Visions of the future: imagining Islamic modernities in Indonesian Islamic-themed post-Suharto popular and visual culture
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Indonesia is home to the world’s largest Muslim population and in the midst of modernization and Islamization. This confronts Indonesian Muslims with the questions what it means to be modern and Muslim, and whether or not Indonesia is on the ‘right’ path toward the ‘right’ kind of modernity. Products of popular and visual culture - like the Obama artwork that is featured on the cover of this book - provide perfect tools to publicly fantasize Islamic modernities. This book zooms in on these products and asks how Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated and contested in popular and visual culture.

Artwork: Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (2009) by Wilman Syahnur

Leonie Schmidt
Visions of the Future

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Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties ingestelde commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel op vrijdag 19 september 2014, te 14:00 uur

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Chapter 1

Introduction
What do we leave behind? What lies ahead?
Chapter 1 Introduction: What do we leave behind? What lies ahead?

“For those thousand times we fail, we have to go a thousand-and-one times forward, forward, and forward. Allahu Akbar!”
- Bang Jack (Deddy Mizwar) in Para Pencari Tuhan (‘God Seekers’)

“There’s no way all these events have passed us without giving us wisdom.”
- Haifa (Anisa Wulandari) in Para Pencari Tuhan (‘God Seekers’)

Soap affairs during Ramadan

For weeks the affairs and adventures of Haifa and Bang Jack – two characters of the Ramadan sinetron (religious soap series annually broadcasted only during Ramadan) Para Pencari Tuhan – had me and my Indonesian friend Eka glued to the TV. Watching those one and a half hour-episodes of Para Pencari Tuhan in that small non-airconditioned living room, in a kampung-house on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, on a flatscreen that was bigger than the diningtable and that lit up a significant part of the street, became a daily routine for me, Eka, her mother, father, brother, aunts, and several of the neighbours. Broadcasted on SCTV at primetime right before iftar (the breaking of the fast during Ramadan), every cliffhanger of Para Pencari Tuhan was followed by a festive homecooked dinner.

During dinner, Eka and her aunts – who are avid sinetron viewers – would often discuss the ‘events’ that happened to the characters. These events included, amongst others, love affairs, alcoholism, bankruptcy, being in prison, being released from prison but having nowhere to go, betrayal, desired and undesired pregnancies, divorces, elections and political intrigue, evil mothers-in-law, going from rags to riches and the other way around, stardom, terrorism, and suitcases with millions of rupiahs popping up in the street without any owner to claim them. While many of these problems are faced by soap characters all over the world, a lot of others are particular to present-day Indonesia.

Set in a village in West Java, Para Pencari Tuhan tells about the daily lives of a group of villagers. In the first episode we meet three former inmates, Chelsea (Melky Bajaj), Barong (Aden Bajaj) and Juki (Isa Bajaj). The three men are released from prison and wander along the roads of Jakarta, feeling lonely and lost. Juki, a former
pickpocket, is rejected by his mother on his return home, while Chelsea tries to reconcile with his ex-wife, but finds out that she is now married to the police officer that had put Chelsea in prison. The three men feel as if they are completely shut out from the world, a feeling that is underscored by the setting: all buildings in the city they try to enter are closed because it is Ramadan. Having nowhere to go, the men strand in a mosque in a nearby village and are taken under the care of the mosque keeper Bang Jack (Deddy Mizwar). While Bang Jack tries to guide the three men to the right path, we also meet the other villagers. We get to know Aya (Zaskia Adya Mecca) and Azzam (Agus Kuncoro). Aya is a beautiful Muslim girl who has excellent knowledge of religious matters and always helps out Bang Jack. Azzam is hopelessly in love with Aya, but sadly he is rejected by her time after time. Then there are Aya’s brother Ustad Ferry (Akri Patrio) the chairman of the mosque, and his wife Haifa (Anisa Wulandari). We also get to know Mr. Jalal (Jarwo Strong), the richest man in the village, and his two loyal security guards Bang Udin (Udin Nganga) and Asrul (Asrul Dahlan), who develop a close friendship.

Over the course of the series this village community not only has to deal with universal soap problems (e.g. betrayal, divorce, evil mothers-in-law), but it is on top of that also repeatedly confronted with issues that relate to the changes that Indonesia is currently undergoing as processes of modernization increasingly transform the archipelago. In one episode, the village elders are for instance shocked by a sudden drop in rice production (season 6, 2012). Worried about the future of the village they set up an investigation. As it turns out, the farmers who work on the sawas (ricefields) have acquired smartphones and are now avid users of social media. Hence, they are constantly updating their Facebook statuses while they should be working the fields. They have become, in the words of one of the village elders, “unproductive citizens” due to their use of modern technology.

This plotline seems to comment directly on the ‘8villages’ project that was launched by the French businessman Mathieu Le Bras earlier in 2012. In the 8villages project, Indonesian farmers received smartphones so they can streamline their production directly with the needs of the urban areas. As stated on the website, 8villages is an ‘information revolution on the countryside’ (http://www.8villages.com) that aims to provide “an efficient information flow between farmers and other agriculture stakeholders” (TechinAsia 2013). Participating farmers receive information about changes in food prices, weather forecast and crop demands on their smartphones. The hope is that the farmers can thereby earn more money (TechinAsia 2013).
But does earning more money and moving up the social ladder really make one happier? In another episode of *Para Pencari Tuhan* we witness how security guard Asrul and his wife begin to have success with their soupstall. For a long time they were the poorest couple in the village, but after their success they could move into a decadent house while winning respect from the other villagers. Their upward mobility is not without problems. Their wealth is threatened when in rivalry for money, other villagers make petrol bombs and set Asrul’s soupstall on fire. In addition to this terror, Asrul’s busy schedule puts a lot of stress on his family, and he has little time to practice Islam. The situation leaves him unhappy and at a certain point Asrul even begs Allah to restore the life he once had when his family was poor.

On the other side of town, Aya faces problems of her own. Aya seems to have everything going for her, she is smart, kind, ambitious, and a well-respected Muslim in the community. But while she wants to have a career and make something more of her life, she is constantly pressured by her surroundings to get married, have children, and become a housewife.

How to deal with all these issues? How to deal with modern technology? What are its advantages and disadvantages? How does technology affect social relations? How can you have a career, a family, and still be (considered) a good Muslim? What defines modern peaceful Islam in our post-9/11, post-Bali bombings world? Does earning more money make you happier? How can you be upwardly mobile and still be happy? What does it actually mean to belong to the middle class? And conversely, how to deal with poverty? As Bang Jack stated in opening of this introduction: how to keep moving “forward, forward and forward” when faced with changes and challenges? And as Haifa wonders in the same opening, what lessons are taught to us during these experiences?

Central to all of these questions that *Para Pencari Tuhan* raises is the theme of ‘modernity’. What is changing, what could change in the future, with which consequences, and how should we think about that? What do we leave behind and what lies ahead? What does it actually mean to be modern? As Indonesia is undergoing processes of modernization, Indonesians are increasingly confronted with these questions. Through making these questions key to its narrative, *Para Pencari Tuhan* critically negotiates what kind of modernity is right and suitable for what kind of circumstances. The series does so from an Islamic perspective. *Para Pencari Tuhan* is a *sinetron Islami* (‘Islamic soap opera’), a Muslim-themed soap opera with an emphasis on prayer, moral guidance, and devoutness (Ida 2010: 1). The question is then not just ‘what does it mean to be modern?’, but rather ‘what does it mean to be modern and Muslim?’ As Indonesia – the world’s most populous
Muslim nation – is simultaneously modernizing and Islamizing, this question becomes increasingly important.

The question what it means to be modern and Muslim was also underlying much of our own dinnertable discussions about Para Pencari Tuhan. For example when Eka and her aunts talked about what they themselves would and should do in a certain situation, or what they thought would (not) be good for the practice of Islam, for the village community – and by extension for the nation. Considering that Para Pencari Tuhan was watched by more than thirtytwo percent of the national television audience, and was viewed by men and women of almost all age groups; 10-24 years; 30-29 years up to 40-49 years (ABG Nielsen 2012), it is not unimaginable that issues like these were discussed at more dinnertables.

But discussions went beyond the realm of the more private sphere of the familyhome. In newspapers like Kompas, The Jakarta Post and on various blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (where the whole series can be watched: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D53SCBVachs), viewers, journalists, cultural critics and others engaged with similar questions (see for instance ‘Islam yang damai: sebagai pilihan hidup zaman modern’/’Peaceful Islam: about lifechoices in a modern time’ 2012). Besides contemplating modernity, viewers and critics also wondered whether and how Islam, Ramadan, consumption, and entertainment can go together. During its broadcast, Para Pencari Tuhan was not only interrupted by lengthy Ramadan-themed commercial breaks, but it was also interspersed with a quiz in which participants could win one million rupiah. During the show’s last quiz break, a pilgrimage tour with Para Pencari Tuhan’s actors could be won.

Both in terms of its negotiations of modernity and its alliances with the market Para Pencari Tuhan does not form an exception. In Indonesia today, media and visual culture present perfect tools to publicly fantasize and experiment with Islamic modernities. They reflect on the question whether or not the archipelago is on the ‘right path’ toward the ‘right kind’ of modernity (Brenner 1999:17; Schmidt 2012: 32). In the last decade, Indonesia has seen a boom in Islamic-themed popular and visual culture as entrepreneurs imbue cultural products with religious as well as economic value (Widodo 2008). These cultural products, which are largely targeted at Indonesia’s next generation of young urban Muslims, are a key site to experiment with Islamic modernities. They provide an arena in which modern Islamic futures are envisioned. This begs the question how and which Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. It is precisely this question that will be the central research question in this dissertation.
The short story about Para Pencari Tuhan foreshadows the five key themes that are explored in the pages of this dissertation while searching for an answer to this central question. These themes concern the intersections of Islam and modernity with (1) consumption, (2) nation(alism), (3) subjectification, (4) gender, and (5) geopolitics. Taking different objects of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture as case studies, I will explore these themes in separate chapters.

Since the intersections of Islam with consumption and capitalism are central to Islamic-themed popular and visual culture, I start by exploring this junction. I do so through analyzing (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan (chapter 2). What happens to the space of the mall during the holy month? How is this space transformed? And how does visual culture play a role in this transformation? How does visual culture knit together Islam and consumption?

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on three of the largest outlets of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture: music, self-help books, and film. In chapter 3, I look at music videos by the Islamic rock band Gigi and map how Islamic popular culture participates in debates about modernity. With which issues does popular culture engage? How does it form a site for experiments with modernity? And what kinds of modernities are imagined?

Chapter 4 extends these questions to Islamic self-help books. Central to this chapter is not so much the question what kinds of modernities are imagined, but rather what ‘ideal’ modern Muslim subjects are imagined and promoted through Islamic-themed popular culture. What, for instance, defines modern subjecthood? What politics are underpinning the construction of modern selves? And how to view Islamic-themed popular culture then? Does it constitute a site for creative experimentation and contestation, or does it attempt to discipline people into responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply?

In chapter 5, I study how the questions raised in chapter 4 are gendered. By analyzing three films, I explore how representations of masculinity and femininity negotiate ‘right’ male and female modern identities. How are gendered bodies subjugated to a national project that revolves around the desired modernization of the Indonesian nation? Is there room left for the practice of critical politics?

Chapter 6 takes up this last question and translates it to our current geopolitical constellation. Taking Islamic-themed art as a case study, I contemplate the possibilities for Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world. How does visual culture provide space to contest the alleged volatile position of Indonesia and Muslims in a post-9/11 world? How are politics and aesthetics intertwined? And how is the ability to critique inherent to being modern?
Before moving on to these case studies, I will first delve deeper into the phenomenon of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. Why is Islamic-themed popular and visual culture booming? Why is its study urgent? Subsequently, I discuss the concept of modernity and explicate the research methodologies that are underpinning my study.

**Islamic-themed popular and visual culture**

This dissertation takes Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture as its object of study. The term ‘popular culture’ is diffuse and filled with a variety of different meanings. It brings together two notions: ‘culture’, referring to that whole way of life and its forms of signification (Williams 1989 [1958]: 4), and ‘the popular’, referring to ‘the people’. These notions are highly complex in itself, and as Stuart Hall points out: “when you put the two terms together, the difficulties can be pretty horrendous.” (Hall 2010 [1981]: 72)

Raymond Williams (1983) summarizes four meanings of the word ‘popular’ in relation to ‘culture’: “well liked by many people”; “inferior kinds of work”; “works deliberately set out to win favor with the people”, and the “culture actually made by the people for themselves” (Williams 1983: 237).

In ‘Notes on Deconstructing the Popular’ (2010 [1981]), Hall discusses these four definitions of ‘the popular’ and points at the problems inherent to them. First, seeing cultural products as ‘popular’, for the reason that many people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and enjoy them to the full (Hall 2010 [1981]: 75) is problematic since it begs for a quantitative index that can help to determine whether something passes for ‘popular culture’ or not. Second, viewing popular cultural products as ‘inferior kinds of work’ is equally problematic. This description makes a rigid and artificial distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, which denies that categories are discursive and change over time. What is considered popular culture can never be fixed once and for all (77). Third, emphasizing popular culture’s commerciality invites perspectives that associate popular culture with imposed manipulative consumerism, and that reduce people to cultural dupes (75). Finally, when defining popular culture as ‘culture actually made by the people for themselves’, popular culture becomes an infinitely expanding inventory. Basically everything that ‘the people’ do can fall on the list. Also, we cannot determine who exactly are ‘the people’ and who are ‘not the people’. This definition tends to validate an ‘authentic’ culture of the people. This is problematic as there can never
be an autonomous culture that is free from relations of power (75).

Vis-à-vis these definitions of popular culture, Hall (1981) offers an understanding of popular culture that draws on Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony and that stresses the dynamic and political nature of popular culture. Popular culture here is a site of constant struggle between the resistance of subordinate groups and the forces of incorporation that operate in the interests of dominant groups. As John Frow and Meaghan Morris (1996) note, popular culture is then not imposed culture, nor a spontaneous oppositional culture of the people, but a terrain of negotiation and interaction between the two. It is “a contested and conflictual set of practices of representation bound up with the processes of formation and re-formation of social groups” (Frown and Morris 1996: 356). As Chantal Mouffe (1981) asserts, the popular cultural field is marked by a struggle to ‘articulate and disarticulate’ (cf. Mouffe 1981: 231) specific meanings, ideologies and politics.

While this Gramscian approach to popular culture has been widely influential, the object of popular culture itself has in the last two decades undergone significant changes, which force us to rethink what defines popular culture. Tony Bennett (2009) for instance suggests that governmental practices that go hand in hand with the soft power tactics of institutions and governments call for a different understanding of popular culture (Bennett 2009: 309-310). For Bennett, a changed definition of popular culture does not define it in semantic terms (as a meaning-making practice), but rather sees it as a governmental practice that transforms both mental and physical behavior (Ibidem).

Henry Jenkins (2006a) on his turn argues that struggles over convergence are redefining the face of popular culture. Convergence here refers to the “technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes” that come with “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the corporation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of entertainment experiences.” (Jenkins 2006a: 2-3)

As Jenkins points out, the circulation of media content depends heavily on consumers’ active participation (3). Consumers are encouraged to participate, seek out new information, and make connections among dispersed media content (Ibidem). In this ‘participatory culture’ (cf. Jenkins 2006b) the lines between producers and consumers of popular culture blur (Miller 2011: 89) – although only a small percentage of all users create content (Van Dijck 2009: 47), and corporations still exert greater power than the aggregate of consumers (Jenkins 2006a: 3).

In Jenkins’ view, not only do the dynamics between producers and consumers of popular culture change, but our experience of popular culture transforms as well.
Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in his or her head, there is an added incentive for us to talk about the popular culture we consume. As a result, for Jenkins, consuming popular culture increasingly becomes a collective process. None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills (4).

My own understanding of popular culture combines these perspectives. Following Hall (1981), I see popular and visual culture as a field of constant struggle over meaning and power. In my analysis of Gigi’s music videos (chapter 3), I for instance observe tensions between different styles of modernities that are in popular discourse connected to different visions of a modern future, and to different political positions. And in my study of Islamic-themed art (chapter 6), I wonder how visual culture helps to contest to the volatile position of Muslims in a post-9/11 world. Following Bennett (2009), I simultaneously see popular and visual culture as accommodating to governmental tactics. The construction of ideal modern subjects in the self-help books (chapter 4) and the films (chapter 5) that I analyze, shows that we need to pay attention to the governmental practices of popular culture. One of the self-help books leans heavily on comments that fans of the author posted on Twitter. This demonstrates that – although the author and/or publisher have the final say about what ends up in the book – the relation between producers and consumers of popular culture is changing, and that these processes deserve our attention.

I focus particularly on Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. I here understand Islam as an Abrahamic religion based in the Qur’an, the teachings (Hadiths) of Prophet Muhammad, and the laws (sharia) that guide human behavior. The focus on Islamic-themed popular culture highlights Islam as a ‘practical religion’, meaning that I explore the ways in which cultural practices articulate Islamic ideas, categories, and symbols in the pursuit of comprehending, expressing, and formulating social experience (Weintraub 2011: 4). Through making Islamic cultural practices central to the analysis, I emphasize the dynamic, contested, and performative nature of Islam in present-day Indonesia.

As Kenneth George (2010) however points out, defining what makes cultural forms ‘Islamic’ is complicated and wrought with assumptions about what constitutes both culture/cultural forms and religion (George 2010, cited in Hoesterey and Clark 2012: 208). Despite its name, ‘Islamic popular and visual culture’ has a tenuous relationship with the religion of Islam itself. While some Muslims produce ‘Islamic popular culture’ for overt religious purposes, many others do not, and some do not
even consider themselves Muslims. Following Ben Arps (1996: 395), James Hoesterey and Marshall Clark (2012: 208), I use the prefix ‘Islamic’ in this dissertation to describe cultural practices that are considered to bernafaskan Islam (‘to breath Islam’), which means that they are inspired by Islam or that they connote Islam thematically.

In the post-Suharto era (1998-), Indonesia has witnessed a phenomenal rise of media and popular cultural products that bernafaskan Islam. This spectacular boom of Islamic media and popular culture was facilitated by a number of structural – political, economic, social, and cultural – transformations that in the past fifteen to twenty years have radically altered the Indonesian cultural scene.

Probably the most drastic transformation has been the liberalization of the cultural scene after the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in May 1998. The ‘New Order’ is one of the four periods that through time have characterized the social-political lives of Indonesians. The period before Indonesia’s independence (1945) is called ‘the colonial period’, the time frame in which Sukarno ruled over the archipelago is known as the ‘Old Order’ (1945-1965). The era that subsequently stretches from the moment that president Suharto rose to power in 1966, until his fall in May 1998 is called the ‘New Order’. The period after the collapse of the regime is referred to as the Reformasi, ‘post-New Order’ or ‘post-Suharto’ era (1998-present) (Ahmad 2003).

During the New Order (1966-1998), president Suharto guided an impoverished nation to rising prosperity and outward stability, however at the cost of abridged political and civil liberties, gutted democratic institutions, nepotism, and flourishing corruption (Schwarz 1997: 119-120). Although media were under the strict control of the Department of Information, Sen, Hill (2000), and Kitley (2000) note that media did leave room for contestations. Media were nevertheless part of Indonesia’s ‘national culture project’, a range of state-sponsored activities that were designed to disseminate the state’s ideology and construct a shared Indonesian national identity (Kitley 2000: 3-4; Sen and Hill 2000: 12).

To bring about a shared Indonesian national identity, ethnic, regional, and religious differences were systematically suppressed. The ‘SARA-regulation’ banned cultural products that foregrounded differences based on suku (ethnicity), agama (religion), ras (race), and antara golongan (social relations/class) (Sen & Hill 2000: 12). Under this regulation, cultural expressions of Islam were banned. In this way, Suharto hoped to safeguard the unity of the geographically fragmented nation and maintain order in a country of extremely diverse cultures, religious beliefs, languages, and traditions. This did not mean that Islam was invisible in the public sphere. As Florian
Pohl (2009) notes, under the influence of the global Islamic revival, Muslim activists have since the 1970s contested Islam’s political suppression and have tried to stimulate public and political Islam (cf. Pohl 2009: 74).

The public promotion of (political) Islam was, at that time, a dangerous endeavour. The suppression of Islam was part of the strong anti-Islam politics that marked Suharto’s rule during the 1970s and 1980s. Suharto feared political Islam, which he rejected for its desire of an Islamic state (Van Bruinessen 2011: 1). Under the infamous ‘Anti Subversion Law’ that was put into place in 1969, Muslim political leaders and those who spoke out about (political) Islam were often prosecuted as right-wing extremists who endangered the stability of the nation. As a result, many people were afraid to publicly identify themselves as Muslims.

At that time, no one could have imagined that a couple of years later, in the mid-1990s, the government’s view on Islam would have made a 180 degrees turn. As the authoritarian regime was losing power in the 1990s, Suharto tried to build new partnerships to maintain power in the face of a divided military that had been his main support base (Heryanto 2008: 14). He started to give way to political Islam by making the composition of the cabinet and the military more Islamic (Ibidem). In this way, Islam became politically institutionalized. Muslim political leaders that had been imprisoned were released, and people who were speaking out against Islam were taken to court (Heryanto 1999: 175). Suharto also lifted the ban on the veiling of Muslim schoolgirls and made a very public pilgrimage to Mecca.

While Islam was gaining political space politically, the state was losing control over media due to changes in media technologies and economies. In the case of the audiovisual media, the sheer volume of material started to defeat the government’s attempts to censor it (Sen and Hill 2000: 12). As a result, Islam also gained cultural terrain and become more visible in the public domain (Weintraub 2011: 4).

It was not until the collapse of Suharto’s regime in May 1998 that the character of the Indonesian cultural scene changed drastically. In 1999, then-president Habibie did away with the requirement for all publications to have a publishing licence. Media were deregulated and privatized. After three decades of state-dominated political culture and censorship, post-authoritarian Indonesia could develop a cultural scene in which identity politics are prominent (Widodo 2008). Groups whose shared interests, identities, and ideologies were oppressed and marginalized during the Suharto regime, and particularly Indonesia’s large Muslim community, took
advantage of the newly liberated public sphere and relative freedom of press\(^1\) to assert their presence and participate in public discourse. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs imbued cultural products with religious as well as economic value when they realized the enormous potential of a national and regional (Malaysian, Singaporean) Muslim market (Widodo 2008).

This resulted in an explosive growth of the media industry in general, and the Muslim popular cultural industries in particular. In the wake of the financial crisis that hit Indonesia in 1997, the media industry was the only industry whose job market expanded (Heryanto 2008: 6). National and local television stations emerged, the music and publishing industries achieved astonishing sales figures, and a new generation of Indonesian filmmakers produced films that often surpassed the popularity of Hollywood titles (Heryanto 2008: 6).

These major changes in the Indonesian political and popular cultural sphere coincided with two closely related processes: the rise of a Muslim middle class and ‘the second wave of Islamism’ in Southeast Asia. It is through these processes that the growth of the Islamic popular cultural industries in Indonesia can be further understood.

Parallel to the much-discussed rise of the East Asian middle classes in the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Kim 2000; Chan 2000; Vogel 2013; Goodman 2008), wealthy and educated Muslim middle classes emerged in Southeast Asia (Van Leeuwen 2011: 16; Barendregt 2006: 174). Richard Robison and David S. G. Goodman (2013) note that Western liberals often assume that the rise of the middle class in Asia is, in cultural terms, a process of convergence. Burgeoning Asian middle classes are seen as embodying universal interests, which will create an Asia that is more like the liberal stereotypes: more rational, more individualistic, more democratic, more secular, and more concerned with human rights (Robison and Goodman 2013: 2). As Bart Barendregt however asserts, Southeast Asian middle classes do not necessarily display the alleged ‘universal’ features of middle classes elsewhere, especially when it concerns rationality, democracy and secularism (Barendregt 2006: 174).

\(^1\) Some limits on press freedom however remain, for instance in journalism. Censorship and suppression by the government has now been replaced by more nuanced influences. Reporters and editors are often constrained by the commercial and political interests of the owners of the large media conglomerates. Journalists also resort to self censorship to avoid prosecution for defamation in Indonesia’s corrupt courts. In some parts of Indonesia that are troubled by political violence, such as Papua, the threat of journalists being intimidated, beaten up or killed for what they say and write is still very real. Two international press freedom watchdogs, the Center for International Media Assistance and Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) therefore both classify Indonesia’s media as ‘Partly Free’ (Infoasaid Indonesia Media and Telecoms Landscape Guide 2012: 18).
Indonesia, the educated middle classes\(^2\) are often more orthodox and religious than other social groups (174). Moreover, they are eager and proud to display their piety in public.

The middle classes’ public piety is part of the ‘second wave of Islamism’: a religious renewal in which Muslims in Indonesia blend into modern urban spaces, increasingly engage in public debates, and use global communication networks to give themselves a public voice (Göle 2002: 174). In these urban spaces, middle class Muslims become professionals and consumers, who are operating in, and embracing, the modern market (Barendregt 2006: 172). In this climate, a new form of Islamization emerges. This form does not just imply religious devotion, but it also implies the increased public visibility of Islam. At the center of this contemporary form of Islamization is what Heryanto calls the ‘new Muslim’, a term that relates Islam to a modern world of lifestyle, talk shows, and fashion (Heryanto 1999: 173) Heryanto writes:

Gone are the old and rigid meanings of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’, as well as the clear boundaries that separate them from ‘lifestyle’. In today’s Islam in Indonesia, old familiar images have been replaced by new ones. The associations of Islam with rural poverty, religious dogmatism, the Middle East, anti-Chinese, anti-West sentiments, and with fundamentalists seeking to establish an Islamic state, are juxtaposed with new images. Now Islam is also associated with television talk shows, name cards with PhDs from prominent Western schools, erudite intellectual debates, mobile telephones and consumption of ketupat during Ramadan at McDonald’s. (Heryanto 1999: 177)

The ‘new Muslim’ signifies a change in Muslim identity in Indonesia. As new and positive images of Muslims and Islam start to circulate in the public sphere, it suddenly becomes ‘cool’ to be a Muslim and to consume images of oneself. Indonesia’s popular cultural industries have responded swiftly to these new consumer demands. As Idi Subandy Ibrahim (2007) points out, in post-Suharto Indonesia: “images of Islam are ever-present and inescapable in the public sphere as producers now point their arrows at Muslims” (Ibrahim: 2007: 139, my translation). Blockbuster films, TV shows, popular music, radio stations, journals, and glossies have all met their Islamic equivalents over the past few years. Religion and consumption go hand in hand. And as I show in my study of shopping malls (chapter

\(^2\) For a comprehensive account on what precisely defines these Indonesian middle classes and their lifestyles, see: Van Leeuwen, Lizzy (2011) Lost in Mall: an ethnography of middle-class in Jakarta in the 1990s, Leiden: Brill.
2), the holy month of Ramadan is the period *par excellence* for entrepreneurs to cash in. During Ramadan, middle class spaces like expensive restaurants, luxurious hotels, and shopping malls are filled with Muslims who are celebrating – and consuming during – the holy month. Different processes have thus facilitated the rise of Muslim popular and visual culture in Indonesia. The liberalization of the Indonesian cultural scene after the fall of Suharto, Islam’s increased political presence, the privatisation media, the rise of the Indonesian middle classes, and the eagerness of these classes to explore new forms of religiosity through consumption and public piety, have all contributed to the post-New Order boom of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture.

Not everybody has greeted these developments with enthusiasm. Indonesian Muslims have questioned the sincerity of those who ‘cash in’ on the market value of Islam (Hoesterey and Clark 2012: 209). Particularly conservative and Islamist groups in Indonesia have blamed Islamic popular cultural products for being ‘commercial Islam’, ‘Islam Lite’, ‘cool Islam’, ‘casual Islam’, ‘air-conditioned Islam’, ‘15-minute Islam’, ‘market Islam’, or even ‘the Devil in disguise’ (Barendregt 2009: 27; Van Nieuwkerk 2011: 10). Underlying many of these claims is the idea that Islam is eternal, divine and God-given, while popular culture is fleeting, man-made and superficial. And since popular culture is associated with pleasure, commerce and ‘the West’, it is often considered unsuitable for Indonesian Muslims (Weintraub 2011: 2). These narratives that place Islam in opposition to popular culture are based in reductive and essentialist ways of understanding both Muslim life and popular culture. Popular culture is here discursively constructed as superficial through narratives that create a hierarchy between high and low culture. Islam too is not unchanging, but flexible. As Andrew Weintraub (2011) stresses, Islam’s teachings are understood to be applicable to all adherents at all times (Weintraub 2011: 2). The case study Islamic rock music (chapter 3) shows how easily Islam translates to modern media. In Gigi’s rock music, Islamic practices and messages are accompanied by energetic drum beats and aggressive guitar riffs, which demonstrates that Islam is a flexible religion, adaptable to the tastes and conditions of a modern world.

If Islam is indeed flexible and manifold, what kinds of Islam are informing Indonesian Islamic visual culture? As suggested earlier, Islam is Indonesia’s dominant religion. Almost 90% of Indonesia’s 250 million inhabitants identifies as Muslim. This Muslim community is often understood in terms of two orientations of Islam – traditionalist and modernist Islam – that are not opposed, but are in a dialogical
relationship. Contrary to what their names may suggest, modernist Islam is not necessarily more ‘modern’ than traditionalist Islam.

‘Traditionalist Islam’, also known as ‘Indonesian/Javanese Islam’, ‘liberal’ or ‘popular Islam’, is a Sufi-inspired orientation of Islam that is adapted to local circumstances. It has blended with adat (customary law), Hinduism, Buddhism, and local mystical practices (Weintraub 2011: 3-4). It is an open and syncretic form of religion that celebrates local beliefs and practices. Traditionalists reject strict or literal interpretations of Islam.

Alongside traditionalist Islam, ‘modernist Islam’ has developed. Whereas traditionalists are often located in rural areas, modernists are often members of the growing urban middle class. This version of Islam, sometimes also called ‘scripturalist Islam’, ‘literalist Islam’ or ‘reformist Islam’, strives for literal interpretations of religious texts. It rejects the syncretism of the traditionalists. Instead, modernists aim to purify their faith to a ‘true’ Islam by stripping it off ‘naive eclecticism’. They here often look to a ‘Middle Eastern or Arabic’ version of the Islam (cf. Eliraz 2004), which they consider as more pure than syncretic Islam (Riddell 2002: 70). Advocates of radical Islam, including Front Pembela Islam (FPI) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), also align with this reformist version of Islam. These radical movements do however not appeal to large segments of the population, and people who practice modernist Islam are not necessarily more conservative than traditionalists (Weintraub 2011: 3-4).

These two orientations of Islam, and particularly the organizations that are associated with them, define Islamic discourse in Indonesia (Barton and Fealy 1996: 56). The respective organizations, Nadhlatul Ulama (traditionalists) and Muhammadiyah (modernists), are the most influential Islamic forces in Indonesia today. While neither is a political party, both have, as popular religious forces, the capacity to frame national debates (56). And although the boundaries between the two have significantly blurred (Liddell 1996: 623), both display different visions of a future Islamic modernity.

Traditionalist Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) is with approximately forty million followers the country’s largest Islamic organization. Due to its size, NU has a strong voice in national public debates related to the (modern) future of the archipelago. In this context, it has primarily called for religious moderation, communal harmony, and a

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3 Although both organizations differ in their respective emphases and visions, the boundaries between both have also blurred. There is a growing acceptance of the idea that the truth lies in synthesis rather than antithesis. This is for instance reflected in interorganizational relations, Islamic school curricula, and the working beliefs of many ordinary Muslims (Liddell 1996: 623).
society marked by openness, collaboration, and respect between different religions. Stressing an ‘open’ and syncretic modern future for Indonesia, NU has actively opposed radical groups that have been involved in attacks on Western and Christian symbols in Indonesia (Riddell 2002: 70-71).

Modernist Muhammadiyah is with thirty million followers the nation’s second biggest Islamic organization. Where traditionalists call for communal harmony, Muhammadiyah has profiled itself as an organization that does not shy away from confrontation. They have for instance pressured the government to pass the anti-pornography law (cf. Allen 2007) and confronted European countries over the publication of the Muhammad cartoons. Since 2006, Muhammadiyah is said to have veered towards a more conservative brand of Islam. One of Muhammadiyah’s central aims has become to heighten people’s sense of ‘moral responsibility’. In public debates related to the (desired) course of modernity, Muhammadiyah has questioned ‘Western’ forms of modernities, as it considers those styles of modernity as ‘unmoralistic’ and irreconcilable with an Indonesian Islamic modernity. Their visions have, particularly by NU, been criticized for being too ‘closed’, which traditionalists consider problematic in a multi-religious, multicultural Indonesia.

In this context, Islamic popular culture and visual culture may, via the politics of representation, evoke different conceptions of Islamic modernities to support either traditionalist or modernist agendas, or a combination of both. As such, products of Islamic popular and visual culture are important participants in the public debate between at least two orientations of Islam and their visions for a modern Islamic future.

**Positioning the research**

When during my fieldwork I told friends that I was studying ‘popular and visual culture’, many of them frowned. Puzzled by my interest in something so ‘plain’ and ‘global’, and confused about my presumed ignorance of the more validated topics (e.g. ‘ritual’ or ‘traditional arts’, Strassler 2010: 16) that usually fall under the gaze of researchers with an interest in Indonesia (Ibidem), they would ask me: “but why don’t you study something more special, something that is of more value to people, something that is more Indonesian?” While this view of Indonesian popular culture as ‘less valuable’ often contradicted greatly with my friends’ own excitement about it, it is a view that resonates strongly in the academic field.
As Ariel Heryanto (2008: 6) also points out, Indonesian popular culture is still an underexplored field of study, in spite of the fact that Indonesia has a vivid popular cultural scene. According to Heryanto, three reasons explain this lack. First, Indonesian popular culture is a comparatively new phenomenon (6). As Raymond Williams (1960 [1958]) argues in Culture and Society, popular culture emerges with industrialization and urbanization (Williams 1960 [1958]: vi; xii). In Indonesia sustained industrialization took place only in the 1980s. This was right at the heyday of the Suharto regime (1966-1998), when control over media was tight (Heryanto 2008: 6). During Suharto’s rule, Indonesian producers of popular culture were often discouraged by the numerous censorship regulations and high numbers of imports. This led to a fairly low number of national productions (cf. Sen and Hill 2002). And while popular culture was a topic of debate among intellectuals in the 1970s, this did not result in comprehensive studies of the topic (Heryanto 2008: 6).

The field of Indonesian studies has mainly been focusing on institutional and economic processes of nation building and modernization. Here, attention has particularly been directed at the negative effects of these processes, e.g. corruption, human rights abuse, militarism, and ethno-religious conflicts (Heryanto 2008: 7). As Laurie Sears and Carlo Bonura (2007) point out, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the new geopolitics of terror have recently resurrected an interest in area studies, and specifically in the Southeast Asian region. Home to over a quarter billion Muslims, Southeast Asia (and particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and southern Thailand) has become a suspect site within the analysis of US security agencies. This has led to a heightened interest in extremist religious practices in the area (Sears and Bonura 2007: 4). While issues like extremism and corruption deserve critical scrutiny, the attention they have won has been to the detriment of the more fun and pleasurable aspects of daily life, like media and popular culture (Heryanto 2008: 7).

When the focus of scholars is on cultural practices in the archipelago, most observers have devoted attention to the so-called ‘traditional or ethnic cultures’ of Indonesia, ‘official versions’ of national cultures, and the ‘avant-garde’ taste of intellectuals (Heryanto 2008: 7). In this intellectual climate, popular and visual culture is still struggling for scholarly attention. It is also in this context that I believe that my study holds particular value for the study of contemporary Indonesia.

This does not mean that the academic field of popular culture is non-existent in Indonesia. In the last two decades, a number of scholars have made significant contributions to the study of Indonesian media and popular culture. Of seminal importance to the development of the field have been Krishna Sen and David Hill’s


When looking at the literature on Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture, we can note significantly fewer studies. In this context, Ben Arps (1996) and Bart Barendregt (2002; 2006; 2008) made significant contributions. Their work on two popular music genres that connote Islam (qasidah modern and nasyid) shows how popular music can simultaneously function as entertainment and as da’wah (the preaching of Islam and the summoning of people to Islam). Other highly insightful additions are Andrew Weintraub’s (2011) edited volume on Islam and popular culture, Ida Rachmah’s (2009) critique of representations of women in Ramadan sinetron, and James Hoesterey’s (2008) analysis of Muslim preacher AA Gym.

The study of Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture is relevant for a number of reasons. First, Islamic popular culture is omnipresent in the public domain and in the private lives of Indonesian Muslims. Analyzing Islamic-themed popular culture helps in understanding the religion of Islam as an everyday sociocultural phenomenon and as lived practice, rather than as an abstract theological phenomenon. A critical reading of Islamic-themed cultural practices becomes urgent
when considering that these practices are an integral part of the Islamization and modernization of present-day Indonesia (Weintraub 2011: 4). Not only do popular cultural products contribute to the increased visibility of Islam in the public domain, they also publicly experiment with Islamic modernities. Through the image bank of visual culture, consumers are provided with the opportunity to imagine, create and perform their modern Muslim identity. Since Islamic popular culture is largely targeted at the generasi muda Islam, Indonesia’s next generation of urban middle class Muslim youngsters, it plays a key role in Indonesia’s aspired Islamization and in the shaping of a modern Muslim nation and self. What kinds of ‘Indonesia’s’ are through visual culture presented to these young people? And what kinds of modern Muslim selves does visual culture promote?

The analysis of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture is not only relevant to the study of contemporary Indonesia and the ways in which Islamic modern selves are imagined through popular culture, but should be seen in a broader context. My study also contributes to the fields of cultural studies/media studies and religious studies in different ways:

First, it challenges the persistent Eurocentrism in Cultural Studies. As Robert Stam and Ella Shohat (2005) have rightly addressed, Cultural Studies risks becoming a Eurocentric form of Anglo-American gazing (Stam and Shohat 2005: 481). Although many Cultural Studies scholars have critically scrutinized the construction of Eurocentric discourses in cultural products, they have mainly done so within the narrow confines of Anglo-American media and popular culture. The field’s main focus on English language cultural practices not only denies the existence of other regionally and globally important centres of cultural production (e.g. Bollywood, Latin America, East Asia), but it also reduces Cultural Studies to a rather inward-looking academic field (Stam and Shohat 2005: 481). Almost ten years after Stam and Shohat’s plea to de-centre and de-eurocentralize Cultural Studies, the discipline still shows little engagement with, curiosity towards, or even vicarious knowledge of cultural practices coming from other locations. And more problematic, Stam and Shohat’s comment that “whatever does not belong to the Anglo-Western world is peripheralized as Area Studies” (481) is still spot-on.

As Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet (2014) point out, the disciplines of Cultural Studies and Area Studies both need each other. Whereas Eurocentrism burdens Cultural Studies, a history of colonialism, imperialism, Cold War objectives, and more recently ‘the war of terror’, continues to burden Area Studies (Chow and de Kloet 2014: 8; Sears and Bonura 2007: 4). As Chow and de Kloet (2014) note, while “a turn to local or indigenous knowledge runs counter to the project of Cultural Studies
itself – that tries to put the cultural adjective under erasure – an uncritical globalization of western knowledge is equally problematic.” (Chow and de Kloet 2014: 8-9) By relegating assumed ‘peripheral locations’ to the realm of Area Studies, Cultural Studies lays itself open to charges of universalism and ethnocentrism. Cultural Studies therefore needs Area Studies’ sensibility to spatial and cultural contexts (8). On the other hand, “[Area studies] requires engaging with global scholarship, recognizing the unilateral production of universals, questioning the replication of unequal patterns of data collection and storage” (Sears and Bonura 2007: 7-8). It is here that area Studies could benefit from Cultural Studies’ critical theorizations (Chow and de Kloet 2014: 8).

In the past decade, several attempts at collaboration and at a de-centered mode knowledge production in Cultural Studies have been made. The most notable here is the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project and journal, which aim to enhance the communication and exchange between Asia and other regions of the Cultural Studies world. Other important contributions are Chen Kuan-Hsing’s Asia as Method (2010), Emma Baulch and Julian Millie’s special issue on media and politics in Indonesia for International Journal of Cultural Studies (2013), Ackbar Abbas and John Emi’s Internationalizing Cultural Studies: An Anthology (2005), and Daya Kishan Thussu’s Internationalizing Media Studies (2009). Following their example, it is also at the junction of Cultural Studies and Area Studies that I position my study.

Central to my study is the relation between media, religion, and modernity. When looking at research that is concerned with media and religion, we can observe that a considerable amount of research focuses on Judeo-Christian expressions in popular culture (cf. McDannell 1998; Forbes and Mahan 2005). Little attention has been given to the connection between religion and media in (postcolonial) societies where the advent of modernity is prominent. Here, secularity and the public decline of religion are seen as intrinsic features of modernity (Meyer 2012: 6). At the same time, Muslim communities worldwide are confronted with the question what it means to be ‘modern’ and ‘Islamic’. Indonesian Islamic popular culture negotiates this question. My study, through its examination of what takes place in these popular cultural texts, could help us to understand the modernities of contemporary Islam. The study of Islamic modernities remains highly relevant to Muslim majority societies that are modernizing and to Muslim minority societies, like the Netherlands, in which Muslims are actively looking for a way to live in harmony with their faith while participating in an assumed modern society (cf. Ramadan and Van Cuilenborg 2005).

My study is also of value to the fields of Islamic and religious studies. In these fields, Southeast Asia in general, and Indonesia in particular, are conspicuously
absent from discussions about Islam. As Robert Hefner (2000) explains, this marginalization of Indonesia has in the past been justified for the reason that Indonesia is geographically far from the historical heartland of Muslim, and especially Arab, civilization (Hefner 2000: xvii). Inasmuch as the study of Islam in the West initially developed through research on Islamic law, there was perhaps a ground for this exclusion (xviii). However, today, Islamic studies concerns itself with a host of issues enveloping in the world of Islam, including religious authority, civil society, philosophy, international relations, and cultural practices (Arkoun 2002: 100). Since we have in the past few years seen an unheralded evaluation of global Islam, Indonesia’s absence can no longer be justified. It is important for Islamic studies to engage more with Indonesia. Not only does the tremendous amount of studies that is focused on the Middle East or the Arabic world often lead to a misperception that Islam does not exist anywhere else (Weintraub 2011: 1), but excluding Southeast Asia from the discussion denies Islamic studies the opportunity to engage with a range of different versions, orientations, and practices of the Islam. It thereby misses out on a chance to create a more diverse, and transnational field of study, which acknowledges the complexity and multiplicity of the Islam.

Within Islamic studies, my study of media and religion highlights the changing modes of religious authority. Such a study is of increasing importance since Islam has recently acquired new forms of visibility as it has made its way in the public avenues of both Muslim and European societies (Göle 2002: 173). This new visibility has led to the coming into being of a Muslim public sphere (cf. Göle 2002), in which Muslims are through media – and not so much through traditional forms of religious authority – linked around areas of common interest (cf. Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Weintraub 2011: 5). As chapter 4 shows, new forms of religious authority, like Islamic self-help books, are quickly gaining popularity. If one is to understand the modernities of Islam in our contemporary world, topics like these should be incorporated in critical Islamic studies.

Theorizing Islamic modernities

Modernity is easy to inhabit but difficult to define. […] Some […] question the value of the very idea of modernity, but the word is all around us, and it may already be too late to legislate its uses.

Dipesh Chakrabarty 2002: xix-xx
In *Habitations of Modernity* (2002), Dipesh Chakrabarty stresses the difficulties of defining the term ‘modernity’. Over the course of this research, I too have struggled with defining and using the term. Modernity is generally understood as ‘the state or quality of being modern’ and has been used as a short hand term to refer to a ‘modern society’. The related term ‘modernization’ describes the transformation of a society from a rural and agrarian condition to an industrial, urban, modern society. This ‘modern society’ is often seen as embodying the following characteristics: an optimism for the idea of the progress of history, a conception of humans as rationally capable beings for bringing about such progress, secularism, the practice of law, a range of political institutions – including the nation-state and democracy, economic institutions – especially industrial production, and a free market economy. It is a society, “which unlike any preceding culture, lives in the future, rather than in the past” (Giddens 1998: 94).

While this seems to be a clear-cut and comprehensive definition, the problem with the concept of modernity is at least twofold. First, if modernity is indeed a definable concept, we must be able to categorize some people or practices as nonmodern. As Chakrabarty (2002) points out, in the nineteenth and twentieth century this was a relatively easy task. Following the tenets of the Enlightenment, many Western intellectuals saw modernity as “the institutions that delivered us from the thrall of all that was unreasonable and irrational. Those who fell outside its ambit could be described as *premodern*” (Chakrabarty 2002: xix, his emphasis). Today this understanding of modernity produces a moral dilemma. Because who exactly are assumed to be ‘premodern’? Lower classes? Peasants? People who practice magic? Javanese mystics?

Chakrabarty (2002) remarks that these groups bring into the public domain their own ideas about justice, spirits, and magic (Chakrabarty 2002: xix). It is problematic to interpret their practices as introductions of the traditional into the modern. Most of these people are as caught up in institutions as the middle and upper classes are. And theoretically speaking, they too enjoy political rights guaranteed by the country’s constitution. Even non-literate members hold these entitlements (Ibidem). But how can we then describe the lives of those who are our contemporaries, yet whose life challenges ‘modern distinctions’, for instance the distinction between feudal and industrialist? (xx) And as Chakrabarty rightly asks, can “the designation of something or some group as *non*- or *premodern* ever be anything but a gesture of the powerful?” (xix) Which relations of power are involved in categorizing a region or a group of people as not yet modern? Marking others as nonmodern is a morally
and politically complex task. At the same time, the concept of modernity loses its value if everything and everyone in the world is by definition modern.

