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

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## Chapter 5

# Social Life of Film and Technology

### Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have shown that the emergence of the cinematic *santri* echoes McLuhan's thesis of "the medium is the message" (1964: 6), in the sense that film technology for the *pesantren* people is the extension of their various "conditions of existence" (Larkin 2009: 108) – such as the historical, the social, the political, the economic, the religious, and the popular –, against which they become able to express their religion.

Yet, within the discipline of digital anthropology, the relation between technology and human beings is never seen as a one-way traffic, and in which the former subsidizes a dominant position over the latter.<sup>1</sup> "People", write Horst and Miller (2012: 11), "are not an iota more mediated by the rise of digital technologies". That is, human beings are neither less nor more cultural before the rise of the digital, and that, by extension, they have the capacity to use the digital in order to achieve the meaningful out of their everyday live circumstances.<sup>2</sup> As an example, while digital technologies such as mobile phone and online-networking sites continue to speed up the process of human interactions, many

- 1) Taking the cue from Milller and Horst (2012), my use of the term digital here refers to everything that can be reduced into binary code. By this definition, film obviously is part of the digital category.
- 2) Such approach is indeed closely related to the social constructivist theory of technology, which argues that the meanings of the technology are largely constructed within the various dimensions of human's social practices (Bijker 1995). See also below.

scholars have demonstrated how ‘quickly’ people domesticate these technologies for their mundane purposes and according to their everyday life necessities (Barendregt 2008 & 2012; Horst 2012; and Miller 2012). As such, digital anthropology refuses to look at the digital as mere technology, but calls for the significance of studying the ways in which human beings use the digital technology in order to “shift our conceptualization of being human” (Horst and Miller 2012: 29).

At the heart of this digital-anthropology’s theoretical framework is a question about the relationship between people and objects. To answer it, one can derive an important theory from material culture studies, which is called “objectification”, that is, “the manner in which objects or material forms are embedded in the life worlds of individuals, groups, institutions or, more broadly, culture and society” (Tilley 2006: 60). While assuming the centrality of objects at the heart of our social inquiry (Küchler 2006), this theory refuses the subject-object dualism, and attempts to recognize instead the dialectical relationship between subjects and objects, between persons and things. Objects are “not simply a mirror of social distinction, set of ideas and symbolic systems”, but they are the very medium through which these very forms of human culture and society “are constantly reproduced and legitimized, or transformed” (Tilley 2006: 61).

Of one particular type of objectification relates to a consumption practice as elaborated by Daniel Miller in his *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987, and also Miller 2006). In his work, Miller challenges our common tendency to value practices of consumption through the “morality of spending” perspectives (2006: 342). He instead points out that people have actively shaped and reshaped their personal and collective identities through the consumer goods they bought, such as furniture, cloth, cars, food, drink, and leisure activities. This is because as soon as a consumer good is purchased, its “purchaser or intended users” will translate, re-contextualize, and transform it from “being a symbol of ...price value to being an *artifact* invested with particular inseparable connotations”, such as social class, ideologies, and personal preferences (Miller 1987: 190, italics mine). Once consumed, in short, a thing will be perpetually appropriated by its users for fashioning their personal and collective identities, as well as their social distinctions: this is what this chapter means by objectification.

In Kidang, this type of objectification over the material forms of film and other media technologies is pronounced. What I mean by the material forms of media technologies here, however, refers less to the materiality of technology than to the use of, and engagement with it. Many Kidang *ustadz* and *kyai* worry about particular aspects of film, mobile phones, the Internet, and various kinds of digital technologies, which they regard as being dangerous to the structures of pesantren’s authorities, beliefs, and identities. This has in turn forced santri to place the use of these technologies under particular regulations. At the same time, film technology as material objects has been attributed by the Kidang people, especially the santri, with particular desires and aspirations for an imaginary elsewhere: one that is distant and global but arousing their

bodily sensory receptors and curiosity. In this chapter, my aim is to explore the ways in which the material forms of film and other media technologies are consumed by the Kidang people, and how it could tell us about their conceptualization of being human beings.

I start this chapter by outlining my theoretical approach to film as a technology, in which I also briefly explain the significance of equating film with other media technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones in the context of the Kidang people. I then explore the ways by which the Kidang *kyai* and *ustadz* have negotiated the use of these technologies in their pesantren, especially against the contexts of Kidang's structure of authorities, social order and morality. Here I provide an ample examination about Kidang people's opinion regarding the legal status of these technologies, especially film, according to Islamic law; as well as about the material aspects of the technologies that are seen as threatening to the Kidang authorities and how they are so. In the second-half part of the chapter, I shift my focus towards exploring the significance of (the engagement with) these technologies as material culture among the Kidang santri. Here I attend to a number of ethnographic stories by which I show how practices of consuming film technologies among the santri are invested with particular desires and aspirations. I argue, finally, that the ways the material forms of film and other newer media technologies have come to matter to the everyday life of the Kidang people, or the "social life" (Appadurai 1986) of the technologies, affirms the reciprocal relationship between human subjects and material objects, that is, they are shaped and are shaped by each other (Tilley 2006: 61, see also Horst and Miller 2012).

### **Theorizing film as a (new media) technology**

As I will state explicitly throughout this chapter, the ways by which the Kidang people do, or should do with the material forms of film technologies have always been stimulated and estimated both *toward and against* new discoveries, new thoughts, new imaginaries, new interactions, and new possibilities. Because of this, I am not inclined to regard film in the context of the Kidang people as a mere technology, but as a form of new media. In this section, I will briefly explain my theoretical underpinnings with regard to my use of the term 'technology' and 'new media'. I start with the latter.

It goes without saying that new media is commonly defined as a new form of communication technologies. What is "new", however, in new media has always been contested.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, my guiding principle is as follows. I frame the 'new' in its relatively historical situations, cultural contexts, and social practices (Marvin 1988; Eickelman and Salvatore 1999; Gitelman and Pingree 2003; Meyer and Moors 2006; Dewdney and Ride 2006; and Gershon 2017); and I refuse to reduce it either to its "novelty" or mere "computing technology" (see Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort 2003; Levinson 2009).

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3) For the latest account on such debates, see Gershon 2017.

This is because, the first introduction of a new medium in each society differs historically across time and space. All new media were at once new (Gitelman and Pingree 2003: xi) and every invention in a new communication technology is but an elaboration of the earlier works of communication technologies (Marvin 1988: 3). Also, as suggested by Boyd, an introduction of new media technologies, despite may alter the landscape in which people get connected with each other, does not affect the underlying motivations and social practices by which people engage and disengage with such new technologies (2014: 13). Because of these, Gershon gently reminds us that what is new in new media does not locate in the technology, but in the ways it calls forth “a new social practices” (2017: 16). That is, the potential of media technology to enable people to create a new way of knowledge circulation, public involvement, communication roles and strategies, and political engagement. Considering this definition, the term new media (especially in the contexts of the Kidang people) can be broadened into one that does not only refer to the most recently-invented forms of communication technologies such as computer, mobile ‘smart’ phone, and the Internet, but also includes older media (that are used in new settings), such as television, radio, photography, and, especially, film (camera).

