over the foundational texts of Islam, conceptualized through institutionalized forms of learning, and established by specific relations of power. For Asad, as long as the correct practices of Islam are authorized by the established practices of the preceding generations

28) "*Jangan akhdzu-akhdzu saja yang didahulukan, tapi harus dijaga juga yang qadim shalihnya*".

(see also Calder 2007: 230), what matters to all Islamic practices is the discourse in which the pedagogy, the training and the argumentation about *the apt performance* of the practice are discursively learned and communicated across different contexts of time and space in Islamic societies, and the case becomes more prevalence in societies where Muslims are minority. Viewed this way, an Islamic discursive tradition, “is therefore a mode of discursive engagement with sacred texts, one effect of which is the creation of sensibilities and embodied practices (of reason, affect, and volition) that in turn are *the conditions* for the tradition’s reproduction” (Mahmood 2005: 115, emphasis mine). What distinguishes discursive tradition from the standard definition of “traditional” is that it refers not simply to the past or its repetition, but rather to the pursuit of ongoing coherence by making reference to a set of texts, procedures, arguments, and practices, which frames the practices of Islamic reasoning (Haj 2009: 5). This means that while there is heterogeneity in Islamic traditional practices across different places, times and populations, there is also modernity in traditional practices of Islam.

Despite Asad’s approach being criticized for its proto-theological paradigm (Lukens-Bull 1999; Marranci 2008; Schielke 2010; and Ahmed 2016),²⁹ I find many aspects of Kidang’s uptake of cinematic practices resonate with Asad’s notion of discursive tradition. The Kidang men and women I worked with, as it should be clear by now, understand their turn to cinematic practices in terms of both ethical discourse and preservation of their traditional practices amidst socio-historical changes occurring in and surrounding the pesantren world. I have shown in this chapter that the capacity of the Kidang people to refer to the maxim for authorizing their cinematic practice is constituted of various skills and knowledge honed in the pesantren’s century-old textual tradition, the *kitab kuning*. In this sense, if *kitab kuning* is a result of, as Pak Zubair’s said, *ijtihad* (learning, debate, and reasoning) of the older generations of the pesantren’s ulama over foundational texts of Islam, their turn to cinematic practices, (a turn authorized by their reference to, and their perseverance of the very same foundational texts of Islam), thus, is a mirror of a reproduction of a new tradition of, and, through a film medium. In the next chapter, I will turn to the practices of film-screening and cinema-going among the Kidang men and women, in order to explore the ways by which cinematic practices as a new tradition in Kidang are engaged with and negotiated by the pesantren people.

29) Such emphasis, according to Ahmed (2016), has put Asad’s approach into a risk of missing the fact that Islamic practices are not always prescriptive, in a sense that it is related to Islamic law, but sometime also explorative: one that is instituted by, for example, the Avicennian philosophy, Akbarian Sufism and Hafizian poetry.