While the first problem relates to issues of categorization (who are exactly modern?), the second problem has to do with the very categories with which we think. It is difficult for social science categories and terms – like modernity – to attain a universality that is free of historical and contingent differences between societies (Chakrabarty 2002: xxii). If we look at the conception of modernity at the beginning of this section, we see that it does not fit Indonesia, particularly where it concerns secularism. In Indonesia many of those who are considered to be modern, are more religious than other social groups (Barendregt 2006: 174).

Indonesia does not form an exception here. More regions do not smoothly fit the assumed blueprint of modernity. In Asia, the rise of industrial capitalism has hardly been accompanied by the encouragement of free markets. Instead, protectionism, quotas, and in some cases corruption and cartels have been central elements in this process (Robison and Goodman 2013: 2). To many Western observers, the Asian entrepreneurial classes do not entirely adhere to a bourgeois ideal of rationality. The upsurge of the new rich in China, Taiwan, and parts of Southeast Asia has for instance brought about a rapid increase in the demand for products like tiger penis and ivory, thereby bringing endangered species closer to extinction. These practices have been cast as bad taste and odd ways to adopt ‘the modern’ (2). Japanese businessmen, who are reading comics instead of the financial section during their subway ride home, appear incongruous to those who do consider themselves part of bourgeois culture (Ibidem). Does not fitting the assumed blueprint of modernity make these regions or peoples less modern? And compared to whom?

In Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference (2000), Chakrabarty engages with these questions. Chakrabarty addresses why “Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Kenyan,’ and so on.” (Chakrabarty 2000: 27) He observes that “there is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.” (27) Europe’s dominant position is secured through teleological narratives of historical transition. These narratives, as Ien Ang (1998) points out, “posit Europe as the sole ‘motor’ for progressive historical change in the world, as the unique bearer of modern civilization, and as the deliverer of modernity to the rest of the world.” (Ang 1998: 76) In this way, modernization will always be a known route, and the modern will always be something that has already happened elsewhere, and which is to be reproduced with some local content (Chakrabarty 2002: 39).
Europe here thus remains the pinnacle of modernity, ‘the original’ (cf. Chow 1995), while non-Europe follows a linear trajectory towards that ideal, but will never fully reach it. This denial of coevalness, the systematic tendency to place the other in a less modern time (Fabian 2002: 33), reduces foreign modernities to translations of a European original. These translations are prone to be cast in terms of a lack, an inadequacy, or incompleteness. As Rey Chow (1995) puts it, “the value of translation is derived solely from ‘the original’, which is the authenticator of itself and of its subsequent versions.” (Chow 1995: 1984) The universality that is instilled in modernity in this way gives rise to a Eurocentric discourse that sanitizes Western history and modernity, while patronizing non-Western trajectories (Stam and Shohat 2005: 482).

Hence, while the concept of modernity is problematic because it cannot achieve a universality that is completely free of historical and contingent differences between societies, powerful forces have endowed it with such universality. As a result, the West often remains the yardstick by which success is measured, casting foreign modernities as deficient.

If modernity is such a problematic concept, why do I still insist on using it? Like Chakrabarty (2002), I realize that it is of course possible that modernity has outlived its effectiveness as a concept. At the same time, it seems like we cannot do without modernity in the context of our everyday discussions of development, equality, and democracy (Chakrabarty 2002: xx). These discussions do not only pertain to the future of Indonesia. If we look at the discussions about Islam, integration, and multiculturalism that have recently taken place in the Netherlands – or Western Europe more generally – we see how tropes like ‘backward’, ‘not modern’, and ‘unsuitable’ endure in rhetoric even when we no longer believe in the applicability of these ideas. The presence of such a discourse shows that, despite our doubt towards them, historicist or stagist notions of modernity are never really far from our thoughts. Modernity continues to shape our understanding of the world. It is therefore important to, as Chakrabarty has put it, “engage and reengage our ideas about modernity in a spirit of constant vigilance.” (xx)

But how to view modernity then? What should one say about types of modernity that do not fit the canonical understanding of the term? In response to these questions, Shmuel Eisenstadt (2000) has coined the theory of ‘multiple modernities’, which has been adopted by a range of different theorists (e.g. Arnason 2000; Bhambra 2007; Delanty 2004; Wittrock 1998; 2000; Hefner 1998; Tambiah 2000). What unites all of their approaches is a strong rejection of totalizing and Eurocentric classical theories of modernization.
In the 1950s and 1960s, classical theories of modernization (cf. Parsons 1966; 1971) promulgated the view that the worldwide expansion of the cultural program of modernity, as it was developed in Europe, would lead to a homogenous world (Eisenstadt 2000: 1). This form of ‘Western’ modernity would ‘naturally’ be taken over in all modernizing societies and would prevail throughout the world.

Multiple modernities proponents interfere by claiming that modernity has, from the start, always been multiple (Kaya 2004: 40). After the Second World War, European modernities crystallized as they expanded, giving rise to multiple modern institutional, cultural, and ideological patterns, i.e. multiple modernities, which sometimes showed a strong ambivalence towards the ‘Western’ cultural and political project of modernity (Eisenstadt 2001: 320). These forms of modernity are so diverse that adherents of the multiple modernities paradigm speak of modernity in the plural.

Partha Chatterjee (1997) in his writings on modernity in India, too emphasizes that “there cannot be just one modernity irrespective of geography, time, environment or social conditions. The forms of modernity will have to vary between different countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices.” (Chatterjee 1997: 8) Stretching this comment a bit further, he asserts that:

true modernity consists in determining the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in particular circumstances; that is, applying the methods of reason to identify or invent the specific technologies of modernity that are appropriate for our purposes. Or, to put this another way, if there is any universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this: that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity. (Chatterjee 1997: 8-9)

The different multiple modernities are thus never constructed in a geographical or temporal vacuum, but are always constructed according to specific socio-cultural conditions of that time: they are rooted in a particular historical moment of a society.

The emphasis on the plurality of modernity opens up the possibility of examining different Islamic modernities in the context of Indonesia. What also makes the approach useful to my project is that it places a strong emphasis on the cultural elements of modernity. The emergence of the multiple modernities paradigm has coincided with the cultural turn in the social sciences in the 1990s. Multiple modernities theorists have strongly argued against a perceived neglect of cultural factors in the study of modernities. For them, modernities cannot only be grasped in economic or institutional terms. They observe that something fundamental separates us from our pre-modern ancestors, and that the spread of institutions has been so
uneven that the change must lie elsewhere: in the realm of culture (Fourie 2012: 58) Cultural orientations are here embodied in institutions, but are not reducible to them (Arnason 2000: 65).

The centrality of culture allows me to study the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of modernities in Indonesian popular culture. The multiple modernities approach recognizes that it is in and through cultural practices that we can explore the complex interplay between ‘the imagined traditional’ and ‘the imagined modern’. For many people in Indonesia, modernity has been a double-edged sword, containing within itself both the hope of freedom and material benefit, but also a perceived loss of identity. Popular culture and visual provides people – both as producers and as consumers – with the creative “opportunity to identify or invent the specific technologies of modernity that are appropriate for our purposes” (Chatterjee 1997: 8-9).

Drawing on the multiple modernities perspective also poses a number of challenges to my study. A question I am for instance constantly confronted with is: how multiple are Indonesian modernities? The theory of multiple modernities exhibits serious ontological confusion since it has not consistently defined its primary unit of analysis (Fourie 2012: 62). Sometimes each society is considered to have its own variant of modernity, while at other moments religion or the territorial state is seen to determine the major dividing lines between ‘modernities’ (59). Cultural differences are in the multiple modernities literature almost always differences that are located at a cross-national or cross-civilizational level (Schmidt 2006: 84). Cultural differences however also occur within nations, for instance between different provinces or among different groups of people. Does this mean that single nation-states contain different ‘multiple’ modernities within themselves? Is there a Balinese modernity? A Sundanese modernity? A Jakartan modernity? Or even a modernity of Jakarta’s new rich?

The Indonesian cultural sphere provides an opportunity to engage with this dilemma. It forms an arena where different orientations of Islam and different styles of modernity struggle for power. Through the analysis of different case studies, I explore how Indonesian modernities are not monolithic wholes, but are internally multiple, diverse and at times conflictive. As my analysis of visual culture in shopping malls (chapter 2) for instance shows, different styles of modernity are – despite their individual battles – also imagined to collaborate in the project of shaping a modern Muslim nation. The Indonesian cultural sphere thus enables the possibility of researching the existence of multiple modernities within a single nation-state.
Another dilemma I encounter by using the multiple modernities approach, is that it views modernity as mobile and open to revision, while it conceives the societies that it encounters as rather static. Societies and cultures are never closed entities, but are open to change. If modernity is indeed ‘a force of dynamism and agency’ (Fourie 2012: 60), then it would be contradictory to imagine that it can so easily be shaped by culture. As Fourie suggests, empirical research could here elucidate some of these questions, but the multiple modernities approach largely resided in realm of theory (Fourie 2012: 59-60).

My study can here interfere critically. In my study, I explore how Indonesian Islamic popular culture both reflects, and is shaped by, the processes of modernization that are currently transforming the archipelago. What fascinates me is how through the construction of powerful discourses that are related to the preferred course of modernity, popular culture and visual culture becomes an important participant in the public debate, and as such may play a key role in the aspired modernization of Indonesia. By taking this as point of departure, my study treats neither culture nor modernities as static entities. Both are open to change and revision during their mutual encounters. But how do they interact? How do they mirror and revise each other?

Another question that confronts me is how to speak of local modernities without falling into the trap of cultural essentialism. In response to classical theories of modernization, the multiple modernities approach attempts to deconstruct singular notions of the modern in order to explain the multiplicity of modernities around the world. Every region is seen as having a unique modernity. By stressing the uniqueness of regions and cultures, the multiple modernities approach lays itself open to charges of essentialism and might revert to the simplistic cultural generalizations that it hopes to avoid (Fourie 2012: 62). How can I speak of Indonesian Islamic modernities without essentializing either Indonesia or Islam?

For Volker Schmidt (2006), part of the problem is that the multiple modernities literature does not tell us what cultural differences consist of. It also fails to reflect on how significant these differences are and why they justify speaking of modernity in the plural instead of in the singular (Schmidt 2006: 80-81). What makes a particular region so unique that it can be viewed as having an institutional and cultural outlook of its own? Are the multiple modernities so distinctive that they differ enough to be considered categories on their own? Several attempts have been made to circumvent these problems. Peter van der Veer (1998) for instance suggests that we should speak of modernity in the singular, and of history in the plural. For him this approach retains “a sense of the uniqueness and power of European modernity
together with a sense of the complexity and variation of its clash with historical processes in many parts of the world” (van der Veer 1998: 285). On his turn, Schmidt (2006) proposes to speak of ‘varieties of modernity’, rather than of multiple modernities (Schmidt 2006: 82). Like the multiple modernities literature, the ‘varieties of modernity’ approach emphasizes difference. The differences that it concerns itself with are seen “as family differences within a common mode of societal (more specifically, economic) organization, that of modern capitalism.” (Schmidt 2006: 82, his emphasis) A problem with both of these approaches is that they focus on institutional, political, and economic factors and neglect cultural elements of modernity.

The singularity or plurality of modernity will continue to fuel scholarly debates. Rather than determining whether modernity is either singular or multiple, I think it is more urgent to study what comprises the defining features of modernities in a particular cultural context (Fourie 2012: 66). My study of the imagination of Islamic modernities in Islamic-themed popular and visual culture engages with this issue.

Methodological considerations

Encounters with modernities

How to operationalize something so large and all encompassing as modernities? How to choose case studies from a burgeoning and eclectic Islamic cultural scene in which now every cultural phenomenon seems to have an Islamic variant? These two questions haunted me at the start of this research project. And when I went on my first fieldwork trip in 2009 to collect data, I still had not figured them out. Not knowing where to start and having no criteria for selection yet, I started to hang out with a group of Indonesian university students, in the hope that they could give me a few leads. I soon learned that the ways in which they encountered modernities in their daily lives were very diverse, but that they also showed significant overlaps. These observations inspired me to take the experiences of one of those informants as a lead in selecting my case studies. What I wondered was: how and where does a young urban Muslim in Indonesia today encounter modernities in his or her daily life? And what role does visual culture play here? In an attempt to make the large and still rather abstract notion of ‘modernities’ more tangible, I used the personal narrative of a Muslim girl, Nisa, and more specifically her encounters with modernities, in constructing a framework for the selection of my case studies.
I realize that by taking just one person’s encounters with modernities as a lead in constructing an empirical frame for my study, I risk being charged with particularism. It is however not my aim to provide a ‘representative’ account of Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture, if such a project is even possible. The Islamic popular cultural scene is so diverse that an all-encompassing examination is beyond the scope of a single study. Instead, I hope to provide a glimpse of this cultural scene, while showing how its products become a site for the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of modernities. And although Nisa’s narrative is highly personal and specific, her ambitions and her newly acquired middle class-ness also seem characteristic of a young generation of urban Muslims. The ways in which she encounters modernities are not obscure, but are shared by many of her generation.

When I first met Nisa in 2009, she was eighteen years old. She had just enrolled in a humanities and arts program at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Nisa was born and raised in Solo, a city of approximately five million people (including six outer regencies), located at sixty kilometres east of Yogyakarta. After she started her program at the university, she moved out her Solo family home and into a student house in Yogyakarta. Due to her father’s recent success as a businessman – he owns several private health clinics – Nisa and her family could permit a middle class lifestyle. Nisa would herself however always stress her humble upbringing, and she preferred to live in a student dorm instead of a private apartment. Although she decidedly identifies as Muslim, she is also open to Javanese beliefs and traditions. Like many other young Indonesians, she had aspirations to go abroad, a goal she accomplished in 2013 by receiving a scholarship to study in the UK.

Nisa’s encounters with modernities can be seen as taking place in at least three cultural ‘spheres’, which I define as the material and immaterial shared and sometimes overlapping spaces; compartments of life, through which we often unthinkingly navigate. When thinking about how Nisa encounters modernities, a first sphere can be untangled. I call this sphere the ‘leisure sphere’. It is through the places where Nisa likes to hang out and spend her free time (e.g. shopping malls, upscale restaurants, swimming pools of chic hotels) that she participates in modernity. Second, Nisa encounters negotiations of modernities through the ‘media sphere’, that is, through her consumption books, films, music, television programs, and other Islamic-themed popular cultural products. Third, Nisa participates in modernity through both her academic education in the arts, and her work as art critic and programmer. It is in this professional or ‘creative sphere’, that she in recent
years has become increasingly mobile. It is also through this sphere that she has created opportunities to travel and to take part in the global art world.

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Figure 1: chapter overview

These three cultural spheres, the leisure sphere, the media sphere, and the creative sphere form the framework of this dissertation. Within each sphere different objects are selected as case studies (Figure 1). Through the analysis of these case studies, I show that the three spheres are closely connected with the Indonesian Islamic popular and visual cultural scene. As Figure 1 shows, to study the leisure sphere, I take shopping malls as my object of study. What interests me here is how the space of the shopping mall is transformed during Ramadan, and what the role of visual culture is in this transformation. Within the media sphere, I explore the three largest
outlets of Indonesian Islamic popular culture: Islamic popular music, Islamic self-help books, and Islamic-themed films. To study the creative sphere, I examine two contemporary Islamic-themed art works. In what follows, I briefly specify my choices of these case studies. More elaborate explanations about the objects of study and their selection are provided in the respective chapters.

**The leisure sphere**

*Case study*: The transformation of the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan (chapter 2)

*Objects of study*: Four shopping malls in Yogyakarta. I focus on Plaza Ambarrukmo, Mal Malioboro, Galeria Mall, and Saphir Square.

*Criteria for selection*: A number of four malls in Yogyakarta are chosen to provide the study with ample data and to enable an examination of recurring patterns in processes of spatial production in the shopping mall. Plaza Ambarrukmo, Mal Malioboro, Galeria Mall, and Saphir Square are selected as they represent the four biggest and trendiest malls in Yogyakarta. The selected malls target adherents of the burgeoning middle class. A focus on these malls then helps to unpack how space and modern (Islamic) lifestyles are mutually constitutive.

**The media sphere**

*Case study*: Islamic rock music (chapter 3)

*Objects of study*: Three music videos of the band Gigi. These music videos are: *Tuhan* (2004), *Perdamaian* (2005), and *Nationalism* (2009).

*Criteria for selection*: As an epitome of Islamic rock music, the band Gigi forms an excellent case to understand Islamic rock music in the current post New Order era. I focus on music videos – and not just on songs – as they allow me to involve the visual dimension in the analysis. *Tuhan, Perdamaian,* and *Nationalism* are selected, since they each engage in a different debate related to modernity. This not only enables a study of Gigi’s negotiation of modernities, but it also allows me to demonstrate the different debates in which Islamic popular and visual culture participates.

*Case study*: Islamic self-help books (chapter 4)

**Criteria for selection:** First, the books represent the three largest sub-categories in self-help literature, namely women, family, and business. Second, the books revolve around different ‘content-dimensions’ and in this way represent different types of self-help books that are on the market in Indonesia.

**Case study:** Islamic-themed cinema (chapter 5)

**Objects of study:** Three films. These films are *Berbagi Suami* (Love for share, 2006), *Virgin* (2004), and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of love, 2008).

**Criteria for selection:** Indonesian Islamic-themed cinema often functions as a catalyst for national debates about gender relations (Van Wichelen 2010: 235). This chapter aims to examine (1) how representations of (Muslim) masculinity and femininity in cinema are constructed, (2) how these constructions negotiate ‘sensitive’ topics like polygamy, (homo)sexuality and domestic violence, and (3) how these representations engage with Indonesia’s post authoritarian present of Islamization and modernization. These three films are selected for their Islamic subthemes and storylines, and because of their thematic engagement with Muslim femininity and masculinity.

The creative sphere

**Case study:** Contemporary Islamic-themed art (chapter 6)


**Criteria for selection:** The aim of this chapter is to investigate the criticality of Indonesian Islamic modernities. How does Indonesia negotiate its position as a Muslim nation in a post-9/11 world? I approach this question through looking at two artworks. What unites these artworks is that they are all connected to Islam by having an Islamic theme running through; they mobilise issues associated with Islam to come to terms with the present state of the world. I select *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* and *11 June 2002*, because their politics revolve
around the same topic. The works negotiate and contest current geopolitics and the volatile position of Indonesia and Muslims in a post-9/11 world. Moreover, the works engage in different politics to formulate their critique. In this way, they enable an examination of the different strategies and facets of this Muslim criticality.

Notes on the case studies

When looking at my choice of case studies, a few things can be observed. First, the selected case studies are relatively recent, the ‘oldest’ case study dates from 2003 and the most recent case study from 2012. Hence, they are produced during the ‘post-New Order’ or ‘post-Suharto’ era. I choose to focus on this period, because as I explained earlier, this period marks the heyday of Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. This does not mean that I view the post-New Order era as a clearly cut-off unit of time. While a direct comparison between the New Order and the post-New Order is not the main aim of this dissertation, at several moments (e.g. in chapters 3, 4 and 5) parallels between both periods are drawn.

The case studies combine the more archetypal genres of popular culture, i.e. books, films, and music, with other cultural practices, i.e. (visual decorations in) shopping malls during Ramadan and contemporary Islamic-themed art. In this dissertation, I bring all of these case studies together under the header ‘popular and visual culture’. I realize that shopping malls and art might seem like odd additions. I however include them in my study for several reasons.

First, they are both cultural practices that construct and negotiate (Islamic) modernities. Young urban Muslims, like many others of their generation, enjoy hanging out in shopping malls. Visits to shopping malls are part and parcel of daily life, especially for middle class Muslims. It is one of those places where they participate in modernity or can fantasize about a middle class life – if only through window-shopping. In addition, the phenomenon of Islamic popular culture is often associated with capitalism, consumption and the commodification of Islam. The transformation of the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan demonstrates these processes. It therefore provides an excellent case study to construct the setting for this dissertation and to explore the intersections of Islam, capitalism, and modernity.

Indonesian contemporary art is an important part of the Indonesian cultural scene. Quite recently, a new understanding of Islam and art has developed that mobilizes issues related to Islam to articulate political, social, and cultural dissatisfactions with
the present state of a post-9/11 world. This makes contemporary art an excellent case to investigate the criticality – i.e. the ways in which visual culture critiques, contests, and rejects specific modernities – of Indonesian Islamic popular and visual culture in the context of our current geopolitical constellation. This focus does however not mean that I believe that popular culture is ‘uncritical’ in comparison to art. As the analyses of music, self-help books and film show, these products also give way to critical politics. I would like to stress that a distinction between high and low culture, or between art and popular culture is hard to maintain. I refuse to establish a cultural hierarchy between art and popular culture, and would like to avoid cutting the cultural field into high and low, or the people versus the elite. As Douglas Kellner (2011) has pointed out, these distinctions generally serve as a front for normative aesthetic evaluations and, often, a political program, i.e. dismissing mass culture for high culture, or celebrating the popular while mocking high culture (Kellner 2011: 7).

Notwithstanding the artificiality of the boundary between art and popular culture, I do acknowledge that these cultural practices are located on different planes, for instance in terms of their access, evaluation, distribution, and circulation. The sheer variety of, and the differences between, the case studies however provides me with the opportunity to address questions concerning genre and medium specificity – something I engage with in the conclusion. How do the means of mediation, e.g. different genres, media, and visualities matter when it comes to the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of Islamic modernities?

On the use of theories and methods

Located at the junction of Cultural Studies and Area Studies, the dissertation is underpinned by insights from the humanities as well as the social sciences. While both seek to understand ‘human culture’, they differ in the ways they approach their objects of study. Spanning five years of my research life, the dissertation reflects my own trajectory, and sometimes my own struggles, of navigating between both perspectives. I notice that some chapters lean more towards a humanities perspective, while others move more in a social sciences direction. By combining insights and methods from both perspectives, I hope that my study as a whole circumvents the twin pitfalls of both, the theoreticism of the humanities and the empiricism of the social sciences.
Although the case studies all engage with the theory of multiple modernities, my dissertation is theoretically eclectic. Theorists ranging from Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, to Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière, and Arjun Appadurai inform the study. This theoretical eclecticism is in many ways a conscious decision. I choose theories and concepts according to the specificity of each case study and each object. Inspired by Hall’s contention that “theory is a detour on the route to something more important” (Hall 1991: 42), I believe that theory must be ‘useful’ in relation to the empirical data; it should highlight important aspects of the objects under study and scrutinize how the objects navigate through a political field. With the concepts I have chosen, I am able to do so.

Stressing the ‘usefulness’ of theory also means that I would very much like to refrain from ‘theory for the sake of theory’. My point of view does however not imply that I simply aim to ‘apply’ theory to my case studies. As Mieke Bal (2002) has emphasized, we must always “allow the object to speak back” (Bal 2002: 45). Explaining this idea she writes:

Making sweeping statements about objects, or citing them as examples, renders them dumb. Detailed analysis – where no quotation can serve as an illustration but where it will always be scrutinized in depth and detail, with a suspension of certainties – resists reduction. Even though, obviously, objects cannot speak, they can be treated with enough respect for their irreducible complexity and unyielding muteness – but not mystery – to allow them to check the thrust of an interpretation, and to divert and complicate it. (45)

Our objects and concepts should always be in conversation with each other. In this way, objects can enrich both interpretation and theory. This is also how theory can change from a rigid master discourse into a live cultural object (45). In my study, I aim to facilitate a conversation between objects and concepts. I hope to go beyond merely highlighting the specificities of the objects, and instead let the objects speak back to theory.

Regarding my choices of concepts and theories, I realize that the theorists that inform my study can be located at different positions along the spectrum between critical theory and poststructuralist thought, but that differences among them remain.
In defense of my own eclecticism – in terms of disciplinary perspectives, methods and the use of theory – I want to suggest, following Hall, that I think that often “the problem is that it is assumed that theory consists of a series of closed paradigms”, rather than to “understand theorizing as an open horizon” (Hall 1996: 138). I would like to underscore here that research in Cultural Studies – and the same counts for Area Studies – should remain open to (external) theoretical influences that sometimes may be conflicting amongst each other. Research should show openness towards those theories that on the face of things seem to have little more than misplaced and contradictory relationships to Cultural Studies – and Area Studies is only one example here. As Hall asserts, “Cultural Studies is fundamentally about theorizing in the postmodern context, it does not believe in the finality of a finished theoretical paradigm.” (Hall 1996: 147) In Hall’s spirit, I believe that Cultural Studies must ‘theorize with an open horizon’: it must stay open to, and find ways for, consciously conjoining seemingly conflicting approaches and concepts. Such an outlook secures the ‘unfinished-ness’ of an academic discipline.

In the context of ‘researching with an open horizon’, I hope to show how my theoretical eclecticism can be productive, and how Cultural Studies and Area Studies can collaborate with, and contribute to each other. In what follows, I describe how I have used methods from both fields.

**Ethnographic observations**

This study draws on data collected during three fieldwork periods that span a total of ten months. The first fieldwork was conducted from January until April 2009 (four months); the second fieldwork trip took place in 2010 from May until September (four months), and the last fieldwork was conducted from April until June 2012 (two months). All of these fieldwork trips took place in Yogyakarta, a city of 3,4 million people (*BPS DIY* 2013) in Central Java. I choose Yogyakarta as a research site for its rich cultural scene. The presence of this scene allowed me to speak to many people involved in the media and the arts. Being a university city, this location also allowed me to mingle with students, with the ‘young Muslim generation’ that I spoke of earlier. I admit that this single-sited approach risks a particular Java-centeredness. This might seep through the contextualization of the different case studies, for which I often use comments by local people. ‘Local’ is here however already a problematic term, since quite a few people I talked to were from outside Java. Furthermore, the
texts that I analyze are not location-bound – except for the shopping malls. Instead, the cultural products I study are created for a nation-wide, sometimes even regional, audience.

Since cultural texts are my main objects of study, I have during my fieldwork collected ample sets of data related to my research. These include among others films, books, television recordings, (V)CD’s, newspaper articles, flyers for events, magazines, photos, and even Idul Fitri greetings cards. The sheer amount of gathered data made it impossible to include everything in this dissertation. I narrowed down this set of data to five case studies using the criteria described earlier (see pages 27-30).

I did not only go ‘to the field’ to collect objects. Following Paul Willis and Mats Trondman (2000), I see ethnography as “a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contacts with agents”, which helps in “presenting, explaining and analysing [...] culture(s) in which experience is located.” (Willis and Trondman 2000: 5-6) To contextualize my case studies; to better understand what I study; hence to better explain ‘culture’ – a problematic term, which I use for the lack of a clearer alternative – I mingled with those who consume Islamic-themed popular cultural products. In their company I often went to Islamic music festivals, Muslim book fairs, watched Ramadan TV, or we simply just hang out together. During these events and meetings, I would often take photographs, while afterwards I made notes about our conversations. The photographs (chapters 2, 4 and 6) have become part of my corpus and I draw on the notes I made throughout my fieldwork.

Apart from data collection and participant observation, I have also conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with several consumers (twenty-four interviews) of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture, and with people who work in the cultural scene (eleven interviews). I should emphasize here that the aim of this study is to provide an analysis of a series of texts, and not a production or audience study. While I cannot stress enough that both production studies and audience research are highly relevant (cf. Hall 1980; Ang 1982; Morley 1992; Mayer, Banks and Caldwell 2010), it was not feasible to extensively include both in this dissertation. My goal is to explore how products of Islamic popular culture are sites for the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of modernities. In the light of this goal, the in-depth interviews have improved my understanding of the Islamic popular and visual culture scene, and have helped me to contextualize the phenomena I am studying. It is then also to these objectives that I use the interviews in my study:
I put a strong emphasis on contextualizing, because as Lawrence Grossberg (1997) points out with his notion of ‘radical contextualism’: “context is everything and everything is context for Cultural Studies; Cultural Studies is perhaps best seen as a contextual theory of contexts and the lived milieux of power.” (Grossberg 1997: 7-8) For Grossberg, cultural forms are always involved in a dialectical practice: they are contingent on the specificities of the historical conjuncture in which they appear, but they also constitute this conjuncture (8). Context is thus not just something ‘out there’ within which practices occur, or which influence the development of these practices; practices constitute the very context within which they are practices (Slack 1996: 125). The interviews I conducted have helped me to grasp this dialectical process; they helped me to understand the context that shapes cultural products, and have helped me to see how cultural products shape the context in which they appear. In the analysis of my case studies, I hope to lay bare this dialectical process. I for instance hope to show how a context in which particular ‘modern behavior’ is considered unsuitable for women is reflected and negotiated in popular films, and how in turn, these representations (1) define the ways in which sexuality can be discussed publicly, and (2) become part of a national project of modernization. In this way, we cannot only understand how Islamization and modernization shape cultural products, but we can vice versa also understand how cultural products play a role in the Islamization and modernization of Indonesia.

The interviews that I conducted were semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews, i.e. interviews conducted through the use of a topic list. In-depth interviews explore the construction of social meaning “through the medium of extended talk” (Schrøder 2003: 147). They seek “to illuminate […] practices and experiences, by getting those involved to verbalize them in the non-natural, but open situation of the qualitative research interview, in which informants have considerable power to influence the agenda” (147). In contrast to for instance focus groups, this method enabled me to ask questions that are tailored to the specific circumstances divulged by the respondent (153). Individual interviews also provided me with opportunities to illuminate more intimate aspects of people’s thoughts and experiences. My interviews all took place in an open and casual setting, like a coffee place or a restaurant, and were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. I have recorded the interviews – if informants agreed – and have made transcripts of the interviews.
The somewhat unconventional way in which I use the interviews in this dissertation does not mean that I see the cultural texts as determining agents or as containing all meaning. While it was beyond the scope and goal of this dissertation to include a full-fledged production or audience study, I hope that this dissertation might provide a starting point for such projects. If we are to understand the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic popular and visual culture in its totality, then the ‘determining moments’ (Hall 1980: 164) of production and consumption must be scrutinized as well.

In the end, my fieldwork experience has made me realize the importance and the indispensableness of such a venture. My original PhD-proposal ‘only’ contained four objects. It was through my fieldwork that I encountered many more fascinating and relevant objects. I think it is telling that I eventually ended up with fifteen objects instead of four. In the field, I also sharpened my focus, reformulated my questions, and discovered details and information that I would have never found from behind my desk in Amsterdam. Fieldwork has also made me more conscious, and forced me to enquire, about my own (speaking) position as a researcher. To claim that ‘locally produced’ knowledge generates a ‘deeper’ understanding of culture is highly problematic. It assumes that culture has an essential core to which some can come closer than others. While not encountering many difficulties, it is undeniable that my background as a mixed Dutch-Indonesian, but European looking, non-Muslim woman played a part in my interactions with people in the field. I sometimes struggled to make people I had just met feel at ease. A few young informants for instance took my Europeanness in combination with my position as an academic as a hint that I must be a ‘cultured person’, making them hesitant to speak about their consumption of popular culture. Mentioning that I binge-view the same TV shows or listened to the same music often helped a great deal to made them feel more comfortable.

Whereas being ‘in the field’ was inspiring, being back was at times difficult – and not only because it brought me back to the more mundane task of writing. In the field, I had direct feedback on my questions, ideas, and observations. I could instantly ‘test’ my ideas, and ask questions about the things I did not understand directly. I could even walk into a shopping mall and encounter a case study. Home in Amsterdam, I sometimes felt detached from my research topic. While I tried my best to keep up with what was going on in Indonesia by reading online newspapers and by keeping in touch with Indonesian friends, I could not help a nagging feeling.
and fear of missing out. On the other hand, I also experienced what many people have told me about ‘going back’: that distance is good, that it helps you to reflect. Often, I could see matters, observations, and objects clearer outside the context of fieldwork.

**Textual analysis**

In this dissertation cultural texts are my prime objects of study. ‘Text’ here refers to a complex set of discursive practices that are situated in specific cultural contexts. As Roland Barthes (1972) has emphasized, these cultural-practices-as-texts must be read critically to reveal their underlying cultural meanings (Barthes 1972: 107-108).

Earlier in the introduction, I suggested that to understand the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic popular and visual culture in its totality, one must in addition to its textual practices also scrutinize its production and consumption. The strength of such a mixed-method approach will always be the understanding of meanings in the context of their creation and their possible re-interpretation at a specific time and location (Fürsich 2009: 249). Notwithstanding my earlier comment, I would like to highlight that a primarily textual approach also has its own strengths and relevance.

As Elfriede Fürsich (2009) has observed, critics of textual analysis often base their critique on the assumption that text-only studies lack depth. Textual analysis presumably results in incomplete findings, which have to be substantiated or even authenticated by audience reactions or production context. These kinds of claims short-change the central contribution of textual analysis (Fürsich 2009: 244). The task of textual analysis is the critical evaluation of cultural artefacts in their own right, as creative moments in the circuit of culture that are often beyond the intentions of the producers (244). As ‘creative moments’, Gigi’s music (chapter 3) or the Islamic-themed blockbuster Ayat-Ayat Cinta (chapter 5) are not just raw materials that have to be authenticated through audience readings.

What also makes textual analysis valuable is that it allows me to lay bare latent meanings and omissions of these creative moments, and that it enables me to interpret these creative moments in the cultural context in which they appear (241). When I for instance look at recent Islamic-themed films (chapter 5), I wonder what kinds of gendered cultural sensibilities prevail in these films and how we can understand these sensibilities. Why do they appear at this moment in time? How do
they compare to earlier periods? Neither inquiries into production practices nor audience readings can be used to answer these questions (246).

Another trait of textual analysis is that it helps to unpack the spectrum of readings that a cultural product promotes. This is to ask in what ways a cultural product initiates various subject positions (247). In my study of Islamic self-help books (chapter 4), I am for instance interested in the kinds of modern Islamic subject positions that are promoted through these books. This goes beyond the question how an audience may read or appropriate the books. It instead refers to the larger question of which life stories, and which gender, sexual, class, and ethnic identities self-help books encourage and which ones they discourage or exclude.

There are many forms of interpretive textual analysis, including among others, rhetorical analysis (cf. Selzer 2004), discourse and ideological analysis (cf. Lassen, Strunck and Vestergaard 2006), psychoanalytic approaches (cf. Rodowick 2013), and approaches inspired by affect theory (cf. Ahmed 2013; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). To analyze the imagination of modernities in Islamic-themed popular and visual culture, I carry out a discourse analysis (see next section). I am interested in the ways in which visual and narrative textual components construct discourses about the modern future of Indonesia.

Chapter 2, in which I analyze shopping malls, forms an exception. In this chapter I do not draw exclusively on discourse analysis to reveal underlying cultural meanings about Islamic modernities. In my study of shopping malls, I use a spatial analysis inspired by the works of Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and Foucault (1986 [1967]) to investigate how not only (audio)visual texts, but also spaces play a role in production, imagination, negotiation, and contestation of Islamic modernities.

*Discourse analysis, visual analysis, narrative analysis*

To explore what kinds of modernities are imagined in the selected case studies and how these modernities are negotiated and contested, I conduct a discourse analysis by studying both the visual level and the narrative level of the selected texts. Since there are many types of discourse analysis, it is important to make a distinction between what is called Critical Discourse Analysis and the type of discourse analysis that is informed by the work of Michel Foucault.

As Linda Graham (2005) explains, Critical Discourse Analysis draws inferences from linguistic features in texts. It aims to provide a framework for the systematic
analysis of texts, so that researchers can go beyond speculation and can demonstrate how texts and language work. Critical Discourse Analysis thus seeks to provide a definitive account (Graham 2005: 3).

By contrast, a Foucault-inspired analysis eschews claims to objectivity and truth. Here “the claim to truth can itself be seen as a powerful rhetorical practice.” (Edwards and Nicoll 2001: 105, cited in Graham 2005: 3) Rather than seeking a definitive account, a Foucault-inspired analysis emphasizes that the process of analysis is “always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint.” (Wetherall, 2001: 384, cited in Graham 2005: 3) Central to this form of discourse analysis thus is a poststructural sensibility, which sees theorizing as resting “upon complexity, uncertainty and doubt, and upon a reflexivity about its own […] claims to knowledge about the social” (Ball, 1995: 269).

In my study, I draw on Foucault’s (1989 [1972]) understanding of discourse and discourse analysis. I use a Foucault-inspired discourse analysis, because it allows me to carry out a detailed investigation of the relation between (visual) language and other social processes. It opens the way for a context-specific analysis of how (visual) language works within power relations.

In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1989 [1972]) Foucault has described his understanding of ‘discourse’. For him, discourse refers to:

> the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements (90)

Hence, for Foucault, statements are constitutive of discourses. How should we then see these statements? As he continues:

> At first sight, the statement appears as an ultimate, undecomposable element that can be isolated and introduced into a set of relations with other similar elements. A point without a surface, but a point that can be located in planes of division and in specific forms of groupings. A seed that appears on the surface of a tissue of which it is the constituent element. The atom of discourse. And the problem soon arises: if the statement really is the elementary unit of discourse, what does it consist of? What are its features? What boundaries must one accord to it? (90-91)
Foucault emphasizes that a statement is not merely a sentence (92), a proposition (92) or a speech act (97), but is:

a function of existence [...] that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space. It is this function that we must now describe as such, that is, in its actual practice, its conditions, the rules that govern it, and the field in which it operates. (97)

For Foucault, a ‘statement’ is thus a ‘statement as function’. This ‘statement as function’ can be conceptualized as a discursive junction box where words and things intersect and become invested with specific relations of power (Graham 2005: 7). The statements that are constitutive of discourses are thus always connected to relations of power. As such, statements, and by extension discourses, have a constitutive effect; they work to structure the possibilities of how we can think about a certain topic.

In my study, I use discourse analysis to investigate how imaginations of modernities in popular and visual culture constitute discursive formations that function to enunciate what modernity is and how it is to be seen. Key questions for me here are: what discourses about Islamic modernities are constructed in Islamic-themed popular and visual culture? How are these discourses linked to relations of power in the context of contemporary Indonesia? How are these discourses constructed through (audio)visual and narrative elements of the objects under study? What is visible and invisible; audible and inaudible; sayable and unsayable; included and excluded? What escapes the limits of discourse?

To investigate these questions, I conduct a visual and narrative analysis. These two methods help me explore how visual and narrative elements work to construct discourses. Visual analysis takes the image as its primary object of study. It studies “the functions of a world [...] through pictures, images, and visualizations, rather than through texts and words” (Mirzoeff 1999: 8). As a method, it tries to lay bare how the visual constructs and conveys meaning. ‘The visual’ is here always seen as polluted by the non-visual: by power structures, beliefs, cultural sensibilities, discourses, and ideologies. It is the main goal of a visual analysis to unpack these processes, to interrogate the image, and to show how the image is a socio-culturally specific construction that is enmeshed with power.

Visual analysis finds its roots in semiotics. Semiotics focuses on how signs and sign systems transmit meaning. A sign consists of a signifier (or sign vehicle, e.g.
white) and a signified (or mental image, e.g. purity). What is crucial is that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary and dependent on context (Bignell 2004: 68). The idea that the relationship is arbitrary, implies that it is a matter of convention – or as I would like to underscore “a matter of politics” (Saukko 2003: 101). There is always a struggle over meaning. Practices of signification are arenas where different social groups compete to make the world mean (102).

In the study of my objects, I pay particular attention to the construction of the image and its practices of signification. When I say ‘construction of the image’, I mean that I am interested in the ways it has been given shape through, amongst others, cinematography (e.g. distance, angle, movement, framing, editing) and mise-en-scene (e.g. the use of light, setting, dress/costumes, props). Although not strictly visual in its modality, sound cannot be seen apart from the (moving) image. Sound can for instance be used to organize a space (Vande Berg 2004: 71). I therefore also pay close attention to acoustic codes.

In addition to a visual analysis, I conduct a narrative analysis of the selected texts (except for case study of the shopping malls). It is important to point out that ‘the visual’ and ‘the narrative’ are not two separate qualities of cultural texts. Stories are often told through the visual, or as John Hartley (1992) has put it: “no picture is pure image; all of them, still and moving, graphic and photographic, are talking pictures.” (Hartley 1992: 28-29)

Visual analysis and narrative analysis can however not be conflated. Whereas visual analysis takes the image as its primary object of study, narrative analysis takes as its object of study the entire text, focusing on the construction of the narrative (Stokes 2003: 67). ‘Narrative’ is here understood as “an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.” (Bignell 2004: 86)

The point of departure for narrative criticism is the idea that “human beings construct their understandings of themselves and their lives, their immediate environments, and even worlds outside their direct experience, through narratives.” (Vande Berg 2004: 198) Since narratives are central to how we understand and experience the world, they are:

...
Since narratives provide insights into the ways a society envisions itself and ‘where it is tending toward’, they make excellent sites for the imagination and negotiation of modernities. It is therefore that I critically scrutinize the narrative dimensions of my case studies.

Chapter outline

Chapter 2
Urban Islamic spectacles: transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan

Since the intersections of Islam with consumption and capitalism are central to Islamic-themed popular culture, I start by exploring this junction. I do so through analyzing (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan.

In recent years, the holy month of Ramadan has in Indonesia allegedly shifted from a period of piety to a euphoric spectacle of consumerism. This shift can be observed in the remarkable transformations that urban spaces of Indonesian cities undergo during Ramadan. Drawing on fieldwork data, thereby particularly focusing on the space of the shopping mall, this chapter analyzes how space is produced (cf. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) and transformed during Ramadan. I suggest that space is not an inert stage where modernity is performed, but that space is instead an active participant in producing and fantasizing Islamic modernities. In this chapter, I also point out that visual culture plays a notable role in the transformation of space during Ramadan. I show how Islam, through discursive representations, carves out a public space of its own. The production of space is charged with ideological symbols and moves through social imaginations.

I suggest that the case study of Ramadan enables a critical reading of two themes that can be recognized in previous studies concerned with the production of space: (1) the separation of space and time, and (2) the linear production of space. Through theorizing the space of the mall as a heterotopia (cf. Foucault 1986 [1967]) and Ramadan as a specific heterotopic moment, I propose a conceptual model that systematically integrates time in the study of space and that can help to study non-linear spatial productions.
Chapter 3
‘A place where grace and sins collide’: Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernity

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on three of the largest outlets of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture: music, self-help books, and film. In chapter 3, I look at Islamic rock music.

In Indonesia’s post-authoritarian mediasphere, Islamic piety and coolness by no means exclude each other. Today Islam has found its place in an urban youth culture that places ‘coolness’ as its core value. The Indonesian rock band Gigi represents this new ‘coolness’ in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture. By taking Gigi as a case study, and by analyzing three of their music videos, I explore how Islamic popular culture engages in debates about the desired course of modernity, and how it forms an arena where Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated, and contested. In this chapter, I particularly zoom in on the following questions: In what kinds of debates does Islamic popular culture participate? What kinds of modernities does it imagine? How ‘Indonesian’ are these modernities? What transnational imaginations and politics underpin their construction? Through my analysis, I also raise questions about the ‘capacities’ of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. How to view Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products? Do they constitute sites of creative experimentation and contestation, or do they attempt to discipline people into responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply? By drawing on Arjun Appadurai’s (2004; 2013) ideas about cultural capacities, I show that in the ways Gigi imagines Islamic modernities, their music gives way to an ‘ethics of possibility’ and an ‘ethics of probability’ (cf. Appadurai 2013: 188). This means that on the one hand, popular culture provides the tools to imagine, fantasize, and stimulate the coming into being of desired Islamic modernities, but that on the other hand, these constructions are never free from relations of power.

Chapter 4
‘How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?’: Self-help gurus and governmentality

In chapter 4, I study Islamic self-help books. Central to this chapter is not so much the question what kinds of modernities are imagined, but rather what ‘ideal’ modern
Muslim subjects are imagined and promoted through Islamic-themed popular culture.

The global Islamic revival of the last three decades has in Indonesia fragmented traditional forms of religious authority whilst producing new figures of public piety (Hoesterey 2012: 38). Recently, Indonesia has seen a boom of Islamic self-help literature. Through Islamic self-help books, pop culture preachers and self-help gurus offer Islamic guidance to Indonesian Muslims. In this chapter, I will analyze three books: *Wonderful Family* (2012), *Rasullulah’s Business School* (2011), and *Twitografi Asma Nadia* (2011). I explore how these books provide families, entrepreneurs, and young women with inspirational stories and practical manuals for living in a modernizing Indonesian society. I suggest that while ‘helping’ readers, the books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. I propose that these subjects are not just gesturing towards a distant modern future. Rather they point our gaze back to the disputes and contradictions that exist in a present Indonesian society. The books encourage the construction of subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the (unequal) spread of wealth, while actively negotiating cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

**Chapter 5**

‘So Islam really honors women?’: Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

In chapter 5, I study how the questions raised in chapter 4 are gendered. I do so by looking at Islamic-themed films. Representations of gender in Islamic-themed films have in the past few years stirred national debates about polygamy, the position of women in Islam, sexuality, and domestic violence. In this chapter, I critically scrutinize these representations. I suggest that we need to view these representations in the light of Indonesia’s recent history. During Suharto’s New Order, representations of masculinity and femininity were part of the regime’s national project, and as such served a national function. State sponsored media products linked good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities, thereby creating highly stereotypical images of women. The fall of the New Order regime opened up a space for identity politics, and for a critical attitude toward New Order gender stereotypes, although regulation and (self)censorship continue to exist today.
The newly liberalized cultural scene nevertheless provides ample opportunities for the creative industry to construct different representations of gender, and to tackle taboo-issues, like sexuality, polygamy, and (domestic) violence.

But how are representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity in post-New Order Islamic-themed cinema constructed? How do these constructions negotiate ‘sensitive’ topics like polygamy, sexuality, and (domestic) violence? How do they compare to their New Order counterparts? And do these constructions also serve a specific national function?