However, introducing film technology as new media requires further problematization. Unlike other technologies - such as dishwashers and bicycles - new media technologies facilitate mediation practices which link the private with the public sphere, incorporating the production of what is the meaningful into the everyday life (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, as cited by Horst 2012). In their edited volume, *Religion, New Media, and the Public Sphere*, Moors and Meyer (2006), emphasized that the adoption of newly introduced media technologies in religious communities “significantly transforms existing practices of religious mediation” (p. 11). This in turn has brought forward a new form of public visibility of the religion, the mode of which might be difficult to control by established religious authorities. Apparently, to introduce film technology as a new media, to paraphrase Moors’ and Meyer’s (Ibid), is to recognize both the destabilizing and enabling potentials of the technology for the established practices of religious mediation.

In relation to my emphasis on the dimension of “new social practices” of new media, it is imperative to mention here now, that the term technology that I use throughout the chapter is more designed as a social practice than an artifact. Technology, or the use of technology, is an embodiment of how people, negotiate, conduct, and give meanings to the ordinary practices of their social lives.

My approach is largely inspired by those who propose the significance of studying technology beyond its technological details and confines, but in the ways by which “technologies are shaped and acquire their meanings in the heterogeneity of social interactions” (Bijker 1995: 6, but see also Pinch and Bijker 1989, and Pfaffenberger

1992).<sup>4</sup> This is because, all technical engagements are never merely technical, but they are “immediately and intimately” linked to variously social dimensions of the everyday lives of the individuals (Mitcham 2003 [1990]: 491; see also Marvin 1988: 4). Brian Larkin, for example, in his seminal work *Signal and Noise* (2008), has shown that the meanings, social usages and technical functions of technologies are not an inevitable consequence. Rather, they are something that is negotiated over time and is contingent upon various contexts of considerable cultural debates within which these technologies exist. Thus, following this line of argument, in order to understand the meaning of film (and other media) technologies among the pesantren people, it is important for us to explore, to mention the most notable ones, the social, cultural, political, and textual dimensions, within which these technologies retain their significance among the pesantren people.

The next section looks at a textual understanding of technology among the Kidang people.

### Technological ambiguity and the importance of ‘intent’

One day in June 2012, I interviewed Pak Hasan, the youngest son of *Kyai* Muhammad, the main leader of Kidang. Throughout the interview I asked him about the legal status of the use of film technology according to Islamic law. Answering to my question, he cited an Arabic phrase from a *kaidah fikih*, or basic rules of Islamic jurisprudence. It says, “*Al-aşlu fi al-aşyā’ al-ibāḥah*”. He translated this as follows: “The initial law of everything is permissible (*mubah*, or *mubāḥ*), depending on its intention (*niat*, or *niyyah*) and its usage (*penggunaan*)”. When later I asked him to further explain the Arabic text he just cited, he told me to imagine the film as if it were a ‘double-edged knife’. He said:

“Assume it (the film) as a knife. (It) depends on how it is used. If it (the film) is used for *dakwah*, it (becomes) better, even (the *dakwah* film) has to be more (produced). But if ... the knife is used to slaughter an animal, (it makes the animal) as *halal* food.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, if (the knife is used) to commit suicide, (it) is *haram* isn’t it?”

Pak Hasan’s answer represents the dominant view of the Kidang people over the permissible status of film media technology in particular, and all technologies in general. In Kidang, the use of technology is pervasive. It has, for example, electricity installed in all the pesantren’s buildings, used microphones for its ritual practices, placed a big

4) Such approach is closely linked to Heidegger’s take on technology (2003 [1954]: 252), in which he argues, “the essence of technology is by no means... technological”, but is “a mode of revealing” (255) the truth that does neither “happen somewhere beyond all human doing”, nor “exclusively *in*” and “definitively *through*” human being (259, italics original). This means, the salience of technology is not located in it being a tool, but in its being, as a tool, used in relationship with others.

5) In Islamic society, slaughtering an animal either for consumption or ritual should be done in such a way that it does not “excruciate” the animal, one of the recommendation of which is by using a sharp tool such as a knife.

television set at the pesantren's dining room, built a telephone café accessible to all santri, installed a wireless-Internet access point, and had Internet-connected computer facilities accessible both to Kidang teachers and students. The Kidang people apparently acknowledge the 'sublime power' of technology (Larkin 2008), i.e. a knife that has the force to cut effortlessly, or a film that has the power to animate still pictures. Yet, they also believe that such power is not inevitable, instead it depends upon the ways it is used by others, i.e. a knife may be used either for ritual slaughtering or for killing innocent souls. Therefore, to say that a film technology is like a double-edged knife that can be used either to do moral damage or religious salvation is to argue that the sublime power of technology is neither value free nor inherently good. Rather, it is deeply invested with the moral character and social order of the society in which the technology is being used. This way, technology may appear as a paradox to the santri: it has the power to bring forth both good and bad influences.

Pak Hasan's answer also illustrates that the legal status of film and other media technologies depends less heavily on the technology itself than on the subject's intention of using the technology. Intention, here, is the matter: if one's use of film technology is for good purposes, their engagement with it should be fine. It is by shifting the use and meanings of technologies from their technical affordances into a matter of intention of their users, that the Kidang people become capable of appropriating film and other new media technologies for their own, acceptable purposes. Such an approach echoes the technological engagement of the Amish people, who carefully consider an introduction of every new technology in their society on the basis of their efforts of strengthening their culture, identity, and community's values (Wetmore 2007). What differs between the two societies, I argue, is the underlying cultural backgrounds by which both have considered the acceptability, meanings and social functions of the technology.

Kidang people's view over the acceptance of film technologies, however, differs from that of earlier generations of the pesantren people. Initial public discussion on the legal status of film-related technologies among Indonesian Muslims most possibly occurred in not earlier than the 1930s (Jasin 1930; Soerono 1941a; Soerono 1941b). By this time, while the majority of the NU people tended to refuse any iconic representation of God and His animate creations (Masyhuri 1977: 41; Hooker 2003: 85), most Indonesian Muslims, even the modernist groups, regarded that any act of going to, and being in a cinema transgresses permissible conduct (Jasin 1930: 282; Hassan 1969: 1187-90 and 1211; and Hooker 2003: 85). Not so long a mere two-decades-ago, more importantly, this view was still common among santri - and even today, is still recognizable to a much lesser degree. This discrepancy, however, should not be understood that the Kidang people have strayed from the 'authentic' path of Islam held dear by their earlier generation. Rather, as such is better understood that an interpretation of Islamic texts among Muslims, including the santri, is by no means static, but conversely, is historically contextualized. By the 1930s, Islam was barely present in local cinema theaters and local Muslims were ranked as the lowest category



of the country's film audiences (Biran 2009 [1993]), meaning they were not yet familiar with the cinematic culture. But today, images about Islam are circulated everywhere, for good or ill, and Muslim men and women are increasingly exposed, if not forced to be so in one way or another, to engaging with image-producing technologies. In other words, there are indeed some aspects in new media technology that become an issue among the santri, yet, what aspect of it and how it is viewed as such are contingent to historical moments and circumstances.

Pak Hasan's answer reveals that Muslims put much emphasis on the significance of intent, in a sense of "rightly guided", for defining their deeds as either worships, hobbies, habits, or others (Möller 2007: 55). Leaving the legal status of film technology to one's intention or its use, however, can be difficult to discern to the personal user. This is because one's intention, whether good or not, is never easily tangible. Intent has a broad meaning: it can be "other than what one sees in behavior" (Bowen 1997: 172), and it is deeply ingrained in an esoteric dimension of one's practices of Islamic teachings of ethics and morality.<sup>6</sup> In addition, what is regarded as good may differ amongst people, so that one's good *niat* can be multiply and wrongly interpreted by others. During the interview, Pak Hasan did exemplify what he meant by good intention, when saying that "if the film is used for *dakwah*, then it is good, even more films about *dakwah* should be produced". Pace his explanation, the meaning of *dakwah* among Muslims is as multi interpretative as that of "good *niat*". For example, a modernist Muslim film director Hanung Bramantyo once told me that film for him is a culprit to a Muslim preacher: a means for *dakwah*. Yet, almost all his Islamic-themed films have triggered public controversy among other Muslims for one reason or the other (Huda 2010; Heryanto 2014). Hence, at this point, we still have the same problem, that is, what does it mean "good intention" when it comes to the utilization of film and new media technologies, especially in the context of Kidang pesantren?

I argue that "what is intentionally good and not good" about the use of new media technologies among the Kidang people is socially constructed and context sensitive. To prove my argument, it is imperative that we shift our attention to particular aspects of new media technologies that trigger a sense of fear and anxiety among the Kidang men and women.

## From visual excess to 'communicative' freedom

One day, Ustadz Rizal, head of Kidang's *Divisi Kepengasuhan Santri* (Santri Supervisory Division), started a weekly evaluation meeting for Kidang's assistant teachers, or *ustadz pengabdian* ('ustadz on service') with an emotional speech. His face was reddish and his voice was piercing. Despite being renowned for his loud voice, this time I was pretty

6) Barendregt (2013) finds out the similar discourses amongst Malaysian nasheed artists, who often refer to "*Ilm al Akhlaq*" (Islamic teachings on ethics and morality) if it comes to intentions.

sure that he was ragged in anxiety. I turned to Imam, my faithful companion in Kidang who sat next to me, with a questioning look, hoping he would explain what was going on. But he only shook his head and said nothing. Realizing everyone in the room was in heightened tension, I tried myself to listen to Rizal's speech, from which I then learned that two couples of santri were caught dating (*pacaran*) around the pesantren area. To the Kidang people, dating is considered a serious infringement of the pesantren's disciplinary and gender segregation rules, one that may risk the continuation of the santri's study in the pesantren.

Rizal asserted, he "had evidence" that the dating santri couples had used mobile phone and Facebook as their means for communication. Because of this, he was sure of himself that many santri must have similarly smuggled mobile phones into the pesantren's dormitories or have escaped to an Internet café for accessing Facebook and the like. Based on his assumption, he urged all the assistant teachers to be more watchful in monitoring the everyday movement of the santri. In particular, he asked them to inspect more strictly the forbidden use and access of mobile phone and Internet amongst santri.

A day after this had happened, I approached *ustadz* Rizal and asked him about the reasons behind his command to restrict the use of communication technologies among the santri. He answered, as follows: "information and media technologies such as Facebook, mobile phone, TV, and film, are dangerous for the santri". To exemplify his answer, he then recalled a piece of news he had read in a newspaper. It was about a boy who committed a crime that was triggered by a program he had watched on TV. It arguably seems to me that, Rizal, along with many other authorities of Kidang pesantren, were worried if new media technologies, as he said, "could influence the santri to break the pesantren's rules".

Implicit in this story is that the use of new media technologies in Kidang environs has ushered in a number of new possibilities, circulation and material freedom among the pesantren pupils that has bluntly subverted the pesantren's social order and morality, highly maintained by the pesantren's authorities. There is obviously a question about image, or the visual, that is problematic and worrisome to Kidang's authorities, as indicated by Rizal's reference to the violence-containing images on TV, hence by extension, images that freely circulate on film, mobile phone, and other new media technologies. I am not inclined, however, to relate their anxiety of the visual either with the prohibition of figural representation in Islamic tradition (*hadis*) or with Muslims' iconoclastic practices across Islamic histories. This is not only due to the scarcity of iconoclastic discourse amongst the Kidang people, but also because of the fact that, firstly, many Muslims throughout histories of Islam have challenged the dominant interpretation of the legal prohibition of figural representation, that is, by celebrating the production of images (Ahmed 2015). And secondly, contemporary acts of Muslim iconoclasts have sought the logic of their iconoclasm within the roots of socio-economic and political realities of global modernity (Barry-Flood 2002).

Compared to spoken and written words, images are not only much more ‘vivid and indelible’ (Daston and Galison 1992) but also much denser with meanings, and much more prone to be always in motion (Spyer and Steedly 2013). Images in motion, argue Spyer and Steedly (Ibid: 8), do not only move intransitively; but as they circulate they also affect their audiences in multifarious ways, often unpredictable and uncontrollable either by their producers or consumers. Yet, “images do not freely flow either within or across borders”; rather the movement of image is “limited by economic interests and moral norms”, as well as “enshrined in law as copyright, anti-blasphemy, anti-incitement, anti-libel, or anti-pornography legislation” (Barry-Flood 2013: 62. See also Barry-Flood 2002, Gerritsen 2012, and Larkin 2013). That is why some images are more threatening, more contagious, and more mobile than others, as exemplified by the case of the Danish caricature controversy of the prophet Muhammad (also the Bamhiyan Budhas).