In this chapter, I explore these questions through analyzing three post-New Order Islamic-themed films. These films; *Berbagi Suami* (Love for share, 2006), *Virgin* (2004), and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of love, 2008) all engage with ‘sensitive’ issues. By drawing on Michel Foucault’s (1975-1976 [2003]) notion of biopolitics, I suggest that the sensitivities portrayed in these films are closely linked to anxieties that come with processes of modernization, and that it is through the representation of gender that modernity is negotiated. I propose that post-New Order representations of masculinity and femininity obtain their own national function; they negotiate ‘right’ male and female modern identities in an era of modernization.

### Chapter 6

**Unearthing the past and re-imagining the present: Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world**

In this chapter, I look at Islamic-themed contemporary art. After 9/11, popular and academic discourses have often constructed Islamic communities as hostile to visual culture. Contemporary Indonesian art shows how visual culture is a site of (Muslim) politics, creativity, contestation, and conflict, a site where issues associated with Islam are mobilized to come to terms with the present state of the world. But how are aesthetics in these artworks mobilized as a way of negotiating and contesting political, cultural, and historical circumstances? How are politics and aesthetics (Rancière 2004) intertwined? What kind of critique is articulated and what tactics are employed here? And how might we understand these politics? Is it possible to read these politics of (Islamic) aesthetics as resistance? If so, how is this resistance structured? And how is being critical a part of being modern?

In this chapter, I explore these questions by analyzing two art works: *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* (2009) by Wilman Syanur and *11 June*
Chapter 1 | Introduction

2002 (2003) by Arahmaiani. Through conducting a visual analysis of these art works, I propose that a Benjaminian socio-historical politics underlies the objects’ aesthetic strategies. Drawing on the works of Walter Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]) and Pierre Nora (1996 [1989]), I suggest that through their aesthetics the works evoke fragments from the past to question the construct of the present. The works keenly fragment the past and translate these fragments into images. These visual historical fragments are reassembled within the present to challenge present (dominant) narratives that are antithetical to Muslims. I suggest that these aesthetic strategies form the base of a (Muslim) politics.

Chapter 7: Conclusion
Changing paths

In the conclusion, I first revisit the question that I asked earlier in the introduction: “How are Islamic modernities imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture?” I also explore a question that I think is equally important: why are these modernities imagined? I suggest that the case studies construct a highly ambivalent discourse about modernity and about an Islamic modern future. On the one hand, the case studies display a positive attitude towards modernity. On the other hand, the case studies also articulate a negative attitude towards modernity, and express a fear and skepticism over the condition of the present. I propose that we can understand this ambiguous discourse by seeing it in the light of Indonesia’s postcoloniality and in the context of our current global condition.

To study how Islamic modernities are imagined in Indonesian popular and visual culture, I look at a wide range of different cultural products and forms: shopping malls, rock music, self-help books, films, and contemporary art. In the conclusion, I reflect on the question how the different forms of these case studies matter in the ways they imagine modernities. How do the means of mediation, e.g. different genres, media and visualities matter when it comes to the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of Islamic modernities?

The question ‘where are we going?’ is central to the rock songs, films, self-help books, malls, and art works that I analyze in my dissertation. Throughout my dissertation, the ‘we’ in this sentence stands for Indonesia, the modern Muslim nation, and the global Muslim world. In the conclusion, I make this ‘we’ stand for
‘scholarship’, and think about where scholarship at the intersections of modernities, Indonesia, and Islam could go in the future. Taking cues from my case studies, I present a future research agenda and suggest four directions that research could take. I summarize these directions under the headings: audiences, bodies, spaces, and flows.
Chapter 2

Urban Islamic Spectacles:
Transforming the space of the shopping mall
during Ramadan
Chapter 2

Urban Islamic Spectacles: Transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan

The increasing public visibility of Islam as Indonesia is going through processes of modernization and Islamization constitutes one of the most notable developments currently occurring in the archipelago (Hasan 2009: 229). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the public ubiquity of Islam is relatively recent, as public expressions of religion (alongside those of race, ethnicity, and class) were suppressed during the Suharto regime (1965–1998) in order to preserve national order and unity. Now, in the post-Suharto era (1998–), in tandem with the seemingly rising eagerness of Indonesian Muslims to publicly display their religious selves, Islam has moved to the center and has become part of political expressions, economic activities, socio-cultural practices, and public space (Hasan 2009: 230).

The presence and visibility of Islam in public space is most significant during the period of Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month. Ramadan is part of most Indonesian people’s lives as approximately 90% of the population is Muslim. During the thirty-day annual ritual, Muslims are obliged to refrain from eating, drinking, and having sex during the day. They should furthermore control their emotions in order to improve their spirituality during the holy month. Ramadan is also a time for giving, when people are supposed to pay attention to those less fortunate than themselves by giving donations in the form of money, food, and clothing. Through fasting, Muslims are encouraged to lead a prudent life. And then at the end of the month, at the celebration of Idul Fitri, people celebrate that they have overcome the obstacles of the fasting days. However, ironically, in recent years the rituals of fasting and celebrating Idul Fitri in Indonesia seem to have shifted from a pious practice to a euphoric spectacle of conspicuous ‘Islamic’ consumerism.

This shift can be observed in the significant and remarkable transformation that urban spaces of Indonesian cities undergo during the month of Ramadan. This transformation is the central concern of this chapter. Using data collected during Ramadan in the city of Yogyakarta, I analyze how space is produced and transformed during the holy month, thereby particularly focusing on the space of the mall. The study is here inspired by Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space (1991 [1974]) and takes two ideas of Lefebvre as its starting points. The first is the idea that space and time are always particular constructs of a specific form of modernity. The
second is the idea that in and through space, social relations are reproduced (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 19). Drawing on these two ideas, I show how via discursive representations Islam carves out a public space of its own in conformity with modern urban Islamic lifestyles and identities that exist in, and are produced by, a specific historical moment. The analysis of the production of space demonstrates how space is charged with ideological symbols, moves through social imaginations, and negotiates Islamic modernities.

While drawing on Lefebvre, the study of the production and transformation of space during Ramadan also enables a critical reading of this work and other key works in the study of space that have been inspired by Lefebvre (e.g. Harvey 1990; Soja 1996). This critical reading revolves around two related themes that are recognized in these studies: (1) the separation of space and time, and (2) the linear and permanent production of space. I develop this critique through theorizing the space of the mall as a heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]) and the production of space during Ramadan as a specific heterotopic moment. I underscore the importance of conceptualizing space integrally with time, and explore the significance of temporality in the production and transformation of urban space. Based on my analysis, I will propose a new conceptual model that systematically integrates time in the study of space.

The analysis of the production of space during Ramadan conducted here is not only relevant to the study of contemporary Indonesia. As Nilüfer Göle (2002) writes, Islam has over the last twenty years acquired new forms of visibility as it made its way into the public avenues of not only Muslim, but also European, societies (Göle 2002: 173). New urban spaces, markets, and media are opening up in response to the rising demands of recently formed Muslim middle classes. The penetration of Islam into the social fiber and imaginary of societies questions the meanings and borders of a secular concept of modernity (Göle 2002: 174). The public visibility of Islam, and the specific spatial practices underpinning it, trigger new ways of imagining Islamic modern collective selves. This stresses the plurality of modernity (cf. Chatterjee 1997) as opposed to theories that speak of a single (European and secular) program of modernity. Robert Hefner (2004) has shown how Islam and modernity are compatible in contemporary Indonesia. Exploring Islamic makings of the modern self and the spatial practices associated with it could help in understanding the construction of modern social imaginaries (Göle 2002: 174). It also highlights how space plays a role in producing, reflecting, and negotiating these modernities. How are spatial practices shaping and interrogating modernities and, vice versa, how are modernities shaping spatial production?
The politics of spatial ordering

To study the production and transformation of space during Ramadan, this chapter draws on fieldwork data collected before, during, and after Ramadan 2010 in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Yogyakarta is a popular tourist destination due to its strategic location and rich cultural heritage. Home to numerous universities (three state universities and eighteen private universities), the city attracts many students from all over the archipelago. This, in combination with the rising prosperity of the city's middle class, has led to Yogyakarta's promotion as the modern cultural capital of Java.

In terms of architecture, with its mixture of Javanese and Dutch colonial styles, and predominantly low-rise buildings, Yogyakarta seems to stand in contrast with the gleaming, high-rise, steel buildings of the so-called 'capital of modernity', Jakarta. This is not to say that Yogyakarta lacks visible spatial performances of modernity, as the spaces of universities, hotels, entertainment-, trade-, lifestyle-, and health centers clearly attest. Perhaps the most evident visual displays of modernity are to be observed in the spaces of Yogyakarta's luxurious shopping malls. The space of the mall has, since Walter Benjamin’s arcades (1999 [1982]), been a metaphor for modernity and cosmopolitanism. At the same time, the mall has been seen as a symbol of ‘American culture’ and, closely related, as a signifier of the assumed homogenization of culture – a carrier of spatio-cultural sameness (Kroes 1996: 14).

In Yogyakarta, the space of the mall undergoes a significant transformation during the holy month. It thereby seems to signify Ramadan’s allegedly public shift from a pious practice to an Islamic consumerist spectacle. This process is not unique to Yogyakarta, but can also be encountered in other cities. Further comparative research is needed to grasp how locality matters and how the mall is a ‘carrier of spatio-cultural sameness’ (Kroes 1996: 14). A focus on the space of the mall in Yogyakarta provides a good starting point. This focus enables an analysis of spatial performances of modernity in a modernizing city and offers insight into the production of space during Ramadan. It enables me to zoom in on the intersection of Islam and consumption, and helps to explore how (Islamic) modernities are produced spatially.

I study the production and transformation of space through focusing on the politics of spatial ordering. As Foucault writes:

Our [...] era [...] seems to be that of space. We are in the age of the simultaneous, of
juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered. A period in which, in my view, the world is putting itself to the test, not so much as a great way of life destined to grow in time, but as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle. [...] In our era, space presents itself to us in the form of patterns of ordering. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 22–23)

For Foucault, our era is that of space. And the questions that confront us in this era are those of arrangement and ordering. How are things and humans ordered, arranged, stored, circulated, and classified in space? In other words, what are the politics of spatial ordering? (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 23) As space presents itself to us in the form of patterns of ordering, a study of space calls for an examination of the politics of these patterns. Therefore, attention will here be directed to the specific arrangements that are underlying the production of space.

The data for this study consist of pictures taken, and observations made, in four malls before, during, and after Ramadan. A number of four malls were chosen as to provide the study with ample data and to enable an examination of recurring patterns in processes of spatial production in the shopping mall. I focus on Plaza Ambarrukmo, Mal Malioboro, Galeria Mall, and Saphir Square, as they represent the four biggest and trendiest malls in Yogyakarta. These malls target adherents of the burgeoning middle class. A focus on these malls then helps to unpack how space and modern (Islamic) middle class lifestyles are mutually constitutive. Pictures were taken both inside and outside the malls. Outside, I photographed the mall and its immediate surroundings. Inside, I took pictures of the general space of the mall, individual shops, advertisements, and decorations.

I analyze this set of data by combining social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988) with a conceptual framework that is based on Lefebvre’s spatial triad (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) and Foucault’s heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]). Foucault’s (1980) assertion that “a whole history remains to be written of spaces, which would at the same time be the history of powers” (149), opens up the study of the production of space in conjunction with questions of power (Foucault 1980: 149, cited in Guür 2002: 240). Social semiotics studies how power relations shape semiotic systems. It is therefore, in combination with the conceptual framework, useful for analyzing how space, and the representations that are shaping space, are socially produced.

Since my study is concerned with a temporary transformation, which includes a beginning and ending situation, the politics of spatial ordering should not only be studied in the isolated moment of Ramadan. Instead, it is important to consider the spatial ordering of the mall as it exists not only during, but also before and after the
moment of Ramadan. The mall itself already exists as a space with specific connotations and politics. Therefore, I will first unpack the spatial politics of the mall itself, where after I direct attention to the production of space during Ramadan.

**The mall as a heterotopia**

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) develops the notion that space is socially produced. With this assertion he means that every mode of social organization produces an environment, a space, which is a result of the social relations that it possesses. By producing a space that is a consequence of its own nature, a society not only materializes social relations, but also reproduces itself.

For Lefebvre, space is within society produced through the dialectical triad of *spatial practice*, *representations of space*, and *representational space*. These are three elements that simultaneously compose space and that are produced in relation to each other. ‘Spatial practice’ is associated with (the production of) physical space. ‘Representations of space’ refer to the hegemonic representations that are associated with the space that is produced. ‘Representational spaces’ are spaces that are directly lived and transformed by inhabiting them (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 33). With this theory of spatial production, Lefebvre aimed to understand the space of modernity (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 24). He believed that Marxist theory neglected the material aspect of production. Both space and time are constructs of specific forms of modernity (Unwin 2000: 15).

Drawing on Lefebvre’s theory and analyzing space as both a product of the social organization of a society and a construct of a specific form of modernity not only provides insight in the politics of these formations in Indonesia. It also helps to examine how modernities are shaping spatial production, and how in turn spatial practices are shaping modernities.

Looking at the production of space in the four malls through Lefebvre’s triad, and starting with the construction of the physical spaces (‘spatial practices’) of Plaza Ambarrukmo, Saphir Square, Galeria Mall, and Mal Malioboro (figures 1, 2, 3, 4), we see that the malls are large multi-floored buildings. Plaza Ambarrukmo is the largest mall of Central Java. It contains seven floors, of which two accommodate wide parking areas that hold up to 1400 hundred cars and 1500 motorcycles. The other three malls are smaller; Saphir Square and Mal Malioboro have six floors while Galeria Mall has five.
Further observing the physical spaces of the malls, we observe that the interior space of the malls is neat, spacious, light-colored, well lit, shiny, and air-conditioned. In the heart of all four malls is an exhibition space that can be used for fairs and (live) performances. Plaza Ambarrukmo contains three of these spaces; the largest (796m²) is located in its center, the others (384m² and 251m²) are located on the second floor and lower ground.

Evidently, shops occupy the largest part of the malls’ space. But there are also other amenities to be found such as food courts, cafés, beauty centers, and a variety of entertainment facilities, including a cinema (Plaza Ambarrukmo), a gaming area (Mal Malioboro), a bowling center (Saphir Square), and an ice skating rink (Saphir Square). Ambarrukmo Plaza also hosts a small mosque. This mosque is however not located in the main space of the mall. Instead, one has to go to the back of the parking lot, where a small staircase gives entrance to the mosque. Mal Malioboro has a prayer room, but like in Plaza Ambarrukmo it is hidden in one of its corners, and only a small door sign attests to its presence. Intriguingly, the architectural construction of Galeria Mall resembles a mosque, but no physical Islamic space is
present inside – notwithstanding individual shops that sell ‘Islamic’ products. These ‘spatial practices’ – the ways in which physical space is constructed – are conductive to the production of different lived moments, different ‘representational spaces’. First, spatial practices produce the mall as a place for shopping and consuming. The wide range of shops offers consumers all they want to have and provides them with a fantasy about who they could be. Second, the entertainment areas make the mall a cultural site. Third, the restaurants, food courts, and cafés also construct the mall as a culinary and social place. Fourth, the mall’s pedestrian-oriented design with benches and sidewalk terraces produces it as a place to relax, hang out, stroll, see and be seen.

It is through these different representational spaces that the mall is produced as a convenient space of economic, social, and cultural activity. In its physical construction, the mall is not explicitly a space for religious lived moments, for religious activity. Islam is present in Ambarrukmo Plaza and Mal Malioboro, but is (for those not knowing it is there) hidden, at least construction-wise. In the case of Galeria Mall, Islam is visually present in the mall’s architectural design, but a distinct space for religious activity inside is absent. Here, the representational spaces seem perfectly in line with the hegemonic representations of the mall: with the ‘representations of space’ in which the mall is a “multipurpose leisure time destination” (Kern 2008: 107).

What can then be observed here is that (1) spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space are all in sync, and that (2) in this case Lefebvre’s triad as the only analytical tool does not help to unpack politics of spatial ordering. Spatial practices are conductive to various representational spaces that in this case perfectly comply with the dominant hegemonic representations of space. In this way, processes of spatial production seem coherent and frictionless. But more important and more problematic, looking through Lefebvre’s triad presents us with an image of the space of the mall as a seemingly unambiguous space; as a space that does not display (internal) politics or contradictions.

It might be opposed here that this is because the above description has focused on what Lefebvre would have considered a center of (capitalist) power – the mall. It is not focused on a (marginal) space that, following Lefebvre, can render visible (capitalism’s) spatial politics, contradictions, and relations of power. However, a binary opposition between center and margin is problematic. Both spaces in themselves carry rules and generate their own relations of power (Hetherington 1997: 34).

Although specific relationships between order, control, and freedom always exist
within every space, the triad as an analytical tool does not directly uncover these
here. It does for example not show how the mall, as a center of capitalism, also
(re)produces the contradictions of capitalism spatially. What should be noted here is
that attention here has focused on ‘the mall as a whole’, and not on the spatial
practices of individual shops or individual consumers. These might of course be
highly political.

While the triad itself does not directly unpack the politics of spatial ordering, it
does offer a systematic description of the various spatial appropriations in the mall.
It also shows how space is not an inert stage where social relations are performed,
but instead is an active participant in the production of these relations. The triad
therefore forms a good starting point for the analysis, but it needs to be
complemented with another concept to enable a reading of the politics of spatial
ordering in the mall.

The above description of the mall is particularly troubled by the inward-gaze
through which it operates. My description ignores that spaces are produced in
relation to each other. This is problematic, as Foucault (1986 [1967]) comments:

We do not live in sort of a vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located
[…] but in a set of relationships that define positions, which cannot be equated, or in any
way superimposed. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 23)

For Foucault, spatial arrangements are defined through their relationships with other
spaces. Foucault’s (1986 [1967]) concept of heterotopia acknowledges this spatial
relationality. Simultaneously, heterotopia shows significant overlaps with
representational space, while transcending problematic features of this concept. As I
propose below, extending Lefebvre’s triad with the concept of heterotopia enables
a study of the politics of spatial ordering.

In ‘Of other spaces’, Foucault (1986 [1967]) coined heterotopia alongside that of
utopia to indicate two types of spaces. Utopias represent a “society brought to
perfection” (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 24), but are fundamentally unreal. In contrast,
heterotopias are:

real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which
constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the
real arrangements […] that can be found in society, are at one and the same time
represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and
yet is actually localizable. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 24)
Heterotopias are thus real places that, within society, constitute places of otherness. This otherness is established through relations of difference with other real places in their environment, which they simultaneously represent, contest, and reverse.

Heterotopias show significant commonalities with Lefebvre’s representational spaces. They overlap in three ways. First, representational spaces and heterotopias are entangled. Heterotopias do not exist in isolation, but come into being through their relations with other sites. Representational spaces produce spaces as distinct places with a specific character. Heterotopias come into being through being distinctive. Representational spaces are thus vital to the production of heterotopias.

Second, both representational spaces and heterotopias displace the metrics of everyday life. Both are ‘other spaces’: they have their origin in everyday life (cf. De Certeau 1984 [1980]), but differ from it. Representational spaces can resist and contest the hegemonic uses of space, and in this process constitute an ‘other’ space (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 33). Foucault’s contention that “the heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations” (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 26), shows that heterotopias are characterized by the coexistence of sites that amongst each other can be incompatible. Heterotopias are thus not only ‘other’ in comparison to other sites. They are also ‘other’ in that they stem from an endless series of contradictions within themselves (Cenzatti 2008: 81).

Third, in being ‘other spaces’ representational spaces and heterotopias can both accommodate to acts of resistance and transgression. For Lefebvre, representational spaces are spaces that must make visible the concealed power relations that have produced space. It is because they differ from everyday uses of space, that representational spaces hold the potential of resistance against “the alienating features of everyday existence” (Hetherington 1997: 23). Heterotopias too have an unsettling function: they can overturn established societal arrangements. They reflect the inverse or reverse side of society (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 3). The difference between heterotopias and representational spaces is that the latter are problematically mapped onto binaries between ‘center and margin’, ‘order and resistance’, and ‘control and freedom’. Lefebvre sees representational spaces exclusively as marginal sites of resistance and freedom. But spaces of resistance also have their own rules and codes, and generate their own relations of power (Hetherington 1997: 34). Lefebvre however does not allow for these politics, for relationships between order, control, and freedom, to exist within representational spaces.
The notion of heterotopia transcends the oppositions between ‘center and margin’ and between ‘order and resistance’, because it does not depart from the notion of order (and resistance), but from that of ordering (Ibidem). The fragmented internal ordering of heterotopias allows for politics and contradictions to exist within the same space. The otherness of heterotopia is not exclusively linked to the margins. Unlike representational spaces, heterotopias can be both center and margin (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 6). Heterotopias are “associated with both transgressive outsiderness, as well as with sites of social control and the desire for a perfect order.” (Hetherington 1997: 46)

The concepts of representational space and heterotopia thus display similarities and differences, which allow them to jointly constitute a conceptual framework that is apt to scrutinize both the mechanics of spatial production as well as its politics. In this framework, Lefebvre’s triad systematically maps the processes that are underpinning the production of space. The concept of heterotopia, based on the notion that the production of space is relational, fragmented, and contradictory allows for a study of (the politics of) the production of space.

Analyzing the fieldwork data through this framework shows the mall as an ambiguous space. During Ramadan, the mall is produced as a heterotopian other space that is at once phantasmagorical, highly controlled, and socially homogeneous. As I suggest in the following, the space of the mall is constructed as this space through two concomitant heterotopian practices: relating and regulating.

When first studying how the malls relate to their immediate surroundings, relations of difference that produce the mall as an other space appear on several levels. Malioboro Mal is located in the heart of the city. Galeria Mall, Ambarrukmo Plaza, and Saphir Square are located more off-center. Since the surroundings of Malioboro Mal and the other three malls represent two different urban environments, their relational practices are analyzed separately.

Malioboro Mal is located on Jalan Malioboro. Because of its central location, the Malioboro area has since the beginning of urban planning been designated as the center of economic activity. When in the eighteenth century the sultan appointed a Chinese captain to organize the area, Malioboro developed as ‘Chinatown’. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dutch colonial influence became visible as colonial-style buildings arose along the street. Since the 1990s, the Malioboro zone has been the most popular shopping area in Yogyakarta (Nitisudarmo 2010).

With its direct surroundings, Malioboro Mal thus is in a relation of sameness: all are areas for economic activity. Relations of difference nevertheless exist and are constructed on two overlapping axes: on that of aesthetics, and on that of spatial
The first axis comes into being through architectural constructions. The shops on Malioboro represent utter architectural eclecticism (cf. Nitisudarmo 2010). There are buildings that still have Chinese rooftops (Figure 5), colonial style buildings (Figure 6), Javanese buildings, modern buildings (Figure 7), and buildings that combine some or all these features in their construction. The different architectural styles create a chaotic architectural street view (Figure 8). Further adding to this visual disorder, the shop owners engage in the spatial practice of attaching large, multicolored signs, and billboards made out of different materials to the shops’ facades (Figure 9). As Sisca (23), employee of the small batik shop ‘Margaria Batik’ explains: “there are many batik sellers here, it is hard to survive … I guess we all try our best to stand out [menyolok mata] to attract visitors, not only through our goods, but also through the look of our shop” (conversation with author, July 2010).
Amidst these spatial practices, Malioboro Mal aesthetically presents an other space. Opened in 1998, the mall is the largest shopping complex in the street. In relation to the rest of space, the box-ish, peach-colored mall with its neat-hung advertisements looks unruffled. In contrast to the shops outside, the mall’s shops are ordered straight along the promenades. And while the outdoor area presents a dynamic, eclectic multi-colored sight, the mall’s interior (Figure 10) is neutrally white. It combines silver staircases with an industrial steel roof-frame, which gives the mall a modern look. The only ‘less-arranged’ (and noisier) part is the gaming space on the top floor. Nevertheless, aesthetically, the mall and its surrounding spaces can thus be seen as presenting each other’s opposite.
A second relation of difference between the mall and its surroundings is constructed through the different mental and bodily experiences that these spaces produce. These different experiences of space are produced through the physical spatial arrangements, the uses of space, and the above-discussed aesthetics. Looking at the way in which space is physically arranged in the Malioboro zone, we see that street vendors are positioned opposite the shops, and that between them there is a narrow pathway. Since Malioboro is a popular shopping area, the pathway is often (over-)crowded with people (Figure 11).

![Figure 11: The crowded pathway between the shops and street vendors](image)

As local students Eka (24) and Sara (23) comment: “it can make shopping uncomfortable, we have, in the heat, very little personal space” (conversation with author, August 2010). And as salesman Sie (26) adds:

> The dense space also makes it a popular area for pickpockets, street musicians, beggars, and street children hoping for the generosity of shoppers. [...] For me it is an exciting place, there is so much going on... but it is also noisy and busy [ramai] with people and traffic ... motorbikes, becaks, cars, horses. (Conversation with author, August 2010)

The spatial arrangements of the Malioboro zone, together with its architectural aesthetic eclecticism and the uses of space thus produce a lively, energetic atmosphere. Since these aspects stimulate the human senses rather intensely, they can also be conductive to an intense, and sometimes hectic, spatial experience for visitors – especially when compared to the spatial experience in the mall. As student Dika (20) explains: “compared to outside [Malioboro], the mall is more relaxed,
clean, cool... entering feels like going up for fresh air.” (conversation with author, August 2010) In the middle of lively Malioboro, the mall thus represents an enclosed tranquil environment. Dika’s boyfriend Michael (22) adds: “we go to the mall when we want to take a break from going around [jalan-jalan]... and then these lounge seats [JCO, cafeteria] are such a relaxed spot.” (conversation with author, August 2010) With its air-conditioned, clean, well-ordered, and bright interior, the mall thus is a place where one can momentarily escape the outside rush, heat, pollution, and traffic.

Hence, Malioboro Mal and its surroundings are produced as ‘other spaces’ through relations of difference. The space of the mall exists as a neat and ordered space in relation to the Malioboro shopping district, while the Malioboro district itself exists as (more) energetic, ruffled, and chaotic in relation to the mall.

The other three malls that I would like to look at in this chapter are located along the highway that connects Yogyakarta and Solo. This area is less packed with buildings in comparison with Malioboro. The malls border residential areas: on the south-side Demangan, and on the north-side Demangan Baru. Plaza Ambarrukmo and Saphir Square are furthermore directly bordering the residential area near the banks of the Gajah Wong River. On the southwest, the malls border Kotabaru, the former Dutch officials residential area. This neighborhood is more spacious than other city areas, as the Dutch designed it as a garden city. Apart from Kotabaru, the malls’ immediate surroundings are (visually) not significantly ‘other’ in relation to the rest of city space. These areas represent regular city space: they are engaged in relations of sameness with most of Yogyakarta’s city space.

In relation to these surrounding spaces, Plaza Ambarrukmo, Saphir Square, and Galeria Mall, but also the earlier discussed Mal Malioboro, exist as heterotopian ‘other spaces’. Relations of difference that construct them as such are twofold. The malls (1) constitute ‘unreal real places’ and (2) engage in different temporalities. Both relations of difference are conductive to each other and are elaborated below.

In relation to their surroundings, the malls come into being as unreal real places. Foremost, the malls are real places; they are physical places of economic, social, and cultural activity. At the same time, the malls are also unreal as they represent a placeless place, a ‘non-place’ (Augé 1995) and a seemingly ‘perfect’ world that exists nowhere outside its walls.

When looking at the malls, we see that spatial practices construct the four malls as enclosed worlds-on-themselves that resemble small towns. In their centers, the four malls feature large spaces (Figures 12-13), which function as town squares. These are spaces for fairs, markets, presentations, and performances. Benches,
plants, and palm trees are placed alongside the square and promenades, creating a town feeling (Figure 13). This ‘town’ is however placeless. Entering Plaza Ambarrukmo is like stepping into another world. It is a world that could have been almost anywhere else, and that could best be termed ‘global’. It seems to exist nowhere in particular (Muzzio and Muzzio-Rentas 2008: 148). One enters a large, light, polished, luxurious, seemingly ‘culturally neutral’ space. There are shops, cafes, and restaurants of international chains. Signs and markers of Indonesian-ness and resemblances with the outside world are largely absent. Through their physical construction and design, the malls keep the other world, the real world, at a distance, especially in the shopping areas. Windows to see the outside world are absent in spaces other than the cafeterias or restaurants. Saphir Square here seems to be an exception since it does offer a view on the highway. Windows are also absent in Mal Malioboro. But Mal Malioboro is not that placeless compared with the other three malls. Located in a tourist area, this mall sells, for instance, many souvenirs, such as batik products. Often Indonesian pop songs are played, whereas in the other malls only ambient music is played.

Figures 12-13: The ‘center’ of Plaza Ambarrukmo

While the real world is kept at a distance, the placeless world inside is constructed as a seemingly ‘perfect’ world. Inside, there is no poverty, only luxury. In strong contrast to its surroundings, it is a world that is modern, luxurious, clean, and comfortable – a space for the wealthy middle class. Comparing this world, for
instance that of Plaza Ambarrukmo, with its direct surroundings, makes clear that this perfect world is a fantasy, and that it (in Yogyakarta) exists nowhere outside its walls. Hence, while the malls are real spaces, they also exhibit characteristics of a utopia, the perfect society that has no real place.

By being these ‘unreal real places’, the malls are engaging in different temporalities than their surroundings. As I pointed out earlier, the Malioboro area architecturally accumulates in one place different periods of time: Chinatown, the colonial period, and the present. This is also true for the surroundings of the other three malls. While colonial-style Kotabaru represents the past, the spaces of the bordering residential areas represent the present. In relation to these representations of the past and present, the malls represent something different. The malls are not engaged in the present world that unfolds outside their walls. Instead, through their signified newness and ‘modern-ness’ they represent a glossy, luxurious, modern urban future that is yet to come into existence outside the malls’ walls. At the same time, we can also see the malls as a representing a specific kind present. In this present, Indonesia is engaged in processes of modernization, which increasingly causes places to display a modern look. As representations of a glossy future or a modernizing present, the malls in Yogyakarta (still) engage in different temporalities than the spaces that surround them. This further contributes to the malls’ ‘otherness’.

While the space of the mall is ordered through practices of relating, it is also ordered through a practice of regulating. Plaza Ambarrukmo, Mal Malioboro, Saphir Square, and Galeria Mall appear to be open and public spaces – one can walk in and out. As much as they appear to be open public spaces, the malls are private spaces, i.e. they are privately managed. Because they are private property, the liberties and rights as they apply to public space, do not apply to the space of the mall (Kern 2008: 107–108). It is for instance prohibited to give a political speech, hand out leaflets, or take photos in the mall.

Security firms police all four malls. Taking the security procedure of Plaza Ambarrukmo as an example, when arriving by car, one first has to pass the security check at the south gate. There, the trunk of the car will first be checked. Then one has to pass by security officers who are standing at the door and who ask you to open your bag, or who will scan your bag electronically – all for possible terrorist threats. These officers are installed at the entrances of all four malls. Inside, other guards are constantly patrolling the malls’ promenades to ensure that everybody sticks to the mall’s rules, and that ‘undesirables’ are escorted out of the mall. Plaza Ambarrukmo has a twenty-four hour security system with cameras installed in every
strategic place. In this way, it is ensured that the mall’s ‘perfect’ world is maintained, and that it is a world of perfect order and control. This however also results in the construction of a space that is – principally along the lines of class – socially homogeneous. Those deemed worthy through their behavior and appearance, are protected from having to encounter those portions of society that may be disturbing; the rowdy, the poor, homeless people, panhandlers, beggars, or street kids. Another way in which the mall excludes particularly working class sections of society is through its high prices. Since renting space in the mall is often more expensive than renting space outside, prices in the mall are higher. The space of the mall is both rented out to shops that sell expensive luxury goods (e.g. Golf House), but also to shops that are somewhat less expensive (e.g. Matahari), but that are usually still more costly than street shops.

Hence, through different forms of government (security checks, rules, cameras, patrolling, prices), the shopping mall is constructed as a safe place that is free from real-world nuisances. This demonstrates the working of a heterotopian logic. Foucault writes that: “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time.” (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 27) The four malls are simultaneously open and closed spaces. As this heterotopian space, the mall embodies, preserves, and exposes a central contradiction of capitalism, one that is divisionary and exclusionary. The mall’s ‘perfect’ world is maintained, but also contested through a mechanism of regulation. An ambiguous panopticon-like space (cf. Foucault 1975) is produced that is phantasmagorical, but that can only be so through being highly controlled and exclusionary.

While the tactics of regulation are not unique to Indonesia’s shopping malls (similar procedures can be encountered in malls in for instance India or the Philippines), there is also something decidedly Indonesian about it. In ‘Back to the city: a note on urban architecture in the New Indonesia’, Abidin Kusno (2006) demonstrates how urban architecture in Jakarta is a site for both political inclusion and exclusion. Kusno observes that in Jakarta there is a tension between architecture that symbolically includes lower class sections of society (e.g. Adi Purnomo’s housing projects), and architecture that excludes the urban poor (e.g. Jakarta’s ‘superblocks’). In Jakarta, the latter architectural structure is dominant.

A parallel can be drawn between Jakarta’s superblocks, the multifunctional high-rise residential buildings that Kusno analyzes, and the shopping malls that I study. Like the mall, the superblock is a world-on-itself, although more ‘complete’, as it contains apartments, offices, gyms, pools, gardens, and shopping facilities. As
Kusno notes, Jakarta’s superblocks are structures that reproduce a form of citizenship based on class through the promotion of behavior that fits the norm of these new urban environments (Kusno 2006: 76) – something that was also observed in Yogyakarta’s malls. According to Kusno, this reveals the growing uncertainty about the status of the middle class following financial crisis of 1997 and the fall of Suharto’s regime in 1998, which had previously sustained the middle class (91). Imagining the middle class as fearful that their identity is out crowded by lower classes (Ibidem), the superblock and mall harden class distinctions. Through their design strategies, their specific regulatory practices, and their disengagement with the world around them, the mall and the superblock reflect the growing conflicts between circuits of poverty and luxury consumption in Indonesian cities today (Ibidem).

Ramadan as an Islamic heterotopic moment

The space that is transformed during Ramadan thus already exists as a phantasmagorical, regimented heterotopian space. The mall is produced as a placeless and ‘culturally neutral’ space, and not as an explicitly (visibly) Islamic space. What then happens when, during Ramadan, ‘Islam’ is explicitly and excessively produced in this heterotopian space? Which aspects of this heterotopia are transformed? And how to interpret these changes?

Another important question that a study of the spatial production during Ramadan helps to answer concerns the role of ‘time’ in the production of space. In works that have focused on the production of space, two related themes are recognized: (1) the separation of space and time, and (2) the linear and permanent production of space.

In The Production of Space (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) and in other key works that have focused on the social production of space (e.g. Harvey 1990, Soja 1996) there is a tendency to treat ‘space’ and ‘time’ as separate concepts. Since these studies are concerned with the production of space, the notion of space is privileged over the notion of time. In giving dominance to space, the significance and the role of time in the social production of space remains underexplored (Unwin 2000: 21).

Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]), Harvey (1990) and Soja (1996) do incorporate an understanding of time in their works. Lefebvre for instance writes that: “if space is produced, if there is a production process, then we are dealing with history” (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 95, cited in Unwin 2000: 21). He also stresses the presence of
a temporal dimension in space:

Let everyone look at the space around them. What do they see? Do they see time? They live time, after all: they are in time. Yet all anyone sees is movements. In nature, time is apprehended within space—in the very heart of space. (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 95, his emphasis)

According to Lefebvre, time is thus in the heart of space. Why then is time neglected? Lefebvre struggles with this issue in various (sometimes contradictory) ways, commenting that “time is distinguishable, but not separable from space” (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 175) and that “time is known and actualized in space, becoming a social reality by virtue of a spatial practice. Similarly, space is only known in and through time” (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 219, cited in Unwin 2000: 21).

Tim Unwin (2000) describes how in works influenced by Lefebvre a separation between space and time persists. David Harvey (1990: 22) for example studied the experience of space in the history of (post)modernism. While his focus is on space, Harvey argues that we have both spatial and temporal worlds. Harvey uses theories of time-space compression to bring these separated worlds together. Edward Soja (1996) updated Lefebvre’s spatial triad to include his concept of ‘thirdspace’ (cf. Soja 1996). Drawing on Foucault’s (1986 [1967]) study of space, Soja is aware of the historicity of spatiality (cf. Unwin 2000: 21). Nevertheless, time, as a concrete element remains absent in his theorization of space.

Hence, in these studies, space and time are separated. Yet, simultaneously there is sense that the two are connected. How to conceptualize the intimate relation between space and time in the process of the production of space? And what would be a systematic method to study the two together?

What can also be noticed from studies that have focused on the production of space (e.g. Axenov et al. 2006; Rotenberg 2001) is a conceptualization of this production as a linear process that produces a long term and/or permanent transformation. The transformation is often tied to processes of modernization and political changes. Consequently, the production of space has been theorized as a gradual process that produces a more or less stable end product (space). Thinking about space as a product of continuously changing social relations, opens up the possibility of non-linear and non-permanent production processes. But how then to conceptualize such processes?

The transformation of the space of the mall during Ramadan in Indonesia provides an excellent case to reflect on these questions. Scholars have addressed
the performative and cyclical nature of the mall on various occasions, for instance
during Christmas in the United States (e.g. McMahon 2005), and during Ramadan in
Turkey (Sandikci and Omeraki 2007) and Dubai (Fattah 2005). The ways in which
time concretely plays a role in the production of space however remain unexplored.
In the following, I propose that time is imperative to the production and
transformation of space in a threefold way: as ritual, as historicality, and as schedule.
Through their entanglement with the elements of Lefebvre’s triad, these three
modes of time are ordering the space of the mall in a specific way during Ramadan.
They are conductive to a particular lived moment, a particular representational
space in the four malls. This lived moment can be viewed as an ‘Islamic heterotopic
moment’, which temporarily produces (more) heterogeneity in the space of the mall.

The first way in which time plays a role in the transformation and production of
space is as ritual. Ramadan is an annual religious ritual with a predetermined
duration and series of traditions. It takes place every ninth month of the Islamic
calendar and lasts thirty days. The term ‘time as ritual’ refers to that bounded period
of time that entails the advent, presence, and passing of the ritual of Ramadan.

Figures 14-15: Details of central ornaments in Malioboro Mal

Time as ritual is the driving force in the transformation of the space of the mall. It
activates and stimulates the spatial practices that start and end the temporary
transformation of space during Ramadan. With the arrival of Ramadan, the
management of the mall and the individual shop owners modify the space of the mall by garnishing it with colorful decorations that signify Islam and Ramadan. In the center of all four malls, large ornaments are hung (Figures 14–15). Stickers, billboards, and advertisements embellish shop windows and decorate the shops’ interiors, displaying special Ramadan discounts.

Figure 16-17: Malioboro Mal before (16 July 2010) and during Ramadan (28 August 2010)

Through these different spatial practices, the neutral and tranquil interior of the mall (Figure 16) is transformed. It is turned into a bright-colored visual spectacle full of Islamic symbols (Figure 17). This transformation is temporary as, with the passing of Ramadan, the mall returns to its calm and neutral-looking appearance. Time as ritual, through activating specific spatial practices, thus perforates normality and produces in the same space, another (layer of) space. This other (layer of) space contrasts with the ‘normal space’ of the mall. Hence, within the very same space, temporary otherness is produced.

Time as ritual therefore forms the first building block in the construction of a heterotopic moment. It creates a momentary breach in normal, linear spatial production, and links the production of space to pieces of time. Foucault describes how heterotopian production is linked to time:
Heterotopias are linked [...] to bits and pieces of time. [...] The heterotopia enters fully into function when men find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time. [...] There are [...] heterotopias linked to time in its more futile, transitory, and precarious aspects, a time viewed as celebration. [...] They are absolutely time-bound. To this class belong the fairs, those marvelous empty zones outside the city limits, that fill up twice a year with booths, showcases, miscellaneous objects, wrestlers, snake-women, optimistic fortune-tellers etc. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 26)

By linking time and spatial production, time as ritual temporarily constructs a heterotopia. As pointed out earlier, the space of the mall already exists as a heterotopia. Time as ritual produces temporary otherness in(to) the existing heterotopian space. This otherness is ‘Islamic’. It is signified Islam that is produced in the normally neutral, secular (looking) space of the mall, and that marks a change in spatial production. Therefore, we can speak of an Islamic heterotopic moment. It is through studying the politics of spatial ordering in this Islamic heterotopic moment that the spatial transformation during Ramadan can be understood.

When examining the Islamic heterotopic moment, we see that the spatial practices that were activated by time as ritual are not apolitical or ahistorical. The decorations, ornaments, posters, and shop windows are not empty free-floating signifiers. Instead, they are politicized by time and context. They are induced with meaning by ‘time as historicality’. Time as historicality refers to a specific moment in the history of Indonesia: a moment in which the country is simultaneously Islamizing and modernizing.

Time as historicality produces seemingly incongruous bricolages in Ramadan’s spatial practices; in the decorations, ornaments, posters, and shop windows. Through this practice, the heterotopic moment juxtaposes in a single real place different spaces and locations that seem incompatible with each other (cf. Foucault 1986 [1967]: 26). It hereby produces (more) heterogeneity in the space of the mall. In the Islamic heterotopic moment, these bricolages are twofold. They exist between Islam, Ramadan, capitalism, and consumption on the one hand, and between Indonesia and ‘Arabia’ on the other. In the following, I elaborate both through analyzing the aesthetics of spatial practices.

When visiting the malls during Ramadan, the omnipresent and seamless bricolage of Islam, Ramadan, capitalism, and consumption is striking. This bricolage is constructed through different but related practices. First, spatial practices delve into a formulaic sign system to create a recognizable ‘Islamic atmosphere’ that must sell products. The color green – the color of Islam – is predominantly used in the malls’
decorations and advertisements. Other examples of the mobilization of a formulaic sign system are the repeated use of the symbols of the mosque, deserts with camels, and ketupat (rice dumplings) (Figures 15; 17; 20, 24-25). Arabic-looking fonts are often used for Indonesian texts on decorations, but Arabic vocabulary is absent. By drawing on this formulaic sign system, a visual culture comes into being that communicates ‘Islamic festivity’ to the malls’ visitors.

Moreover, symbols that specifically connote the excess of Idul Fitri (end of Ramadan), are mobilized throughout the whole period of Ramadan. Figures 14 and 15 show details of the central ornaments in Mal Malioboro. Figure 14 reads “Selamat Idul Fitri 1431”, the greeting that is used to wish each other a good celebration at Idul Fitri. Figure 15 displays ketupat, rice dumplings wrapped in palm leaves. Ketupat is in Indonesia traditionally consumed at the end of Ramadan. Both are thus symbols of the celebration and the excess at the end of Ramadan. In other spaces, such as markets, restaurants, entertainment centers, or on billboards along the city’s roads, these symbols were only visible near the end of Ramadan. By contrast, in the mall they were on central display from the start. Together with the festive atmosphere that is produced, this spatial practice creates in the enclosed world of the mall an early and prolonged moment of celebration – and of consumption.

In addition, in the endeavor of selling individual products, traditions that are characteristic for the ritual of Ramadan are mobilized. Figures 18-20 show how
Ramadan’s traditions are used to sell products. The advertisements here are for books, but similar ads were also found for other products such as clothing, motorcycles, cars, CDs, and golf packages. Figure 18 shows an advertisement for Islamic books in Galeria Mall. The text reads “the great Ramadan 1431, clean your heart with buying (our) discount books.” One of the central aims of Ramadan, namely the purifying and ‘the cleaning of the heart’, is here turned it into a selling slogan, into a reason to consume. It is suggested that through buying (and reading) these books one will become a better Muslim. Figures 19 and 20 demonstrate similar strategies. Both are advertisements for the Gramedia bookstore and show Islamic books. The poster of Figure 18 reads “add insight during Ramadan”, while Figure 20 reads “purity from the heart, have a good fasting period.”

The bricolages of Islam, Ramadan, capitalism, and consumption that are marking the heterotopic moment are not exceptional. Instead, they reflect a historical moment in which Islam is increasingly commodified. As explained in the previous chapter, entrepreneurs are currently imbuing cultural products with religious as well as economic value to take advantage of the country’s huge Muslim market (Widodo 2008). This has led to a wide range of cultural expressions, e.g. films, TV series (cf. Subijanto 2011), music, and literature, in which signified Islam functions as a selling mechanism. As I pointed out in the introduction to this dissertation, not everybody has positively greeted this development. Conservative and Islamist groups have blamed ‘Islamic’ popular cultural products as being ‘Islam Lite’, ‘15-minute Islam’, or even as being ‘the Devil in disguise’ (Barendregt 2009: 27). But religious commodification should not be equaled with commercialization. Commodification always entails the ideologization of commodities. It is as much about selling ideology as it is about selling products (Lukens-Bull 2008, cited in Hasan 2009: 242). To understand how the spatial practices are ideological, we need to look at the second bricolage that marks the heterotopic moment.

In the heterotopic moment, the malls are not ‘placeless’ anymore. While markers of cultural identity used to be largely absent in the heterotopian space of the mall before Ramadan, now spatial practices are merging markers of Arabic-ness and Indonesian-ness. As discussed, in the malls, Arabic-looking fonts and stereotypical desert-camel imaginaries connoting Islam are present. Plaza Ambarrukmo, Mal Malioboro and Galeria Mall take this Arabic imagination a step further. In these malls, a ‘one thousand and one Arabian nights’ theme is created. During Ramadan, Ambarrukmo Plaza is for instance exotically dressed in ‘Enchanting Sahara’-style. Moroccan lamps are hung in shop windows (Figure 21), the white pillars of Plaza Ambarrukmo are draped in dark blue fabric with gold-colored embellishments.
(Figure 22), and gold-mosaic gates are placed in front of stores (Figure 23). Centro, a clothing and lifestyle store had also adopted this theme for its advertisements. In these ads (Figures 24-25) non-Indonesian looking models are placed in ‘the Sahara’. In Mal Malioboro and Galeria Mall similar themes are created, most markedly by the Matahari store.