Rizal’s reference to a violent image is revealing here. In the early years of *Reformasi* which was characterized by serial eruptions of regional civil wars, political upheavals and freedom of press and expressions, mass-mediated images of violence were omnipresent in the country’s public domains, triggering public fears about the effects of these images to children being exposed to them. Against such fears, assuaging the putative effects of images of violence on children was normalized as a pedagogical strategy by many parents and educational agencies, who regard children as a site of their anxiety, desire and aspirations (Strassler 2006). In Kidang nevertheless, the greatest fear among its authorities is less about santri watching images of violence than watching pornographic images accessible through technology, not the technology in itself. This difference relates to both the fact that the young santri in Kidang are more teenagers than children, and the notoriety among many Indonesians about the use of mobile phone as a circuit of (production and) exchange for “mobile pornography” (see Barendregt 2008).

Yet, I never found an occasion in which the Kidang santri used mobile phone or other new media technologies for accessing pornography.<sup>7</sup> This echoes the article by Nilan and Mansfield (2014) about online activities of Indonesian young adults and teenagers at Internet cafes, in which they found out that while most teenagers used internet for socializing with their teenage peers, online activities of the young adults, conversely, often suggest an exchange of adult contents (compare with Barendregt 2008 I mentioned above). If this is true, hence, the rhetoric of image fears is triggered less by what the santri is actually doing with film and other new media technologies, than by the ways adult authorities in Kidang look at their santri: i.e. they are vulnerable teens that have to be protected from the perceived dangers of the use of technology.

In addition to persuasive images, new media technology is worrisome to the Kidang people due to its technical affordances for “communicative possibility”, which I broadly

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7) The closest I came to finding an example of ‘pornography’ among them is when a group of santri rented a Hollywood film that contains images of scantily clothed females and males; yet it is absolutely not a porn film.

define here as “a desire to the newer spectacles” (Marvin 1988:153). Film, for example, is a communicative technology because of its technical ability to show the other worlds and it is for this reason that film in the context of Kidang is categorized here as a “new media technology”. Likewise, mobile phone is technically equipped to generate an instantaneous exchange of information at distance, while some of it has come with built-in camera, radio, and internet connectivity, thanks to the so called “convergence culture” (Jenkins 2008).<sup>8</sup> The invention of Internet technology, more importantly, has provided greater amounts of information and faster modes of socialization that are much more readily available to much more people than ever before.

The communicative possibilities allowed by these newer technologies are often at odds with Kidang’s social structures and cultural values. An institution of Islamic learning, Kidang recognizes the significance of social order, structure of authority, standardized morality, and ethics of learning. Everyday life activities in Kidang, for example, are tediously organized through a series of disciplinary surveillance and regulations. Participation of every santri in Kidang’s learning activities, their circulation in and out pesantren areas, and their communication with the opposite gender, all are put under close examination enacted by the pesantren’s structure of authorities, in this regard, led by *Ustadz* Rizal (see Chapter 4). It is at the background of such social systems that the use of film and other new media technologies by the santri may become disturbing to many *ustadz* and *kyai* in Kidang. For one thing, while seeing that film could expose santri to the other worlds, using a mobile phone could allow them to exchange messages with people inside and outside the pesantren’s area (for dating or anything else), without knowledge and authorization of the pesantren authorities. Similarly, with the Internet technology, santri could enter into a chatting room, read articles, watch videos, play social media, and possibly access pornographic materials in ways that are invisible to the “alert gaze” (Foucault 1975) of pesantren surveillance. These possibilities have in turn frightened Kidang’s authorities in that they may bring the santri into “the other worlds” that are harder to be comprehended and more difficult to be controlled by Kidang’s authorities.<sup>9</sup>

The worries that emerge around the use of new media technologies in Kidang, thus, are not because of their sheer artifacts as technologies that come from the West, but due to their ability to allow the santri to go outside and against the channels of the pesantren’s authority, thus attacking the very heart of Kidang’s social systems as an institution of Islamic learning. Such worries reflect scholarly works on the impacts of new media technologies in Muslim societies, which argue that the negative response of

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8) One of the meanings of “convergence culture” is an acceleration of the flow of media contents across various delivery channels taking place within the same appliances (Jenkins 2008: 15-16).

9) In the language of Marvin’s (1988), these newer technologies are feared because they “created unprecedented opportunities” that “went unobserved by the regular community” (p. 70).

Muslims toward information and media technologies is not simply because of the fact that these technologies come from the West (Robinson 1993). But because of their instrumental roles in shaping variously new Muslim actors, who vigorously created alternative sites of learning about, and speaking of and for Islam (Eickelman and Anderson 1999), that subvert, break with, and even attack the traditional structures of scholarship, ideologies and authorities in the Muslim world (Devji 2005). The emergence of these new media practices, these works suggest, has in turn led into democratization of Islamic knowledge, individualization of Islamic discourses, globalization of Islamic movement, and fragmentation of religious authority; the accumulation of which demands a restructuration of Muslim beliefs and practices.

*Ustadz* Rizal was very confident when blaming new media technologies and the fear of the santri's violation of pesantren's gender segregation rules.<sup>10</sup> Upon my fieldwork in Kidang, I did encounter with santri frequenting an Internet cafe and using a mobile phone without authorization from the pesantren's authorities. Yet, most of them told me that they were using mobile phone for contacting their parents and friends, or they went to an Internet cafe for searching materials needed to accomplish their school's assignments. Still, it is imperative to recall here that upon my hanging out with the male santri, I often witnessed a discreet exchange of flirtatious communication between male and female santri inside Kidang areas, not through an illegally owned mobile phone nor illegal access of the Internet, but through a small group of middle aged-women working in the pesantren's kitchens (Chapter 4). Having free access to move across Kidang's male-female spatial boundaries, these women would help deliver a message from a male santri to his girlfriend in a female dormitory, and vice versa. This means, an introduction of new media technologies into Kidang does not necessarily bring up a "dating" practice between the santri; rather, the (use of) technology only extends the similar practice that has always been there among the Kidang santri into unbounded settings.

In contrast to their worries about the use of new media technologies among the santri, almost all *ustadz* and *kyai* in Kidang are mobile phone users, and a few of them are also active on social media.<sup>11</sup> Yet, I never heard them fearing *themselves* of being corrupted because of using these technologies. Conversely, a (not so) young *ustadz* of Kidang, married to a daughter of a Kidang's *kyai*, once confessed to me *in a very casual*

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10) In Indonesia, the use of moral panic discourse against the uptakes of newer media technologies among teenagers is not specific to Kidang authorities, but is prevalent among adult people across the country (see Smith-Hefner 2007; Kailani 2011; Lim 2013; and Nilan and Mansfield 2014).

11) To essentially regard young people as "digital native" and old people "digital immigrant" is inaccurate (Boyd 2014; see also Thomas 2011). For not every santri in Kidang has similar skill and knowledge about using newer technologies like the Internet, and a few of Kidang's older generation is savvy enough in using social media. Indeed, if knowledge is not inherently generational and technical skills are acquired through active cultivation, then people of various ages have a relatively equal chance to become either digital native or naive.

*manner* that he first knew his wife through a Facebook communication. His confession is to a certain extent paradoxical, because what he was doing on Facebook (for ‘dating’ his wife to be) is exactly what the teenage santri are assumed not to be doing with new media technologies by the Kidang ‘adult’ authorities. I do not mean to judge the *ustadz*. Yet as such is reinforcing my argument about the tendency of Kidang authorities not only to look at teenage santri as vulnerable figures before the assumedly dangerous seduction of technology, but also to regard them as “a site of their aspiration, desire and anxiety” (Strassler 2006). This significantly means that what is intentionally good and not good about the use of technology among the Kidang santri is decidedly located at the hands of Kidang adult authorities, that is, in the form of particular regulation and authorization.

## Regulation and authorization

The logical consequence of their worries over the assumed danger of communicative freedom and visual excess of new media technologies is that Kidang authorities went on to regulate the use of these technologies among the pesantren’s pupils. This regulation asserts that every santri is not allowed to bring any communication and digital devices such as mobile phone, radio, television, and laptop into pesantren dormitory. In a situation that a santri needs for a considerable reason to bring one of these devices, let’s say mostly mobile phone, they have to report it to their supervisory teachers, who will keep it under their reservation, retrievable only either when the santri want to call their parents on weekend, or when they return to their homes during the pesantren holidays. If they fail to report their possession of one of these devices, the pesantren’s security division is entitled to collect the device, as well as to put them in a series of punishment, ranging from reading the Qur’an at public to a physical sanction, such as having one’s head shaved for male santri (for my discussion on the structures of authority in Kidang, see Chapter 4).

Use of new media is not totally restricted in Kidang. In contrast, Kidang has provided some of these as public facilities to its santri, such as television, Internet-connected computers, an Internet hotspot, a camcorder and DSLR camera, a telephone cafe (*wartel*). In addition, every santri is suggested to borrow their supervisory teacher’s mobile phones whenever they need to call their families. Also, every supervisory teacher should give their phone numbers to their supervised santri’s parents, so that the parents are able to talk to their children when needed.

Still, it is necessary to mention here that access to these facilities is highly controlled by Kidang’s temporal and spatial surveillance, along with authorization from Kidang’s authorities. For example, the use of television, while set in the pesantren’s dining room, is only allowed during the off-study hours, or when learning activities in Kidang were in suspension during holidays. The use of computers by santri, moreover, is limited for study purposes under supervision of an *ustadz*, and any access to social-media sites



such as Facebook (not to mention porn sites) is blocked. The Internet hot spot, while strong enough to stream a YouTube video and free from any social-media blockage, is only accessible from the pesantren's central office. Considering that none of the santri in Kidang are allowed to possess a mobile phone, the Internet hot spot is apparently specifically provided to serve the teachers, not the santri. Supposed there is an occasion in which a santri is able to access it with or without notification from the authorities, the fact that it is only accessible from the pesantren's main office is significant to limit the santri's liberty of using it. An organization of film-related practices, such as film-making, film-screening and film discussion, is no different in the sense that it has to be authorized by one of the Kidang authorities. In the case of film-making, santri are especially required to go directly to Pak Hasan, handing in to him a copy of their film proposals, on the basis of which he is expected to value their film projects.<sup>12</sup> I argue, the use of these new media technologies among Kidang santri, while allowable, is tediously regulated in such a way that santri are only able to do so under the control and surveillance of Kidang authorities.

This does not mean, however, that the teenage santri are incapable of being agents of their own rights. In Chapter 4, I have shown how some of the santri have reclaimed their agency to achieve their "freedom" of, for example, going to a cinema theater for a public film screening, by creating various strategies to control and reconfigure their situations against the pesantren's disciplinary practices and surveillance. In the following section, yet, I will focus on showing the ability of Kidang santri to interpret in their own rights one of the meanings of "good intention" in regard to their use of new media technologies, one that is distinctive to that that is constructed by Kidang authorities. In this regard, I will focus on the ways by which the santri have objectified the material aspects of film-related technologies, such as a film camera, through "their emotions and attitudes as human beings" (Marranci 2008), in the ordinary lives.

## Stories on film technology among the santri

### *Film camera*

One day in June 2012, I went to see Aisyah in Matapena's office for an interview (on Aisyah and Matapena, see Chapter 3). Since the office is located in the female area, where the mere presence of a single male is prohibited, I asked Taufik to be my companion.

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12) Yet, I was told that the process of authorization was always very quick, and Pak Hasan did not read the whole film's scripts but only its synopsis. This however, not necessarily has to be indicative of his authorization being a mere formality. For according to Taufik, a grandson of Kidang's main *kyai* who is responsible to supervise film-related practices in Kidang, his quick examination of the film proposal was uncharacteristic of Pak Hasan. Usually, he had been always quite critical to the writings of Kidang santri submitted to him for publication in Kidang's bulletin and magazine. I argue, as rightly pointed out by Taufik, his uncritical examination toward santri's film proposals may have much to do with his lack of knowledge of film-making.

We arrived at the office earlier than Aisyah. It was a small room located in one of the pesantren's female buildings, just behind the staircase of the second floor. Its door was left open. As I entered the room, I noticed that it had only one table, one bookshelf and two chairs, all of them stood at the rear side of the room. A vase of plastic-made flowers was on the table. Next to it was a box of bulletins and DVD films of the Matapena's production. Neither did I remember what kinds of book were on the bookshelf, nor if there was any of them in there. But as my notes recall, I was more attracted by the two wooden boards hanging on the room's wall, just above the table. The first board contained the newest edition of *NahLab*, a student monthly bulletin published by Kidang santri. The other board displayed a series of pictures of santriwati's cinematic-related activities, and is entitled, "Matapena on the Wall".

Looking at these pictures, my eyes quickly spotted a snapshot of a female santri posing with a big film camera. I had actually seen a similar picture before, uploaded on a social media account of the very woman in the picture that I was now looking at, Aisyah. Yet, seeing it now hang in the office where the female in the photo had a significant position, I could not disregard the photo anymore, as I did when I first saw it on the Internet. I remember, while waiting Aisyah to come, I took a while to carefully look at the photo. It pictured Aisyah with her ordinary Islamic dress: a combination of a long skirt, a long-sleeve blouse and a loose-fitting headscarf. She looks sitting on a chair, facing onto a video camera that was steadily put on a tripod. Her left hand held the main body of the camera, and her right hand was on the neck of the tripod. Her eyes - she was wearing glasses - were looking on through an object that is supposed to be the camera's viewfinder. Her eyes looked focused, likely indicating that she was seriously working with the film camera in her hand. Yet, her lips were smiling, just a little, posing! (See picture 9).