Figures 21-23: (From left to right) Shop window for Matahari in Mal Malioboro, pillar of Plaza Ambarrukmo, and entrance of Centro (inside Plaza Ambarrukmo)

Figures 24-25: Advertisements for Centro in Plaza Ambarrukmo
While the Arabic theme seems prevalent, markers of Indonesian-ness are also present. The Indonesian ketupat symbol is dominant on ornaments and in Plaza Ambarrukmo a bedug lebaran is placed at the entrance (Figure 26). The latter is a traditional Indonesian drum that is played to indicate the break of the fast. Moreover, the products that are advertised through the use of an Arabic imaginary are not distinctively Arabic. Clothing here presents a good example. Often batik clothing and accessories are advertised in settings and posters that use Arabic signs (Figure 27). Also, the clothing advertised in Figures 21 and 27, reflects global and/or Indonesian Muslim fashion, rather than Arabic or Middle Eastern Muslim fashion, which predominantly uses white fabric.

Through the bricolage of Arabic- and Indonesian-ness, the world of the mall is in the heterotopic moment thus not placeless anymore. While still defying one clear location, it does exist somewhere, namely in a space between Indonesia and the Arabic world. While it is clear that symbols of Arabic- and Indonesian-ness are used to sell products, they also move through socio-political imaginations.

In *Popular Culture in Indonesia*, Ariel Heryanto (2008) explains how post-Suharto Indonesia is reminiscent of Indonesia in the 1950s. Now, as well as in the 1950s, Indonesia tried to rebuild a modern nation-state after the demise of a long-running repressive government. In both periods, the project of imagining and constructing a
modern nation proved to be difficult (Heryanto 2008: 9). One of the reasons for this difficulty is the seeming incompatibility of the major ideological forces that constitute Indonesia. Heryanto describes four of these identities: ‘Javanism’ (referring to what is known as ‘Javanese culture’ or Javanist syncretism), ‘Islam’, ‘developmentalism’, and ‘Marxism’ – the latter dramatically weakened after the events of 1965 (cf. Heryanto 2008). Although these forces have blended in heterogeneous composites, their relationships have also been characterized by tension, rather than mutual desire (Heryanto 2008: 10).

Heryanto shows how popular culture is a site where tensions between these different ideological forces can be observed. In this light, we might read the bricolage of Arabic- and Indonesian-ness as juxtaposing two strands of Islam that are prevailing in Indonesia today. On the one hand there is a reformist (Sunni) Islam, which strives towards a purification of faith–often taking Arabian/Middle-Eastern styles of Islam as example – and on the other a syncretic Islam, that is seen as a distinctively Indonesian (Javanese) strand of Islam. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, at a moment in which Indonesia is caught in processes of modernization, both versions publicly articulate different modern Islamic futures. However, in the malls’ spatial practices, Arabic and Indonesian imaginations seamlessly and creatively go together. When seeing the mall as a representation of a modern future, then the heterotopic moment imagines this modern Islamic world as existing between Indonesia and an Arabic world, while negotiating a modernity in which capitalism and Islam go together.

Time as historicality thus produces seemingly ambiguous bricolages in the space of the mall during Ramadan. These bricolages do not only temporarily produce more heterogeneity in the space of the mall, but both bricolages also reflect a present historical moment and negotiate a potential (modern) future moment. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, the heterotopic moment composed by time as ritual and by time as historicality then functions in two ways. On the one hand, the heterotopic moment works as a magnifying glass over the current public visibility of Islam. On the other hand, it provides a snapshot of an Islamic modernity. As a magnifying glass, the heterotopic moment shows us how Islam today carves out a public space of its own. It displays the sign system through which Islam is spatialized. As a snapshot, the heterotopic moment provides a ‘momentary image’, a fragment of social reality, in which we are able to fleetingly see ‘the meaning of the whole’ (Frisby 1985: 6). As such, the heterotopic moment provides us with a glimpse of a particular modern Islamic future. This is a future in which Islam, modernity, and capitalism seamlessly go together; that exists between two versions
of Islam; and that particularly includes a middle class. The heterotopic moment as magnifying glass and snapshot then simultaneously exist in reality as well as in potentiality, in the present as well as in the future.

The spatial practices stimulated by time as ritual and time as historicality seem to construct this heterotopic moment as a moment that confirms the transformation of Ramadan from a pious practice to a consumerist spectacle. A third mode of time, ‘time as schedule’, partly contests the above-observations. Time as schedule refers to the daily rhythm and routine of Ramadan, which strongly affects the ways in which the space of the mall is produced at different moments during the day. While the mall is open during fasting hours (sunrise to sunset), it is extremely quiet during the day. It is only after breaking of the fast that the space suddenly becomes crowded. When asking mall visitors about their (shopping) routines during Ramadan, many of them confirmed that they liked to visit the mall after the breaking of the fast. College students Rahmanita (22) and Bambang (22) explain that they come to the mall to collectively break the fast. Rahmanita:

I’m from Medan, and he [Bambang] is from Surabaya. Since our families are far away, we gather here with our peers to do the iftar together. We eat, walk around, shop […] Many young people hang out here after iftar, I enjoy seeing that… we are all doing this together and have successfully finished another day. (Conversation with author, August 2010)

Suhada (36), English teacher, explains her visit to the mall as a treat after a tough day of fasting:

I have three young kids and work full time, just before iftar, my husband and I come to the mall to stroll and to treat the kids with food. Fasting is tough and this is the moment we can relax a bit. We meet friends, and let the kids play together in the [gaming] hall when they have been good all day. (Conversation with author, August 2010)

Hence, while in the mall the ritual of Ramadan has spatially shifted into a consumerist spectacle, people still adhere to the ritual’s premises. Moreover, the mall is not only a place for shopping, but also becomes embedded in Ramadan’s rituals: it functions as a place for a collective experience of iftar. Reflecting on their shopping behavior, visitors of the mall showed an awareness of negative discourses about Ramadan and consumption. High school student Tina’s (17) comment is here illustrative:
I do carefully watch my spending, many shops in the mall offer discounts and it is easy to lose yourself, they keep warning us … I don’t need it, I think a lot of us don’t even shop for ourselves like many say, we buy gifts for our family, friends to give away at Idul Fitri. I mean that is also an important part of Ramadan. (Conversation with author, August 2010)

A different perspective is offered by hotel receptionist Dian (22): “I shop more during Ramadan, but I don’t care to shop for big expensive things… I mean that’s not the idea of Ramadan for me. I buy books to better study Islam. I go out and find headscarves for me and my friends to wear during Eid.” (conversation with author, August 2011)

While more thorough ethnographic research is needed on pious consumption during Ramadan – that for instance also explores the variables of gender, class, age, education, and ethnicity – these comments do indicate that consumption entails a cautious negotiation. These girls’ carefully position their shopping practices within their interpretation of Ramadan. This confirms what Carla Jones (2010) has observed in her study of religious commodification, namely that pious consumption is a complex process of negotiation (cf. Jones 2010).

Two final observations can now be made about the production of space during Ramadan. First, while time as ritual and time as historicality seem to be the two constructive forces in the coming into being of the Islamic heterotopic moment, it is time as schedule that finally produces it as a lived moment, as a representational space. Second, this representational space is less straightforward than it may appear. We cannot claim that Ramadan has simply shifted from a pious practice to a spectacle of consumption in which Muslims passively consume. Time as ritual, historicality, and schedule produce this representational space as a complex heterotopic moment. To further grasp the complexities of this moment more research is needed, for instance a more elaborate examination of pious consumption during Ramadan and shoppers’ individual motivations; an analysis of the (gendered) spatial politics in the mall; a close reading of the (religiously themed) booths and sales points that mock or copy (products from) the formal stores in the mall; a comparison with processes of spatial production during other festivals in Indonesia such as Chinese New Year or Independence Day; or an analysis of the spatiality of Ramadan in different Indonesian cities, which can help to tease out how local specificities play a role in the construction of the Islamic heterotopic moment.
Towards an integral study of space and time

In this chapter, I have analyzed the politics of spatial ordering in four shopping malls to explore the ways in which space is produced during Ramadan. I first proposed that the space of the mall is constructed as a phantasmagorical, highly controlled, and exclusionary heterotopian space. I then suggested that during Ramadan, time is imperative to the production and transformation of space in a threefold way: as ritual, historicality, and schedule. Through their entanglement with Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) triad, these three modes of time produce an Islamic heterotopic moment in the already heterotopian space of the mall.

Time is thus imperative to the production of space. However, in scholarly accounts of spatial production, time and space are often seen as separate notions. Based on my analysis and its theoretical framework, a new conceptual model for the study of space and time can be envisioned. The model that I would like to propose systematically integrates ‘time’ in the production of space. Figure 28 visualizes the ways in which the space of the mall is produced during Ramadan.

In this model, space is produced through Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. These three elements, that are each occupying a corner of the triangle, jointly construct and compose space. As was shown in the analysis, Lefebvre’s triad does not exist in a void. Spatial practices,
representations of space, and representational spaces exist in a specific context, and in this context they intersect with time. In the case of Ramadan, time was for example important in a threefold way (as ritual, historicality, schedule). These three modes of time intersected with Lefebvre’s triadic elements and through this interaction a heterotopic moment was constructed. The model can, however, also be used to study other spaces, at other moments. In studies of other spaces, time can be imagined to take on many other forms. Time as historicality, seems to be of continuing presence, since all spatial production always takes place in a particular historical moment.

My case study of Ramadan showed that the intersection with time produces each of Lefebvre’s triadic elements in a particular way. Consequently, time thus influences the ways in which space is produced. Therefore, time is, in the model, located at the heart (of the production) of space.

During Ramadan, time as ritual, historicality, and schedule produced in the space of the mall a representational space – a heterotopic moment – that is full of contradictions and politics. At the beginning of this chapter I however argued that the concept of representational space does not allow for politics and contradictions to exist within the same space. I also argued that Lefebvre’s ‘representational space’ and Foucault’s heterotopia (1986 [1967]) share significant similarities. At the same time, heterotopia overcomes some of the problematic features of representational space. The concept of heterotopia, based on the notion that the production of space is relational and internally fragmented, does allow for a study of the politics in the moment of representational space. Therefore, in the model, heterotopia extends Lefebvre’s triad at the position and the moment of, representational space, with which it is entangled, but which it also transcends.

Through positioning time at the heart of space, the model ensures that Lefebvre’s three elements cannot be considered without, or apart from, specific ‘contextual modes of time’. And since Lefebvre’s elements are always at the basis of the production of space, time is in this way systematically integrated into the study of space. The model thus enables an integral study of space and time. In this integral study of space and time, the concept of heterotopia helps to unpack the politics that are underpinning the production of spaces.

My study of spatial politics in the mall (during Ramadan) shows that spaces produce, imagine, and negotiate Islamic modernities. I have suggested that the malls as heterotopias are representations of a modern future. During Ramadan, a heterotopic moment imagines this future modern (Islamic) world as existing between Indonesia and an Arabic world, while it negotiates a modernity in which capitalism
and Islam go together. The analysis here thus shows how space is not an inert stage where modernity is performed, but instead is an active participant in producing and fantasizing Islamic modernities.

The analysis also points at the notable role that visual culture plays in spatial negotiations of modernity. As we have seen, visual culture is central to the transformation that the space of the mall undergoes during Ramadan. During the holy month, Islam, piety, capitalism, and consumption all come together in the space of the mall. Visual culture knits these seemingly contradictory elements together and suggests that modernity, Islam, and capitalism are compatible. At the same time, visual culture facilitates the public visibility of Islam. Through a visual sign system, Islam carves out a public space of its own. And as we have seen, the signs that are mobilized in this endeavor are not free floating signifiers, but are ideologically charged.

These observations raise a number of questions. While the Islamic-themed visual culture in the mall is only temporarily on display – once a year during Ramadan – the Indonesian cultural industries are today producing Islamic-themed popular and visual culture (e.g. films, books, magazines, music, television programs) on a mass scale. Do these products also move through social imaginations? How are modernities imagined, negotiated, and contested in these products? In what kinds of debates do these products engage? What audiences are targeted? What politics are practiced? In the following three chapters, I will explore these questions by zooming in on three forms of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture: music, self-help books, and film.
Chapter 3

‘A place where grace and sins collide’: Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernities
Chapter 3
‘A place where grace and sins collide’: Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernities

“Once an old cleric with a long goatee came to me. I thought he was going to criticize me. But instead he asked us to compose more upbeat religious songs. [He was] bored of slow religious songs. As it turns out, he’s a heavy metal cleric.”

- Armand Maulana, vocalist of Gigi (The Jakarta Post 2008)

In Indonesia’s post-authoritarian mediasphere, Islamic piety and coolness by no means exclude each other. Today Islam has found its place in an urban youth culture that places ‘coolness’ as its core value. And while the space of the shopping mall is only temporarily Islamized (cf. chapter 2), the growth of the Islamic popular cultural industries indicates that ‘cool Islam’ is here to stay.

The Indonesian rock band Gigi, 1 which was formed in 1994 in Bandung, represents this new ‘coolness’ in Indonesian Islamic popular culture. In the past, Islamic music was associated with ‘qasidah’ (cf. Arps 1996), an Islamic genre blending Middle Eastern, Indian, and Western sounds and ‘nasyid’, a form of Islamic acappella (cf. Barendregt 2006; 2008b). These genres – and particularly qasidah – are now often regarded as ‘conservative’ and ‘uncool’ by today’s generation and are shunned (Hermawan, The Jakarta Post 2008). By contrast, Gigi’s project of rendering their religious reflections and spiritual confessions into distortion-laden rock songs that are accompanied by visually polished music videos, has proved to be phenomenally successful among the young Islamic generation (Ibidem).

Gigi, which consists of vocalist Armand Maulana, guitarist Dewa Budjana, drummer Gusti Hendi, and bassplayer Thomas Ramdhan, reflects the Islamization of the post-authoritarian mediasphere. Although Gigi has been around since 1994, they did not always have an Islamic orientation. The band only turned to religion when Islamic-themed popular culture appeared to be commercially successful. The band released its first Islamic-themed album Railah Kemenangan in 2004 and has since made five other Islamic-oriented albums, which have all received critical acclaim and were wildly successful (Hermawan, The Jakarta Post 2008). Most of

1 ‘Gigi’ means teeth. The band was named Gigi after the burst of laughs that the band’s members had when hearing that the name ‘Orang Utan was nearly decided as the band’s name.
Gigi’s Islamic-oriented albums are released during Ramadan, as the band’s producers try to play in – and cash in – on the extra religious awareness of the consumers during this time. Gigi’s members explain their switch to Islam by their need to share their love for Allah through music (Ibidem).

The commercial success of their religious albums indicates that Gigi’s shift to Islam has been well-received by the public. Two Gigi fans told me that they were not bothered by the band’s switch to Islam, and that they respected the move. In Gilang Sihombing’s (26) words: “The band does not really sound different on their religious albums. Sure their message has changed, but it is not like they suddenly became like Opick [another religious singer]. They are still cool.” (conversation with author, March 2009) Or as Naufal Cantilan (19) comments: “I think it makes them better artists, they dare to put something out there that is so intimate to them.” (conversation with author, March 2009)

The band’s switch to Islam did not only entail a change of musical themes, lyrics and iconography, but also of the band members’ physical appearance. Whereas before they wore casual hip clothing, or often no shirt at all, they now wear baju koko – a long white Muslim outfit – when performing their religious songs (Figures 1-3). Articulating their concern with their cleaner image is also their choice of sponsors. While previously they were sponsored by various cigarette companies, they have now switched to Enervon C (a multivitamin produced by a pharmaceutical company). Despite these changes, Gigi has retained its rock sound.

Figures 1-3: The change in attire of Gigi’s frontman Armand Maulana (photos by gigionline and The Jakarta Post)
Gigi’s music has – like other forms of Islamic popular culture – been criticized by conservative groups for its assumed compliance with consumerism, for representing an embellished set of images, and for merging Islam with banal and profane cultural forms (Hermawan, *The Jakarta Post* 2008). When it comes to music, Islamic authorities disagree on whether Islam forbids, tolerates or encourages Islamic music. Religious leaders have, nevertheless, made distinctions between what is considered music and what religious chant. Although melodious in nature, Qur’anic recitation and the call to prayer are not considered music within Islam. There are strict rules about the ways these texts can be used (Otterbeck 2004: 14-15). Indonesian ‘devotional music’, in its many genres, generally avoids the direct usage of religious sources (Hermawan, *The Jakarta Post* 2008). Gigi’s albums too refrain from quoting the Qur’an. Nevertheless, their music has remained a target for critique. “Religion is honesty and so is rock”, responds band member Gusti Hendi, when asked how rock music and Islam go together (Ibidem).

Krishna Sen and David Hill (2000) point out that rock music has always been entangled with Indonesia’s political history. Under Sukarno, rock music was banned as it was considered to be a genre of the nekolim, the neo-colonialist and imperialist countries of the West. For Sukarno, cultural imperialism, like economic and political imperialism, formed a threat to the newly independent nation. The official censorship ironically turned rock music into the symbol of defiance against state-authority and directed young Indonesians’ minds to the forbidden far-flung music scenes. Foreign albums were smuggled into the archipelago and Jakartan youngsters tuned into overseas radio broadcasts (Sen and Hill 2000: 166-167).

When Suharto overthrew Sukarno’s Old Order in 1966, the ban on rock music was lifted, giving rise to a vibrant rock scene. At the moment that students in the 1970s grew critical of the New Order regime, this rock scene became the vehicle for critical politics (180). The anti-authority message, and particularly the invitation to disorderliness that underpinned Indonesian rock music, essentially opposed New Order ideology. ‘Disorder’, always the political antithesis of the New Order, became a way for the young to contest the dominant powers. The ‘politics of disorderliness’, which casted rock as masculine and working class, did not only challenge New Order ideals through their ‘disorderly form’, but also through their profound critique on middle-class consumerism – the epitome of the developmentalist New Order government (181).

The second half of the 1990s signifies a radical shift away from these tropes. Emma Baulch (2007) describes how during this period, changes in the music industry led rock music to move into the feminized realm of consumerism, where it
transformed from a (criminal) working class, masculine construction, into a bourgeois, image-centered construction. As Baulch writes:

The coincidence of private, advertising-funded television, including the establishment of the advertising saturated MTV Asia, and the transnationalization of the recording industry meant that, increasingly, rock music came to be understood as a set of images. Moreover, on television, and particularly on MTV, rock videos interwove with advertisements for other products, such as shoes, soft drinks, chocolate bars, shampoo, and facial scrubs, indicating a rapprochement between ‘rock’ and an emerging and increasingly idealized Indonesian consumerism. (Baulch 2007: 26)

What makes rock music political today? What kind of politics are practiced by a band like Gigi, a band that was formed amidst these changes in the mid-1990s and that has moved into the consumerist and image-conscious sphere of Islamic popular culture? As I suggested in the introduction of this dissertation, Islamic popular culture engages in debates about the desired course of modernity, and forms an arena where Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated, and contested. But in which debates does Islamic popular culture actually participate? What kinds of modernities does it imagine? And considering Baulch’s (2003) observation that Indonesian cultural scenes often ‘gesture elsewhere’, to a global cultural scene, how ‘Indonesian’ are these modernities? What transnational imaginations and politics underpin their construction?

By taking Gigi as a case study, and by conducting a discourse analysis of three of their music videos, this chapter will explore these questions. In doing so, it contributes to the study of Indonesian music. So far, scholars of Indonesian music have insightfully explored the genres of among others qasidah (Arps 1996), nasyid (Barendregt 2006; 2008b), kercong (Hardjana 1996), dangdut (Browne 2000; Weintraub 2006; 2010), campusari (Sunarto 2007), and death metal (Baulch 2002; 2003; 2007). While omnipresent in the Indonesian cultural scene, Indonesian Islamic (pop)rock music is still an underexplored phenomenon. A study of Islamic rock music could show how a global rock sound feeds into local politics. Whereas the Balinese metal bands that Baulch studied (2002; 2003; 2007) were concerned with the relation between Bali and Jakarta, Gigi is concerned with the relation between Indonesia and a larger – Islamic – world. But how does the band negotiate this relation, and how are Islamic modernities mapped upon an imagined Islamic world?

By exploring these questions, my analysis also contributes to the study of (pop) rock music and religion. When looking at research that is concerned with (pop) rock
music and religion, we can observe that a considerable amount of studies focus on Judeo-Christian expressions in music (cf. Howard 1992; Howard and Streck 2004; Stowe 2011; Reed 2004; Luhr 2005; Begbie 2007). Most of these studies focus on American religious (pop) rock music, although a few studies address African engagements with Christian (pop) rock music (cf. Collins 2004; Parsitau 2006). This body of work demonstrates that religion and rock music are compatible. When comparing Christian and Islamic rock music, we see that both articulate piety and devotion. They are also both concerned with issues that their adherents may encounter in their everyday lives. In that sense, Christian and Islamic engagements with rock music do not differ that much. Islamic rock music however differs from Christian rock music through its central engagement with modernity: (how) is Islam compatible with today’s modern world? This question does not only underpin Gigi’s Islamic rock music. In his comprehensive studies of the role of rock music in Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, and Pakistan, Mark Levine (2008; 2009) observes that – particularly after 9/11 – Islamic rock music has become concerned with, and increasingly reflects on, the state of the religion of Islam (Levine 2008: 2). While Levine explores rock music in many regions of the Muslim world, he has ignored Southeast Asian Islamic rock music. My case study of Gigi’s music here adds an Indonesian perspective to the study of Islam and rock music.

**Imagining Islamic modernities, an imagination across time and space**

The project of imagining Islamic modernities revolves around a kind of imagination that crosses both space and time. Imagination is spatial since Islamic popular and visual culture fantasizes modern national spaces. This does not mean that the reach of imagination is limited to the borders of the archipelago. As we shall see in the analysis, the modern Indonesian nation is visualized through both a national and a transnational imagination.

This reflects Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) observations about imagination. To describe how imagination works in our current epoch of globalization, Appadurai adopts Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of the ‘imagined community’, and extends it to the concept of ‘imagined worlds’. For Appadurai, imagined worlds are the “multiple worlds constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai 1996: 33). Appadurai believes that we now live in such globally imagined worlds rather than simply in locally imagined communities. In these imagined worlds, imagination no longer takes place
only at the level of the nation-state, but has become transnational or ‘postnational’. Two processes underpin this postnational imagination: migration and electronic media. Today, both images and people are in simultaneous circulation: “neither images nor people fit into circuits that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces anymore, instead they are in simultaneous circulation.” (Appadurai 1996: 4) Through these continuous processes of circulation, the local has for Appadurai become a space that is created by the confluence of many lines of global composition.

But then what constitutes ‘the global’ that is imagined to be part of ‘local’ – Indonesian – Islamic modernities? What kinds of transnational imaginations and politics are underlying the construction of Islamic modernities in popular and visual culture? How are these modernities accommodated to a world that after 9/11 has grown suspicious of Muslims? How do transnational imaginations of modernities explore constructive solutions for Muslims?

While I will not be able to address all of these questions in this chapter, the analysis of Gigi’s music videos will provide a starting point for thinking about how Islamic modernities are constituted by a transnational imagination. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will further investigate these questions.

Imagining Islamic modernities and futures is not only a spatial venture, but also an essentially ‘temporal’ project. Again the work of Appadurai (2004; 2013) helps to elaborate and raise questions. In *The Future as Cultural Fact* (2013), Appadurai moves from seeing the social world as an informational space – a domain where diverse imaginations cluster on a topography of pathways and diversions – towards a more pressing concern with time. Appadurai’s book, and also my own study here, can be seen as replying to Jane Guyer’s call (2007) for an anthropology of the futures that people posit, fantasize, fear, await, defer, or dissolve (Guyer 2007: 410).

Appadurai (2004; 2013) suggests that if we want to learn how people fantasize or fear their futures, we should look into their cultural practices. It is for Appadurai in and through culture that ideas of the future are embedded and nurtured (Appadurai 2004: 59). Appadurai asserts that through its assemblages of representation, disposition, practice, and thought, culture produces two distinctive capacities for ‘being otherwise’. The first is ‘the capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai 2013: 126; Appadurai 2004: 67), which means that culture has the ability to imagine forms of human life as forms of life worth living (White 2013). At stake here are the many visions of ‘what a good and right life should be like’. People have developed, and continue to develop, these visions in the context of particular forms of collective social existence. The capacity to aspire then involves positioning oneself in a field.
that comprises, not just individual means and ends, but also collective understandings of what the means and ends are (Ibidem).

The second capacity of culture is what Appadurai calls ‘the social life of design’ (Appadurai 2013: 257). This is the capacity to not only imagine, but also to devise the social ecologies and the material and institutional arrangements, within which “lives worth living are plausibly livable” (257). For Appadurai, culture can stimulate alternative forms of living and can accommodate to makings of different social environments.

The capacity to aspire and the social life of design both imagine, and long to create, a better future. It is then not hard to see the link between Appadurai’s cultural capacities and the imagination of Islamic futures in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. In its capacity to aspire, Islamic-themed popular culture accommodates to visions of better and ‘right’ modern lives. Simultaneously, it offers people tools and models through which they are stimulated to actively try to accomplish such a life (the social life of design). Islamic-themed popular culture also points out what kinds of practices lead to the wrong kind of future.

This not only raises questions about what are ‘right’ and what are ‘wrong’ kinds of futures. But it also begs questions about the figures through which these futures are imagined – and what these figures say about Indonesia’s present. Does Islamic popular and visual culture for instance invoke notions of utopia and dystopia (Jameson 2005) to point at ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ roads to the future? Or do popular cultural products, in Guyer’s (2007) words, mobilize “reconfigurations of elements that are well-known already”? (Guyer 2007: 416) Does popular culture create in Islamic modernities “temporal architectures [that] become like M. C. Escher drawings: familiar figures, precise, and replicated yet brought together [in] reversions, and [with] shifting focal points”? (Ibidem) The question is not just what spatial and global elements constitute imagined modernities, but also what temporal elements constitute these modernities and through which figures they are imagined.

Appadurai’s two ‘capacities to be otherwise’ always stand at least partially in a negative, or even in a critical relationship, to the given state of affairs, rather than simply affirming it (White 2013). As Appadurai asserts, it is in culture’s orientation towards the future that its political potential is located. Although both capacities are unequally distributed throughout society – they are more readily available for the well off than for the lower classes – they always involve an ‘ethics of possibility’ (Appadurai 2013: 188).

Appadurai puts the ‘ethics of possibility’ in stark contrast with an ‘ethics of
probability’’, which animates our social life as well. In the first, a diversity of collective
goods is imagined. The latter is the ethic of the contemporary financed economy
and its impulse is instead to control and manage risks. Both ethics work
simultaneously on Islamic popular and visual culture. On the one hand, popular
cultural products give way to an ethics of possibility. Popular culture provides
perfect tools to imagine, fantasize, and stimulate the coming into being of desired
Islamic modernities. It accommodates to visions of ‘better’ and ‘right’ modern lives.
On the other hand, these constructions are never free from relations of power. They
are always at the same time subject to an ‘ethics of probability’, which works to
diminish risks and which seeks to control what kinds of future are envisionned as
wrong and right. Since the dynamics between the two determine how modernities
are imagined, their interplay asks for close examination.

This chapter provides a starting point for the investigation of the above-raised
issues and questions by analyzing three of Gigi’s music videos. While Gigi is not the
only Indonesian Islamic rock band, I focus on their work since their trajectory and
recent transformation mirrors the development of the Indonesian popular cultural
scene itself. I focus on music videos – and not just on songs – because they allow me
to include the visual dimension in the analysis. I selected Tuhan (‘God’, 2004),
Perdamaian (‘Reconciliation’, 2005), and Nationalism (2009), since they each engage
in a different debate related to modernity.

**Tuhan: Islam in a modern world**

After a decade of making non-religious music, Gigi released their first Islamic-
oriented album Railah Kemenangan (‘Reach for victory’) in 2004. Through this
album, Gigi constructs a discourse in which Islam is a ‘flexible’ religion that can
adapt itself to a modern world, and that is reconcilable with this world. By
constructing this discourse, Gigi participates in a debate about the reconcilability of
Islam and modernity. While there seems to be a general agreement that modern
technology and education are desirable, in conservative public discourse modernity
has been associated with the dangers of extreme individualism, loose morality, and
secularism. Modernity is here seen as something foreign, which is not reconcilable
with Islam and is thus unsuitable for Muslim Indonesia (Brenner 1999: 22).
Government officials and religious leaders have often warned the Indonesian people
not to import the bad with the good. Especially modern(izing) cities like Jakarta with
their alluring sinful attractions and distractions are framed as unsuitable places for
(young) Muslims to live. Here modern city lifestyles are seen as troubling Muslim piety. The rising influence of Islamic movements has added particular force to these views (Ibidem).

The discourse that Islam is reconcilable with a modern world is through Gigi’s first religious album constructed in at least two ways. First, Railah Kemenangan shows how Islam in a present-day context makes use of modern media and technology. The songs on this album can be read as da’wah. Da’wah denotes the spreading the word of Islam and the active encouraging of fellow Muslims in the pursuance of greater piety in all aspects of their lives. Da’wah is an age-old Islamic practice, but is on Railah Kemenangan now accompanied by Gigi’s drums and guitar riffs. An example from the album is the song Lailatul Quadar (‘the night of honor’), which refers to the most virtuous night of the year. In this Ramadan-night, the reward of one good deed is multiplied. The song Lailatul Quadar reminds Muslims of the significance of this night and its accompanying practices. The idea that da’wah is translatable to rock music is not the only way in which Railah Kemenangan shows that Islam is a flexible religion, adaptable to the conditions of a modern world.

Tuhan (‘God’, 2004) was the first single released off Railah Kemenangan. When we look closely at its music video – directed by movie director Hanung Bramantyo – we see that the verbal, visual, and sonic level work together to construct a discourse that articulates that Islam and modernity are reconcilable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesian [original]</th>
<th>English [my translation]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuhan</td>
<td>God/Allah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempat aku berteduh</td>
<td>The place I find shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di mana aku mengelu</td>
<td>Where I complain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dengan segala peluh</td>
<td>In all my sweat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuhan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuhan yang maha esa</td>
<td>God/Allah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempat aku memuja</td>
<td>God the almighty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dengan segala do’a</td>
<td>The place I admire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re却ain (repeat)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aku jauh, enkau jauh</td>
<td>I am far away, you are far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aku dekat, enkau dekat</td>
<td>I am close by, you are close by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hati adalah cerrmin</td>
<td>The heart is like a mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempat pahala dosa bertarung</td>
<td>The place where grace and sins collide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Lyrics of Tuhan
When first looking at the verbal level, at the lyrics of Tuhan (Figure 4), we see that the song praises Allah. As can be read from the lyrics, central to the praising of Allah is an (abstract) notion of ‘place’. ‘Allah’ is the ‘place’ where Muslims can find shelter, where they can complain, where they admire Allah, and where they pray. Hence, it is the place where they can be a Muslim and can practice their religion.

Figure 5: Screenshots of Tuhan

When now looking closely at the visual level (Figure 5), there are two ‘places’ that can be recognized in the music video. First, a symbol of modernity: the big city that looks chaotic and busy with its people, cars, flashing lights, and speedy movements. Second, we see a forest or countryside where Gigi performs their song, dressed in baju koko. Here, people are shown chopping wood, gathering food, and praying. The video constructs the two places as each other’s opposites. On the one hand, we see the chaos and ‘modernity’ of the city. On the other hand, we see the serenity, quietness, and ‘the tradition’ of the forest or countryside. The latter is depicted as a place where people can find rest, grace, can pray in all tranquillity, and be a Muslim (see Figure 5). Framed like this, these two depictions at first seem to reflect conservative public discourse: ‘tradition’ allows you to be a Muslim, while ‘modernity’, embodied in the modern city space and its alleged chaos, makes it hard to practice Islam and be a pious Muslim.

The video of Tuhan however continuously blends these two allegedly opposed
places together by superimposing shots of the city and shots of the forest (Figure 5). As an effect, the flashing lights of the city enter the realm of the forest, while the people in the forest, among whom a praying man and a Muslimah dressed in white (Figure 5), are now placed in the space of the city. The video here thus dissolves the alleged boundaries between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. It creates a place where – as Gigi sings in the song’s last line – “grace and sins collide“. This blending of places, in combination with the song’s lyrics, which tell about ‘the place’, where one can be a Muslim and practice Islam, constructs a discourse that expresses the idea that one can now find that place in both the countryside and the city. Allah can be found in places that are in public discourse often seen as ‘traditional’ as well as those that are considered ‘modern’.

The sonic level further strengthens this discourse. When studying the sonic construction of *Tuhan*, the song can be divided into two parts. The first part combines (A) slow ‘easy’ rhythm, lengthy, and smooth diction components with (B) fast pace, rough rhythm, and loud, bristly diction components. The second part of the song only uses (B) the fast components as it builds towards a climax.

In the first part, the slow components (A) are mainly linked to shots of the forest, while the fast components (B) are linked to the images of the city. The song hereby thus reinforces a separation between the assumed ‘slow’, laidback ‘traditional’ places and the fast-paced (life in) ‘modern’ places. This separation is challenged as the song progresses. The second part of the song, which contains only (B) the fast components, is accompanied by images of both the city and the forest. By linking these together, the video brings the ‘fast’ sound of modernity into the realm of the forest.

This interaction between the sonic and visual level, articulates two discourses. First, the interaction constructs a discourse in which the sharp division between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ and the connotations that are attached to them in the public sphere disappear as they blend together. And second, the interaction signifies a fear for the disappearance of these allegedly traditional places. The blending of the two places suggests that ‘traditional’ places are inevitably modernizing, and that one cannot stop modernity from invading these places. The negative traits of the latter discourse are challenged by the interaction between the visual and verbal level, which pointed out that Allah can be found in both places, hence that modernity is not be feared.

Concluding, through *Tuhan*, Gigi constructs a discourse in which Islam is a flexible religion that can adapt itself to a modern world, and that is reconcilable with this world. This discourse is constructed through an imagination that is still primarily
‘national’. The ‘Islamic modern’ is here constructed via references to an Indonesian situation in which under forces of nationwide modernization the assumed boundaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ places are increasingly breaking down.

*Perdamaian*: imagining, negotiating and contesting Islamic modernities

Tuhan constructs a discourse in which Islam is reconcilable with modernity. But what kinds of modernities are then reconcilable with Islam? What kinds of Islamic modernities does Gigi’s music ‘aspire’? Which modernities are suitable for Indonesia? *Perdamaian* (‘Reconciliation’, 2005) engages with these questions.

*Perdamaian* was released off Gigi’s second Islamic-oriented album *Railah Kemenangan Repackage* (2005). This album contains cover songs, of which many were originally composed by ‘qasidah moderen’ groups. ‘Qasidah’ is a traditional Arabic poem used to praise the Prophet Muhammad. Ben Arps (1996) has pointed out that when Indonesia started modernizing in the 1970s, a pop music version of qasidah, called ‘qasidah moderen’ developed to keep up with the rapidly changing social conditions and popular aesthetics (Arps 1996: 393). ‘Moderen’ here refers to modernity. The songs were concerned with the development of the Indonesian nation. They tried to make sense of the processes that were changing the aspects of social life at that time.

Gigi’s *Perdamaian* was originally sung by the qasidah moderen group *Nasida Ria*, which was founded in 1975 in Semarang. The group was put together by HM Zain, an Islamic teacher, who assembled nine of his female students for the band. *Nasida Ria’s* work is known for its critical reflection on the social changes that came with processes of modernization in 1970s and 1980s Indonesia. In this context, the band commented on a variety of issues like justice, environmentalism, gambling, and warfare. *Nasida Ria’s* social engagement is also apparent in the lyrics of *Perdamaian* (Figure 6), which were written by Ahmad Buchori Masruri, a kyai (expert in Islam). When we look at the lyrics, we see that the song calls for peace and tranquility as it observes that there are a multitude of wars going on.

The references to peace and wars need to be read in the context in which Masruri originally wrote *Perdamaian*. The song was produced and released amidst the Cold War, and can be read as a comment on this tense period. Through its critique on the Cold War, *Perdamaian* comments on a developmentalist project of modernization that was at that time spearheaded by the New Order government.
As we can read from the lyrics, the conflicts are imagined to be stirred by a developmentalist project of modernization as “the money to make weapons, millions, comes from the many buildings that are created.” Like other qasidah moderen groups frequently did, Nasida Ria here engages with changing social conditions of that time. In the 1970s and 1980s social life (in the capital) changed radically as, under the repressive developmentalist² New Order government, Jakarta grew out to be the symbol of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization.

² Suharto’s New Order government has been labeled ‘repressive/authoritarian developmentalist’ (Suryakusuma 2012) Developmentalism here refers to a set of ideas which converge to place economic development at the center of political endeavors and institutions and also as a means through which to establish legitimacy in the political sphere. Economic development is here framed by modern-day Western criteria: economic success is gauged in terms of capitalistic notions of what it means for a country to become developed, autonomous, and legitimate (Yu and Chung 1996: 22-24).
buildings arose and people increasingly migrated to the newly industrialized capital (Emmerson 1999: 34).

These developments prompted both feelings of excitement and fear. Nasida Ria’s Perdamaian constructs a discourse that has strong dystopian sentiments. It emphasizes that when capitalism is practiced without good morals and values, its profits could be used for the wrong ends, such as warfare. This discourse thus critically assesses the unbridled capitalism that was at the core of the New Order government’s developmentalist outlook, and that was supposed to bring about a modern and prosperous Indonesia.

Today not only Jakarta but many other spaces undergo processes of modernization. As a result, the desired path to modernity again becomes a topic of debate. In this debate discourses appear that are very similar to those articulated by Nasida Ria in the 1970s and 1980s. The fear over the loss of morals and values for instance still features prominently in discussions about the desired course of modernity. As will be shown in the following two chapters about self-help books and films, the loss of morals is today particularly linked to two issues: loose or ‘deviant’ sexuality and the advent of a consumer society.

It is in this context that Gigi’s cover of Perdamaian takes up Nasida Ria’s critique of modernization and geopolitics and translates it to present-day Indonesia. In what follows, I suggest that through mobilizing the figure of dystopia, Gigi’s version of Perdamaian constructs a discourse that profoundly criticizes a capitalist and consumerist road to an Islamic modern future.

In Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (2005), Jameson points out that ‘utopia’ and the concept spawned by it, ‘dystopia’, are figures that explore social and political structures. Through the figure of utopia, a perfect, but unrealistic, ideal world is imagined, while through the figure of dystopia a nightmare world is constructed. Jameson observes about dystopia that: “although there are many different dystopias, they share the negative characteristic of being undesirable societies. Dystopias are societies where the condition of life suffers from destruction, deprivation, oppression, or terror.” (Jameson 2005: 120) According to Jameson, narratives often use the figures of utopia and dystopia as metaphors for the different directions humanity can take in its choices, ending up with one or two possible futures (119). Utopia and dystopia are thus figures through which futures are imagined, and through which narratives reflect on the directions humanity can take towards those futures.

In Gigi’s translation of Perdamaian, the dystopian sentiments that were recognized on the verbal level, i.e. in the song’s lyrics, explicitly manifest themselves
on the visual level. When looking at the opening shot of the music video (Figure 7), we see that – like Jameson’s fictional dystopias which are often set in the future – Gigi’s *Perdamaian* is set in space (Figure 7). This suggests that the world it depicts is set in the future. The camera zooms in on the planet and we see Gigi playing on this desolated, smoking – as if it has just been destructed – planet, without any sign of life to it.

On this smoking planet, a red and white storm is continuously raging (Figures 8-9). Red and white are the national colors of (the flag of) Indonesia, and the storm is at times even resembling the waving of the Indonesian flag. This creates the impression that the desolated planet represents the dystopian future of Indonesia. This suggestion becomes stronger when further analyzing the video clip.

The opening shots (Figures 7-9) are followed by a flashback. This flashback shows how the destructed, desolated planet, ‘the dystopian future of Indonesia’, has come into being. The video maps the road to dystopia through a recurring pattern. In this pattern, first images, signs, and symbols that refer to capitalist modernization are shown. Subsequently these signs are destructed by terror.

Figures 10-12 illustrate this pattern. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the first part of the pattern. Both figures display symbols of capitalist modernization and of a consumer society. Figure 10 shows how skyscrapers are being build/placed on the planet.
Subsequently, the planet turns into the head of Gigi’s vocalist Armand Maulana. In Figure 11 and 12, we see that in addition to the buildings, now big cars are also placed on the planet/Armand’s head. Cars are in Indonesia seen as the ultimate symbol of middle class consumerism. Figure 12 shows the second part of the pattern: the destruction. When Armand’s head is full with cars and skyscrapers, knives are pierced through his head. Guns appear on the right side of the screen, shooting him in the head (Figure 12). During this sequence question marks appear (Figures 10-11), while Armand angrily sings “confused, confused, my mind becomes confused.” The combination of lyrics and visuals here underscores Gigi’s confusion and anger about the rise of consumerism, while constructing it as a destructive force.

Figures 13-21: Screenshots of Perdamaian
In the video, this pattern recurs several times, and every time it recurs the planet is destructed a little bit further. Figures 13-21 provide an illustration. Figure 13 shows how symbols of capitalism and a consumer society, respectively skyscrapers and cars, are one by one placed on the planet. Figures 14-16 shows how they are subsequently destructed and blown into space. After these explosions, chaos and destruction take over. The future planet is now ruled by wars and terror (Figures 17-19) and ultimately reaches the state of a dystopia (the smoking planet) that was also shown in the video’s opening shots (Figure 20). In the end the destruction reaches an apocalyptic climax, as in the video’s last shot, the planet implodes (Figure 21).

Through this recurring pattern, references to capitalist modernization and a consumer society are in *Perdamaian* turned into images of dystopia, and eventually lead to the destruction of the planet that was suggested to be the future Indonesia. What we see here is that while mapping the road to a dystopian future, the video mobilizes elements (capitalism and consumerism) that are already part of Indonesia’s present. This reflects Jameson’s (2005) observation that:

> Fictional dystopias [...] serve to critique current actual cultural, social, economic and/or political trends that are by the author observed as dangerous and threatening for the future. Fictional dystopias critique these trends by extrapolating and exaggerating specific elements of contemporary society. This functions as a warning against a specific modern trend or the threat of oppressive powers in one form or another. (Jameson 2005: 156)

Like Jameson’s dystopias, *Perdamaian* criticizes current social, cultural, economic, and political processes. In Gigi’s case, these processes are related to modernization. In its construction of a dystopia, *Perdamaian* exaggerates very specific elements of modernization. It extrapolates those elements that are in Indonesia linked to a capitalist, consumerist style of modernity and frames them as leading to the destructed planet that is ‘the dystopian future of Indonesia’. In this way, the figure of dystopia has become a metaphor for the direction modernity can take in Indonesia, and the direction *Perdamaian* here warns for is a capitalist and consumerist road to a modern future.

This warning is strengthened by the use of sound in *Perdamaian*. The sound of the drums and electric guitars that is accompanying the images of dystopia is both daunting and enraged, while Armand’s voice sounds angry and desperate, thereby framing the video as a wake-up call, a last chance or attempt to turn the situation around.

The warning is in *Perdamaian* explicitly framed as coming from ‘Islam’. In between
the shots of destruction, which are accompanied by rough up-tempo drums and guitar riffs, the video suddenly breaks away from the visual and sonic unruliness. The instruments are muted and the video cuts to Armand (Figures 22-24). The replications of the Kaaba that we see in the background (Figure 22) and the architecture of the Al-Masjid al-Haram mosque (Figure 27) suggest that Armand is preaching from Mecca. During his ‘preach’ he is shown in direct-address, while singing in a calm, but desperate-sounding voice: “ohhh, you children of humanity, you all want peace and tranquillity, but if the money to make weapons, millions, comes from the many buildings that are created...”. The use of direct-address and the muting of sound call for attention and invite viewers to listen to Armand.

The fact that Armand is shown preaching from Mecca and not from Indonesia is significant, because it frames ‘Islam’ as Arabic or Middle-Eastern. As explained in the previous chapters, an Arabic or Middle-Eastern Islam is in Indonesia often associated with a modernist style of Islam. Perdamaian then not only frames a capitalist and consumerist style of modernity as undesirable for a modern future of Indonesia, but it constructs this path as specifically undesirable for a modernist Islamic future.

The suggestion that a capitalist or consumerist style of modernity is not right for a modern Islamic future is in the video of Perdamaian articulated through a transnational imagination. It is mapped onto past and present conflicts in the
transnational Islamic world. In the video of Perdamaian, a discourse is constructed that frames capitalism as a ‘dystopian’ force to other (majority) Muslim countries as well. In the music video, this discourse is constructed through the insertion of shots (Figure 28-29) in which the earlier described symbols of capitalism and consumerism are superimposed on, and combined with, newspaper headings that refer to past and present wars in the Muslim countries of Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine.

The visual references to these conflicts can be read in different ways. First, these images can be read as suggesting that the planet of which we thought represented a future Indonesia, is actually representing the transnational Islamic world. It is then not only a future Indonesia that is threatened by a capitalist project of modernization, but the future of a transnational Islamic modern world. Second, it can be noted that in all of these conflicts, the United States are involved. The destructive capitalism/consumerism that seems to threaten the Islamic world, can then be read more specifically as ‘American capitalism and consumerism’, and the rejected style of modernity as a ‘Western’ style of modernity. Third, and this contrasts the second reading, these images can be read as suggesting that the transnational Islamic world itself is not adopting a capitalist project of modernization in the ‘right’ way, that it uses capitalism to make weapons and that indeed, as the lyrics suggest, they are destructing themselves.

What these readings show is that in Perdamaian the imagination, contestation, and construction of the Islamic modern transcends national boundaries. In a context in which the desired path to modernity is a topic of debate, Perdamaian imagines and negotiates Islamic modernities. It points out what kind of modernities are not to be ‘aspired’ (Appadurai 2013: 126). Perdamaian constructs a discourse that is critical of a capitalist Western-style of modernity, and frames it as leading to a dystopian prospect for a (modernist) Islamic future. Gigi’s full-fledged critique of capitalism and
consumerism is ironic, considering the band’s own recent transformation and their tactics to release albums during Ramadan to increase sales numbers. At the same time, the band here also shows that capitalism and Islam are not necessarily irreconcilable.

**Nationalism: building a modern future**

At this point in the analysis, it has been demonstrated that whereas *Gigi’s Tuhan* constructs a discourse of Islam as reconcilable with modernity, *Perdamaian* constructs a discourse that is highly critical of a capitalist Western-style of modernity, while gesturing via a transnational imagination to a Middle Eastern oriented Islamic style of modernity. How an ‘aspired modernity’ is to be reached or established is still unclear. In 2009, *Gigi* released *Nationalism*. In what follows, I will propose that *Nationalism* constructs a discourse that holds Indonesian citizens responsible for reaching and securing a ‘right’ modern Islamic future.

This discourse is constructed through the figure of utopia. In *Nationalism* a narrative is constructed in which (1) a reference to a specific utopia is made, where after (2) specific ills that prevent this utopia from coming into being are shown. Finally, (3) Indonesian citizens and their nationalist sentiments are framed as antidotes against these ills and are seen as providing the road towards an aspired ‘own’ Indonesian Islamic modernity. Here *Nationalism* attests to both the capacity to aspire as well as the social life of design (Appadurai 2013: 126; 257).

![Figure 30](image1)
![Figure 31](image2)
![Figure 32](image3)

**Figures 30-32: Screenshots of Nationalism**

In the music video of *Nationalism*, which shows *Gigi* in the process of recording the song in the studio, close-ups of newspaper headings are inserted and superimposed over images of the band (Figures 30-32). The newspaper heading that is shown first announces: “Hillary visited quickly this afternoon: a new phase for the Muslim world.” (Figure 30) This is a reference to the visit that US Secretary of State Hillary
Clinton made to Indonesia in February 2009. During this visit, she applauded Indonesia for being a “Muslim nation that demonstrates that Islam, democracy and modernity are compatible” (Arshad and Davies 2009). She also told Indonesians that their nation “is an example of how Islam, modernity, and democracy cannot only co-exist, but thrive. As I travel around the world over the next years, I will be saying to people: if you want to know whether Islam, modernity, democracy, and women’s rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia!” (Ibidem) This image, of a thriving democratic modern Muslim nation, is an ideal image that has been created for and by Indonesia since the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime (Hartono 2009). It is then no surprise that Indonesian news media hailed Clinton’s speech with great enthusiasm. *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, the newspaper of Yogyakarta, for instance wrote: “finally our work is rewarded, we have made ourselves into an example for a new modern Muslim world.” (Hartono, *Kedaulatan Rakyat* 2009)

*Nationalism* criticizes the triumphant idea that Indonesia has reached this ideal state. After the video has displayed this reference to a modern Islamic utopia, it points out, on the verbal and visual level, that there are still dilemmas that prevent Indonesia from being and becoming the thriving democratic modern Muslim nation that was envisioned.

On the visual level, close-ups of newspaper headings are superimposed that relate to the instability of the Indonesian economy (Figures 31-32). Figure 31 for instance refers to the Indonesian oil crisis that reached a critical point in 2009 and that caused turmoil among Indonesians. Oil and natural gas represent one of Indonesia’s largest sources of export revenue. But as a result of red tape and corruption scandals after the liberalization of parts of the market, Indonesia has become a net oil importer, as companies shy away from investing (Arnold 2009). At $50 a barrel, oil has become a big threat to Indonesia’s economic health and the oil issues have slowed down the archipelago’s economic growth tremendously. As Malaysia and Thailand faced the same problems, a new Southeast Asian crisis was at that time lurking, something to which the newspaper heading in Figure 32 refers. Adding to the problem is the fact that Indonesia used to subsidize fuel to keep it affordable for its citizens. But to protect the government’s budget, subsidies were cut and the burden was placed on the shoulders of the people (Robison 2008: 68).

Another example of how Gigi points to dilemmas that are keeping Indonesia from fitting the utopian image that Hillary Clinton sketched, is found on the verbal level, in the lyrics of the song (Figure 33). Gigi sings that they are tired of the “collusion and corruption disasters, which keep hitting us.” Corruption is still a big problem in present-day Indonesia and sometimes has dramatic consequences for Indonesians.
Government politics still sees many corrupt officials and politicians. The business sector has also seen corrupt leadership, which often led to bankruptcy, leaving thousands of Indonesians unemployed (Arnold 2009).

Gigi thus challenges the idea that Indonesia is a thriving democratic modern Muslim nation by pointing to the specific ills that prevent this utopia from coming into being. Noteworthy, in both the dilemmas pointed out here, it is the elite: the politicians, the leaders, and the businessmen who are the cause of the problems, while the (lower class) Indonesian people are duped. In what follows, I propose that through a specific nationalist discourse, the video of Nationalism frames ‘the Indonesian people’ themselves and the action that must be taken by them as a solution to these dilemmas. Both the lyrics and the visuals tell Indonesians to forget about these ills, and instead ‘get ready’ to serve the Indonesian nation. Nationalism here thus puts the responsibility for ‘healing’ the nation and bringing about a thriving modern Muslim nation on the shoulders of ordinary people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesian [original]</th>
<th>English [my translation]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lupakan saja kehancuran yang ada di bumi Indonesia</td>
<td>Just forget all the destruction that is on the Indonesian ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masa kini, dan masa yang akan datang</td>
<td>In the time that is now, and the time that is going to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janganlah bicara dan berpikir licik tentang kejadian di Timur dan Barat Utara, Selatan</td>
<td>Don’t talk and think negative about what is happening in the east and the west The north and the south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan siap, siap (x 2)</td>
<td>Get ready, get ready (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kau bertaruh</td>
<td>you must give everything for you, for you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>untukmu, untukmu!</td>
<td>Indonesia!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolusi dan korupsi bencana yang terus menghatam kita</td>
<td>Collusion and corruption disasters which keeps hitting us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lelah...</td>
<td>Tired...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagi kehidupan tidak akan pernah hilang</td>
<td>The life will never disappear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janganlah bicara dan berpikir licik tentang kejadian di Timur dan Barat Utara, Selatan</td>
<td>Don’t talk and think negative about what is happening in the east and the west The north and the south</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 33: Lyrics of Nationalism
As can be read from the lyrics, the song suggests to Indonesians that they need to forget about “the destruction” that is on the Indonesian ground, hence, that they need to forget about the ills and problems that threaten the prosperity of the nation. The song gestures to the future and suggests that the road to a healthy and prosperous Indonesia will not be easy, as it urges people to do this “in the time that is now, and the time that is going to come”. At the same time, the song promotes a positive mental attitude since people should not “talk and think negative” about what is happening in Indonesia. Moreover, *Nationalism* proposes that instead of complaining, people should take action and “get ready” to “give everything” for Indonesia. In combination with the narrative that evolves on the visual level, the lyrics thus assign responsibility for curing the ills that prevent the coming into being of a modern Indonesian ‘utopia’ to Indonesian people themselves.

Not only the lyrics stimulate positivity and action, but the song also sonically articulates vivacity and optimism. *Nationalism* contrasts strongly with the daunting sound and feel of *Perdamaian*. In *Nationalism* this is achieved mainly through using mid-tempo beats and less-disorderly sounds. The use of voice is also pertinent. Like in *Perdamaian*, Armand calls out to an audience, however, this time not in desperation or anger, but in wholehearted (higher pitched) enthusiasm. In contrast to *Perdamaian*, which ‘threatened’ with destruction, *Nationalism* motivates people in a more positive way to take action.

The nationalist discourse that is constructed through the lyrics, and which frames ‘the Indonesian people’ themselves as being the solution to the nation’s ills, is strengthened by the video’s visuals. As can be observed from the screenshots below (Figures 34-39), the video’s visuals illustrate the lyrics as we see people saluting the flag. These shots position the people as subservient to a bigger national project. They literally serve the nation. Importantly, the visuals also further specify who are ‘the people’ that are expected to serve Indonesia.

Figures 34-39 show that ‘the people’ – the ‘you’ that is addressed in the lyrics – refers to a very diverse group of people. The video thereby suggests that it is the collective of the Indonesians that is being called upon. Figure 34 for instance shows a group of Muslims saluting the flag, while Figure 35 depicts a young boy saluting. In Figure 36, we see a man who is saluting the flag while wearing a T-shirt that reads ‘I Love RI (‘I love the Indonesian nation’). The man is filmed from a low angle, which makes us look up to him and which idealizes his love for Indonesia. In Figure 37, we see that women are also imagined to take part in the development of the nation. Figure 37 depicts a group of veiled women. Significantly, in contrast to the men, these women are not saluting. Instead, the images of the women are superimposed...
with an article that reads *Etika* (‘ethics’) and which shows the ‘right way’ for Muslim women to dress. This suggests that the way in which women ‘serve the nation’ is not through direct action, but through ‘guarding’ Muslim values and ethics. The ways in which Indonesians contribute to the development of the nation is thus highly gendered, an idea that I will explore further in chapter 5 where I discuss Islamic-themed films.

Figure 34       Figure 35          Figure 36

Figure 37       Figure 38          Figure 39

Figures 34-39: Screenshots of *Nationalism*

Figure 38 also includes *Gigi* in the group of people, as the band’s members are shown with the Indonesian flag superimposed over their faces. Figure 39 gives a concrete example of the ways in which Indonesians might serve the nation. Under the heading that announces “taxes for multimillionaires” a second heading is shown. This heading advises Indonesians to “not misuse the [economic] facilities that the nation offers” and in this way help the progress of the economy.

In *Nationalism*, a nationalist discourse is constructed that frames Indonesian people, and the action that must be taken by them, as the solution to the dilemmas that prevent an Islamic modern utopia from coming into being. In this way, a discourse is constructed in which ordinary people build the road to a modern Muslim nation and in which each and everyone can contribute. This discourse is in contrast to *Perdamaian* constructed via a ‘national imagination’. The ‘Islamic modern’ is in *Nationalism* imagined to be constructed through the nation’s very own
‘resources’. This suggests that the modernity that is aspired is above all an Indonesian modernity, one that is initiated by Indonesians themselves.

**Aspiring and actualizing an Islamic modern future**

The analysis of *Tuhan*, *Perdamaian*, and *Nationalism* shows that these songs together construct a narrative that critically imagines, negotiates, and contests Islamic modernities. This narrative tries to formulate an answer to the question what kinds of Islamic modernities lead, and do not lead, to the ‘right’ modern Islamic future. By constructing such a narrative, *Gigi*’s songs participate in different debates that revolve around Islam and modernity.

We have first seen that *Tuhan* constructs a discourse, which articulates that Islam is reconcilable with modernity. The song thereby challenges conservative voices that view modernity as unsuitable for Indonesia. Subsequently, we have seen how *Perdamaian* negotiates different Islamic modernities and mobilizes depictions of dystopia to construct a discourse that warns for a capitalist and consumerist style of modernity, which the video links to the United States. This style is specifically framed as irreconcilable with a Middle Eastern-inspired style of Islamic modernity. *Perdamaian* is however still unclear on how to reach a desired modernity. Here, *Nationalism* constructs a discourse that specifically holds Indonesian people responsible for actualizing a prosperous and healthy modern Indonesian nation.

As shown, *Gigi* imagines the modern future of the archipelago through a kind of imagination that is both national and transnational. This shows contra Appadurai (1996) that the nation still matters. Although *Gigi* gestures to Mecca, the band also emphasizes that ‘the national’ forms a very important part of a desired modernity. The modernity that *Gigi* imagines is thus composed of the confluence of both the national and the global.

At a moment when the course of modernity is publicly debated, *Gigi*’s songs thus constitute a site where experiments with Islamic modernities are taking place, and where critical politics are practiced. *Gigi*’s music is therefore not to be exempted from political contestations in the Indonesian society. The band shows that the post-New Order transformation of rock music from a working class, masculine construction into a commercialized, bourgeois, and imaged-centered construction does not necessarily de-politicize the genre. On the contrary, it can be seen as repoliticizing rock music in a post-authoritarian context. The analysis shows that in an increasingly image-centered environment, the polished visuality of *Gigi*’s music
videos plays a key role in the practice of politics.

This does not mean that Gigi’s rock sound is irrelevant or apolitical. By contrast, in Tuhan, the fast and chaotic feel that is established through the use of rhythm represents the sound of modernity, while in Perdamaian the anger and unruliness of Gigi’s rock music accommodates to, and strengthens, the discourse that discourages the ‘wrong’ style of modernity. In Nationalism the use of sound articulates optimism and calls out to an audience in wholehearted enthusiasm to get ready to serve Indonesia.

Another way in which rock music is re-politicized in the post-New Order period, is through its move into the realm of Islamic popular culture. By moving into this realm and targeting middle class Muslim youngsters, not only are those with purchasing power targeted. But also those who are considered to hold the modern future of the nation in their hands are addressed. In a time in which Indonesian Muslims increasingly consume abstract elements of Islam (ideas, concepts, thoughts) through Islamic-themed popular culture (Muzakki 2007), we need to look critically at the politics practiced by these artefacts.

In this context, Tuhan, Perdamaian, and Nationalism demonstrate how Islamic-themed popular culture articulates the cultural capacities that Appadurai (2004; 2013) has distinguished. The songs first attest to the ‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai 2013: 126). The songs point out what kinds of practices lead to the wrong kind of future. At the same time, the songs accommodate to desires and aspirations of better and ‘right’ modern lives. And as we have seen in the analysis of Nationalism, the song also offers people tools through which they are stimulated to accomplish such a life. Nationalism actively stimulates the making of a different social environment. It thereby attests to what Appadurai calls the social life of design (Appadurai 2013: 257).

By embodying these two capacities, Gigi’s songs demonstrate how Islamic-themed popular culture gives way to an ‘ethics of possibility’ (Appadurai 2013: 188). Gigi’s songs show how popular culture provides the tools to imagine, fantasize, and stimulate the coming into being of desired Islamic modernities. However, as particularly the analysis of Nationalism has shown, these constructions are never free from relations of power. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, popular culture is also subject to an ‘ethics of probability’. This is the ethic of the contemporary financed economy and it always tries to diminish risks.

Nationalism shows the dynamics between the ethics of possibility and the ethics of probability. On the one hand, the song encourages the coming into being of a prosperous modern Muslim nation. But on the other hand, it gives way to a
governmental narrative (cf. Foucault (1978a; 2007 [1977-1978], see also chapter 4), which stimulates people to forget about the structural causes that hamper the development of the nation – and which puts responsibility for successful modernization on the shoulders of people themselves.

These observations beg the question what relations of power are actually underpinning Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. How to view Islamic-themed popular cultural products? Do they constitute sites of creative experimentation and contestation, or do they indeed attempt to discipline people into responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply? And if so, how do both go together? How are an ethics of possibility and an ethics of probability balanced? I will turn to these questions in the next two chapters, which explore Islamic self-help books (chapter 4) and Islamic-themed cinema (chapter 5).
Chapter 4

‘How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?’: Self-help gurus and governmentality
Chapter 4
‘How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?’:
Self-help gurus and governmentality

The global Islamic revival of the last three decades has in Indonesia fragmented traditional forms of religious authority whilst producing new figures of public piety (Hoesterey 2012: 38). Amidst these new public voices are not only Muslim scholars and clerics, but also a new generation of pop culture preachers and self-help gurus who offer Islamic guidance to Indonesian Muslims (Ibidem).

Undoubtedly the most visible Indonesian pop prophet has been the flamboyant television preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar, affectionately known as Aa Gym. Gym pioneered Islamic self-help in Indonesia when he captured the hearts of millions in 2002 with his humorous television sermons. His sermons did not dwell on a hazy hereafter, but rather focused on the practicalities of everyday life (Elegant and Tedjasukmana 2002). Dubbed by the head of Indonesia’s Liberal Islam Network as the ‘Britney Spears of Islam’, Gym managed to transform himself into a celebrity and Islamic name brand (cf. Hoesterey 2007). His popularity rapidly skyrocketed: teenage girls and statesmen of various political leanings lined up for pictures while hundreds of thousands made pilgrimages to his Islamic school (Ibidem).

It was not only Gym’s charismatic personality that made him popular. He also smartly positioned himself in the moderate Islamic majority and promoted himself as an icon of Islamic modernity. Gym’s pop psychology promoted a twenty-first century Islam that embraced the benefits of technology and that aimed to advance Indonesian Muslims economically through merging modern-day practices of religion and business (Elegant and Tedjasukmana 2002). His approach was thus adeptly attuned to modernizing and Islamizing Indonesia.

Although Gym fell from public grace after he took the path of polygamy in 2006 (cf. Hoesterey 2007), his success paved the way for a new generation of Muslim self-help experts who were eager to follow in his footsteps. These gurus often lack official credentials in Islamic education. They are nevertheless accommodated by rapidly emerging Muslim publishing houses and organizations (e.g. FLP), if not by their own print company (e.g. Asma Nadia publishing house; Mujahidin Press). The books of these gurus quickly grew in popularity and it was not long until – in 2011 –
Islamic self-help became the leading category in the Indonesian publishing industry (Hoesterley 2012: 39).

The boom in Islamic self-help occurs at a moment when Indonesian Muslims are increasingly seeking control over the production and consumption of (printed) popular culture in the face of recurring moral panic about content that allegedly threatens Islamic values (Widodo 2008). To conservatives these ‘dangerous’ popular cultural products (e.g. tabloids) signal “an offensive and immoral process of westernization and secularization” in Indonesia (Widodo 2008). In this context, Islamic self-help books seem to serve a double function. First, they offer a profitable Islamic alternative to assumedly dangerous (printed) content. And second, Islamic self-help books provide readers with inspirational stories and practical manuals for living in a modernizing Indonesian society. The books offer their advice from an Islamic perspective, i.e. they link guidelines for practical everyday living with quotations and stories from religious texts such as the Quran and hadith (Widodo 2008).

But how do Islam and modernity intersect here? What kinds of modern Islamic selves are promoted? What politics are underpinning the construction of these selves? How do these politics differ across different types of books? How do these books attempt to govern readers?

In this chapter, I explore these questions through conducting a discourse analysis of three Islamic self-help books that are written by three different motivational writers and that are aimed at different audiences: families, entrepreneurs, and (young) women. By drawing on Michel Foucault’s (1978a; 2007 [1977-1978]) notion of governmentality, I propose that the books promote and construct specific modern Islamic subjects that are fit to participate in (Islamic) modernities. These subjects are not just gesturing towards a distant modern future. Rather they point our gaze back to the disputes and contradictions that exist in present Indonesian society. The books encourage the construction of subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the (unequal) spread of wealth, while actively negotiating cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

Despite its current omnipresence in our culture, the genre of self-help has received relatively little scholarly attention. As Martha Cheng (2008) observes, researchers who did analyze self-help books have mostly employed a macro-level and quantitative approach (Cheng 2008: 2). Studying large corpora (e.g. 300 books, Dolby 2005) these scholars have identified common characteristics of self-help and considered the effects these books have on people, culture, and society (e.g. Lancaster and Stead 2005; Kyouz and Humphreys 1997; Gellatly, J. et al 2007;
Adamsen and Rasmussen 2001; Orleans, C. T. et al 1991). While valuably mapping the self-help genre, these studies lack a contextualized in-depth analysis of the strategies and politics that underpin the construction of new selves (but see Starker 1989; Cowlishaw 2001; Rimke 2000; Cheng 2008; Illouz 2008). My study contributes to this body of work by conducting a close reading of three self-help books, thereby paying particular attention to the tactics that underpin the promotion of modern subjects.

When looking at research that has used a similar approach to analyze self-help books, we can observe that the majority of the studies have focused on American self-help literature (cf. Cowlishaw 2001; Illouz 2007; 2008; Cheng 2008; Rimke 2000). Zooming in on American self-help, Cheng asserts: “traditional American values of individualism, self-improvement, and hard work have supported the publication and the popularity since our country’s inception” (Cheng 2008: 2). The American self-help industry thrives, because the contents of the books feed into the American Dream. But how are these values articulated and appropriated in a different cultural context? How do Indonesian Islamic self-help books compare to their American counterparts? Do they reflect the same values? And do they use the same rhetorical strategies? By exploring these questions, my analysis adds an Indonesian perspective to the study of self-help books.

My focus on Indonesian Islamic self-help books also challenges the persistent Eurocentrism and secularism in governmentality studies. Although the range of studies of governmentality is very diverse – studies are marked by various disciplinary orientations and focus on different empirical objects (Bröckling, Krassmann and Lemke 2011: 9-11; Kipnis 2008: 277) – they have largely failed to look at non-Western contexts (but see Chong 2010; Thongchai 1994; Rudnyckyj 2004). Studying self-help in an Indonesian context might reveal different (Indonesian) forms and tactics of governance.

My study also addresses the dearth of research in governmentality studies on questions of religion (but see Carrette 1991; 2000; Garmany 2010; Bendle 2002). As Jeff Garmany (2010) points out, Foucault was captivated by religion, writing about the Church that it is “a superb instrument of power for itself. Entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on, it is superb!” (Foucault 1991: 107, cited in Garmany 2010: 908). In his efforts to show how power is not uniform, but is defined by the specific points through which it passes, Foucault was often drawn to questions of faith, seeing in religion – with its practices and institutions – a ‘superb’ instrument of power (908). Yet, while Foucault’s works on sexuality, psychiatry, medicine, and prisons have inspired many
scholars, his fascination with religion and Christianity has often been overlooked. Extending Foucault’s discussion of governmentality to an Indonesian Islamic context addresses this gap. How do Islam and governmentality go together? How is governmentality produced through Islam? What ‘Islamic’ modes of governmentality allow for which technologies of the self?

**Islamic self-help books**

A stroll through the Gramedia bookshop in the Malioboro Mal in downtown Yogyakarta affirms the flourishing market for the consumption of self-help books in Indonesia. The large *pengembangan diri* (self-development) section dominates the shop (Figure 1), while pillars that promote the top ten-bestselling self-help books are placed throughout the shop (Figures 2-3). Although the bulk of the self-help books are found in the *pengembangan diri* section, they are also on display in other sections, such as ‘business’ ‘management’, ‘Islam’, ‘religion’, and ‘family’. Self-help books with an Islamic theme are not only found in the ‘self-development’, or ‘Islamic’ section, but across all categories. One of the reasons for this apparent categorical chaos is the absence of established criteria for including books in the self-help category.

![Figure 1: The large *pengembangan diri* ('self-development') section in Gramedia, Yogyakarta](image-url)
Figures 2-3: (Left) The self-development section, (Right) one of the pillars advertising (Islamic) self-help books

Because of this lack of criteria, scholars studying self-help books have used rather broad definitions to select their corpus (Cheng 2008: 2). Sandra Dolby (2005) for instance defines self-help books as “[books] written with the aim of enlightening readers about some negative effects of our culture and worldview, and suggesting new attitudes and practices that might lead them to more satisfying and more effective lives” (Dolby 2005: 38, cited in Cheng 2008: 2). Although a precise definition of self-help books is lacking, two common characteristics are identified. First, the self-help genre as a non-academic genre usually eschews using reliable data. It instead relies on rhetorical devices such as personal narratives, parables, and meta-commentary to convey its message. And second, self-help books respond to human and social concerns in a specific period of time (Cheng 2008: 2).

For this study, Dolby’s (2005) definition and the above-mentioned characteristics were used as the first criteria in the selection of a corpus. Three books are selected as case studies. The first book, Wonderful Family (2012), written by Cahyadi Takariawan, is a book for achieving a harmonious Islamic family life. The second book selected here is Rasullulah’s Business School (2011) by Ustadz Abdullah Richmoslem and Prof. Laode Masihu Kamaluddin. This book, aimed at prospective entrepreneurs and businessmen, promises to teach you: “(1) how to transform
poorness into wealth and create a brave pious mind; (2) how to build a business empire worth billions with zero capital, just like Prophet Muhammad; and (3) how to become a Muslim billionaire like the Prophet [as advertised on the book’s cover].” The last book is *Twitografi Asma Nadia* (2011) by the popular female Muslim writer Asma Nadia. The book that is aimed at (young) women is a ‘Twittergraphy’. It contains a collection of inspirational tweets that Nadia posted on her widely followed Twitter-account @asmanadia. These tweets are grouped into topics that concern young Muslims, such as ‘Muslim fashion’, ‘love and boyfriends’, ‘diets and sports’, and ‘travelling Muslims’.

I select these three books for two reasons. First, they represent the three largest sub-categories of self-help literature, family life, business, and (young) women’s concerns. Second, the books revolve around different ‘content-dimensions’ and in this way represent different types of self-help books that are on the market in Indonesia. Steven Starker (2002) distinguished three pairs of ‘content dimensions’ to describe different types of self-help books (Starker 2002). Although Starker based his dimensions on American self-help books, I found the same kinds of dimensions in Indonesian self-help literature and I therefore think that these dimensions provide a useful vocabulary to talk about self-help.

The first pair Starker identifies is ‘anecdotal – informational’. Anecdotal self-help books are heavily infused with humorous or biographical incidents. Other books are more informational. They depend on empirical data and facts to support their perspectives (Starker 2002: 9). The second pair is ‘descriptive – prescriptive’. Self-help books often prescribe clear rules or directions for behavior. There are however also works that offer a number of possible procedures for accomplishing a goal, leaving the reader free to choose among alternatives (Ibidem). The last pair, ‘closed – open system’, describes a work’s philosophy. A book with a closed system presents a self-contained philosophy, which resists interaction with other perspectives. An open system encourages access to new information (9-10). For Starker, these three pairs are not rigid categories. He observes that books often fuse dimensions.

The books selected for this study revolve around these different dimensions. *Wonderful Family* is informational and descriptive, while offering an open philosophy. *Rasullulah’s Business School* is informational, provides a closed system, and is prescriptive. *Twitografi Asma Nadia* is anecdotal, offers an open system, and combines a prescriptive with a descriptive style. By selecting these books, a study of governmental tactics across different types of self-help works is enabled.

The process of selection was challenging. Together with Dana, an employee of
the Gramedia bookshop in the Malioboro Mal (one of the largest bookshops in Yogyakarta), I browsed through more than one hundred pengembangan diri books. We created a pool of twenty-eight books that were concerned with (young) women’s concerns, family life, and business, and that revolved around the different content-dimensions. From this pool of relevant books, I selected *Wonderful Family*, *Rasullulah’s Business School*, and *Twitografi Asma Nadia*. Although official sales numbers for the selected books were inaccessible, even for store-staff, these books are written by known authors and can therefore be expected to sell well. For this reason I selected these three books. As Dana explained, sales numbers are obscured because “it is of crucial importance that every self-help book must be believed to be a best seller. The books are branded as such, so that people feel no shame in buying them. They should believe they are not the only ones with the problem.” (conversation with Dana, Gramedia bookshop employee, May 2012)

**Governmentality, self-help and religion**

*Wonderful Family*, *Rasullulah’s Business School*, and *Twitografi Asma Nadia* are analyzed through a Foucauldian framework. Particularly Foucault’s notion of governmentality and his work on technologies of the self offer me a generative lens through which to apprehend the discursive means by which these self-help books elicit modern Islamic subjects.

In Foucault’s writings, the term ‘governmentality’ (gouvernementalité) first surfaces in the Collège de France lectures of 1977-1979. The term is derived from the French adjective gouvernemental, and is used by Foucault to describe a range of forms of action aimed in a complex way at steering individuals and collectives (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 1).

Foucault’s interest in studying government signals a refinement of his analysis of power, and particularly of his analysis of disciplinary power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault describes how sovereign power – marked by the theatrical spectacle of public executions of the criminal bodies (Foucault 1975: 9) – transforms into disciplinary power. In disciplinary power, the body is not directly punished, but is cast as “a useful and intelligible body […] at the center of which reigns the notion of ‘docility’, which joins the analyzable body to the manipulable body.” (136) Foucault observes that these “subjected and practiced bodies” (138) are a cost-efficient way to produce effects in the social body at large. They function to “increase the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminish these
same forces (in political terms of obedience).“ (138)

In the mid-1970s, Foucault observes that this conception of power has two problems. First, it does not consider the more comprehensive processes of subjectification. It does not do justice to the double character of subjectification as a practice of subjugation and a form of self-constitution (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 1-2). Second, focusing on institutions like the hospital and the prison turned out to be insufficient (Ibidem). Power is not only located in specific institutions, but “power is everywhere; not because it engulfs everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” (Foucault 1978b: 93)

What was needed was a double expansion of the analytic apparatus (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 2). In ‘Security, Territory, Population’ (2008a [1977-1978]), Foucault elaborated the notion of ‘government’, which accounted for these two problems. This concept of government also allowed Foucault to expand his analysis to involve biopower as a new mode of power, and to conceptualize ‘biopolitics’ as a particular modern notion of governmental reason (for an elaboration of biopolitics see chapter 5).

Foucault traces this notion of government in religious history. For Foucault, modern political power is the result of a complex linkage between political power and what he calls ‘pastoral power’. Introduced through the Christian Church, pastoral power underpins our modern technologies of governance. To explain his idea of pastoral power, Foucault (2007 [1977-1978]) draws a parallel between a shepherd and a pastor. Much like the relationship between a shepherd and a flock, pastoral power is defined by beneficence and care, and its objective is the salvation of the multiplicity (Garmany 2010: 910). As Foucault writes, the salvation that must be assured to the flock has a very precise meaning in the theme of pastoral power:

Salvation is first of all essentially subsistence. […] The shepherd is someone who feeds and who feeds directly, or at any rate, he is someone who feeds the flock first by leading it to good pastures, and then by making sure that the animals eat and are properly fed. Pastoral power is a power of care. It looks after the flock, it looks after the individuals of the flock, it sees to it that the sheep do not suffer, it goes in search of those that have strayed of course, and it treats those that are injured. (Foucault 2007 [1977-1978]: 172)

Pastoral power is thus an individualizing power that is based on the pastor’s responsibilities to ‘the flock’ – in their knowledge, in their vigilance, and in their care for each individual. Simultaneously, it is based on each member’s obedience to the pastor – to practice self-care, to maintain self-awareness, and to communicate and
confess this knowledge to the pastor (Garmany 2010: 910). Hence, pastoral authority does not seek to rule over the flock, rather it seeks to affect and induce the flock, so that a certain set of behavior is produced that helps to achieve salvation. Pastoral power thus governs souls: their individual instruction and guidance takes place in view of otherworldly salvation (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 3).

For Foucault, pastoral power is a prelude to governmentality in two ways:

First, it is the prelude through the procedures peculiar to the pastorate, through the way in which, fundamentally, it does not purely and simply put the principles of salvation, law, and truth into play, but rather, through all these kinds of diagonals, it establishes other types of relationships under the law, salvation, and truth. […] And it is also a prelude to governmentality through the constitution of a specific subject, of a subject whose merits are analytically identified, who is subjected in continuous networks of obedience, and who is subjectified (subjectivité) through the compulsory extraction of truth. (Foucault 2007 [1977-1978]: 239-240).

In accord with their Christian pastoral origins, today’s governmental practices are focused on the steering and conducting of individuals, just as they were aimed originally aimed at the individual’s conscience and personal salvation (Balke 2011: 88). Modern governance was born out of an expansion and secularization of the pastoral techniques that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This secularization eventually produced forms of subjectification from which the modern state and capitalist society could later develop (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 3). As Foucault writes:

We can say that Christian pastorship has introduced a game that neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews imagined. It is a strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, and self-identity – a game that seems to have nothing to do with the game of the city surviving through the sacrifice of the citizens. Our societies proved to be really demonic since they happened to combine those two games – the city-citizen game and the shepherd-flock game – in what we call the modern states. (Foucault 2000: 311).

To explain how modern states govern, Foucault cites a sentence from the French writer Guillaume de La Perrière: “Government is the right disposition (disposer) of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end.” (de La Perrière, cited in Foucault 2008a [1977-1978]: 96) What interests Foucault in this sentence are the ‘things’ that
government governs. Foucault observes that in the eighteenth century:

Government is not related to the territory, but to a sort of complex of men and things. The things government must be concerned about [...] are men in their relationships, bonds and complex involvement with things like wealth, resources, means of subsistence, and, of course, the territory with its borders, qualities, climate, dryness, fertility, and so on. ‘Things’ are men in their relationships with things like customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking. Finally they are men in their relationships with things like accidents, misfortunes, famine, epidemics, and death. (Foucault 2008a [1977-1978]: 96)

Government is thus concerned with governing men in their relationships to a wide range of things. But de La Perrière’s sentence also indicates that government has a specific purpose. It arranges these ‘things’ for a ‘suitable end’. And whereas for sovereign power the end was obedience to the law (98), the end for this type of modern government comprises something else. The end here must be suitable for each of the things that are being governed (Ibidem). This implies two things:

[It implies] first of all, a plurality of specific ends. For example, the government will have to ensure that the greatest possible amount of wealth is produced, that the people are provided with sufficient means of subsistence, and that the population can increase. So the objective of government will be a series of specific finalities (99).

[Second] one will arrange (disposer) things to achieve these different ends. This word disposer is important because, what enabled sovereignty to achieve its aim of obedience to the laws, was the law itself; law and sovereignty were absolutely united. Here, on the contrary, it is not a matter of imposing law on men, but on the disposition of things, that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, or, of as far as possible employing laws as tactics; arranging things so that this or that end may be achieved through a certain number of means (99).

Whereas the end of sovereignty is internal to itself and gets its instruments from itself in the form of laws, the end of modern government is internal to the things it directs. And the instruments of government are not laws, but diverse tactics (99). These tactics are targeted at the population, not just to govern, but also “to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health.” (Ibidem) Effects of government are thus deemed simultaneously beneficial for an individual, a collectivity, and a state. The effects of government do not create responsible people, but responsible citizens.
What is important is that the instruments that government uses to govern are immanent to the population. Instruments are acting directly on the population through campaigns, or, indirectly through techniques that, without people being aware of it, stimulate the birth rate, or direct the flows of population to this or that region or activity (105). The population is the end and the instrument of government. As Foucault writes:

[The population] is the subject of needs and aspirations, but also the object of government manipulation; vis-à-vis government, [population] is both aware of what it wants and unaware of what is being done to it. (105)

The needs and aspirations of people here thus become the target and the instrument of the government of populations. For Foucault this leads to the birth of “new tactics and techniques” of governance (106).

The significance of this notion of government in Foucault’s work lies in the mediating function he ascribes to it: it mediates between power and subjectivity. Practices of government generate subjects, they subjectivate by invoking and legitimizing certain images of the self while excluding others. To become a subject always means actualizing certain subject positions and dispensing with others; it means being addressed in a certain way as a subject, understanding oneself as a subject, and working on oneself in alignment with this self-understanding (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 14). But subjects are not merely effects of the exercise of power, they also possess self-will and agency; they too desire a ‘suitable end’. This relationship between power and subjectivity, where power and freedom are present at the same time makes it possible to study how techniques of rule are tied to ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault 1988), that is, how forms of political government have recourse to the “processes by which the individual acts upon himself“ (Foucault 1993: 203, cited in Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 2).

These ‘technologies of the self’ allow individuals to effect by their own means a certain number of operations on their bodies, minds, and lifestyles, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain quality of life. For Foucault, techniques involve “modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills, but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.” (Foucault 1997: 225) These technologies of the self are not only distributed through state institutions. Proceeding from the idea that “power is everywhere” (Foucault 1978b: 93), Foucault contends that not only governments govern (Rimke 2010: 71). Scholars of governmentality have therefore looked beyond
the formal institutions of government to emphasize the everyday techniques through which individuals organize and govern themselves as an implicit condition of their citizenship (Ouellette and Hay 2008: 473). It is today through socio-cultural intermediaries such as schools, but also via popular media, that these technologies circulate in a highly dispersed fashion (Ibidem).

Self-help books too are part of this mix. Self-help – an assumedly voluntary activity – encompasses technologies of the self that assist citizens “who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves” (Rose 1996: 45) and in this way contribute to the maintenance and progress of the nation-state. These technologies operate not so much by way of negative restriction, but by way of productive application: the self-helper must be encouraged and skilled in his or her own subjection. In this way, the self-help genre can contribute to the invention of subjects who are psychologically ‘healthy’ inasmuch as they are governable, responsible, and self-regulating (Rimke 2010: 63).

But what kinds of technologies of the self do Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia offer? What are the ‘things’ that are arranged? And what comprises the ‘suitable ends’? In my study, I will zoom in on these questions and suggest that self-help books practice a form of modern government. The books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in an Indonesian modern nation. Through the construction of these citizen-subjects, the books seek to govern and control a larger modern nation.

Because governmental practices are never stable, attempts to analyze them must be contextual. My focus here is on present day Indonesia. While governmentality applies to different historical periods and different regimes of power, it is – because of its close links to neoliberalism – most often used in reference to the type of governance that characterizes advanced democratic liberal societies.

But when, following Aihwa Ong (2006), we see neoliberalism not as a form of predatory capitalism with adverse effects on the Global South or as a simple “code word for America’s overweening power” (Ong 2006: 1), but as “a technology of government” (3), then a range of non-Western contexts open up to the study of governmental practices.

In Neoliberalism as Exception (2006), Aihwa Ong argues that modalities that view neoliberalism as the latest stage of capitalist global structural and hegemonic domination (cf. Gill 1995), construct a framework of a neoliberal North versus a South under siege (12). Ong suggests that this framework has spawned two schools of thought in anthropology: “The first identifies a Northern ‘culture of neoliberalism’
that engenders Southern responses, including occult economies, messianic movements, and other social upheavals. The second seeks to identify ‘neoliberal states’ that centralize capital and monopoly power ‘at the global level’” (12). In this last view, the ‘neoliberal state’ is often invoked as an ideal-type and is thereby unwittingly presented as an entity of singularity (Ibidem).

Ong observes how these typological approaches based on a simple geographical North-South axis, or a typology of nation-states, are challenged by the dynamic and novel combinations of neoliberal interventions and Asian political cultures. Today we find neoliberal interventions in liberal democracies as well as in postcolonial, authoritarian, and postsocialist situations in East and Southeast Asia. (3) In these locations, states are making exceptions to their usual practices of governing in order to position themselves to compete in the global economy. Rather than taking neoliberalism “as a tidal wave of market driven phenomena that sweeps from dominant countries to smaller ones” (12), Ong proposes an alternative view of neoliberalism as an extraordinarily malleable technology of governing that is taken up in different ways by different regimes, be they authoritarian, postcolonial, democratic, or postsocialist. For Ong, neoliberalism as a malleable technology of government is a profoundly active way of rationalizing governing and self-governing in order to ‘optimize’ (3).

As an array of techniques centered on the optimization of life, neoliberalism migrates from site to site and interacts with various assemblages that cannot be analytically reduced to cases of a uniform global condition of ‘Neoliberalism’ writ large (14). Neoliberalism, as an ethos of self-governing, encounters and articulates other ethical regimes in particular contexts. In Southeast Asia the neoliberal exception in an Islamic public sphere for instance catalyzes debates over female virtue (9). Ulamas (Muslim scholars) often resist the new autonomy of working women, while feminists claim a kind of gender equality within the limits of Islam. Contrary to the perception that transnational humanitarianism replaces situated ethics, questions of status and morality are problematized and resolved in particular milieus shaped by economic rationality, religious norms, and citizenship values. (Ibidem)

If we look at Indonesia, we see that neoliberalism as an ethos of self-governing and self-reliance at first sight seems to run counter to the basic premise of the Indonesian ideology as contained in the country’s constitution. Article 33.1 of the constitution for instance states that the Indonesian economy should be based on the family (kekeluargaan) or the mutual assistance principle. Furthermore, article 33.3 stipulates that “land, water and natural resources […] shall be controlled by the state
and shall be used for the greatest prosperity of the people”, while article 33.2 claims that “production branches which are important for the state and which affect the livelihood of the public, shall be controlled by the state” (Chandra 2011: iii). Despite this more socialist approach, economic liberalization has been prevalent throughout the post-Reformasi era (Chandra 2011: iv). Almost all post-New Order governments have pursued neoliberal principles. Both external factors (e.g. the changing global and regional economic environment) and internal factors (e.g. protests against the protectionist policies that made for corruption and nepotism during the New Order) are central to the current promotion of neoliberalism as an optimizing technology of government.

Neoliberalism as an ethos of self-government is thus not confined to the milieus of advanced liberal democracies. However, it has barely been investigated outside North Atlantic situations (Ong 2006: 14). If we look at Islamic Indonesia, what kinds of self-government can we distinguish? What kinds of modern Islamic subjects are promoted through Indonesian Islamic self-help books? How do Islam and governmentality go together? How is governmentality produced through Islam?

By exploring questions of Islam, modernity, and governance my study contributes to governmentality studies, which has focused on a wide range of topics (cf. Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011: 14), but which has largely ignored questions of religion (but see Carrette 1991; 2000; Garmany 2010; Bendle 2002). This lack of studies on governmentality and religion is remarkable since Foucault traces the roots of governmentality in religious history. But as Jeremy Carrette (2000) asserts, Foucault’s engagement with religion goes further than recognizing the historical relationship between the Christian pastorate and the techniques of modern governance (Carrette 2000: 135-136). For Carrette, Foucault’s interest in the ‘new relations of power’ was also very much part of his overall strategy to place religion within the framework of governmentality (Carrette 2000: 136; Garmany 2010: 910). Foucault was interested in highlighting how these regimes of power and technologies of the self were part of religious discourse; he was interested in showing the inescapable political techniques of religion (Ibidem). Furthermore, as Carrette writes, religion is an essential to Foucault’s concept of governmentality itself:

Foucault appears to collapse the ‘spiritual’, the ‘ethical’, and the ‘political’ into a single trajectory of ‘truth’, ‘subjectivity’, and ‘power’, a strategy, which can only be appreciated by locating it within the original 1978 framework of ‘governmentality’. The notion of ‘governmentality’ holds together the ‘ethical’, ‘spiritual’, and ‘political’ inside a single
framework, outside of which the terms become dislocated and redundant by being fused together (Carrette 2000: 136, cited in Garmany 2010: 910).

In this understanding of governmentality, spiritual, ethical, and political moments thus intersect in the production of truth, subjectivity, and power (Garmany 2010: 910).

The close connections between governmentality and religion raise a number of questions for my study of Islamic self-help books. How are governmental practices in Islamic self-help books not secularized, but Islamized? How do the modern Muslim selves that Islamic self-help books promote form the basis for the construction of ideal Muslim subjects – and by extension ideal Muslim citizens? How does governmentality operate through Islam to discipline and affect subjects and practices, and what are the ramifications of this for individuals? What ‘Islamic’ modes of governmentality allow for which technologies of the self? These questions will be central to the following analysis of Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia.

**Wonderful Family: the keluarga sakinah as the foundation of an Islamic modernity**

A considerate part of Indonesian Islamic self-help books focuses on the improvement of family life. I here focus on Wonderful Family (2012). This book (Figure 4), written by Cahyadi Takariawan, offers tips to achieve a keluarga sakinah, a harmonious Islamic family. Takariawan or Ustadz Pak Cah (Islamic teacher Cah) as he is sometimes called, is a Muslim self-help writer from Central Java. In addition to his job as a writer, Takariawan is also a Jogja Family Center trainer and counselor. He has written over forty (self-help) books. While most of his books revolve around the topic of family life, his works also include da’wah books, i.e. works that summon people to Islam. To explain his ideas of ‘the ideal Muslim family’ in Wonderful Family, Takariawan often draws on his professional experience as a counselor. He also includes personal anecdotes about his own family. In Starker’s (2002) terms, the book thus fuses informational and anecdotal dimensions.

When analyzing the tools that in Wonderful Family facilitate and rationalize the construction of the ideal family, two different types of governance are identified: (1) a direct mode that explicitly frames the progress of the Indonesian nation as a responsibility of the family and (2) more indirect tactics that work through
technologies of the self. As I suggest below, both tactics work in favor of an overarching technology of responsibilization that helps the state reduce the effort it puts into governing.

Figure 4: Wonderful Family (2012)

In Wonderful Family, the responsibility for the nation’s future is first located in the intimate domain of the family by the use a rather direct rhetoric. This rhetoric is constructed through both written language and visual illustrations. As Takariawan writes in the opening sentences of the book: “families that produce good values play a crucial role in the progress of the Indonesian society, the nation, and the state” (Wonderful Family: ix-x). And as he later claims: “The family is first and foremost an educational institution that shapes the identity of the nation. Especially the children function as important tools for successful national development. They should therefore be imprinted with a strong character that reflects the nation’s identity.” (Wonderful Family: 229) These statements that link the development of the nation to the well being of the family attempt to instil in the self-helper a sense of responsibility. Claims like these are repeatedly used throughout the book (e.g. see pages: ix-x; 12; 14-16; 20; 225-226; 229; 230-231).