After a while, Aisyah finally came in to the office. Yet, no sooner did we start our interview than a female santri came over at the office. She asked Aisyah for a short supervisory advice about her short story that she had been struggling to finish. I let Aisyah first finish her business with her student, before we continued the interview. While waiting for them, though, my mind kept thinking about the "Aisyah snapshot". The night before, I had a long night conversation with Taufik, in particular about the production process of the film. He told me that one of the most difficult parts of it was finding the camera. This was because the pesantren did not have a video camera that is good enough to make a film. He went to some people, asking around if they have a film camera to hire. In the beginning, he came to a friend he knew from his university whom he thought had camera skills. But he only came to find out he was an amateurish cameraman without having any camera. Then after a while of searching information, he found a newly established production house, called *Lingkar Kreatif*. It belonged to a professional community of cameramen, who used to work in various local TV stations. Still new, they offered him a promotional price. Taufik, then, happily decided to hire them for the pesantren's film production, including the film's shooting and editing.





Picture 9: Picture of Aisyah at the centre of “Matapena on the Wall”.

When Aisyah finally finished her supervisory session, I began my interview, and asked her to talk about the photograph. She explained that what in the picture was a mere performance. She did not take the imagery. Not only because the film camera was not hers, but also, she was lacking the skill for operating a film camera. Then she told me that as the film director, what she did was instruct the cameraman to take the scene from certain angles that she desired. But what she did in the picture, she adds, was “to try how it did feel to work with the film camera”. She finished her answer by saying that giving creative instruction to the cameraman was much easier than operating the film camera herself, because “the film camera was a bit heavy, and often bothered by her wearing eyeglasses”.

The ‘Aisyah Snapshot’ indexes how the camera as a material object matters to Aisyah, in a sense that it connotes “a diffuse, sentimental association” (Miller 1998: 11). Unlike many other people in Kidang, Aisyah owns herself a digital SLR camera<sup>13</sup>, and self-confessedly recognizes the “evidential force”<sup>14</sup> (Barthes 1981: 89) of photography, which is apparently her another hobby, next to film-making and writing. During my fieldwork, almost in every event in Kidang that I attended, I always noticed Aisyah taking photographs of the events with her digital camera, a few of the photographs

13) Because of her position as an assistant *ustadzah*, it is allowed for her to possess and bring digital devices such as camera, mobile phone and even laptop, into her dormitory.

14) Or the capacity of photograph to be a testimony of a past reality (Ibid).

of which would be uploaded either on the pesantren's official website, or on her blog. Aisyah's explanation about what she was mainly doing with the film camera, i.e. she tells the cameramen what to shoot, reveals the importance of the snapshot for Aisyah in order to reclaim her authority with the film camera especially to the public recognition of the Kidang people. Yet, the camera in the photo is also aspirational for Aisyah. Writing on the use of various backdrops which displayed images of an airplane, an expensive car, and a luxurious hotel among photo studios in modern Java, Strassler (2010) argues that material objects have the power to embody aspirations, because backdrops such as these embody the longings of those who visited the studios toward signs of material wealth and modernity, ones that are unable to "be brought home... as personal accoutrement" (p. 98). In a similar way, the story of Aisyah's need to hire someone with professional skills as a cameraman because of her lack of such skills, and that this was part of Aisyah's explanation of her snapshot, evokes her aspiration over the film camera as a material object. I think, to the extent that the film camera has been produced and introduced as an icon of modernity in the sense that, for example, it creates new imaginaries (Siegel 2005), the camera in the photo embodies Aisyah's desire toward a sign of modernity. Or to say it in different words, through the materiality of a (film) camera, Aisyah attempts to present herself as a modern female santri.

### ***We are santri (but/and) 'moderen'***

Aisyah is not alone among the Kidang santri who have embraced film technology as an emblem of modernity, though. Regarding this, my unstructured interviews with a number of santriwati (female santri) who all took part in Kidang Matpena's film projects, are worth recalling.

One of the main questions I asked to the santriwati during the interview was about their feelings to film practices. All of them said they were happy and proud of the films they have acted in and produced. They went further to tell me that they showed the films to their family members, to their friends and to their neighbours back in their villages, who would together watch the films. Some santriwati even bluntly told me that by making and playing in the film, they could prove to their friends who attended the non-pesantren schools, that they were able to make a film while living in a pesantren.<sup>15</sup> I also asked them if they watched films in *Cinema 21*, and if yes, how they found information about the films being shown in the cinema. While most of them said no, a few of them had attended a film screening in a commercial cinema, especially, during the pesantren holidays. Those who often went to cinema admitted that they found information about the films from the Internet and in newspapers, passionately mentioning a number of films they have watched. When I asked why they loved watching and searching

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15) As far as my hanging out with the male santri can tell, a few of Kidang santri are friends to students of other non-pesantren-based schools whom they knew through their participation in extracurricular activities.

information about films, a santriwati replied in a short but sharp sentence, saying, “Karena kami santri tapi moderen!” (‘Because we are santri but modern!’) Unlike when I was talking to Aisyah and other teachers in Kidang, I hardly heard these santriwati emphasizing that their cinematic practices were for *da’wah* or propagating Islam. Most of them translated their cinematic practices with the vocabularies associated with being youthful, santri and modern.

Here I want to consider the expression of ‘we are santri but modern’. Some santri in Kidang refused to be associated with being rural. Yet, the fact that the student chose to use “but” in order to relate the word “santri” with the word “modern” is telling. As the word “but” suggests an opposition between the objects before and after it, the grammatical structure of this expression indicates, at least for a while, that the word santri already bore an association of ‘not modern in itself’ to the unconscious minds of the Kidang santri. During my hanging out sessions with the santriwan, the santri I talked with often confessed that they somehow and sometime had an inferior feeling in front of their fellow teenagers who study outside the pesantren. This feeling of inferiority is seen in the prevailing mockery that circulates amongst the santri. A good example of such mockery is a slang expression of “*kamseu!*”, an abbreviation of “*kampungan sekali*”, which literally means, very rural, being backward, lack of education, ignorance, et cetera.

Smith-Hefner (2007) has argued that the prevalent use of slang expressions among Indonesian young people registers their aspiration for youth modernity. We need, however, to unpack the use of the slang expression “*kamseu*” among the santri, because the social contexts in which the santri use this expression may lead to a different conclusion.

The santri used the word “*kamseu*” in many different contexts. Mostly, however, it is used as mockery when someone makes a silly mistake. I remember, some santriwan used this word as a joke when their friend who borrowed my camera couldn’t operate it. Another time a santriwan also mentioned this word to describe his funny first experience of watching film with his friends in the cinema: he described the situation in which he and his friends were not really sure what to do in the cinema as very “*kamseu*”. And still another time a santriwan complained to me that an *ustadz* was very “*kamseu*” because the latter had made a mistake in a book he wrote but refusing the former’s offer to correct the mistake.