In addition to this explicit responsibilization through written language, the book also mobilizes instructive visuals to construct this disciplinary discourse. The book’s images work to specify the responsible family member as both a responsible modern citizen and as a responsible Muslim citizen. Figures 5 and 6 provide examples. Figure 5 is found in the book’s introduction in which the importance of the family is explained. The drawing depicts a number of buildings standing
alongside a road, while the sun shines cheerfully. The tallest building is however collapsing and threatens to destroy the other (lower) buildings. The drawing comes with the text: “High-rise buildings must be accompanied by a strong foundation in the earth. If the foundation is fragile, the buildings will collapse”. The high-rise buildings here function as a symbol of Indonesia’s current project of modernization, whereas the “strong foundation in the earth” stands for the family. In this image, the family is held responsible for a stable and successful project of modernization. A responsible family member is thus responsible modern citizen. In this way, Figure 5 emphasizes the importance of kekeluargaan – the aforementioned idea that the Indonesian economy and its development should be based on the family.

Figure 5: “High rise buildings must be accompanied by a strong foundation in the earth. If the foundation is fragile, the buildings will collapse.” (Wonderful Family: 14)

Figure 6: “The number one function of the family is to provide education for children so that they can later become religious people that are useful to the society, the nation, and the state.” (Wonderful Family: 224)
Figure 6 shows how in Wonderful Family the responsible family member is also constructed as a responsible Muslim citizen. The drawing depicts a Muslim family – recognizably dressed as such – in a domestic setting. The parents are watching television, while the children are reading a book. The text that accompanies the image reads: “The number one function of the family is to provide education for children so that they can later become faithful people who are useful to the society, the nation, and the state.” This image points at the obligation of parents to actively teach and instill in their children good Islamic values – and not be self-centered and watch television – so that the future of the nation is safe in the hands of the next generation of Muslim citizens. We can read these good values as good Islamic values when considering that it is in Wonderful Family a specific family that is imagined to safeguard the nation’s future, namely keluarga sakinah. This is a family based on the Islamic ‘sakinah, mawadah wa rahmah’ as it is described in Surat Ar-Rum: 21. In Takariawan own words, the keluarga sakinah is a family “filled with harmony and happiness, where there is no violence or destruction […] and that is blessed and protected by Allah.” (Wonderful Family 2012: 1; 7)

More interesting than the direct disciplinary discourse is the indirect mode of governance that is also at work in the book. This mode operates through technologies of the self. Wonderful Family promotes at least two sets of technologies that assist self-helpers to improve the quality of (family) life. These are (1) technologies that work to neutralize regional and ethnic differences and (2) technologies of gratitude and positivity. Through these technologies, readers are encouraged and skilled to manage the problems (Figure 7) they encounter in trying to achieve and preserve a keluarga sakinah.

Figure 7: “Family conflicts are part of life. Husbands and wives should have the skills to manage conflicts and resolve problems in a mature way.” (Wonderful Family: 176)
Before discussing these technologies, it is important to note that in *Wonderful Family* these technologies – promoted to readers as self-help tools – are imbued with authority through the construction of the author-as-expert. Different tactics are used to construct the author as an expert. First, Takariawan repeatedly uses the rhetorical device of the personal narrative to frame himself as an expert on family life. On the first pages, Takariawan shares that he has been married for twenty years and that he hopes that this experience will help others to reach his state of happiness (*Wonderful Family*: viii). Takariawan often mentions his own twenty-year milestone as evidence of the success of his methods (e.g. see pages: viii-ix; xi-xvi; 71). Takariawan’s expertise is confirmed through the use of photographs. Each chapter of *Wonderful Family* starts with a photo spread that depicts Takariawan with his own family and that attests to his family skills and happiness (Figures 8-11). Takariawan also uses other stories than his own as examples. These are often stories that he knows through his work as a counselor for the Jogja Family Center and that construct him not only as a personal expert, but also as a professional expert (e.g. see pages: 54; 57; 91-92; 103; 129; 132; 133). In contrast to the construction of the author-as-expert, the reader is framed as unknowing through the belittling tone of the book and the almost childlike aesthetics (Figures 5-7).

![Figures 8-11: happy family pictures of the author with his wife and child](image-url)
The first set of technologies consists of what I call ‘technologies that neutralize regional and ethnic differences’. Indonesia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country that acknowledges six different religions, that is home to over a thousand distinct ethnic groups, and that lists more than seven hundred languages (Aspinall 2010). Because of this sheer diversity, the chance of finding a partner with a different ethnic and cultural background is high. And since Muslims often find their partners through arranged marriages, problems might be encountered when they move in together after the wedding ceremony.

It is here that Wonderful Family offers help. Despite there being many problems one might encounter at the start of a marriage – especially in a marriage in which the partners barely know each other – Wonderful Family focuses almost exclusively on problems that are assumedly caused by the different ethnic backgrounds of both partners. Chapter 6, which is dedicated to these problems, opens with the following fictional story of Narti and Hakam:

Narti is very surprised by the temperament of Hakam, the man she just married. Narti, who was born in a very Javanese cultural setting, was raised by a family that paid close attention to Javanese etiquettes. Speaking softly in Kromo Inggil, she does not use direct language to express herself, but instead relies on subtle symbolic expressions.

Hakam on the other hand was born and raised in Sulawesi and is thus very Sulawesian. Hakam is used to saying everything as it is. Hence, he does not use symbolic expressions to make his desires known (Wonderful Family: 120).

In this introduction Narti and Hakam’s different communicative patterns are essentialistically linked to their ethnicity. And as the story continues this becomes a problem for these newlyweds:

Every morning Narti is shocked by the way Hakam orders her to do things: “Make me tea!“; “Make me fried rice!”, Hakam commands.

Narti tried to be patient and accept the situation, but after a few months she cannot take it anymore. “In the house where I grew up, no one talks to the other person like this”, Narti says. “I am your wife. It is okay to ask me something, but when you do, please say ‘please’”. “Please, could you make me some tea, honey? […] And try to be more subtle: what a delicious tea you made me honey, I know you made it with love, would you like to make me tea this morning, my love?”
But Hakam becomes angry when he hears what Narti says. He feels that she offends him because of his ethnic background. He shouts: “That is how you Javanese do it! I am from Sulawesi, I cannot ‘Javanize’ myself, this is who I am”. With an emotional voice Narti replies: “That is how you do it in Sulawesi, but I am Javanese, I cannot become someone from Sulawesi” (Wonderful Family: 120-121).

Hence, the story ends in an unproductive situation. Hakam and Narti cannot move forward: their different ethnic backgrounds are at the core of their conflict and neither of them is capable of solving the situation. Before offering self-helpers the tools to overcome problems of this kind, Takariawan first emphasizes how regional culture matters:

Regional culture shapes a person’s communication patterns. It greatly affects our character and temperament. Therefore, Indonesians are different from Arabs and [...] batak are different from Javanese (Wonderful Family: 124).

But, as he advises:

It is not productive nor important to say “I’m Javanese, Batak, Bugis, Dayak, Sundanese, Ambose, Madurese”. Husband and wife form an unity in a holy marriage. Therefore, it is irrelevant to point at different ethnic backgrounds. There is no need to Javanize someone from Sulawesi and the other way around. Differences are good, but what we need are attempts to better understand each other and the skills to adjust to the partner. (Wonderful Family: 121)

In Wonderful Family, ethnic differences are constructed as the main source of conflicts between husband and wife (for more examples see Wonderful Family: 122-123). But, as can be read from the last quote, ethnicity may never be the source of conflict in a marriage. To neutralize ethnic differences and thus prevent conflicts between husband and wife, Takariawan offers readers specific self-help tools. These can be subsumed as tools of ‘multicultural immersion and interaction’. These tools claim that we can understand each other better when we keenly try to understand each other’s perspectives. As Takariawan explains:

We must actively attempt to meet, interact, and talk to people with other ethnic and cultural backgrounds to understand their perspective. Our communicative map and skills will then fuse with theirs, our skills will be enriched and we will develop new habits for
interaction with others and ultimately our marriage and family life will benefit from it (Wonderful Family: 125).

To improve multicultural communication, Wonderful Family offers readers a number of techniques: know and be aware of the topics that might be sensitive or offensive to the person that has a different ethnic background; be empathetic and be a good listener; pay attention to non-verbal language, because in some regions these are of high significance; in any case convey your message subtly and kindly; select the right place, atmosphere, and moment for interaction (Wonderful Family: 155-159).

The harmonious keluarga sakinah that the reader is supposed to achieve through these tips has broader significance in Indonesia today. For more than a decade, Indonesia has had a reputation of being afflicted by serious ethnic and communal conflict. Anti-Chinese riots for instance accompanied the protests that helped to bring down President Suharto, while in the early years of the transition to democracy there were grim episodes of ethnic violence in many provinces. In Kalimantan, ethnic Madurese settlers were killed and driven from their homes; communal wars took place in Maluku and Central Sulawesi, and there was violence associated with ethno-nationalist mobilization in Aceh and Papua. In this context, Wonderful Family promotes technologies of the self through which people cannot only improve their family life, but that simultaneously encourage people to become aware of, and deal with, ethnic and regional differences. The family skills promoted in the book thus function in a larger project of maintaining social stability and preventing new conflicts.

The social-conscious self that is here promoted differs significantly from the self that is promoted in the American self-help books that were studied by Heidi Marie Rimke (2010) and Eva Illouz (2008). Rimke (2010) writes that (American) self-help literature “exalts the individual over the social” (62); “promotes […] the idea that a good citizen cares best for himself by evading or denying social relations” (61); and “undermine[s] collective formations and the essential interdependencies of selves” (70). Rimke sees these characteristics as consistent with “the political rationalities promoted in advanced liberal societies” (62). In a similar vein, Eva Illouz (2008) observes that (American) self-help creates a self “that has withdrawn inside its own empty shell” (2). Self-help “has made us abandon the great realms of citizenship and politics and cannot provide us with an intelligible way of linking the private self to the public sphere, because it has emptied the self of its communal and political content, replacing this content with a narcissistic self-concern.” (Ibidem) While Wonderful Family promotes self-concern, the self that is promoted in the book is not
the “hyper-individualistic” self (Rimke 2010: 61) that Rimke and Illouz identify in American self-help. Rather, it is a socially concerned self that actively negotiates cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. This observation is both confirmed and contested when we look at the second set of technologies that is promoted in Wonderful Family.

While ethnic and regional differences are considered to be the main source of conflict for newlyweds, economic insecurity is regarded as a threat to the family at a later stage. To help out, the book promotes ‘technologies of gratitude and positivity’. These technologies encourage people to adopt a specific attitude that is supposed to help them deal with a precarious financial situation. Takariawan introduces the topic of economic precarity with a personal anecdote:

A friend once asked me the question: “What is the relation between financial conditions and problems within the family?” This friend had just told me a number of stories about families that were ruined by their poor economic conditions. “I’ve almost come to the conclusion that poor economic conditions of a family will lead to many problems within that family”, this friend said (Wonderful Family: 184).

To which the writer responded:

I have never done a survey on this, so I do not have data to connect economic conditions to the well being of the family. But my answer is: it [the financial situation] is a technicality; a fact. However, there are things that I think are non-technical, namely the way of looking at the economic problems within the family and one’s attitude to life (Wonderful Family: 184).

In this introductory anecdote the financial situation of a person is thus constructed as a fact and a technicality – as something beyond one’s control. As we shall see, this masks the contradictions and inequalities of capitalism. And while the financial situation of a person is framed as something that is beyond someone’s control, people’s attitude is considered to be something that can be controlled and changed. In Wonderful Family this attitude is the key through which to deal with economic precarity. As the book claims, people should:

Not just try to improve the financial reality of their family, but rather their attitude in the face of their economic reality. [People should] also do this when the economy is in decline (Wonderful Family: 191, my italics).
The attitude through which people can supposedly deal with poor living conditions is an attitude that is marked by positivity, hard work, and gratitude. In her study of American self-help books, Martha Cheng (2008) also observed the promotion of a positive and hard-working attitude. Cheng saw these as “traditional American values” (Cheng 2008: 2). These values and mentalities – of which their exclusive American-ness is debatable – can thus also be found in Indonesian self-help. As we shall see, ‘gratitude’, which is not mentioned in Cheng’s (2008), Illouz’ (2008) and Rimke’s (2010) studies of American self-help, is constructed as an ‘Islamic mentality’. In Wonderful Family three rhetoric strategies are mobilized to encourage readers to adopt this positive, hard-working, and grateful mentality: (1) motivational stories, (2) cautionary phrases, and (3) religious citations.

First, Wonderful Family offers seven short motivational life stories that should inspire and motivate readers to be(come) positive, assertive, and grateful. All stories are about people who are physically or mentally disabled. Let me cite two examples here:

Hee Ah Lee was born in South Korea in 1985 with lobster claw syndrome. Both his hands only have two fingers in the shape of a lobster. In addition, he has no lower legs. And even more depressing: he has a mental disability. Through a very hard struggle that was full of tears, he learned how to play piano. Sometimes he needs one year to learn how to play a song. In fact, to play a Chopin-song, he had to practice about five to ten hours everyday for five years. For only one song! Now he is invited to perform all over the world, with only two fingers on each hand. Disability did not stop him from achieving world-wide success (Wonderful Family: 186).

Hirotada Ototake was born in Japan in 1976 with tetra-amelia syndrome, which is characterized by the absence of all four limbs. However, Oto learned to write by using his shoulder, he ran the school marathon and he even became a member of the school’s basketball team. Oto’s positive attitude in life made him happy and successful. […] Oto now is a successful motivational speaker, and his No One is Perfect is a bestselling book (Wonderful Family: 187-188).

What we see in these stories is that unchangeable ‘facts’, namely people’s mental and physical disabilities (i.e. something that happened to them and that is largely beyond their control) are mobilized to demonstrate how despite these ‘technicalities’ one can still become happy and successful in life – if only you have the right mentality. The stories communicate that with a positive attitude and hard work there are no obstacles to achieve success and happiness, which should here
inspire people who have to deal with poor economic conditions.

By comparing the ‘facts’ of disabilities and economic precarity, the stories encourage readers to put things in perspective: ‘you should not complain about money, as there are people in a seemingly worse situation’. By aligning disabilities and a poor living condition, the latter is framed as something that is also beyond one’s control; that with bad luck happens to you, and that you should accept and just try to make the best of. Such a framing of economic precarity masks the contradictions and inequalities of capitalism while it ignores more structural causes for the uneven spread of wealth.

At the same time, the stories encourage people to overcome their precarious situation by means of their own efforts. The stories show readers that having limited means is merely a technicality, which should not stop you from working hard for happiness and success. Central to these stories thus is a neoliberal logic: social risks (i.e. poverty, unemployment) are not responsibilities of the state. Instead people themselves are responsible for their own happiness. Rimke (2010: 62) has observed the same neoliberal sensilities in American self-help books.

These seven motivational stories are accompanied by cautionary phrases that try to convince people that it is however not money that leads to more happiness. These phrases make use of a generalizing rhetoric (e.g. ‘there are many people’, ‘everybody knows that’) to make their point. As we can for instance read:

Happiness is not only related to money. Many families have abundant funds, have great living facilities, they even experience excess, but often their family falls apart. There are many rich people who experience anxiety and depression. At the same time, there are many poor people who are able to feel joy in the midst of the difficulties of everyday life (Wonderful Family: 186).

Central to Wonderful Family then is a seemingly odd contradiction. The book first constructs a discourse that defines people in a poor economic situation as unsuccessful and unhappy. To find happiness and success, readers are through the motivational stories encouraged to deal with and overcome their precarious financial situation by means of their own efforts. Yet at the same time, the book constructs a discourse in which it is not financial security that leads to more happiness.

The particularities of the attitude promoted in the book resolve this contradiction. As we can read from the quote below, it is not money that makes one happy, but the right mentality – a mentality that is here exclusively connected to Islam:
Prophet Muhammad teaches us about a positive attitude in life. Notice for instance the Prophet’s expression: “It is amazing, the affairs of the faithful, basically everything that happens to them is good for them. This applies only to the religious. When they are fortunate and reach a state of happiness they are grateful, which makes them better people. But when misery hits them, they are patient, which also makes them better people”. Gratitude and patience thus define the ways of the Prophet. He shows us the importance of approaching life with a positive attitude and to avoid negative thinking. (*Wonderful Family*: 190-191)

The positive and grateful ‘religious’ mentality promoted here helps people to be happy in all possible scenarios. When they are (financially) fortunate they should be thankful, and when they are (financially) unfortunate they should be patient. And as observed in the motivational stories: when they are (financially) unfortunate and unhappy about it, a positive outlook should prompt them to work harder and achieve the desired happiness.

At the present moment in which Indonesia is rapidly modernizing, such a mentality is highly convenient to the authorities. Although the Indonesian economy is currently booming, the income gap between rich and poor is widening (Priyambodo 2013; Fabi 2013). In 2012 Indonesia measured a growth of 6.3 percent, making Indonesia the second fastest growing economy after China (Sinaga 2012; Hussain 2013). More people are finding jobs and inflation has been kept stable, but the rich are still receiving a (much) greater proportion of the wealth in comparison with the poor and the middle class (Sinaga 2012). Economics and analysts fear that the growing divide between the very rich and the very poor may lead to tensions, or even worse, conflict. And as Andre Sinaga writes: “especially [in a] diverse nation such as Indonesia, groups and individuals may associate particular ethnic groups with wealth and then target them during times of discontent, as we saw in 1998.” (Sinaga 2012)

In this context, *Wonderful Family* not only uncritically ignores structural and systematic causes for poverty by framing it as a fact or technicality. But it also promotes a mentality that is imagined to keep people on both sides of the economic divide happy – and thus calm about financial inequalities. This contests the construction of the social-conscious self that I observed earlier. This social-conscious self is now cast as ambiguous. While engagement with ethnic differences is encouraged, financial inequality is rendered irrelevant – although this is in itself ambiguous since in *Wonderful Family* financial success also matters.

The modern Muslim selves that are promoted in *Wonderful Family* then form the basis for the construction of an ideal Muslim citizen-subject that is responsible, hard
working, positive, grateful, responsive to social and ethnic differences when this helps to maintain the order, and unresponsive to differences when this threatens to disturb the social order. Technologies that neutralize ethnic differences and technologies of gratitude and positivity thus both seek to maintain social order and harmony.

Significantly, both sets of technologies locate responsibility for social order in the individual domain – and specifically in the domain of the family, as the book consistently turns social problems into problems of self-, or family-care. Wonderful Family's rhetoric is in this way reminiscent of New Order discourse. During the New Order the state relied on the ideological control of the family for implementing its economic and social agendas (cf. Brenner 1999: 14). The family was deployed to define agendas for modernization – or pembangunan (development), the buzzword of the state back then (Brenner 1999: 16). The affairs of the family were defined as public rather than private or intimate matters, making the family the ground upon which ideological contests over the nation's future were waged (Brenner 1999: 16). The governmental technologies in Wonderful Family indicate a continuation rather than an ending of this mode of governance.

Rasullulah’s Business School: transforming Muhammad into a modern entrepreneur

In the last decade, Islamic corporate training seminars and business self-help books have become incredibly popular, especially among Indonesia’s aspiring middle class (cf. Hoesterey 2012). Rasullulah’s Business School (2011), is very much part of this trend. The book – the title of which translates as ‘The Prophet’s Business School’ – is aimed at (prospective) entrepreneurs. It promises to teach you: “(1) how to transform poorness into wealth and create a brave pious mind; (2) how to build a business empire worth billions with zero capital, just like Prophet Muhammad; and (3) how to become a Muslim billionaire like the Prophet” (as advertised on the book’s cover – Figure 12).

The two writers of Rasullulah’s Business School both have scholarly credentials. Laode Masihu Kamaluddin (b. 1949, Wakatobi) is a professor in economics who is affiliated with Universitas Unhalu, Universitas Islam Bandung, and Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. In the past few years he has written several successful entrepreneurial self-help books, such as Business Secrets from the Prophet (2007) and The Best Life (2011). The other author, Abdollah ‘Richmoslem’ (b. 1978,
Bangetayu Wetan) has been given the honorable title of ‘Ustadz’, which refers to a religious teacher. ‘Ustadz Rich’ as he calls himself, works as a motivator for young businessman and owns his own business agency ‘Richmoslem Networking Group’, through which he is involved in publishing, printing, distribution, and property management. As stated on the blurb of the book, Ustadz Rich’s ‘big dream’ is to ‘MAKE MUSLIMS ULTRARICH, but pious’ (his emphasis).

Figure 12: Rasullelah’s Business School (2011)

The authors’ educational credentials are touted on the book’s cover (figure 12), which states that the book is written by ‘Prof. Laode, M.SC., M.Eng., PhD.’ and ‘Ustadz Rich, PhD.’ In this way the writers are constructed as knowledgable experts, while the book is endowed with scientific authority. Rasullelah’s Business School is nevertheless written in an accesible style and is aimed at a broad audience. The book presents a ‘closed system’ (Starker 2002), meaning that it contains its own philosophy and does not encourage the reader to combine it with other other perspectives.

As the book’s title ‘The Prophet’s Business School’ suggests, the life and lessons of Prophet Muhammad are central to the entreneural advice that the book offers. It is the legacy of Muhammed that here must inspire, help, and motivate readers on their way to wealth. But what kind of life history; what kind of legacy of Muhammad
is created here? And in what ways is the prophetic tradition summoned for business advice? How is a seventh century Prophet transformed into an example for entrepreneurs in Indonesia today? And how does the desire for material abundance go together with being a pious Muslim?

In the following analysis, I suggest that *Rasullulah’s Business School* mobilizes the Prophet’s legacy in ways that turn him into an ideal modern and moral Muslim subject. This subject position forms the base for the promotion of a kind of citizenship that matches with the aspirational piety and consumerist longings of today’s Muslim middle class (cf. Heryanto 1999: 173). But before constructing this subject, the book first clears the ground by resolving two sets of assumed contradictions that may form obstacles for the coming-into-being of this subject. The book here orchestrates a vision in which the desire for wealth and Islamic piety not only go together, but in which they also strengthen each other. Simultaneously, the seemingly conflicting notions of a self-enterprising subject (‘you determine your own fate’) and an almighty God (‘Allah determines your fate’) are matched. To build this vision, the book first constructs a discourse in which money improves both the quality of life, and the quality of faith, as we read:

> It is fair to say that money will determine one’s life quality. [Also] money can produce true blessings when it is earned and spent properly. For instance when it is used for something good, to build a mosque, to help the poor or the needy, or anything else that can improve the quality of our faith and that of others […] Money would then be something like sugar, for which ants are always searching and around which they all gather. In a similar vein, we will be loved by everybody. (4)

As can be read from this passage, money – when spent in ‘the right way’ – can strengthen one’s faith. And for the book, spending money in the right way means spending the money to ‘worship Allah’ (*beribadah Allah*). As as Laode and Rich explain, readers can worship Allah through sharing their fortune. To persuade readers of their perspective, the authors look for authority in sources such as the Quran and the hadith (reports on the life and actions of Muhammad):

> The prophet says: “Allah gives us fortune for a purpose: as a means to worship Him.” A lot of people who are rich forget that, they only think of themselves. (13)

> Al-Quran explains to us that fortune has to be divided and should not to be kept only for oneself. So worship means sharing with others. And the richer a person is, the better the quality of his worship should be. (14)
We must remember the spirit of the Prophet “eat when hungry and stop before you are full”. We should not be greedy. Because when we are greedy we disrespect Allah. [...] Money must be used as something to bless our friends and relatives with. In this way, we will come closer to Allah. We must be rich both materially and spiritually. (14)

While arguing that spending and sharing money helps readers to improve their life while getting closer to Allah, the book also connects the longing for wealth to respecting and recognizing Allah:

Allah does not ask anything of us, He does not ask of us to be rich. But we ask him. Because God is the provider of fortune. Allah once said aloud: “I do not want the slightest fortune from anyone. I do not want anyone to give me something to eat. I am the Supreme Provider of Sustenance, that is my power.” That is why we must ask Allah for fortune. As much as possible if necessary. Do not be shy. Because Allah is the one who will give us fortune, not others. If you do not pray and do not ask for it, you feel that you do not need Him. Do not become cocky! How arrogant is that? Be rich in God’s provision. (12)

*Rasullulah’s Business School* here links the desire for wealth to acknowledging the position of Allah – something that is of course crucial to the practice of Islam. The book suggests that if you do not ask Allah for wealth, you deny his power and disrespect his position. That ‘wealth’ is here material wealth, and not food or ‘sustenance’, is stressed when the writers continue:

Don’t be content with being poor. Being poor is difficult and not nice. When you are poor it is easier to just fall into disbelief; to stop believing in Allah. (12)

What we can witness in the above-cited excerpts is that the book makes (the desire for) wealth and the aspiration for piety perfectly compatible. Money can be used to enhance the quality of one’s faith (see the first quote), while being poor endangers the quality of one’s faith (see the last quote). Simultaneously, one does not have to be shy or ashamed about desiring and asking for more wealth, even ‘as much as possible’ (12), since it is through expressing this wish and involving Allah in this wish, that one respects Him and His power (see the penultimate quote). The book here counters the advice that *Wonderful Family* gives readers. As we have seen, *Wonderful Family* does not see money as determining the quality of life or faith. *Wonderful Family* states that “happiness is not only related to money” (186);
attempts to keep people on both sides of the rich-poor divide happy; and it advises poor people to be patient. By contrast, Rasullah’s Business School stimulates the desire for wealth and advises people not “to be content with being poor.” (12)

While uniting Muslim piety and (the desire for) wealth, the book also pairs the seemingly conflicting notions of a self-enterprising subject and an almighty God. From the previous it may seem that when Allah is the sole provider of fortune, it is Allah who determines people’s fate – and all people have to do is ask and wait. But the book is quick to counter this idea. It here again looks to the Quran for inspiration, as the authors cite: “Allah will not change the fate of people if they do not want to change their destiny (QS Al-Israa’ [17]: 30).” (98) And elsewhere the book states: “Fortune is appointed by God […], but we need to be willing to take action and pick it up. If we are willing, then Allah will certainly give, rest assured. […] Go take it!” (16) The book thus stresses that people need to take action and responsibility. And when they do so, Allah will bless them with fortune. In this way the book combines the two seemingly incongruent notions of an almighty God and a self-enterprising subject.

The seamless blend of two apparently contradictory sets of ideas clears the ground for the construction of a moral and modern subject that matches with the aspirational piety and consumerist longings of Indonesia’s Muslim middle class. This subject is constructed through a fourteen-step plan that the book offers to its readers. This plan should help (prospective) entrepreneurs to build a business that is as successful as that of Prophet Muhammad. As we shall see, this plan, titled “14 steps to build a business empire like Rasullahul” (113-212), selectively reconstructs the life of Muhammad and mobilizes this remodelled legacy to give readers business advice.

The life of Muhammad (c. 570–622) is generally divided into two parts, namely the period before and the period after declaring the prophecy. The book mainly looks for inspiration in the period before Muhammad became the Prophet. Before coining its fourteen-step plan, the book gives a short overview of the early life of Muhammad. This brief biography largely corresponds with twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on the life of Muhammad (e.g. Conrad 1987; Armstrong 1992; Rogerson 2003).

Muhammad was born in Mecca and belonged to the Banu Hashim clan, which was part of the Quaraish tribe. Roughly six months before Muhammad was born, his father Abdullah died. After he was born, Muhammad was sent to the desert to live with a Bedouin family, as was Islamic custom at that time. He stayed there until he was between two and four years old. When Muhammad was six, he lost his mother
to sickness and was fully orphaned. His grandfather Abd al-Muttalib took him under his wings, but passed away when Muhammed was eight. Muslimad then came under the guardianship of his uncle Abu Talib, one of the leaders of the Banu Hashim clan. During his teen years, Muhammed joined his uncle on trading trips to Syria where he gained experience in commercial trade (Rogerson 2003: viii-x; Rasullulah’s Business School: 109-110). Little is known of Muhammed’s life during the later years of his youth, and it is difficult to separate history from legend as the documentation on the period is fragmented (Watt 1974; 2013: 8). What historians agree upon is that Muhammed became a merchant and that because of his honest character he earned the nickname ‘Al-Amiin’ (the trustworthy). Muhammed’s good reputation also led to a marriage proposal from the wealthy widow Khadija whom he married at the age of twenty-five (Rogerson 2003: viii-x; Rasullulah’s Business School: 109-110).

After providing this brief biographical note, Rasullulah’s Business School picks up specific fragments from Muhammed’s life story and mobilizes them in its step plan. Through interpreting and retelling Muhammed’s life in the global language of corporate management and psychology, this step plan turns the Prophet into a modern and moral businessman; the ultimate example for Muslim entrepreneurs in Indonesia today. The ideal entrepreneur that is constructed in this way is a perfect self-governing subject.

According to the fourteen-step plan, the ideal entrepreneur is a ‘mental entrepreneur’, and Muhammed can be seen as one. As the introduction to the plan reads:

What is important is how of Muhammed became rich. He departed from zero, from hard work, from his belief [...] and built his business empire. [...] Muhammed’s wealth came not because of his heritage [...] But it came from his mentality, he was what is in the modern world now called a “mental entrepreneur”. What is a mental entrepreneur? A mental entrepreneur “goes-and-creates” (meng-create). He uses everything in himself and his enviroment to his benefit. [...] That is the lesson that we can learn from Prophet Muhammed. (110)

In this passage, the ways of Muhammed are interpreted and made contemporary by fitting them into the mold of the ‘mental entrepreneur’, a buzzword stemming from corporate business management. ‘The mental entrepreneur’ can become successful without start-up capital or seeds, indicating that with the right skills and the rights mentality everybody can become a succesful (and rich) entrepreneur. This narrative
that claims that everybody who has the right mentality and is willing to work hard ‘can make it’ bears close similarities to the American Dream. As mentioned earlier, Cheng (2008) sees these values as hard-wired in American self-help (Cheng 2008: 2). As we shall see, Rasullulah’s Business School constructs a similar ‘from rags to riches’ narrative, but bases this narrative in the Islam.

The first step of the plan “Learn to value the school of nature” (121) shows readers how Muhammad as toddler already acted like a mental entrepreneur and used his enviroment to his advantage. As the book recounts this period:

During four years of his childhood, Muhammad lived in the middle of the Sahara desert [...] In such a natural enviroment, Muhammad developed a strong body and high-stamina. Meanwhile he became smooth-tongued, smart-minded, and skillful in riding horses. (123)

The strong and healthy body of Muhammad, which he developed during childhood, helped him gain intelligence in the form of ‘physical intelligence’, or what we now are familiar with as ‘Physical Quotient’ (PQ). (123)

Muhammad’s toddler-years are here cast in the light of global psychology. Subsequently, the book refers to scientific research to further convince readers of the value of PQ:

A survey, conducted in Canada, with more than 500 students said that students who spend extra time each day in the gym to work out are better in doing their tests than the less active exercisers. [...] In her book Smart Moves: why learning is not all in your head, Carla Hannaford explains that movement is directly beneficial to the nervous system. Muscle activity, especially activity that stimulates the production of coordinated neutrophin, a natural substance that stimulates the growth of nerve cells, helps to increase the number of neural connections in the brain. (123)

Muhammad as a child was always active [...] it turned him into a strong young man with great intelligence (124)

Through making Muhammad an example of a healthy PQ, the book here tries to motivate readers to exercise. The book suggests that through a healthy body readers will improve their PQ, and hence their intelligence – an important asset if one wants to become a successful entrepreneur. Individuals are here thus addressed on the assumption that they want to be healthy, something that is beneficial to the
functioning of the social body. Whereas the first step focuses on a strong active body as the basis for a sharp mind, the other steps of the plan help readers cultivate the abilities and attitude that should set them on the road to success. Steps 2, 3 and 4 for instance stimulate the construction of an independent, hard-working, and patient subject. “Step 2: learn to live independently from an early age” for example makes self-reliance a crucial condition for becoming a successful entrepreneur, as the writers claim:

Of all creatures, Allah gave humans the trust to lead this world. But how can humans be capable of managing the earth when they are still dependent on other things than their own authority? How can men rule the world without an independent attitude? (125)

‘Independence’ for the book is not only an attitude, but also a state of being. The book particularly motivates people to be their own boss:

In the world of entrepreneurs, self-reliance is an absolute must-have. When an entrepreneur is facing problems, he should respond quickly and take appropriate decisions. At that moment no one else can be relied upon but yourself as your own boss. An entrepreneur should thus always think of creative ways to manage everything. [...] Like on a plantation, independence is the fertile ground that allows beautiful things like determination, creativity, and visionary people, to grow. (128, my emphasis)

While stressing that people should become independent in every sense of the word, the book sees creativity and quick decision-making as the results of this attitude. Muhammad provides both an example and the evidence of the success of independent and creative thinking, as we read:

Muhammad had to become independent at an early age because he lost both his parents when he was young. While other children were still being hugged by their loving parents, Muhammad fought the hard challenges of life. But he never gave up and learned to solve problems with clear solutions. (132)

When Muhammad was only twelve years old he went to Syria on a business trip. With that experience, he grew into an independent person. [...] He learned to make difficult decisions. What provides evidence of this, is the way Muhammad dealt with things at the moment his uncle went bankrupt. Muhammad did not dissolve in sadness and pain. Instead, he deftly took an immediate decision. He looked for an alternative to bankruptcy. Armed with experience and skills in trading, he began selling merchandise to Mecca’s wealthy merchants. Of course, Muhammad was adept to trade according to this model, because, when he was younger he already sold things to Muslims who went on
the hadj. Exactly these experiences became the capital on which the further development of the entrepreneurial spirit of Muhammad was based. (133)

*Rasullulah’s Business School* here summons this story about Muhammad to prove the success of the independent attitude that the book promotes. And in this example it is specifically an assertive, creative, positive, and pro-active mindset that is constructed as effective.

Becoming an independent entrepreneur also requires leadership skills (135). The third step “Perfectionize your leadership qualities” and the fourth step “Appreciate the process” teach readers how to develop these leadership skills. The book particularly tries to convince readers to work hard, as “being a true leader requires hard work” (139):

> Working time for an entrepreneur is not determined regular working hours. […] According to a belief, although Muhammad had his eyes closed while sleeping, his heart was always open. Even during his sleep he would contemplate. His mind was always working, thinking, evaluating, and designing the future of His people. For Muhammad, there was no time limit for thinking of His people. (140)

As can be read from this passage, in addition to working hard, a good leader must always feel responsible for his or her people. Hard work and responsibility are thus for the book important qualities of the ideal entrepreneur.

And although the book presents the plan as a “recipe for success” (120), readers should not expect immediate change as “everything that exists must go through a process” (143). The book stresses that the process itself already teaches you a lot, and that therefore one should never give up. Muhammad for instance unknowingly laid the base for his excellent leadership when he was young:

> When he was young, Muhammad lived in poverty. He could only buy clothes once a year. For each year, he only had one outfit. […] His uncle, who raised him, was also not a very rich man.

To take the load of his uncle, young Muhammad started hearding goats. He learned a few lessons from hearding goats. […] Herding goats can cultivate an attitude of gentleness, patience, and humility. Therefore it is not surprising that Muhammad came to be known as a humble person. […] This lesson was very important to him as an adult. Herding goats taught him how to lead people, how to manage them, and how to organize their lives. (145-146)
Rasullulah’s Business School here shows readers that they can find a lesson in everything. As observed so far, a healthy body in combination with an independent, assertive, hard working, and responsible attitude are important to become a ‘mental entrepreneur’. These are also qualities of an ideal self-governing subject. And while the first half of the step plan looks inward, the second half of the plan looks outward, as it tries to govern one’s attitude towards other people.

The eighth step “Be loyal” and the twelfth step “Always try to empathize with others” attempt to persuade readers that a loyal and empathetic attitude towards others is crucial for the success of one’s business. As Laode and Rich write:

In business, trust, honesty and loyalty form the greatest capital. (169)

To achieve success, attitude is as important as ability. Our attitude will determine the altitude of our position. If we want others to understand us, then we have to understand them as well. The benchmark in interacting with others is that if we behave well, others will also be nice to us. If we please others, then others will please us in return. (191)

After these statements, the book recounts several stories about Muhammad. Through these stories the book gives readers specific cues on how they can achieve ‘the right’ attitude. As can be read from the following two extracts, in their interaction with others, readers should try to be: honest about what they sell, trustworthy, friendly, and outgoing:

Young Muhammad sold goods to other merchants. […] When his goods were defective, he never tried to hide it. This became a sort of obligation to him. Also, he never sold goods on unfair prices. Muhammad’s honesty took him to the pinnacle of success in the world of commerce. […] And precisely because of his honesty a lot of people wanted to be his agent. (170)

Muhammad always tried to make people happy. Therefore many people wanted to be friends with him. His friendly and outgoing personality made him a success in the world of traders. Every time he engaged in trade, he always got good profits. And he did not take a single dime from the profits before his agents allowed it. Because of his honesty and friendliness he made rich and powerful friends. (194)

In these stories a loyal, social and empathetic attitude is rewarded with the growth of a network (“a lot of people wanted to be his agent”; “he made rich and powerful friends”). The eleventh step “Have an egalitarian attitude and build a network” goes
further into building a network – which is considered an important condition for developing a successful business (188). The plan here specifically persuades people to adopt an “egalitarian mindset” (185), which according to the book helps to build up a strong network. For this egalitarian attitude, Muhammad is “the most ideal figure to look at” (188):

Muhammad was known as a person who had many friends. His relations were not only located in Mecca, but also outside Mecca. Among his mixture of friends, Muhammad did not practice any kind of favoritism. He made everyone feel special. He was known for being egalitarian. He made friends with the young and the elderly, with the educated and uneducated, with commoners and rulers; and with black and white people. All without a difference. (188)

The egalitarian mindset that the book here promotes is then not only purportedly beneficial to growing a strong and diverse network, but also to social order and harmony in multi-cultural and multi-religious Indonesia (see also the analysis of Wonderful Family). Rasullulah’s Business School here thus challenges the socially withdrawn subject that is identified in American self-help books (Rimke 2010; Illouz 2008) and that was ambiguously present in Wonderful Family. Rasullulah’s Business School states that: “Helping each other, loving each other, and respecting each other is not just some duty, but has become a necessity today” (185). In the following story that attests to Muhammad’s egalitarian attitude, responsibility for social order is moved from the authorities to the individual:

When there are people who are oppressed, Muhammad appeared on the front to provide relief. One time, when Muhammad was young, the power of the leading clan in Mecca became weaker and this clan could no longer able to guarantee the safety of the city’s residents. At that time, there was no court or police to prosecute people that did something wrong, and that in this way could ensure the security people and their rights. When Muhammad saw this situation, he called out that sacred hearts cannot be silent about wrongdoings happening everywhere. Together with other residents, Muhammad took action and held a meeting. [...] The result was an oath, a commitment to prevent violence in Mecca. [Such actions] extended Muhammad’s network and increased his credibility. (189-190)

This example not only works to show that an egalitarian attitude can be beneficial to one’s network, but it also constructs Muhammad as a responsible and self-governing subject; someone who does not look to state institutions for assistance (there literally was no police or court), but who together with others took action to preserve
security and social harmony. Last but not least, a good Muslim mental entrepreneur sees Allah as an indispensable teammate. In the fourteenth and last step of the book, readers are encouraged to believe in the “God Factor” (205) – the idea that Allah supports you, and that when you do good Allah will bless you with fortune:

As human beings we certainly have weaknesses. Sometimes we predict that a business decision will bring us benefit, but then it leads to losses. Our weaknesses make us realize that we need God and that we need each other. Good teammates complete each other. Human life should be used to thank God. (205-206)

If we do things the best we can, of course Allah will bless us. We are His fellow worker in creating a better world. (209-210)

Rasullulah’s Business School here completes the circle as it comes back to the unity between an ‘almighty God’ and an ‘self-enterprising subject’ that it had constructed earlier.

To conclude, we have seen that Rasullulah’s Business School recounts and reconstructs Muhammad’s legacy in ways that turn him into an ideal moral and modern citizen-subject; that turn him into the ultimate example for Muslim entrepreneurs in Indonesia today. This appropriation and (re)interpretation of the prophetic tradition, here in the global language of corporate management and psychology, is not an exception. Ali Sultaan Ali Asani, Kamal Abdel-Malek, Annemarie Schimmel (1995), James Hoesterey (2012), and Anna Gade (2010) have also observed that representations of Prophet Muhammad are shifting and changing according to historical timeframes and contexts, as they write:

Now, under accelerating conditions of global capitalism and worldwide Islamic awakening, new types of texts circulate in regional context […] The very understanding of the figure of the Prophet Muhammad himself and his life story may now be imagined entirely in terms of inspiring connection over distance and difference. (Gade 2010:272, cited in Hoesterey 2012: 40)

Muslims see their Prophet through a variety of lenses, and the role he plays […] differs according to the perspective they choose to adopt. Portrayals of Muhammad […] are strongly influenced by diverse interpretations of his status as well as local cultural and literary idioms. (Asani; Abdel-Malek and Schimmel 1995: 8)
The present portrayal of Muhammad as a mental entrepreneur – a modern and moral businessman – resonates with the aspirational piety and consumerist longings of today’s Muslim middle class, as described by Ariel Heryanto (1999: 173). The subject that is constructed through this portrayal is a healthly, independent, hard-working, assertive, and social responsible citizen-subject. *Rasullulah’s Business School* thus manages to transform Prophet Muhammad into a perfect self-enterprising subject that is fit to participate in a post-New Order Indonesia in which neoliberalism, as an optimizing technology, is increasingly present (Chandra 2011).

**Twitografi Asma Nadia: governing Muslim girls**

In simple language Asma Nadia helps us to understand ourselves, to understand how we can be a Muslim who knows Shari’ah and still be sociable loh [supel]. She is very cool, I have bought all her books (Pratiwi Mufliha, female, English language student – conversation with author, May 2012).

When asking Pratiwi (18), an English language student at UGM, about self-help books, she told me that she not only buys self-help books, but that she is also ‘a devout asmanadian’ (Pratiwi, May 4 2012). She explained that an asmanadian is a follower of Asma Nadia on Twitter.

Asma Nadia, who was born as Rosalba Asmarani in 1972 in Jakarta, is one of Indonesia’s best-selling female authors. In the past ten years, Asma Nadia has published more than forty books, both fiction and non-fiction. She has won numerous national and regional awards. In 2000, 2001, and 2005 she earned the Best National Author award, while in 2008 she received the Anugrah IBF award for the best Islamic novelist. In addition to writing books, Asma Nadia is also involved in screenplay writing, has her own publishing company, and is a celebrated public speaker. She has repeatedly expressed her desire to empower and inspire her readers, mostly women, to make most of their lives. Her books are mainly targeted at fellow wives and housewives, but also increasingly at a younger generation of women.

*Twitografi Asma Nadia* (2011), which is the focus of study here, is aimed at this younger generation, i.e. girls in the age of 15-25. As the title suggests, the book is a ‘Twittergraphy’. It contains a collection of inspirational tweets that Asma Nadia posted on her widely followed Twitter-account @asmanadia. From this account, which is currently followed by more than 135.000 people and which contains over 50.000 tweets, around 1400 tweets were selected for this book. These tweets are
grouped into topics such as ‘Muslim fashion’, ‘love, boyfriends, and marriage’, and ‘travelling Muslims’.

I choose focus on the book rather than on the (discussion on the) Twitter-page for two reasons. First, in the book Asma Nadia’s tweets are teamed with supplementary explanations, tips and religious citations; hence they are repackaged for the market as self-help. A focus on this repackaging helps to scrutinize the intersections between Islam, self-help, and capitalism. Second, in the ways that these loose tweets are selectively clustered into topics and are ordered into more or less coherent narratives, governmental politics are practiced. The book and the website nevertheless remain closely connected.

Figure 13: Twitografi Asma Nadia (2011)

Like the author of Wonderful Family, Asma Nadia is also explicitly constructed as an expert. The cover of the book (Figure 13) shows a veiled Asma Nadia. She is sitting on a cloud and holds up a blackboard that amongst others displays the title of her book. Asma Nadia is thus framed as the teacher while the book contains her lessons. The image also constructs Asma Nadia as a guru. The white and blue stripes that are beaming behind her, in combination with the grass/flowers at the bottom, and the blue sky/stars on top of the image, call to mind (Buddhist) guru iconography. The
cloud is drifting over a city in which a mosque is prominently present. Up on her cloud Asma Nadia is surrounded by veiled Twitter-birds. The cover here not only constructs Asma Nadia as a figure to (literally) look up to, but also as someone who, from an all-knowing bird’s perspective, can look down at (Islamic) city life and tweet, i.e. advice, about it.

Twitografi Asma Nadia answers to worries young Muslim girls may have and to issues they assumedly encounter in their lives. Asma Nadia offers her advice from a personal perspective, sharing her own experiences with readers. The book has a mostly prescriptive (Starker 2002) style, it gives it advice (do’s and don’ts) in the form of rules – that look like random tweets. In the following analysis, I propose that in the act of giving advice, a technology of normalization is at work. This technology turns problems into excuses that stand in the way of becoming a ‘perfect’ Muslim girl, i.e. someone who has fun, is self-confident, self-conscious, ambitious, fashionable, family-minded, cosmopolitan, and above all pious. In this way an idealized norm of conduct for Muslim girls is constructed. In Twitografi Asma Nadia this technology of normalization seeks to govern three domains: (1) girls’ bodies, (2) girls’ interpersonal and intimate relations, and (3) their relation to, and their mobility in, space.