Indeed, most of the time the use of the word “*kamseu*” refers to a mild joke, indicating the close friendship between them. However, a joke is never a mere joke: it hides something that underlies it. For ages, pesantren have been associated with being rural and backward due to its historical emergence in remote and countryside areas. But even to this day, despite majority of Kidang students being of urban and middle-class backgrounds, there are still some of the students who come from villages and small towns, and from lower middle-class families. This, no doubt, has contributed to the widespread existence of “*kamseu*” mockery practices among the Kidang santri. Yet, I also think another explanation is relevant. The fact that, in Kidang, as well as in many

other pesantren, santri are living a monastic way of life, and that their access to mobile phone, Internet, cinema, shopping malls, and mixed-sex socializing symbols of urban youth culture of fun practices and trendy lifestyles is placed under strict regulations is worth considering. I argue, the word “*kamsau*” is better understood in relation to the santri’s *generally* restricted access to, and by extension being less up to date about current trends of young people’s urban lifestyle and practices of popular culture, especially if compared to those young people studying in non-pesantren-based schools. That is why, when santri are able to closely engage with, let’s say, film technology and film practices, even from the very ground of their pesantren, they associate such practices with a self-entitlement of being a modern santri. In other words, there is a strong desire to be able to participate in the wider, and global world among the Kidang santri.

The statement ‘we are santri but modern’, thus, suggests a long struggle among the Kidang santri to prove to themselves and to others that as traditional santri they are not ‘that rural’, but are conversant with, and being up-to-date to current trends of global popular culture, the proof of which they found it in, among others, their engagement with film technology. Still, the word “but” in my view should not be thought of as an incompatibility of “being santri” with “being *modern*”. Bearing in mind Kidang people’s strong attachment to tradition as one of their ways to live as a good Muslim in the modern(izing) world (Chapter 3), I am not inclined to translate the word “but” as a tradition/modernity dichotomy. I would rather relate it with what Strassler (2010) has called as, “an alien and yet to be achieved modernity.”<sup>16</sup> Note that in the previous part of this chapter, I have explained that Taufik and Aisyah had to hire professional cameramen for making their films because Kidang did not own a film camera. A year later, however, I returned to Kidang to find out that the pesantren now had a digital SLR camera and a handy-cam, both of which were a gift from a local donor. While, I have seen santri in Kidang using both devices for documenting various events in the pesantren, Taufik and Aisyah continued to hire “*orang dari luar*”, non-pesantren people who have a “professional” skill on camera and film editing, for making their second feature film project, *Intensif*. Taufik once implicitly told me that such hiring was due to Kidang’s lack of a good film camera, e.g. a low-end professional camcorder to say the least. I would however argue that it is their lack of skills in both using camera and film editing that was crucial to their hiring decision, as self-confessed by Aisyah on her explanation about the ‘Aisyah Snapshot’.

Implicit in the expression “we are santri but modern”, thus, is that Kidang people have treated film technology as an emblem of modernity, with which they yearn to identify themselves. Yet, they have unconsciously viewed that such modernity is originally foreign to pesantren tradition. Indeed, for many people in Kidang, modernity

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16) Strassler (2010: 16-18) uses it to refer how photography has been treated by the Javanese society in relation to their desire to achieving “the culture of documentation”, one that is viewed as part of a modernity that is still alien to Javanese tradition.

is often seen as an equivalent of Westernization and hence coming from afar, a notion I will make clear through a following ethnographic case.

***Western modernity: desirable but dangerous***

One afternoon, I deliberately went to Kidang in formal santri attire. I covered my head with a *kopiyah*,<sup>17</sup> put on a long sleeve t-shirt, and wore a *sarung*.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as usual, I also put on my eyeglasses, wore my wristwatch, brought my digital camera, and, wore some perfume. Arriving in the pesantren, I sat for a while at the terrace of the pesantren's office, just across the mosque. I saw many santri passing by in front of the office, most of them just finished from their *dzuhur* prayer. A few of them, particularly those with whom I mostly hang around, approached and sat around me. As we talked, one of them asked to try my camera to take some photos. I gave it to him. He took some random pictures with the camera, until at one point, he faced the camera to me, or us, as I was sitting with some other santri. Instinctively, we came closer to each other and made a pose toward the camera. As we finished our picture making, a santri who was sitting right on my left side, suddenly extended his nose tip to my shoulder and smelled it for a short while. No sooner did I realize what he was doing there, then he told me, "*Ah, ustadz*"<sup>19</sup> *mah santri moderen*" (lit. "Oh, you are a modern santri"). I stared at him with astonishment, trying to understand what he was meaning by it.

The smelling act of the santri reverberates Appadurai's term of "synaesthetic experience of modernity" (2003 [1996]: 1), that is, a sensation of an elsewhere modern which is distant and global, yet, intrusive and arousing our bodily sensory receptors and curiosity. Once modernity is supposed to be "something triggered elsewhere" (Barendregt 2014: 7; see also Spyer 2000: 32), imagination becomes central to one's experience of modernity. In the case of the Kidang people, many of them often spoke to me of moments in which they imagined the embodied Netherlands that I deliberately made visible in Kidang as a desired modernity. The smelling incident above was not the first and only time to happen to me in Kidang. As almost all people in Kidang knew about my Dutch educational background, many of them often questioned me about sharing my experience of living in the Netherlands with them, or to show to them my picture collection about Dutch cities and people. To these santri, the Netherlands was seen not only as a distant place they were connected to through colonial history, however critical these santri can be about it, but also as a symbol of progress, of wealth, of a developed country, and of modernity. Yet, what they imagined the Netherlands as

17) *Kopiyah*, or, *peci*, is a truncated-cone-shaped head cover, resembling the Ottoman cap, usually made from a black-colored velvet.

18) *Sarung*, is a loose-fitting, and skirt-like cloth that is typically worn by traditional Southeast Asian men, by wrapping it around the lower part of the body, and tucking it in at the waist.

19) As I have explained in Introduction, a few of Kidang santri called me by the name *ustadz*, probably, out of respect of my older age, as well as due to my self-confessed status as a pesantren graduate.



a modern country is often confused with their imagination about modernity in other places in Europe, North America and Australia, simplified in what they typically referred to as 'Barat' or the West. In other words, the santri saw the Netherlands as a modernity that is at the same time an essentially representative of Western modernity. In this regard, film technology is by its nature suitable for one's imagination of Western modernity, not only because, as a modern device, it is a result of Western innovation, but also because, as a medium, it allows a relatively democratic access (among the santri) to intimate images of modern lifestyles of Western societies.