The first part of the book is dedicated to fashion. Asma Nadia helps out with issues that are related to wearing a veil and offers her advice about other Muslim must-have items. The veil has earlier been discussed, among others, as “the ultimate symbol of Muslim otherness” (Moors 2007); as “a political statement of women, an active reappropriation of Islamic religiosity” (Göle 1996: 4), and as a popular fashion item (Jones 2007; Amrullah 2008). Veiling has among others been seen as “a way to affirm one’s cultural identity” (Wagner 2012: 521), as an effort “to reconcile the opportunities for autonomy and choice offered by modern education with a heightened commitment to the profession of Islam” (Smith-Hefner 2007: 389), and as articulating “new prosperity, high cultural taste and cosmopolitan beauty that complement, and occasionally overtly substitute for, religious piety, self-restraint from worldly pleasure, or sexual chastity.” (Heryanto 2010)

Among the multiplicity of meanings that has been ascribed to the veil, Twitografi Asma Nadia turns the veil – as well as other fashion items – into something through with girls can be governed. Via Asma Nadia’s fashion advice, girls are encouraged to inflict certain actions (up)on their bodies, thereby turning their bodies into a site of governance. Dressing the body – and deciding to dress the body – in what according to the book is ‘the right way’, stimulates the construction of fashionable, pious, and seemingly autonomous female subjects.
A number of tactics are mobilized to encourage readers to follow the book’s fashion advice and position themselves as this subject. To start, Twitografi Asma Nadia sums up the possible challenges that stand in the way of dressing in the right way. When Asma Nadia for instance discusses the wearing of the veil, a practice the book strongly encourages, we learn about the difficulties she herself faced when she was a teenager:

Deciding to wear the veil is not without challenges. There are challenges that we will have to face when we decide to wear a veil. Problems might arise from our family, school or work place. But is life not a challenge? (6)

I’m grateful to Allah that I pursued to veil. Although my mom was initially furious and I was almost kicked out of school. (7)

One thing I had to give up when I started veiling was swimming. I love swimming. However in 1988 there was no Muslim swimsuit like there is now, let alone a separate pool for women. (7)

I’ve been rejected by the mother of my best friend when I was in highschool, because her child came to me and asked me to explain about the veil. (11)

[…], despite its light weight, it [a long veil] can cause a headache and you get dizzy so fast. (7)

I was the best (rank 1) of my class during secondary school, from second grade all the way to graduation. When I was in highschool, and just started wearing the veil, I however got a fail in my report card, because I could not wear the veil when doing sports. (11)

I was almost expelled from highschool because of being veiled - but in the end I did not get expelled because of the school fire (that happened around the time the decision had to be made, but due to school fire they were too busy taking care of redevelopment). (11)

Through citing these challenges, the book points at the obstacles that may keep girls from dressing in the desired way – in this case, that may keep them from veiling. Subsequently, the book tries to counter and dismantle these challenges. It does so through offering counter-arguments that should convince girls to dress in the appropriate way (i.e. wear a veil). Three sets of reasons are here distinguished.
The first set provides education about Islam. If we again take the case of the veil as our example, we for instance read that:

There are millions of reasons that Muslim women have for not wearing a veil. But there are a million reasons more to wear a veil, a lot of people just do not realize this. […] The veil is not just an Arabic cultural tradition, but a law mentioned in the Quran, just like the prayer, fasting etc. (2)

By pointing out that veiling is a law in Islam, the book frames women that do not wear a veil as disobedient. In this way, the book tries to convince readers to overcome challenges and conform to the practice of veiling. Simultaneously, the book tries to make it ‘easier’ for readers to conquer their issues. It does so through offering a second set of arguments, which makes the dressing practice crucial and central to one’s existence as a Muslim. Asma Nadia writes:

After a long time of thinking, I realized, Allah has given us so much, why do I then still doubt about just having a light piece of clothing on my head. (3)

[…] I felt I needed to wear a veil, because then Allah could embrace me. Why would someone want to deny his rule? His protection? (3)

If you honestly believe in an afterlife, what is stopping you from immediately complying? (2)

Have you forgotten how beautiful heaven is? Is that the reason why you postpone obedience to Him? (2)

Much good awaits those who are obedient to Him, and much good awaits those who have taken risks to receive His love. (6)

Do not worry about lost opportunities, because we defend a principle. Allah always supports our intentions. (6)

I was thinking, a veil is heavy, but would I not feel very relieved when with the veil I would be free from punishment? (7)

In these tweets, the veil is constructed as the key to afterlife; to being welcomed in heaven; to being free from punishment; and to being loved, embraced, supported, and protected by Allah. By connecting these fundamental aspects of being a Muslim to a dressing practice, the earlier mentioned obstacles are (re)constructed as both
insignificant and as issues that without a doubt must be conquered.

Whereas the first and second set of arguments make the veil essential to being a (good) Muslim, a third set assures readers that this dressing practice does not clash with being ambitious, successful or cosmopolitan, as Asma Nadia writes:

Who is to say that with a veil your grades in school will be hampered? There are not just one or two veiled women who have achieved the highest level in the world, but there are actually many. This proves that [...] with the veil you can still conquer the world. (8)

The veil does not stop you from making history. (8)

Many artists still shine bright after wearing the veil. (8)

The myth that causes many Muslimahs to worry is never proven to be true. They say that when you wear a veil it is very hard to find a husband. However, I was 23 years old when I found mine :-D (9)

There is no need to feel inferior in foreign countries when you wear the veil. So far, I have travelled to 130 cities in 30 countries as a backpacker. Thank God, there is no obstacle. (9)

Twitografi Asma Nadia thus assures that wearing a veil and being a modern girl are perfectly compatible. The book even goes on to suggest that one becomes more successful and more fashionable after deciding to wear a headscarf. In a separate chapter titled “my accomplishments after wearing the veil” (Twitografi Asma Nadia: 9), Asma Nadia for example writes:

Did I become less popular, or did I have less friends after starting to veil in highschool? No, and actually, I became class president many times. Also, I was accepted into graduate school without having to take extra tests. (9)

After I started veiling, I became the champion of the biology group DKI Jakarta. (9)

I graduated from highschool with the highest diploma score. (9)

During highschool I was always in the top 3. (9)

While wearing a veil, I was actually asked to be the face of different headscarf brands. (9)
Wearing a veil and Muslim clothing does not have to kill your style. (17)

Using the right colors and patterns can help you look even more stylish, […] but do not be a fashion victim! (23)

Pay attention to colors, models, and motifs that make you look more elegant and graceful. (23)

We see that through mobilizing three different sets of arguments that try to dismantle possible challenges and objections to veiling, the book encourages girls to dress in ‘the right way’. I have here focused solely on the example of the veil, but the same pattern of reasoning is also central to the advice the book gives about other Muslim must-have items, such as dresses (p: 17-18, which cannot be too tight, short or transparent), pants and leggings (p: 19-20, leggings are a no-go, as they show one’s body shape, are unflattering and ungraceful), long socks and shoes (p: 21-22, socks are a must to cover feet and prevent sweaty feet, black socks are particularly advisable so that no one sees they are dirty, good quality shoes should be bought so that others cannot smell your feet).

What is central to all fashion advice is the construction, in minute detail, of an idealized norm of dressing and a subsequent rewarding or punishing of girls for conforming or deviating from this norm. In the case of the veil, the book suggests that when girls work on themselves and conform to the constructed norm they: will overcome their problems; learn to make seemingly autonomous decisions (that may go against the wishes of family and friends); will be successful and fashionable, and are embraced by Allah. Deviation from this ideal is constructed as conduct that disappoints Allah and that makes one a bad Muslim.

But there is more to Twitografi Asma Nadia. In addition to seeking control over the Muslim female body (see also chapters 5 and 6), the book also attempts to govern girls’ interpersonal relations and conduct. It focuses on two types of relations, namely (1) the relations between girls and their friends and (2) the relations between girls and their potential love interests. While it is through the governance of the public visibility of the Muslim female body that the book promotes a fashionable but pious modern female subject, it is through governance over interpersonal relations that the book sets the ‘wrong’ kind of modern female Muslim subject apart from the ‘right’ kind of modern female Muslim subject.

The first domain that is subjected to this practice of governance involves the ways in which girls communicate and express themselves when they are amongst friends.
The book for instance tells girls explicitly not to “be(come) a Muslim alay” (Twitografi Asma Nadia: 59). ‘Alay’ refers to a subculture that first came around the scene in Indonesia around 2007/8. The word alay has no exact translation, but it is widely accepted as an abbreviation of ‘anak layangan’ (kite kid), a derogatory term for a kampung (village) kid. The term finds its roots in the idea that kites are cheap entertainment for lower class youngsters, who cannot afford ‘city games and toys’ due to the financial constraints of their families (Kuswandini 2009). Unlike those kids in big cities who play with a PlayStation, Xbox or Nintendo, kampung youth spend much of their time outside flying kites – hence getting dark skin and a messy look (Kuswandini 2009).

Today metropolitan Indonesians use the term alay to critically describe youngsters who are trying to keep up with trends, but do so in the wrong way. In their eyes, alay youngsters have a poor understanding of what is modern, cool, and trendy. As a cultural critic in The Jakarta Post notes:

Forgive me for saying this, but alay refers to someone from a kampung who is experiencing culture shock when he or she comes to a big city like Jakarta. That person dresses up in what he or she thinks is ‘trendy’, while in the eyes of others (urbanites) that attire is truly bad taste. (Arya Verdi Ramadhani, cited in Kuswandini 2009)

Alay youngsters are seen as participating in modernity in the ‘wrong’ way. And as Pratiwi, one of my informants, further explains: “alay youngsters usually hang around malls with other kampung people. They talk and write in a dumb and annoying way. They are fashion victims in the negative sense, wearing skinny jeans, tight dark T-shirts with a punk print, and they have strange hair-do’s. They look messy and unsophisticated. They are sort of ‘hipsters gone wrong.’” (conversation with author, May 2012).

Alay youth express their subcultural affiliation in a number of ways such as through fashion and music. But the most characteristic feature of alay is the (written) language through which they communicate with friends and express themselves on blogs and social media. Their writing, ‘tulisan alay’, can best be described as Indonesian language that has undergone extensive leet transformation; that is highly condensed and that uses combinations of small and capital letters, numbers, as well as special characters (‘L1k3 7hI5 / like this’), often to the point that it becomes unreadable for outsiders. An example is ‘cXnK qMoh tO cKiDnAAAAaaAaaaa’ reading ‘sayang kamu tahu sakitnya? (honey, do you know how much that hurts?)’ (Kuswandini 2009).
Tulisan alay has been condemned by critics who see it as a destruction of the national language and as evidence of the dumbing down of the young generation (Ibidem). As Nadia, a self-proclaimed alay girl, however explained to me: “I see this use of language as part of my identity, as a creative and unique way of expressing myself. Moreover, texting my friends alay messages is a sign of friendship and closeness, because of the extra effort we put in and the idea of secrecy” (correspondence with Nadia, June 2013).

Twitografi Asma Nadia tackles alay language to construct a discourse that claims that being alay and being a good Muslim are incompatible:

Many young people think that condensing Islamic phrases into short sentences is a new modern style of expressing themselves amongst each other. Though this practice has been around a long time it is not a good thing. (59)

In Betawi we know the word ‘yaela’, from ‘Ya Allah’ and ‘Lailahailallah’. Because we still sometimes hear people say ‘yaela hailallah’ (a coalition of Islamic and Betawi) especially teenagers, now start to follow the alay trend and abbreviate [alaykan] Islamic terminology. Please do not do that. (59)


I was shocked when at home I heared Adam and his friends play computer games, because when they panicked they yelled ‘astazim, astazim’. [...] Can we abbreviate astazim astagfirullah to azim? No way! (59)

Rather than condensing ‘assalamu’alaikum’ to ‘ass’ (which in English means what?) better use the full greeting to great pals. (59)

The greeting is like a prayer, when you make it alay, you cancel the prayer. (59)

By using the alay language among each other you lower yourself and degradate the teachings of Islam. So keep alay away from Islam. (59)

As can be read from these excerpts, Twitografi Asma Nadia considers the central feature of alay culture, its use of language, a ‘degradation’ of (Islamic) language and an act through which girls ‘lower themselves’. By constructing this discourse and by speaking about alay in the same terms – and from assumedly the same position – as those who consider themselves ‘sophisticated city people who do get it right’, the book aligns itself with alay’s metropolitan critics. Through seeking control over the
way in which Muslim girls express themselves and communicate about Islam, the book tries to eliminate alay as an option; as a possibility of modern female Muslim identity. Twitografi Asma Nadia claims that alay is low, unsophisticated, and a degradation of Islam.

Twitografi Asma Nadia not only attempts to govern the way girls communicate with friends, but also the way in which they deal with potential love interests. Dating and relationships are generally not acknowledged in Islam, but they nevertheless occur among many young Indonesian Muslims. Asma Nadia writes that she receives many questions about this, e.g. “can I have a boyfriend?” (86), “how can I find a partner?” (101) She has therefore taken up this issue in her book (85). As we shall see, through giving advice on this matter, Twitografi Asma Nadia simultaneously blocks and opens up possibilities of Muslim subjectivity, thereby further crafting and specifying its ideal modern female Muslim subject. The book does so via a specific rhetoric pattern.

To start, the book sums up reasons that girls have for wanting to be in relationship:

When I asked on Twitter why you girls want to have a boyfriend many answered to me: just because we want to and they are willing to, mbak! :p (86)

Or they answered that having a boyfriend gives prestige ‘others have a boyfriend, but I don’t have one yet. This gives the impression that I’m still for sale. (87)

There also also those who said that having a boyfriend is handy because you have someone to pick you up … lol, this is a motorcycle boyfriend. (85)

There also those who say your boyfriends can carry heavy stuff when you are shopping… lol. (85)

Also you can learn a lot from a boyfriend. (86)

After mentioning a variety of reasons, some that have to do with social pressure and others that have to do with just making fun, Asma Nadia comes up with arguments that are intended to overrule the ones that have been coined by her Twitter followers. These arguments discourage relationships and are driven by two central incentives: (1) an ambitious mindset and (2) family.

First, Asma Nadia sees boyfriends as emotionally distracting. She for examples writes:
Having a boyfriend brings with it a risk... your mood goes up and down, which happens when your boyfriend does not love you, or does not change his relationship status on FB or Twitter :p (87)

Another risk of boyfriends is that they can break your heart... seriously! (87)

Your achievements are not measured by how many boyfriends you have had hehehe. This does not count the same way as a job achievements on your CV do :p (87)

So if you do not want a broken heart, or waste your time, energy and tears, do not take a boyfriend! (87)

This emotional distraction is here seen as a hinderance to girls’ ambition and achievements, as she advises:

Do not waste your young years on boyfriends and troubles, but realize your potential to achieve and realize your dreams and that of your parents. (89)

Use the period before marriage for improving yourself in His presence. Remember, good men choose good girls. That can happen without first having a boyfriend. (89)

The emphasis on self-development, autonomy, ambition, and achievement identified in the above cited fragments often recurs in Twitografi Asma Nadia. It forms an important part of the ideal female modern citizen subject that is constructed and promoted in the book. A citizen-subject that is focused and ambitious, contributes to the country’s workforce. Note, also in the above-quoted tweets, that it is particularly in their ‘young years’ and ‘before marriage’ that girls should work hard and focus on themselves, because, as is implicitly suggested, after marriage they will have other priorities.

In Twitografi Asma Nadia boyfriends do not only form a threat to girls’ desired ambitious mindset, but they also pose a threat of a much more fundamental kind. As Asma Nadia writes:

Are the tears you shed the only risk of having a boyfriend? :) Actually no. The world of boyfriends is also vulnerable to crime! Creepy. (88)

We often hear newsreports of harassment and murder by ex-boyfriends. […] :( (88)
An extreme case: there was a female student who disappeared, then three months later they found her corpse in the closet of her boyfriend :((88)
A girl, the eldest child and the foundation of the family, was disabled for life because she refused to have sex with her boyfriend. (88, my emphasis)

In this criminalization and strong discouragement of relationships and sexuality, a second argument against relationships surfaces: boyfriends pose a threat to the family. This discourse keeps recurring, for instance when the book tries to dissuade young women from dating by opposing boyfriends to parents in a diametrical manner:

Coining the reason ‘that you can learn from boyfriends’, to me, is not really fair to your parents. Why? (86)

How long have you known your boyfriend? What did he give you? Compare that with the bond and what has been given to you by your parents. (86)

Your parents have given you so much. Why are your parents not enough to learn from? (86)

What is evident: in the end the love from your parents and family is the most important. Why do you have to search for something impure? (89)

In this argument the repercussions of dating are imagined to go beyond readers themselves. Not only do they hamper their own development by having a boyfriend, but they also offend their parents and damage family bonds. Thus, through giving advice about dating and relationships, the book not only carves out a modern Muslim self that is ambitious, but also one that is family-oriented.

Twitografi Asma Nadia thus fiercely discourages relationships. What is also striking, is that the book only mentions sexuality once – and then it criminalized. Sexuality seems something that cannot be spoken about. Despite the book’s fierce rejection of relationships, it does not leave girls in the dark when it comes to finding a partner. Under the heading “how to get married without buying a pig in a poke (beli kucing dalam karung)” (90), the book provides girls with a solution that avoids both dating and (blind) arranged marriages. The book’s solution, the ta’aruf, is a gathering by which youngsters of marriageable age are introduced to each other and can get to know one another. As Asma Nadia puts it: “ta’aruf is flirting with the intention to marry.” (90) The difference with a relationship is that one ideally marries within three to six months after the ta’aruf.

After clarifying the concept of ta’aruf, Asma Nadia gives girls tips for a good
ta’aruf:

We can identify a good candidate quite easily. The trick is to ask good questions and see what the candidate answers. (101)

What do you ask? First, make a list of questions, and define the weight of the answers corresponding to your own principles. There are for sure key questions and key answers. (102)

Do not use the #ta’aruf for just staring at one another :p use the #ta’aruf for gathering as much information as you can about the other candidate. (103)

During the #ta’aruf, try to get to know his background, his character, his ideas about marriage, children and other future arrangements. (103)

If utilized properly, the #ta’aruf can give not only you information about the candidate, but also the potential problems after you marry. (104)

Find elegant ways of asking questions, so that it does not feel like a job interview for the other person. (104)

When it doesn’t feel like a good fit after the #ta’aruf inform the other ASAP. (104)

Give the other a deadline, nobody wants to be hung on an appointment that is not clear. (104)

As can be read from these excerpts, Twitografi Asma Nadia encourages girls to be resolute and take matters into their own hands. The book thus again promotes a Muslim self that is autonomous and hands on – something that at different moments recurs in the book.

To recap, we have seen that it through seeking control over the body that the book elicits a fashionable, autonomous, but pious modern female subject. We have also seen that it is through its attempts to govern interpersonal relations that the book further defines this ideal subject. In doing so it sets the ‘wrong’ kind of young modern Muslim subject (alay, engages in relationships) apart from the ‘right’ kind of young modern Muslim subject (ambitious, family-minded, autonomous, finds a partner through ta’aruf).

The third and last domain that the book seeks to govern involves girls’ relation to space and their movement in and through space – space here being both national and international. The book here tries to produce its ideal modern female Muslim
subject as an active, responsible, and cosmopolitan citizen.

Inducing this construction are concerns about the state of ‘public mosques’ in Indonesia. ‘Public mosques’ are mosques that one can find in (privately-owned) places such as hospitals, malls, offices or bookshops. These mosques offer Muslims an opportunity to pray while they are on the go or at work. But as Asma Nadia observes:

When going to visit the mall or a public space, we often see that the mosque is in a poor condition. Its facilities are poor, it is very difficult to find, it is not clean, and it smells really bad. This is even more dismaying when the mosque is located in a mall or luxury hotel. These mosques are in bad shape, although the visitors of the malls/hotels are mostly Muslims. (65)

Also, we too often see that office staff is forced to pray in the emergency staircase, because their building does not have a mosque that is easily accessible. (65)

Perhaps the mosque is placed in a far-off location (in the basement, parking lot or behind the toilets), because it is not really a productive commercial place. (65)

While Asma Nadia here observes that public mosques are in a poor shape, she assigns the responsibility for their improvement to individuals, as she writes: “Many Muslims just complain about this situation, but few actually do something about it. In fact we can do a lot of simple things to help change this situation.” (65) To help readers to take action, she provides them with a ‘simple’ five-step plan:

Step 1. If you go to the mall and encounter a mosque that is in bad shape inform the receptionist at the information booth that he or she must let the manager know that the mosque facilities need to be improved. Say that mall’s visitors will be more comfortable if the mosque can be easily reached. If visitors are comfortable, they will stay longer in the mall, and the mall will benefit from it. (66)

Step 2. Go more often to the mall which has a good mosque. Also, tell the receptionist that you love this mall because it has a good mosque. So do not only complain, but highlight what is positive. (66)

Step 3. Publish in a safe manner (avoid slander) which mosques are not good. The more people publish about mosques in malls or other public places which are not okay, the harder people will try to improve the facilities. [...] be kind and bring across your message in clear language. (66)
Step 4: This step can be taken by Muslims who love praying and have political power. […] you can issue a regulation that requires that there are mosques in strategic places, for instance on every floor, or you can issue for other regulations that regulate facilities of the mosque in public space. (67)

Step 5. Become a rich Muslim and build a great mall / office / hospital / bookshop / supermarket with a great mosque. (67)

As we can observe, this five-step plan moves responsibility for better and more hygienic praying facilities to Muslims themselves. If they would like to see better mosques, they need to stop complaining and instead become active and attentive citizens who take responsibility. Although in step 1-3 of the plan managers and organizations are responsible for the actual improving, it is people themselves that need to set this change into work – and each and everyone can contribute.

Improved public mosques are not only beneficial to individual Muslims, but also to the workplace and the economy. Employees could for instance spend more time at work if they do not have to travel far to pray. Also employees might be less prone to stress, frustration, and health issues if they do not have to pray in staircases and basements. Muslim visitors of the mall can spend more time and money there. More visits to the mall is even part of the plan for action (step 2), making consumption and the middle-class mall-visiting lifestyle (see also chapter 2) very much part of the modern Muslim self that is imagined in the book.

While disciplining readers to be more concerned about the maintenance of religious spaces, Twitografi Asma Nadia also encourages girls to travel out of the country and experience foreign (more secular) places. But, as Asma Nadia explains, travelling is not always easy for Muslims. In the section ‘travelling Muslims’ she offers girls advice on several issues they can encounter while travelling.

The first issue she highlights and helps girls with is the “damaged image” (image buruk) (211) of Muslims (see also chapter 6). As she writes:

Women who wear a veil often become the victims or negative stereotypes and discrimination when they travel abroad. First, they are frequently mistaken as migrant workers who are looking for work, and second they are suspected to be terrorists. (211)

I was approached by the police in England and they investigated my activity. (235)

Also in Spain I was roughly questioned by the police. (236)

Veiled Muslim women are often mistaken for being migrant workers when they are
abroad or when they travel to or from East Indonesia. (211)

[...] At my arrival in Hong Kong and Switzerland I have been asked sarcastically: do you want to find a job here? (212)

As Asma Nadia comments on this problem: “this is obviously not ideal, but we can prepare ourselves for this. Let’s go!” (211). Asma Nadia emphasizes that girls should be conscious of the negative image that they, as Muslims, have in other parts of the world, but that they cannot let discrimination stop them. The book advises that girls deal with these issues assertively, but with kindness, and that they try to distance oneself from what they are accused of. She gives the following example:

When I took a walk in the park in Korea, an old lady saw me wearing my veil and yelled: “Oh Islam, you are a terrorist!” I just smiled to her and said, “We also hate terrorists.” “Please, I hope there will be no more Muslims who commit acts of terrorism. That bothers us too.” (212)

The idea that Muslims can travel the world unproblematically when they have the right attitude, is further emphasized when the book gives advice on two other challenges that Muslims may face while travelling: eating halal food and continuing their prayers:

One of the obstacles for Muslims when traveling around the world is to find halal food. So what is the trick? (217)

If you want to be safe choose vegetarian food. Then you do not have to worry about halal food. (217)

An alternative can also be to find an Indian or Pakistani (Muslim) restaurant, or find a kebab restaurant, most European countries have kebab restaurants. (217)

Make sure that the kebab is halal! Because in Volendam, the Netherlands, I was at a kebab place which also sells pork. (217)

If in doubt make instant noodles. Some of my friends bring a small ricecooker with them. (218)

Do not stop praying during the trip. (219)
Try to find a place to pray during your travel, a quiet place in the train, a museum, or a park, or another place. (219)

Choose a place that does not attract and provoke a lot of attention. (220)

If you cannot find a good place, just ask where the nearest mosque is, it might be close to where you are at that moment. (220)

Asma Nadia’s advice on these challenges thus shows that with an assertive and self-conscious attitude (e.g. ‘do not pick a place that provokes attention’) Muslim girls can travel the world with ease. The self that is advocated here is cosmopolitan and is able to adjust religious practices to any other place in the world.

To conclude, I have suggested that via offering advice on issues that Muslim girls encounter in their lives, Twitografi Asma Nadia seeks to govern three domains: (1) girls’ bodies, (2) girls’ interpersonal and intimate relations and, (3) their relation to, and their mobility in, space. In its attempts to govern these three domains a technology of normalization is at work. The book constructs an idealized gendered norm of conduct for Muslim girls and rewards or punishes girls for conforming or deviating from this norm. Through both its form – a Twittergraphy’ – as well as its content, the book claims hipness. The discourse that Twitografi Asma Nadia articulates is however highly repressive. Girls are encouraged to become ‘fashionable’ and ‘autonomous’ subjects that make their ‘own’ decisions and that are in line with what their religion allegedly asks of them. By following Asma Nadia’s advice, readers make themselves governable. While setting the ‘wrong’ modern self apart from the ‘right’ modern self, the book carves out a female modern citizen-subject that is ambitious, self-conscious, sophisticated, fashionable, family-minded, responsible, cosmopolitan, and above all pious. This is a female citizen-subject that is fit to participate smoothly in a global Islamic modernity, and that is still a good Muslim.

The modern Muslim as a self-enterprising citizen-subject

Through Islamic self-help books, pop culture preachers and self-help gurus offer Islamic guidance to Indonesian Muslims. Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia provide families, entrepreneurs, and young women with inspirational stories and practical manuals for living in a modernizing Indonesian society. In the analysis, I have suggested that while ‘helping’ readers, the
books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects.

If we look at the form of the books, we see that Starker’s (2002) categories are encapsulated by a governmental logic. Personal anecdotes become sites through which the authors are constructed as experts who “govern at a distance” (Rose and Miller 1992: 181). Informational passages give ‘evidence’ that the promoted attitude indeed works – we have seen this last point repeatedly in Rasullulah’s Business School. And as Twitografi Asma Nadia shows, a more prescriptive style, which depends on particular ‘do’s and don’ts’, leads to a repressive governmental discourse.

My analysis in this chapter has shown how through different governmental tactics, Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia each construct a different Islamic subject. The three subjects share the similarity of being self-governing and self-enterprising modern citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities.

In my analysis of Wonderful Family, I have shown how the book deploys family issues to define its agenda for modernization. The book thereby turns the affairs of the family into public rather than private or intimate matters. Wonderful Family constructs the responsible family member as a responsible modern Muslim citizen. This citizen-subject is modelled in such a way that it can help to maintain social order. As we have seen, Wonderful Family’s ideal modern Muslim citizen-subject is aware of Indonesia’s ethnic and cultural multiplicity and stimulates intercultural dialogue, something that is important for the prevention of ethnic conflicts. In addition, this subject also maintains social order by not contesting the growing rich-poor divide. Wonderful Family ignores structural and systematic causes for poverty by framing it as a fact or technicality. At the same time, the book promotes a mentality that is imagined to keep people on both sides of the divide happy – and thus calm about financial inequalities. I have proposed that through the emphasis that the book puts on maintaining social order, and because it defines the family as an important realm of governance, Wonderful Family’s rhetoric is reminiscent of New Order discourse. The governmental technologies in Wonderful Family indicate a continuation rather than an ending of this mode of ‘family - social order’ governance (see also the next chapter on Islamic-themed films for a more elaborate discussion of this form of governance).

In Rasullulah’s Business School, it is not the family, but the Prophet who forms the model for the construction of an ideal Muslim citizen-subject. This business self-help book reconstructs and appropriates Muhammad’s legacy in ways that turn the
Prophet into the ideal Muslim citizen-subject. For this subject, the desire for wealth and Islamic piety not only go together, but also strengthen each other. This matches with the aspirational piety and consumerist longings that according to Ariel Heryanto (1999: 173) mark today’s Muslim middle class. On the issue of the desire for wealth, Rasullulah’s Business School challenges Wonderful Family, which stresses that money does not determine one’s happiness. Furthermore, in Rasullulah’s Business School the seemingly conflicting notions of a self-enterprising subject (‘you determine your own fate’) and an almighty God (‘Allah determines your fate’) go hand in hand. The citizen-subject that is constructed through the portrayal of Muhammad is healthy, independent, hard working, assertive, social, caring, and responsible. Rasullulah’s Business School suggests that by displaying this behavior one will win Allah’s favor, which will lead to blessings and success.

For Twitografi Asma Nadia, ‘the right behavior’ will make one a fashionable, ambitious, and cosmopolitan Muslim girl, while ‘the wrong behavior’ will make one a bad Muslim. Twitografi Asma Nadia constructs a more repressive moral discourse (in the sense that it constantly warns for bad behavior) than Wonderful Family and Rasullulah’s Business School. At the same time, it claims a certain hipness, both through its form – the book is a Twittergraphy – which alludes to the popularity of social media among Indonesian youngsters (see also chapter 7), and through the way it imagines Muslim girls as fashionable and cosmopolitan.

Twitografi Asma Nadia answers to worries young Muslim girls may have and to issues they assumedly encounter in their lives. I have proposed that in the act of giving advice, a technology of normalization is at work. This technology of normalization governs three domains: (1) girls’ bodies, (2) girls’ interpersonal and intimate relations, and (3) their relation to, and their mobility in, space. Through this technology the book constructs a gendered and idealized norm of conduct for Muslim girls. The book suggests that girls who fit this norm are rewarded, while girls who deviate from this norm are considered a bad Muslim. The ways in which in Twitografi Asma Nadia girls are governed along the lines of their femininity (for instance through their female bodies or through their relationships with men), suggests that there is a gendered dimension to governmentality. This is something that I will explore further in the next chapter, where I will zoom in on gendered biopolitical practices in Islamic-themed films.

Twitografi Asma Nadia in the end distinguishes between the ‘wrong’ modern female subject and the ‘right’ modern female subject. It promotes a female modern subject that is ambitious, self-conscious, sophisticated, fashionable, family-minded, responsible, cosmopolitan, and above all pious. This is a female citizen-subject that
can participate in a Indonesian Islamic modernities, and that is still a good Muslim.

Although the three books construct different Islamic citizen-subjects, they also share similarities. First, they are all responsible, self-enterprising, and self-governing subject. While *Wonderful Family* and *Rasullulah’s Business School* stimulate hard work and self-reliance, *Twitografi Asma Nadia* encourages an ambitious and autonomous attitude. In all three books, people – and not the government or someone else – are responsible for themselves. We have seen that people are responsible for their own success, for their own position in society, and even for the maintenance of religious public spaces (*Twitografi Asma Nadia*).

Second, the modern Islamic citizen-subjects that *Wonderful Family*, *Rasullulah’s Business School*, and *Twitografi Asma Nadia* construct and promote can all participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. This does however not mean that these subjects are only gesturing towards a distant modern future. Rather they point our gaze back to the disputes and contradictions that exist in a present Indonesian society. As we have seen, the books encourage the construction of citizen-subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the unequal spread of wealth (although *Wonderful Family* forms an exception here), while actively negotiating cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. *Wonderful Family*’s subject actively negotiates ethnic and cultural differences, *Rasullulah’s Business School*’s subject is encouraged to share its wealth and to help others, and *Twitografi Asma Nadia*’s subject is aware of negative discourses that cast Muslims of terrorists and aims to challenge these discourses.

*Wonderful Family*, *Rasullulah’s Business School*, and *Twitografi Asma Nadia* here differ from the socially withdrawn, detached and hyperindividualist subjects that Rimke (2010) and Illouz (2008) identified in American self-help books. The three self-help books that I analyzed do not “undermine[s] collective formations and the essential interdependencies of selves” (Rimke 2010: 70), but are instead socially conscious – although *Wonderful Family*’s masking of capitalism’s contradictions challenges this observation. Since the books’ citizen-subjects are modelled to help an Indonesian society and an Indonesian Islamic modernity to function, we could see the construction of this sometimes ambiguous social-conscious subject as the result of a specific Indonesian mode of governmentality.

In the beginning of this chapter, I wondered whether we could also think of an Islamic mode of governmentality. This is a relevant question in a time in which non-Western and non-secular states increasingly make use of optimizing technologies of government (Ong 2006: 3). This question has however received little scholarly attention, since, as I suggested earlier, there is a lack of research in governmentality.
studies on questions of religion.

My analysis of Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia shows how Islam and governmentality can go together. It shows how the seemingly conflicting notions of a self-enterprising subject (‘you determine your own fate’) and an almighty God (‘Allah determines your fate’) go hand in hand. In ‘Security, Territory, Population’ (2008a [1977-1978]) Foucault observes how in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pastoral governmental practices are secularized and broadened at the moment when feudal structures disappeared and territories and colonial empires developed (265). The modern and capitalist state later instilled in these practices the ideas of calculation, population, goals, and the government of the social body at large. What we can witness in Indonesian Islamic self-help books is that these ‘secularized practices’ are induced with religiosity again: they are Islamized. ‘The governance of souls’, ‘the authority of an otherworldly entity’, and ‘the establishment of mores’ that were part of pastoral power are in Islamic self-help books (re)mapped on the modern notion of governmentality. The result is a form of Islamic governmentality in which people are first and foremost governed through their ‘Muslim souls’, i.e. through their belief and loyalty to Allah. Unlike in the secular notion of governmentality, they are not only accountable to themselves, to others and by extension to society, but now also to a higher power, Allah. It is then through affecting the ‘Muslim soul’ that this form of Islamic governmentality – like pastoral power – not only tries to establish general (Islamic) mores within the population, but also produces citizen-subjects that act in ways that are beneficial to Indonesian society and future Islamic modernities.

This form of Islamic governmentality thus seeks to govern people through their ‘Muslim souls’. The analysis of Twitografi Asma Nadia however also hinted at a form of government that focuses on the gendered body. How does Islamic governmentality produce not only ideal Muslim citizen subjects through their ‘souls’, but also through their (gendered) bodies? How are governmentalized Muslim bodies produced? In the next chapter I will engage with these questions by zooming in on Islamic-themed films.
Chapter 5

‘So Islam really honours women?’: Muslim masculinity and feminity in Islamic-themed films
Chapter 5
‘So Islam really honours women?:
Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

“I wiped away my tears several times. It is a touching film; it delivered its messages very well. I think all of us agree that this film teaches us good values... about how we should uphold tolerance and peace in life.”
- President Yudhoyono after watching Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Nurhayati, The Jakarta Post 2008)

On 28 March 2008, Plaza EX in Jakarta was closed down to host a special film viewing. On that Friday evening, Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was joined by his cabinet ministers, state officials, the Jakartan diplomatic community, journalists, cast members, and his own family to watch the Islamic-themed blockbuster film Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of love, 2008). In the weeks before, the romantic drama about a pious Indonesian student and his female admirers had spread a film-fever across the archipelago never seen before in the history of Indonesian cinema. Attracting a staggering four million Indonesians in the first month, Ayat-Ayat Cinta crushed all previous visitor-records in Indonesia. The Muslim must-see also drew the strictest Muslims to ‘the secular spaces’ of cinemas and malls, spaces they generally like to avoid (Nurhayati, The Jakarta Post 2008). It seemed as if nobody could escape the Ayat-Ayat Cinta fever. Viewers even declared “if you did not cry when you saw the film, then there must be something wrong with you as a Muslim.” (Widodo 2008)

After watching the film, Yudhoyono admitted that he too had to wipe away tears and that he felt the film set a good example of “how Indonesians should struggle to show the true face of Islam to the world, i.e. as a religion of peace, harmony and tolerance.” (Indonesia Matters 2008) The president also stated that he was proud of the Indonesian film industry and that he believed that it could continue to thrive in the future. As it turned out, with this last statement Yudhoyono was not far from what would soon thereafter happen to the Indonesian film industry. In retrospect, Ayat-Ayat Cinta was the film that opened the cinematic floodgates for the portrayal of Islamic lifestyles and issues in popular film, thereby giving the domestic film industry a new impulse.
Ayat-Ayat Cinta set off a wave of Islamic-themed films (The Jakarta Globe 2011). Films with titles like Ketika Cinta Bertasbih (When love is glorified by God, 2009), Perempuan Berkalung Sorban (The woman with a turban, 2009), 3 Doa, 3 Cinta (Three prayers, three loves, 2009), Sang Pencerah (The enlightener, 2010), and Di Bawah Lindungan Ka‘bah (Under the protection of Ka‘bah, 2011) were released and have often beaten Hollywood productions in the Indonesian box-office. Before Ayat-Ayat Cinta’s success, only few Islamic-themed films were made. Among them were Al-Kautsar (1977), Titian serambut dibelah tujuh (1982), and Nada dan dakwah (1991). As I pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation, cultural expressions of Islam in popular culture were long suppressed during Suharto’s rule. Katinka van Heeren (2007) however asserts that during the New Order religious elements were present in the horror and supernatural film genre. In this genre, Islam was often personified by the kyai (teacher of Islam) who exorcized all evil and restored moral order (Van Heeren 2007: 213).

The recent emergence of Islamic-themed films reflects the increasing prominence of Islam in the cultural landscape of post-authoritarian Indonesia. The rise of what in popular discourse is often called film Islami (‘Islamic film’), has not escaped controversy. Ekky Imanjaya (2009) explains how the undertaking of film Islami has been rejected by cultural critics and Islamic groups. Lukman Hakim, an intellectual and well-known blogger belonging to the conservative Salafi School, for instance stated: “buying a ticket to watch a movie like Ayat-Ayat Cinta is like buying a ticket to hell.” (Hakim, cited in Imanjaya 2009) For him, “watching movies is a useless and pointless activity that takes place in an environment of ikhtilat, a space where boys and girls mingle.” (Hakim, cited in Imanjaya 2009)

Ariel Heryanto (2011) has pointed out that many cultural critics now also admit to “the diverse motivations, meanings, and intentions involved in what may appear to be a common pattern of consumerist passion” and that they acknowledge “the pleasure of displaying both wealth and piety among contemporary urban-based young and educated Muslims in Indonesia” (Heryanto 2011: 61).

In response to the controversy, filmmakers and cultural organizations have also expressed their views on combining film and Islam. The independent organisation MAV-NET (Morality Audio Visual Network), for instance claims that Muslim filmmakers should make films that avoid the violation of the Islamic law (Imanjaya 2009). To facilitate such filmmaking, the network actively tries to find ways around problems that could surface during filming. A scene showing intimacy between a husband and wife could for example be troubling if the actors are not married in real life. Following Ustadz Abu Ridho from the PKS (Prosperous Justice Party), MAV-NET
advises that such a scene is acceptable as long as the focus is on Islamic virtues (Imanjaya 2009). As Fendy Purohito of the independent Yogyakarta-based production company Mata Productions explains, many filmmakers have found ways to work around sensitive issues. According to him, most filmmakers rely on the audience’s knowledge of cinematic conventions. “A love affair between two characters does not have to be shown through kissing, but can also be suggested through the exchange of love-struck looks.” (conversation with author, July 2010)

More liberal Muslim directors see things yet differently. Deddy Mizwar (Ketika Cinta Bertasbih), for example, claims that it is a filmmaker’s duty to expand the language of film in new and creative ways. Mizwar believes that syariah (Islamic law) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) should not hinder filmmakers, but could open up creative spaces in the search for alternative idioms and forms of storytelling (Imanjaya 2009). For him, showing an unmarried couple hugging to express their feelings for each other is just another cinematic cliché. Instead Mizwar opts for a more poetic alternative by having the male character in Para Pencari Tuhan address his love interest with the words: “If syariah allows it, I will purify myself in the water of your tears.” (Imanjaya 2009)

Despite these creative alternatives, Islamic-themed cinema remains a catalyst for debate. And nothing appeals more to commentators than the content of these films, i.e. the stories they tell, the characters they create, and the issues they put forward. In this context, particularly portrayals of Muslim femininity and masculinity have figured prominently in wider public debates. As Sonja van Wichelen (2010) points out, representations of gender have in the past few years stirred national debates about polygamy, the position of women in Islam, sexuality, and domestic violence (cf. Van Wichelen 2010: 235; Hoesterey 2013). The film Berbagi Suami (2006) has for instance helped people to publicly assess polygamy, thereby challenging the taboo on talking about the subject (Van Wichelen 2010: 235).

I would like to stress here that the post-New Order representations of gender need to be seen in the light of Indonesia’s recent history. During Suharto’s New Order (1966-1998), representations of masculinity and femininity were part of the regime’s national project, and as such served a national function. Media products frequently contained ‘messages’ from the government. As Sita Aripurnami (1996), Saraswati Sunindyo (1993; 1998), and Suzanne Brenner (1999) show, these messages often had a strong gender implication. They linked good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities, thereby creating highly stereotypical images of women (Brenner 1999: 15).

In her study of gender discourses in New Order TVRI television programs,
Sunindyo (1993) provides an example. She cites the ‘Panca Dharma Wanita’, the five duties of women that were repeatedly propagated through state-run women’s organizations. According to these, “a wife’s role is to support her husband, provide offspring, care for the children, be a good housekeeper, and be the guardian of the community” (Sunindio 1993: 135). The impact of these precepts was enhanced by media, which functioned as part of the state’s ideological apparatus (Sunindio 1993: 134; Brenner 1999: 15). Consequently, media portrayals of women during the New Order showed them mostly in the domestic sphere, catering to their husbands and taking care of the children. And while it is hard to document the impact of the state’s gender ideologies on media and other social domains, there is a broad agreement among scholars that the New Order state’s policies had a marked influence on public discourses surrounding gender (Brenner 1999: 15).

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 opened up a space for identity politics and for a critical attitude toward New Order gender stereotypes, although regulation and (self)censorship continue to exist today. The newly liberalized cultural scene nevertheless provides ample opportunities for the creative industry to construct different representations of gender and to tackle issues that are considered to be taboo.

This raises the question how today’s post-New Order representations of gender compare to their New Order counterparts. How are representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity in post New Order Islamic-themed cinema constructed? How do these constructions negotiate ‘sensitive’ topics like polygamy, sexuality, and (domestic) violence? And do these constructions also serve a specific national function?

This chapter explores these questions through conducting a discourse, visual, and narrative analysis (cf. Introduction p: 39) of three post-New Order Islamic-themed films. These films: Berbagi Suami (Love for share, 2006), Virgin (2004), and Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of love, 2008) all engage with ‘sensitive’ issues. Berbagi Suami deals with polygamy, Virgin tells a story about teen sexuality, and Ayat-Ayat Cinta confronts (domestic) violence and the position of women in Islam.

In the previous chapter, I explored how self-help books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. In this chapter, I look at the three films to explore how this process is gendered. I do so by drawing on Michel Foucault’s (1975-1976; 2003) notion of ‘biopolitics’. For Foucault, biopolitics refers to a particular modern notion of governmental reason in which bodies, life, and biological processes move to the heart of political struggle (Lazzarato 2002: 99).
Whereas in the previous chapter, I drew on a more general notion of
governmentality as a range of forms of action aimed in a complex way at steering
individuals and collectives, I here focus on a particular mode of governmentality that
aims to govern a population through seeking control over bodies and biological
processes. Since ‘a politics of the gendered (Muslim) body’, ideal images of Muslim
femininity and masculinity, issues of reproduction, and related to that, questions of
motherhood and fatherhood, are central to the negotiation of ‘sensitive issues’ in
Berbagi Suami, Virgin, and Ayat-Ayat Cinta, analyzing them through the prism of
biopolitics can provide insight in the ways in which Islamic governmentality is
gendered. Through the analysis, I propose that the sensitivities portrayed in these
films are closely linked to anxieties that come with processes of modernization, and
that it is through the representation of gender that modernity is negotiated. In this
way, post-New Order representations of masculinity and femininity obtain their own
national function; they negotiate ‘right’ male and female modern identities in an era
of modernization.

This study of post-New Order representations contributes to a growing body of
work that is concerned with gender relations in post-authoritarian Indonesia (cf.
Most of this research has concentrated on the realities of women. Tom Boellstorff
(2005; 2007), Sharyn Davies (2010), and Dede Oetomo (2000) have nevertheless
done extensive work on other genders and sexualities in Indonesia (e.g. gay, lesbi,
waria, bissu). Significantly less attention has been paid to heterosexual masculinities
(but see Paramaditha 2007; Clark 2004; Hoesterey and Clark 2013). As Lyn Parker
(2008) notes in her study of adolescent sexuality in Indonesia: “at present we have
the rather bizarre situation that we seem to have more explicit and sophisticated
work on alternative sexualities than we do on hegemonic heterosexuality” (Parker
2008: 4, cited in Clark and Hoesterey 2013: 4). By studying heterosexual Muslim
masculinity and femininity, this chapter aims to bring more balance into the
discussion of gender in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Also, by exploring how ideas about manhood and womanhood serve a national
function, I formulate a critique on a number of theoretical treatments that are
concerned with ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’, but that have ignored gender (e.g.
Gellner 2008; Greenfeld 1992; Hobsbawn 2012; Anderson 1983; 2006). Simultaneously, I will look critically at theories that share a concern with bringing the
notions of ‘gender’ and ‘nation’ together, but that have largely ignored masculinity
(e.g. Yuval-Davis 1997; De Mel 2001). Finally, this chapter problematizes the much
celebrated identity politics that the fall of the New Order regime has brought about.
I suggest that the contestatory force of stereotype-defying representations of gender is thrown into question by the ways these representations become subject to biopolitical governance. Their instrumentality to this kind of governance marks the emergence of ‘new’ representations of gender highly contradictory.