Their excitement about Western modernity notwithstanding, the Kidang santri often criticized it and saw it as dangerous. The following story of Fauzan is revealing. One evening, he went to my rental room for returning a book that he had borrowed from me. It was a book on a number of santri who shared their personal experiences of studying in Europe and America, which is edited by Sumanto Al Qurtuby, one of the young santri intellectuals by then just obtaining his PhD degree from an American university. In particular, Fauzan asked me about Al-Qurtuby whom he suspected to be a liberal thinker. I asked him how he could think about him that way, to which he told me that he knew about it from the Internet, and he then asked me if I am also a liberal too or not. I replied to his question in a diplomatic way, telling him that it very much depended on what he thought of being liberal. I told him that for me being liberal was about being an open-minded and respectful person to other's choices of lives. If he agreed with my definition then I might be a liberal. Instead of agreeing with or arguing against my answer, Fauzan continued to tell me about an *ustadz* in Kidang who often warned him and his other classmates about the danger of liberalism, and about santri who studied at Western universities. These santri, said Fauzan, are well knowledgeable about Islam, but because they had lived in the West for long time, they were indoctrinated with *liberalisme* ('liberalism'). When they returned home, concludes Fauzan, they became *kaum liberal* (liberal people), thus being westernized.

Importantly, in Indonesia, liberalism is often understood in a derogatory way, exemplified by the 2005's release of MUI's controversial, but widely supported fatwa on pluralism, secularism and liberalism, in which liberalism was defined as a total domination of human rational over interpreting religious texts (Gillespie 2007). In Kidang, where MUI's definition of liberalism is to a certain extent influential, evidenced by the cautious *ustadz* against liberalism in Fauzan's story above, liberalism is also occasionally simplified to moral grounds. On many occasions, the Kidang santri asked me about the Netherlands in relation to its sex liberation and its legalization of homosexuality and same sex-marriage. In short, by associating Western counties with liberalism in its simplified meanings, and equating modernity with Westernization, Western modernity can similarly appear to the Kidang people as destructive to their (religious) identity as santri.<sup>20</sup>

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20) Imagining modernity as Westernization and seeing it as dangerous, however, is not unique

Before I finish this section, I will briefly relate the ambivalence of Kidang's aspiration of Western modernity with the materiality of film and other newer media technologies. In Kidang, as in many other societies, modernity is technological, in the sense that a newly-used technology like film, the Internet and mobile phone - a compelling symbol of material freedom and connection to the other worlds - is objectified by the Kidang people to hook up with modernity. That is to say that by personifying themselves with these technological devices, the Kidang people created an image of "being modern", while at the same time disassociating themselves with their stereotype of "being backward". Yet, the widespread anxiety among the Kidang *kyai* and *ustadz* toward the communicative possibilities of these technologies, and Fauzan's story about the danger of being intoxicated by modern Western cultures and lifestyles, both indicate that the effects of using a symbol of modernity in a Muslim society is never uniformly welcomed (Göle, cited in Barendregt 2006: 173). By saying this, I argue, that film technology, along with other newer media technologies that are being related to it in the context of the Kidang people, become a rich site for the pesantren people to continually negotiate and articulate their particular voices of "being modern" the santri ways.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the Kidang people have looked at and engaged with film and new media technologies not only as material objects but also as being emblematic of modernity. For the Kidang people, the legal status of these technologies is highly contingent upon the intentions of their users, which, importantly, never come as inevitable but are socially constructed. In Kidang, the santri's communication with the wider worlds, including with other teenagers living outside pesantren, is placed under strict regulations, enacted by the pesantren's *ustadz* and *kyai*, who are, to borrow Zaman's words (2002), the "custodians of change" of the pesantren tradition. Yet, at the same time, the visual and communicative possibilities brought up by film and other new media technologies such as mobile phone and the Internet, have allowed them to be very much part of the world. This in turn has triggered a sense of anxiety among the Kidang *kyai* and *ustadz*, fearing that the santri may subvert and break away with their authorities. As a result, the use of film technology in Kidang has been regulated in such a

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to the Kidang people. Studying Al-Hikam pesantren in Malang, East Java, by the early 1990s, Lukens-Bull (2001: 359) found out that such attitude has been widespread among the pesantren people, both in Al-Hikam and other pesantren, who often lamented the putative danger of American films and television shows to Islamic values and societies, due to their portrayal of women with bare shoulders and knees, young people drinking alcohol, disco-frequenting, and blue-jeans wearing. Likewise, working on the consumption of Islamic films and self-help books among urban young Muslims who studied in Islamic and secular universities, Haryadi (2013) also attests to the widespread association of modernity as originating from the West, and can be destructive to their Islamic identity.

way that the engagement of Kidang santri with film and new media technologies is only allowed as long as it is observable under the gaze of the Kidang authorities, manifested in the form of regulation and authorization.

This regulating system notwithstanding, the santri are by no means ‘stripped off’ from (‘reclaiming’) their agency, which I understand here as ‘a capacity for action’ (Mahmood 2001) for realizing their own interest.<sup>21</sup> In fact, they went on to translate their engagement with film and other new media technologies with and in their own languages, i.e. being youth and modern Muslim santri. In this regard, the second part of this chapter has shown how many people in Kidang have objectified the materiality of film technology for their desire to modernity, and for producing “a sense of difference” (Larkin 2009: 133), either against the widespread stereotype of santri’s backwardness, or against the other young people who live outside the pesantren worlds. That being said, the problems of how to control authorities, manage the santri, and aspiration of modernity, apparently converge in the materiality of film and other new media technologies.

Yet, modernity is not always desirable, or precisely not always uniformly desirable. To the extent that film technology is seen to have a threatening nature, modernity that is associated with it also contains the similar threat. This circumstance is heightened by Kidang people’s association of modernity with Westernization, in which the Western world, which includes not only the Dutch-experience that I happen to bring to Kidang, but also generally the European countries and the States, is often imagined to have contained destructive characters. Through Fauzan’s stories of ‘the simplified notion of liberalism’ and ‘the alleged danger of the liberalized santri who had studied in Western universities’, taught to the Kidang students by a Kidang *ustadz* on his classes, I pointed out how “modernity-Westernization” is seen as destructive to santri’s piety and morality. I argue, it is in the context of imagining Western modernity as one that is both desired and destructive that film as a material culture becomes ‘a matter’ to the Kidang santri, that is, they want to master these technologies, and then to use them according to their own tastes and needs, or to phrase it with their own rhetoric: “being santri ‘and’ modern, not just being santri ‘but’ modern”.

In the following chapter, I further explore how the santri have used these technologies according to their own tastes and needs, that is by focusing on the films that have been so far produced by the Kidang people.

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21) By this I mean that agency is not identical with being ‘active’ only. But as pointed out by Mahmood (2001) when working on the practice of ‘virtue of patience’, or *sabr*, among Egyptian mosque Muslim women: one’s ability to endure in the face of hardship without complaint can be seen as a constructive project of the self against social injustice.