The ways in which identity politics are here encapsulated by a governmental project also raises questions about the practice of critical politics. How to resist when identity politics become subject to (biopolitical) governance? Are identity politics a useful tactic of contesting structures of power? What strategies for politics does Islamic-themed popular and visual culture offer? How can Muslims practice identity politics? What forms can contestations take? I will engage with these questions in the conclusion of this chapter.

Islamic-themed cinema: notes on selecting case studies

To investigate representations of femininity and masculinity, I take three Islamic-themed films as objects of analysis: Berbagi Suami (2006), Virgin (2004), and Ayat-Ayat Cinta (2008). Berbagi Suami tells the stories of three women who live in polygamous marriages in the city of Jakarta. Indonesia’s capital city also provides the backdrop for Virgin, which follows three girls as they explore both the city and their sexuality. Ayat-Ayat Cinta is a love story about the pious male student Fahri and his three female admirers.

While Berbagi Suami and Ayat-Ayat Cinta are considered to be film Islami (‘Islamic films’), Virgin is not immediately typified as such. It nevertheless features significant Islamic themes, characters, and storylines. I would like to underscore here that to investigate representations of Muslim femininity and masculinity, one does not necessarily has to focus on film Islami exclusively, but can also investigate other (Islamic-themed) films. To explain my point of view, I will first expand on what film Islami is understood to be.

Film Islami is a term that in post-New Order popular discourse has been used to refer to films that bernafaskan Islam (films that ‘breath Islam’). In recent years, several scholars have tried to understand film Islami as a specific film genre. Here, they have paid particular attention to unpacking what the adjective Islami means in the context of film. Hence, what makes films ‘Islamic’? What makes them ‘breath Islam’?

According to Eric Sasono (2013), the adjective Islami cannot be traced back to the films’ directors or producers. Indeed a small number of respected Muslim directors is particularly prominent in making film Islami, e.g. Hanung Bramantyo (Ayat-Ayat
Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

Chapter 5

Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

Cinta, Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, Sang Pencerah, Tanda Tanya, Doa Yang Mengacak), Chaerul Umam (Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1 and 2), and Nurman Hakim (Khalifah, 3 Doa, 3 Cinta) (Sasono 2013: 48-50). These filmmakers however emerge – like most producers, actors and crewmembers of film Islami – from a secular film industry rather than from Muslims groups. In addition, some of them are not even Muslim themselves. The producers of Ayat-Ayat Cinta – the Indian father and son Dhamoo and Manoj Punjabi from MD Pictures – are for instance Hindus and not Muslims. In a similar vein, Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1 and 2 (2008, 2009) and Dalam Mihrab Cinta (2010) were produced by Sinemart, the production company owned by the Catholic Chinese businessman, Leo Sutanto (Hoesterey and Clark 2013: 16).

Because the personal backgrounds of filmmakers and producers do not function as an organizing principle for film Islami, most scholars have used a definitional approach to understand film Islami as a genre (Mittell 2004: 2-3). They have tried to identify the core elements of film Islami by looking at a number of different texts. In his study of Islamic (electronic) films, Muzayin Nazaruddin (2008) for instance found that Islamic films have three recurring features. First, they use Islamic symbols. Characters wear Islamic attire and titles of films refer to Islamic idioms, e.g. Pintu Hidayah (The guidance way) or Rahasia Ilahi (Divine secret). Second, the (electronic) films are adaptations from religious books. The films often draw on stories from Muslim novelists (e.g. Habiburrahman El Shirazy) or even use the hadith as a source. And third, the figure of the Islamic cleric has a central role. In the films, clerics represent (male) Islamic authority and give moral advice to other characters (Nazaruddin 2008, paraphrased in Hakim 2010: 109-110).

While usefully pointing at the textual features of a number of films, these kinds of conceptions of film Islami ignore the idea that genres do not emerge exclusively from texts. As Jason Mittell (2004) has emphasized, genre is best understood as a process of categorization that is not (only) found within media texts, but that operates across the cultural realms of media industries, policy, critics, audiences, and historical contexts (Mittell 2004: xii). Rather than developing from texts, genres work to link texts into clusters of cultural assumptions through discourses of definition, interpretation, and evaluation.

Therefore, the discursive utterances of critics, producers, and marketers who are calling certain films film Islami or say they bernafaskan Islam (‘breath Islam’) may seem to reflect on an already established genre, but they are themselves constitutive of the genre. They are practices that define genres, delimit their meanings, and posit their cultural value (Mittell 2004: xii). Defining films as film
Islam is then not only tactic of branding and a smart way of targeting Indonesia’s large Muslim market, but it is also a way of demarcating a genre.

Indonesian audiences too are constitutive of the adjective Islami. Film Islami is especially remarkable in its capacity attract Muslims to the cinemas. As James Hoesterey and Marshall Clark (2013) argue, film Islami articulates forms of aspirational piety that particularly resonates with the anxieties, desires, and frustrations of middle-class Muslim audiences in Indonesia, who consume these films in large numbers (Hoesterey and Clark 2013: 2). This does not mean that film Islami speaks only to Muslim audiences, as non-Muslims can also enjoy the films’ universal themes of love, friendship, and family. Finally, the adjective Islami needs to be understood in the context of the long suppression of Islam during Suharto’s rule. Calling films Islami is an affirmative act; it is an act that carves out a new space in Indonesia’s cultural scape for Muslim issues and identity politics.

Although symptomatic for the post-New Order boom in Islamic popular culture, film Islami is not automatically better suited to study representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity than other Islamic-themed films. Films like Laskar Pelangi (Rainbow Militia, 2008), Rindu Kami padaMu (Our Longing for You, 2004), and Virgin (2004) are not considered to be examples of film Islami, but they are still full of Islamic values and representations of Muslim society. As Imanjaya (2009) asserts, film critics would even argue that sometimes these films are more ‘representative’ of Islam in Indonesian society than works that are considered film Islami (Imanjaya 2009).

For this reason, the label ‘film Islami’ was not a prerequisite for including films in my corpus. Rather, I selected films that feature significant Islamic themes, storylines, characters, and values. I particularly selected Berbagi Suami (2006), Virgin (2004), and Ayat-Ayat Cinta (2008) as case studies for two reasons.

First, these three films engage with different ‘sensitive’ topics. Berbagi Suami deals with polygamy, Virgin confronts teen sexuality, and Ayat-Ayat Cinta confronts (domestic) violence and the position of women in Islam. Exploring how the three films represent these topics helps to provide insight in the ways in which contemporary cinema positions itself in the post-authoritarian cultural scene. A study of these films allows me to look critically at the post-authoritarian cultural scene. This cultural scene has often been (uncritically) celebrated as liberalized and as providing space for identity politics (Widodo 2008). This view is understandable after more than three decades of state-dominated media, censorship, and fears of publicly expressing one’s beliefs and identity. But how ‘liberal’ is this scene? How does it for instance deal with issues that are considered taboo? An analysis of Berbagi Suami,
Virgin, and Ayat-Ayat Cinta enables me to look at these questions through the prism of film.

Second, I selected particularly these three films because they show a range of different femininities and masculiniti es. While Virgin deals with teenage sexuality, Ayat-Ayat Cinta explores gender related issues that young adults encounter, and the storyline of Berbagi Suami that I will analyze follows a middle aged couple. A comparison across age is particularly relevant considering that in public discourse it is often Indonesia’s next generation of young Muslims whose gender and sexuality is under intense scrutiny.

I pay attention to both masculinity and femininity. As Ayat-Ayat Cinta features a male character in a leading role, the analysis of this film is skewed towards masculinity. I particularly focus on Ayat-Ayat Cinta since the kind masculinity the film portrays seems to have inspired, or is at least part of, a larger trend in Indonesian Islamic-themed cinema in which a gentle Muslim masculinity is linked to piety. Hamid in Di Bawah Lindungan Ka’bah (2011) and Khairul Azzam in Ketika Cinta Bertasbih (2000) are other examples of this trend.

Similarly, since Berbagi Suami and Virgin feature female characters in leading roles, the analyses of these films will focus on femininity. I specifically choose to focus on these two films as both feature a variant of ‘the modern woman’ in a leading role. ‘The modern woman’ is a representation that blatantly defies the proper behavior of the ideal New Order woman (cf. Brenner 1999: 20) and that is symptomatic for a more liberal post-authoritarian cultural scene. While Berbagi Suami features the figure of the wanita karier (career woman) as a modern woman, Virgin casts ‘wild girls’ (promiscuous girls) as modern women. Both the figures of the ‘educated working woman’ and the ‘wild girl’ mark a break with the New Order stereotype of the ‘caring housewife’. They signify a shift in the representation of women from the passive, dependent New Order woman who serves her husband to a more independent woman, who does not need her husband’s financial support and/or enjoys sexual freedom. As I will show in the analysis, this shift is rendered contradictory when considering how representations of gender become subject to biopolitical governance and obtain a specific national function.

**Gender, nation and biopolitics**

To study how the representations of gender obtain a national function, I draw on Foucault’s notion of biopolitics. Foucault first elaborated his ideas on biopolitics in

In ‘Society Must Be Defended’ (2003 [1976]), Foucault describes how biopolitics departs from traditional modes of power. It specifically departs from sovereign and disciplinary power, which characterized the epochs that preceded the modern industrial era. Importantly, biopolitics does not replace these preceding modes of powers, but superimposes them.

In a sovereign society – where people obey to the laws of a monarch or central authority figure – “the right to ‘take’ life or ‘let’ live” defines power (Foucault 2003 [1976]: 241). In the classical theory of sovereignty, the right of life and death was one of sovereignty’s basic attributes. The sovereign can grant life in the same way that he can inflict death. However, as Foucault explains, the balance is always tipped in favor of death (240). Sovereign power’s effect on life is only exercised when the sovereign can kill. It is at the moment when the sovereign can kill that he exercises his right and obtains power over life (240-241).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries disciplinary power emerges and gradually takes over from sovereign power. The techniques of disciplinary power were focused on the individual body and included practices that ensured “the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, alignment, serialization) and the organization, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility.” (242) These mechanisms attempted to exercise or to drill individual bodies with the aim of increasing their productive force (Ibidem).

Then, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Foucault witnesses the emergence of yet a new form of power: biopower. Foucault writes of its emergence:

It is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organizing schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization. So much so that far too many things were escaping the old mechanism of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level. A first adjustment was made to take care of the details. Discipline had meant adjusting power mechanisms to the individual body by using surveillance and training. […] And then at the end of the eighteenth century, you have a second adjustment; the mechanisms are
adjusted to phenomena of population, to the biological [...] processes characteristic of
human masses. (249-250)

Foucault describes this second adjustment as the ‘biopolitics of the human race’
(243). Importantly, biopolitics does not exclude disciplinary power, but “dovetail[s]
into it, integrate[s] it, modify[es] it [...], and above all, use[s] it by sort of infiltrating it,
embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques.” (242) Hence, biopolitics does
not do away with disciplinary techniques, but “exists on a different level, on a
different scale, and it makes use of very different instruments.” (242) In contrast to
disciplinary power, which focuses on individual bodies, biopower is applied not to
man-as-body, but to man-as-living-being, to man-as-species. As Foucault writes:

The new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to
the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that
they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes
characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on (242-243).

Hence, the purpose of biopolitics is to intervene at the level of life. Life expectancy
has to be increased, birth rate has to be stimulated and mortality has to be lowered.
Biopolitics is not about ‘taking’ life or ‘letting’ live, but about ‘making’ live and
‘letting’ die (241). It aims to optimize the state of life and installs security
mechanisms around random elements inherent to a population. It thereby tries to
control the series of random events that occur in a living mass by predicting the
probability of these events and by compensating for their effects. In this way, a
population is not disciplined, but regularized (246).

From the end of the eighteenth century onward there are thus two technologies
of power – one disciplinary, one regulatory. These modes of power were established
at different times and were superimposed. Both technologies are obviously
technologies of the body, but one is a technology in which the body is
individualized as an organism endowed with capacities, while the other is a
technology in which the body is massified to regulate the population as a whole
(249). Because these two sets of mechanisms do not exist at the same level, they are
not mutually exclusive and can be articulated together (250). This power is not
centralized in state apparatuses, but is fragmented through society, across the
entirety of social relations.

In this chapter, I address how media, and in particular film, articulates this form of
power. I suggest that through their representations of gender, the selected films are
engaged in biopolitical governance. More specifically, their portrayals of masculinity and femininity revolve around both the pole of discipline and around the pole of regulatory control. The films seek to discipline male and female bodies in a way that secures, governs, and controls a larger future modern Indonesian nation and that protects the – quality of – life within this nation. As a result of these practices, gendered bodies are subjugated to a larger national project that revolves around the (desired) modernization of the Indonesian nation.

This chapter is then centrally concerned with the notions of gender and nation. My understanding of gender follows Judith Butler’s idea that gender is culturally constructed (Butler 1990: viii-ix), while my understanding of nation follows Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation as “an imagined political community [that is] imagined as both limited and sovereign” (Anderson 2006 [1983]: 6). Both notions are useful to this study as they are culturally and historically specific, which enables me to embed the analysis in the context of contemporary Indonesia.

Anderson’s (2006 [1983]) seminal work on imagined communities has, like other prominent theorizations of nations and nationalism (e.g. Hobsbawn 2012; Gellner 2008; Greenfeld 1992), ignored gender as irrelevant. As Nira-Yuval Davis (1997) asserts, this is most remarkable, especially when realizing that a major school of scholars, ‘the primordialists’ (e.g. Geertz 1963; Shils 1957; Isaacs 1975), has viewed the nation as a natural phenomenon that is an automatic extension of kinship relations (Yuval-Davis 1997: 1). And yet, when discussing issues of ‘national production’, prominent studies of nations and nationalisms do not relate to women or gender, but instead prefer to emphasize the role of intellectuals and state bureaucrats in the production of the nation (1-2).

Carole Pateman (1988) explains why gender has been conspicuously absent from theorizations of national production. She points at classical theories of ‘the social contract’, which divide civil society into a public and a private domain. These theories locate women and the family in the private domain, which is not seen as politically relevant for national processes (Pateman 1988: 4, paraphrased in Yuval-Davis 1997: 2). And since these theories have been widely influential, gender has been largely absent from theorizations of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997: 2).

The work of Partha Chatterjee (1990) forms an important exception to “gender-blind theorizations” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 4) of nations and nationalisms. He points out that we need to see the production of the nation as a gendered process. In ‘The National Resolution of the Women’s Question’ (1990), Chatterjee shows how national production is gendered. He observes that in colonial India the issue of female emancipation disappears from the public agenda right at the moment when
the national movement emerges. According to Chatterjee, this is no coincidence. During the national struggle, issues relating to women were to be looked upon as internal matters, which had to be resolved without the interference of the British colonial rule (Chatterjee 1990: 240; Taneja 2005: 36). As Chatterjee writes:

In the entire phase of national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of national culture, its spiritual essence. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity, at home they were tantamount to the annihilation of one’s very identity. (240)

Indian nationalist ideology thus locates the assumed core of national culture in the space of the home. For Indian nationalism, the home is the domain of the woman, while the outside world is the domain of the man. As Chatterjee continues:

The world is external, the domain of the material; the home represents [...] our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. (Chatterjee: 238-239)

By framing ‘the home’ as the space that must prevent ‘the nation’s true identity’ from crumbling under foreign forces, and by assigning the domain of the home exclusively to women, the weight of safeguarding the nation is placed on their shoulders.

Chatterjee’s example shows how ideas about womanhood and manhood thus play an important role in the production of nations. Other authors have – in different national contexts – observed similar processes. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) for instance notes how in Israel, the construction of nationhood brings with it specific notions of gender. Yuval-Davis describes how women produce the nation biologically, symbolically, and culturally (Yuval-Davis 1997: 21-23). Similarly, Neloufer de Mel (2001) describes how in Sri Lanka a nationalist discourse is produced that:

renders the male as the author and subject of the nation, while the female stands for the nation itself, in need of male protection, [she is] the reproducer and nurturer of future generations and the transmitter of cultural values. As reproducer she carries the responsibility of avoiding miscegenation to ensure ethnic, class, caste or racial purity. Her sexuality has to be policed and regulated to this end in the service of the nation. (2-3)
In this discourse, women are thus cast as instrumental to the ‘health’ of the nation. Through biopolitical practices that seek to regulate their sexuality, their mobility, and their motherhood, women are kept at the boundaries of the nation. And although in Sri Lanka – as well as in other postcolonial contexts – nationalism has been commensurate with the rise of women’s movements and the construction of ‘the modern woman’ through reforms that encompass education and marriage laws, it is often through these reforms that women are controlled (cf. De Mel 2001: 2).

In the context of Indonesia, Saskia Wieringa (2003) has shown how the New Order state has, for over thirty years, waged a war of sexual imagining against the communist party’s (PKI) women’s movement Gerwani. During the New Order, the government continuously posed itself against ‘the communist whores’ by launching a campaign that depicted the army under General Suharto as the virile saviors of a nation on the brink of destruction (Wieringa 2003: 70). As Wieringa writes: “their wrath seemed specifically aimed at women who had breached the kodrat wanita (women’s moral code), a [New Order] ideology that suggested women should be meek, submissive, and politically passive” (Wieringa 2003: 70). Through portraying communist women as disobedient and sexually aggressive, the New Order state could delineate and promote its own models of femininity that were to sustain New Order ideals of discipline and order.

By showing how discourses of gender serve a national function in post-authoritarian Indonesia, this chapter articulates a critique of gender-blind theorizations of the nation. Simultaneously, my study contributes to the existing body of work that has been concerned with bringing the notions of gender and nation together (e.g. Chatterjee 1990; De Mel 2001; Yuval Davis 1997; Sharp 1996; Kandiyoti 1991; Boehmer 2005; Geiger 1997). The national projects that these authors have studied – the works of Chatterjee, De Mel, Yuval-Davis, and Wieringa here form a case in point – often assign a central role to women. Consequently, masculinity, and specifically of non-military and non-violent masculinity, has often been ignored (but see Nagel 1998; Banerjee 2012; Lambevski 1999).

The present case study of contemporary Indonesia interferes here. The analysis of the representations of gender in post-New Order films demonstrates how not only women, but also men, become subject to biopolitical regulation. In Indonesia both men and women are imagined to be part of a national project that revolves around the (desired) modernization of the Indonesian nation. I propose that the ways in which these ‘national subjects’ are envisioned both confirms and contests the
dualistic view that sees men as the authors of the nation while women stand for the nation itself.

**Berbagi Suami: polygamy and the struggle of the modern woman**

*Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share, 2006) is the second fiction film by Nia Dinata, a feminist artist and director. Dinata is known for her explicit use of the medium ‘film’ to practice affirmative identity politics. Her debut film, *Arisan!* (2003), was the first Indonesian film to show a gay couple kissing on the big screen. In *Berbagi Suami*, Dinata tackles the ‘issue’ of polygamy. The film was well received and won several prices in the international film festival circuit. It was also sent to the 79th Academy Awards as Indonesia’s official submission, but was not shortlisted.

Polygamy, the right for a Muslim man to marry more than one woman, has long been a subject of debate in Indonesia (Van Wichelen 2010: 187). President Suharto, who promoted the conjugal couple and the nuclear family, had legally restricted the practice of polygamy (189), thereby temporarily silencing Muslim groups who advocated the practice. The fall of Suharto’s regime re-opened the discussion about the controversial topic. And when in 2003 the polygamous entrepreneur Puspo Wardoyo set up the ‘Polygamy Awards’ – to be rewarded to men who were regarded to have successful polygamous marriages – a nationwide debate came into effect with arguments against and in favor of polygamy. This debate intensified when in 2006 the popular celebrity preacher AA Gym announced his polygamous marriage. Arguments in favor of polygamy included the idea that men practice polygamy because of their biological sexual drive, and the idea that polygamy protects the nation from social ills. In this latter reasoning, men shoulder to the ‘heroic’ burden of saving women from poverty. Arguments against polygamy included the idea that polygamy is detrimental to the freedom and health of women and children, and the idea that polygamy discredits the harmony of the family (188).

Through this debate, polygamy-endorsing and polygamy-discouraging images and narratives entered public discourse. Gradually the taboo on polygamy was lifting, replacing silence with openness and allowing a variety of discourses about polygamy to be heard.

The film *Berbagi Suami* participates in this public discussion about polygamy. *Berbagi Suami* follows, in three separate stories, three women who are dealing with polygamy. I focus on the story of Salma. Salma (Jajang C. Noer) is a middle class *wanita karier* (educated working woman) who discovers that her husband has
secretly married four other women. Salma works as a gynecologist in a clinic where she monitors pregnant women and conducts research. Her husband, Ali Rohim (El Manik), is a politician and bears the title ‘Pak Haji’, which indicates that he has gone through pilgrimage in Mecca. Together they have a son, Nadim (Winky Wiryawan), who at the beginning of the film is a young child and at the end of the film is a young adult. I particularly zoom in on the story of Salma, as her middle-class background and her professional status allow me to investigate the representation of ‘the modern woman’. The other two stories, one about a lower-class couple and one about a Chinese-Indonesian woman, however also provide rich material for analysis.

In the following analysis, I propose that through the story of Salma, Berbagi Suami constructs a highly critical discourse about polygamy. This discourse views polygamy as an unjust and perilous practice. This critical discourse may at first – especially for those who see polygamy as detrimental to women – seem very progressive. It is however highly contradictory. In Berbagi Suami polygamy is framed as a challenge for women to overcome. The film suggests that even in an extremely painful situation, like a polygamous marriage, women should put their family – and not their own happiness – first. Through articulating this discourse, Berbagi Suami offers women an ‘right modern’ subject position in which her role as a mother and her role as citizen of the nation are linked together.

The discourse that is critical of polygamy is constructed through three sub-discourses. In these discourses, polygamy is considered to be (1) detrimental to the unity of the family, (2) hurtful to women, and (3) destructive to men themselves. These discourses are in Berbagi Suami constructed through different narrative and audiovisual techniques.

Through the use of sound, editing and framing, Berbagi Suami’s opening scene straightaway articulates the discourse that polygamy threatens the unity of the family. In the opening scene, Salma discovers to her surprise that her husband has married a second wife. We see Salma and her husband Pak Haji at a fundraiser party, where Pak Haji is a guest of honor. Salma and Pak Haji are introduced to the viewer in a two-shot (Figure 1). They are listening to a band that is playing and they are enjoying each other’s company: we see them chatting, happily smiling, and affectionately touching each other. The shots of Salma and Pak Haji signify a harmony and balance between husband and wife. This balance is disrupted when a woman and her daughter join their table. As Figure 2 shows, the woman literally comes to stand in between Salma and Pak Haji, thereby breaking up their two-shot (Figure 2). This signals a first interruption of Salma and Pak Haji’s unity.
A second and much stronger interruption of the couple’s unity takes place when the woman – unaware of the fact that Salma does not know of her existence – introduces herself as Indri, and her daughter as Icha. Salma listens politely to Indri’s introduction (Figure 3). When Icha addresses Pak Haji as “daddy!” Salma realizes that her husband has secretly married a second wife, and that Icha is their child. Precisely at the moment that Salma discovers this, Berbagi Suami cuts from a shot of Salma’s face (Figure 3) to a black screen (Figure 4) while all sound is muted. After the screen remains black for a few seconds, we return to the scene. It appears that the venue suffered from a power failure. Significantly, when the lights flash back on, we see Pak Haji holding his daughter, while Salma has been pushed to the border of the frame (Figure 5).

Figure 1: Two-shot of Salma and Pak Haji at a fundraiser party

Figure 2: Indri and her daughter join Salma and Pak Haji
Figure 3: Salma listens politely to Indri’s introduction

Figure 4: Insert of a black screen

Figure 5: Salma looks at her ‘new’ family and has herself been pushed to its borders
The black-screen interruption generates a threefold meaning. First, it signifies the cut that has just been made in Salma’s family by the polygamous marriage, while also pointing at the disruption of the harmony between Salma and Pak Haji. Second, the black screen expresses Salma’s mental state, i.e. her shock reaction to the discovery of the polygamous marriage. The insert of the black screen suggests that Salma is for a moment disconnected from her surroundings; that for a few seconds everything has turned black before her eyes. And when Salma ‘comes back’, she is faced with the harsh reality that there is a new woman and a new child in her life, and that she has moved from a central position in the family (Figure 1) to its border (Figure 5). It is from that position that she is now forced to watch a new family enter into her old family. Finally, the insert of the black screen breaks up the unity and the flow of the film itself. This not only points to the breakup of the unity of the characters onscreen, but it also distances the viewer from the film for a moment, before pulling the viewer back in again. By doing this, *Berbagi Suami* aligns the experience of the viewer with Salma’s experience of temporary alienation.

The opening scene puts forward the issue with which Salma has to deal in the rest of the film. In the remainder of the film, Salma’s struggle to keep the family together is shown. *Berbagi Suami* stresses that this struggle is painful and difficult. The film constructs a discourse that polygamy is hurtful to women, but that they have to hold on for the sake of the family. In *Berbagi Suami*, this discourse is constructed through at least two patterns. I will elaborate each in the following.

In *Berbagi Suami*, the use of setting, light, framing, and composition repeatedly suggests that Salma is trapped in, and confined by, the polygamous marriage. Moreover, it is suggested that in this marriage Salma is subjected to the will and wishes of her husband. Illustrating this pattern is the scene where Salma and Pak Haji come home after the fundraiser party. After the shock discovery at the fundraiser Salma remains composed. However upon their arrival home, Salma rushes into the bathroom, locks herself up, and starts crying. When Pak Haji manages to open the door, they have an argument about his polygamous practices. The setting, lighting, framing, and dialogue of this scene construct Salma’s confinement and her lack of power in the polygamous marriage. As Figure 6 shows, the bathroom in which Salma locks herself up is a rather dark closed off space. The impression is created that the only light in the room is the light that falls through the venetian blinds (Figure 7). The blinds, which create a barred space, construct Salma’s imprisonment; they highlight her entrapment. Simultaneously, the blinds create the impression that it is darker and more claustrophobic inside the room, in which the characters are confined, than it is outside. This inside-outside opposition is
significant as we later learn that Salma tries to hide her painful struggle from the outside world. For the outside world, Salma and Pak Haji still perform that they are a happy couple.

During their conversation, Pak Haji explains that he decided to marry Indri, because by marrying her he would avoid adultery. In the scene, Salma is constructed as subordinate to Pak Haji in several ways. First, Pak Haji is quick to tell Salma that she needs to accept the situation and “throw away all the anger that she holds against him”. The dialogue thus makes clear that Salma is rather powerless in this situation.

Simultaneously, Salma is ‘cornered’ through various visual strategies. While they are arguing, Salma is positioned in the corner of the room, and often in the corner of the screen (Figure 7). During the full length of the scene, Salma is positioned lower in the frame than Pak Haji (Figures 6-7). Consequently, Pak Haji is constantly looking
down at Salma (Figures 6-7), while Salma has to look up at Pak Haji (Figure 8). In this way, Pak Haji is constructed as a powerful and dominant person. The fact that Salma is crying, looks dishevelled and dressed in a bathrobe, while Pak Haji remains composed and is dressed in a formal shirt, further adds to the impression that he is in control of the argument and the situation, while Salma lacks control and power.

At the same time, Pak Haji is in this scene constructed as an unsympathetic and dodgy character. Chiaroscuro lighting constantly covers half of Pak Haji’s face in shadows (Figure 9). This in contrast to Salma’s face, which is fully lit (Figure 8). This lighting creates the impression that Pak Haji is hiding something. And as it later turns out, Pak Haji has indeed not told the whole truth during their bathroom argument. It later appears that he did not just marry one, but four other wives. Hence, through the setting, framing, lighting, and dialogue this scene (in combination with later events where Salma finds out Pak Haji has lied to her) constructs not only the discourse that polygamy is confining and hurtful to women, but also that men who practice polygamy are untrustworthy.

Figure 8: Salma looks up to Pak Haji

Figure 9: Chiaroscuro lighting covers Pak Haji’s face in shadows during their argument
The pattern in which Salma is trapped in spaces in which she has to obey to the wishes of her husband – no matter how painful this is – recurs several times. Halfway through the film, Pak Haji suffers from a heart attack and becomes bed-ridden. He wants to be treated at Salma’s home. As a result, the other women move into Salma’s place as they all thrive to offer attention to the sick man. Until then, Salma has avoided the other women. Seeing them is too painful for her. But now that they moved into her house, Salma cannot escape them anymore. *Berbagi Suami* emphasizes that Salma stays strong for Nadim. As her voice-over sounds: “looking at Nadim and his dedication to his father adds to my drive to care for Pak Haji.”

The situation is about to get even more painful. When Salma heads home to treat Pak Haji – she is after all a doctor – two other wives greet her in front of her own house (Figure 10). When Salma tells them that she has stopped by to treat Pak Haji, the women object and physically block her from walking into her own house. Salma is during this conversation positioned next to a birdcage (Figure 10). The presence of the cage is highlighted through tweeting sounds. As the scene develops, the cage comes to signal Salma’s own confinement. The women tell Salma that they have found an alternative doctor and that Salma is no longer needed. Salma objects, but the women push her back, walk inside and close the door of her house on her (Figure 11). The camera zooms out to a long shot, while slow, sad non-diegetic violin music is played. As figure 12 shows, Salma is again caught in a barred setting. Moreover, she is positioned in between two birdcages, which symbolize Salma’s ‘imprisonment’. Significantly, through this imprisonment, she is not closed in, but shut out, creating an even more agonizing experience for Salma. She is shut out from her own house. In the long shot, the distance – which makes Salma look small,
especially in front of the big house – in combination with the violin music and the shut door emphasizes her loneliness. As her voice-over had earlier commented: “Loneliness comes when he [her husband] has to share his time, but I have to be strong for Nadim and looking at his peaceful face gives me the power to go on.” Although the situation is utterly painful, Salma holds on for her son.

Figure 11: The door is closed on Salma

Figure 12: long shot of Salma in front of her own house

The scenes in which Salma is caught in barred spaces and is subjected to the will and wishes of her husband are contrasted with a scene where she finally makes her own decision. Near the end of the film, Salma and Nadim go horse riding and are shown jumping obstacles, a practice that is symbolic for what happens as the scene develops. Figure 13 shows Salma riding a horse, an act that creates the impression that she is in control. The low-angle shot shows the obstacle’s bars in the foreground, while Salma and her horse – who are seen in the background and who
we look up to – have just leapt over the obstacle. This shot suggests that the bars do not trap Salma anymore, but that she literally overcomes them.

And when we subsequently see Salma and Nadim talking in the stables – again a barred space – (Figure 14) it appears that Salma has finally made a decision of her own. In the stables, Salma and Nadim have a disagreement about how Pak Haji has ordered Salma to go on a publicity trip and how Salma never fights the hurtful situation she is in. Nadim objects to Salma’s lack of resistance. The distance between them during their conversation (Figure 14) emphasizes their difference of opinions. Their conversation goes as follows:

Salma: Don’t be upset Nadim, it’s our fate we have to accept it.
Nadim: Fate? Fate is decided by Allah. Mankind has no power to change that. You have a choice. I always thought you were the smartest, most independent woman I’ve ever known.
Salma: Being smart and independent has nothing to do with this.
Nadim: Well, as a doctor you should feel ashamed to go to Aceh with dad’s political entourage.
Salma: Who says that I will do so? I cancelled the trip with your dad.

In this conversation two opposing discourses about polygamy are constructed. On the one hand, polygamy as constructed as a fate one has to undergo, while on the other hand polygamy is constructed as a choice where there is a way out of a painful situation. Nadim finds Salma’s position incompatible with her identity as a modern woman, i.e. as an independent, educated, and smart woman, as a doctor. While Salma and Nadim’s disagreement about polygamy remains unresolved – no discourse is favored – the scene negotiates a midway. Salma’s view on polygamy does not change, but she finally makes her own decision and takes a first step towards improving her condition. The remainder of the scene supports this decision. After telling Nadim that she has decided not to join Pak Haji on his publicity tour, they walk from the barred setting together (Figure 15) into an open space (Figure 16). The open space points at Salma’s self-acquired freedom. The distance between them has disappeared and as Figure 16 shows, Nadim has put his arm around Salma, constructing them as a unity.
Figure 13: Salma jumping obstacles

Figure 14: Salma and Nadim talking in the stables

Figure 15: Salma and Nadim walk away from the stables
Hence, so far I have suggested that through a pattern of spatial confinement, *Berbagi Suami* constructs a discourse in which polygamy is hurtful to women and in which polygamy suppresses women. A second pattern contributes to the construction of this discourse. This pattern not only shows polygamy as hurtful to women, but it also constructs the (public display of) struggle and pain as incompatible with Salma’s (public) identity as a strong and independent ‘modern woman’. In this pattern, the divide between private and public breaks down, which leads people to see Salma’s subordination. As a result, Salma is humiliated and loses face.

A scene in which Salma is at work illustrates this pattern. While Salma is treating a patient, her voice-over sounds: “When fate revealed its absolute power, my life has changed. But I try to act as if nothing has changed, despite all the contradictions. The design of the exterior still has not been changed.” Hence, Salma makes a distinction between her private and her public life. Although Pak Haji’s polygamous marriage has changed her private life, she aims to keep her public life intact, i.e. her life in which she is a well-respected woman, has a career, and has status.

In *Berbagi Suami* the private/public divide however continuously breaks down. During a lunch with her colleagues at the hospital, Salma is paged by Pak Haji and immediately leaves the table to call him. Her colleagues act surprised that she immediately comes to his aid and start gossiping about Salma, saying: “When it comes to her husband she is not that tough. She is only tough at work. By the way, the rumour that her husband has another wife is really true.” While her colleagues are gossiping, we see that Salma overhears their conversation and ashamedly looks away. Despite her attempts to maintain the divide between her private and her
public life, it is breaking down. Moreover, Salma’s subservient reply to Pak Haji’s message and the discovery of her polygamous marriage are here threatening her image as a ‘modern woman’, i.e. as a strong, respected, and tough professional.

A second example of the breakdown of the public/private divide is a scene where Salma heads to Pak Haji’s favourite restaurant to pick up his favourite meal. Salma does everything she can to protect her family, and most important her son. When she notices a crack in the bond between father and son because of her own bitter attitude toward her husband, she tries to repair it. As Salma heads to the restaurant, we hear her voice-over: “apparently my bitterness has caused him [her son] to become a cynical young man. I think it is time to repair the bond. I’ve bought their [her husband and son’s] favorite roasted duck for dinner tonight.” While Salma pays for the duck, she chats with the cashier, who is a family friend. When Salma takes her seat in the car that is waiting for her, she looks out of the window (Figure 17). To her shock she notices that Pak Haji and his second wife are eating in the same restaurant. Sad non-diegetic violin music is played. Simultaneously, we hear Salma’s voice-over: “He’s still busy with the same old face, and ten years are still not enough to completely heal my wound.” Despite the passing of time, the polygamous marriage thus remains painful to Salma.

Figure 17: Salma watches her husband having dinner with his second wife

Salma sadly watches how Pak Haji and Indri walk up to pay for their dinner. The cashier, with whom Salma had just made a conversation, recognizes Pak Haji and realizes he has another wife. She directly gives Salma a surprised look (Figure 18). Salma looks shaken, not only because she feels humiliated, but also because she has been caught in public looking distracted – which contrasts with her normally composed and in-control demeanour and appearance. In response, Salma immediately closes the car window (Figure 19). By closing the window Salma not
only shields herself from the public eye, but closing the window also symbolizes her attempt to restore the divide between public and private, between an outside where she acts strong and composed, and an inside where she lacks control and breaks down. As Salma drives away, she is overwhelmed. Despite the painful situation, she later that evening sits calmly at the table with her husband and Nadim, acting like nothing has happened to not disturb the father-son bonding. Upholding family harmony is for Salma thus of utmost importance.

Figure 18: The cashier finds out about the polygamous marriage and gives Salma a shocked look

Figure 19: Salma closes the window in an attempt to restore the private/public divide

The biggest threat to the breakdown of the private/public divide comes from Nadim. At this point in the film, it has become widely known that ‘the politician Pak Haji’ is in a polygamous marriage. Being his first wife, Salma is therefore invited to discuss polygamy on a talk show. Salma is hesitant, but she has little choice: a positive message would be good publicity for Pak Haji. The host and the other guest, a female Muslim professor who is against polygamy, question Salma critically.
When asked if she sees polygamy as a setback for women, Salma answers: “I simply lead my life with the Qur’an as guide. In the Annisa [the Woman] verse the following is written: marry another woman that you like, two, three, four…” Hence, Berbagi Suami stresses that Salma does not only stay in a painful polygamous marriage, because she believes that her son needs a family with a mother and a father, but also because she is a devoted Muslim.

During the broadcast, Salma acts like a ‘happy wife’ and defends herself and her polygamous husband. Salma’s performance of confidence and control does not only serve Pak Haji, but can also be read as an attempt at restoring her public image. Nadim was also asked to appear on the talk show, but refused, as he is angry with his father for hurting his mother. When the host asks Salma what her son thinks about the situation, Salma answers that he is completely fine with it. Nadim, who is watching the live broadcast at home, is stunned by Salma’s comments. When the host asks people at home to call in and respond to the show, Nadim immediately picks up the phone and dials the show’s number. Nadim thus is about to break down the private/public divide and threatens to reveal the truth about Salma’s struggle on live television. When Nadim calls to the studio, the show is interrupted by breaking news: the tsunami has hit Indonesia. The interruption prevents that Salma’s struggle is revealed in the worst way possible: on national television, by her own son. The interruption however also ensures that Salma can – or has to – continue with keeping up appearances, which leads to more painful situations in the remainder of the film.

In Berbagi Suami two patterns thus construct a discourse in which polygamy is hurtful to women: (1) a pattern of ‘imprisonment’ and (2) a pattern in which a public/private divide breaks down or is threatened. This latter pattern does not only construct polygamy as hurtful, but it also constructs the (public display of) struggle and pain as incompatible with Salma’s (public) identity as a strong and independent ‘modern woman’. Berbagi Suami suggests that being a modern woman and being in a position of subordination do not go well together.

Berbagi Suami does not only show polygamy as hurtful to women, but the film also constructs the discourse that polygamy is destructive to men themselves. Berbagi Suami takes a strong stance against polygamy when halfway through the film Pak Haji suffers from a heart attack. It appears that handling four wives was too stressful for him. Over the course of the film, we witness how polygamy transforms Pak Haji from a self-confident and powerful man (Figure 6, 7) into a bed-ridden weak old man who has to rely on others to take care of him (Figure 20). In the end of the
film Pak Haji dies from heart failure, regretting that he, through practicing polygamy, has made a terrible mess and now pays for it with his life.

It is Nadim who, despite his anger with his father, takes care of Pak Haji on his deathbed. Salma is proud; she apparently has passed her good (family) values on to Nadim. On his deathbed Pak Haji tells Nadim: “Nadim, when you marry, later, promise me, only one wife.” Salma’s voice-over sounds: “those were the most important words for Nadim, right before Pak Haji died. He is not angry anymore.” Pak Haji’s death, and the fact that it was caused by the stress of his polygamous marriages, underlines *Berbagi Suami*’s rejection of polygamy.

![Figure 20: Salma and a nurse have to support Pak Haji while he tries to walk](image)

Hence, *Berbagi Suami* constructs a highly critical discourse about polygamy. This discourse views polygamy as an unjust and perilous practice. This discourse is constructed through three sub-discourses. In these discourses, polygamy is considered to be (1) damaging the unity of the family, (2) hurtful to women, and (3) destructive to men themselves. This critical discourse may at first – especially for those who see polygamy as detrimental to women – seem very progressive. It is however highly contradictory. *Berbagi Suami* frames polygamy as a challenge for women to overcome. The film suggests that even in an extremely painful situation, like a polygamous marriage, women should put their family – and not their own happiness – first. The scenes that follow Pak Haji’s death suggest that Salma did the right thing by staying in the polygamous marriage.

After Pak Haji’s funeral, Salma is ‘released’ from her painful situation and is ‘rewarded’ for being a good mother, for keeping her family together and for passing good values on to her son Nadim, as he becomes a ‘national hero’. Nadim becomes
a volunteer for the Red Cross to help people who have been hit by the 2004 tsunami. He has learnt from Salma that it is important to genuinely care about others. In his explanation for volunteering, he blames sensation-seeking Indonesians who do not contribute to society: “I really don’t get it, we are Indonesians, every time we want to help we always just look for media exposure… everybody is lining up to go there [Aceh], religious leaders, movie stars, rock stars… after taking some snapshots of them with the disaster they run back home.” By contrast, Nadim decides to go to Aceh for a longer period of time, so that he can help to rebuild the province. Salma, in her role of being a mother, here thus comes to play an important part in the development of the Indonesian nation. Because she passed on the ‘right’ values to her son he can now actively and genuinely contribute to society.

Salma not only embodies this role as a ‘guardian of the nation’ in her private life, but also in her professional life. After Pak Haji’s death, Salma has to adjust to a life alone. As she puts it: “For the first time, I am leading my life without my son and husband. I have to find a way to give more meaning to my existence.” As it appears, Salma finds happiness and solace in her work. It is also there that she continues her role as a guardian of the Indonesian nation. Salma, in being a gynaecologist who works in a clinic where pregnant women are monitored, has literally made safeguarding the life of women and their unborn children her calling. Her job is to protect the production of Indonesia’s next generation and to secure its health. Now that her son and husband are no longer around, it is this job that, in Salma’s words, “gives meaning to [my] existence.”

Berbagi Suami here then constructs a subject position for women, which conflates a woman’s role as a mother and her role as a citizen of the nation. As I have demonstrated, it is in Berbagi Suami the figure of the woman who, in spite of all difficulties, must safeguard the well being of the family – and by extension that of the nation. Women’s choices are then not just seen as individual choices, but as choices that have a bearing on the future of Indonesian nation. Because of this great responsibility women cannot be selfish. They cannot divorce a polygamous husband, as this could break up the family and endanger the future of the nation.

To understand why women are, at this particular moment in time, viewed as the harbingers of the future of Indonesian nation, we need to look at the association of women with tradition and men with modernity. Suzanne Brenner (1999) explains this association:

As tradition and modernity are conceptualized, women tend to be identified as the keepers of tradition and the guardians of those institutions, domains and values that are
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most closely linked to tradition. This does not confine them conceptually to the past, however, because their duty is to maintain continuity with the imagined moral values of the ancestral past and to transmit them to future generations. (Brenner 1999: 21).

According to Brenner, particularly in their role as mothers, women are considered to hold the moral fate of the nation in their hands. By contrast, men are typically envisioned as the pioneers of the economic, political, and social innovations that are associated with modernization. Hence, they are not burdened with the moral baggage of the past to the extent that women are. In a period in which Indonesia is increasingly modernizing, the task of maintaining good morals and values is therefore likely to be placed on women’s shoulders (Brenner 1999: 21). 

*Berbagi Suami* demonstrates this dynamic. As we have seen, it is Salma’s task to keep her family together and pass ‘the right’ values on to her son. Significantly, it is in Islam that she finds the strength to continue this task.

*Berbagi Suami* then very much confirms the observations of Chatterjee (1990), Yuval-Davis (1997), and De Mel (2001). As elaborated earlier, these authors identified a discourse that sees the man as the author and subject of the nation, while the woman stands for the nation itself, which needs masculine protection. Similarly, Salma here stands for the nation through her role as mother, and as a nurturer of the next generation, while it is Nadim who actively protects the nation and national development by volunteering in Aceh.

By rejecting polygamy and by offering women a ‘right modern’ subject position in which their roles as mothers and Indonesian citizens are linked, *Berbagi Suami* is engaged in a two-fold biopolitical practice. First, through the articulation of a discourse that rejects polygamy, *Berbagi Suami* is set out to prevent this ‘illness’ from affecting the family and by extension the nation. Second, through creating a subject position for women in which they put their family above everything else, *Berbagi Suami* constructs a ‘back up plan’. In case polygamy does affect the family, it is women who must compensate for the effects. The critical discourse on polygamy that *Berbagi Suami* articulates is then thus highly ambivalent.

Significantly, *Berbagi Suami* also finds a way to make the subject position it promotes compatible with a woman’s identity as a ‘modern woman’. We have seen that *Berbagi Suami* suggests that being a modern woman and being in a position of subordination do not go well together. But, we have also seen how the film supports women making their own decisions in polygamous marriages. The film suggests that women do not necessarily have to be subjugated to their husband’s will and wishes.
Being a modern woman and being in a polygamous marriage then do not necessarily always conflict.

**Virgin: controlling wild girls**

In Indonesia, the state has always had a strong role in defining sexuality as it frequently intervened in matters of sexuality for ‘moral reasons’. An example is the anti-pornography law that was passed in October 2008 and that was mainly supported by Muslim groups. Earlier drafts of the bill had caused intense debate. What particularly sparked debate was the fact that the bill did not only attempt to restrict artistic displays of sexuality, but that it also tried to also confine *pornoaksi* (public displays of sexuality), such as kissing in public or the exposure of ‘sensual’ parts of the (female) body.

Sonja van Wichelen (2010) examined the debates about the anti-pornography law and noticed the centrality of what she calls ‘morality talk’, i.e. “discursive strands focusing on moral issues that intervene normatively in public matters.” (Van Wichelen 2010: 113) This morality talk entered the public sphere at a time when sexuality became more openly discussed. The national newspaper Kompas, for instance, introduced the curhat (‘to confess’) section, a space for readers to discuss issues relating to sexuality in an open manner. In contrast to New Order times, in which the subject of sexuality was less openly discussed, these new developments in ‘sexuality talk’ paved the way for new ways of thinking and speaking about sexuality in Indonesia. However, particularly Muslim groups criticized this development, and it did not take long before the ‘talk of sexuality’ was followed and challenged by ‘talk of morality’ (Ibidem).

The film *Virgin* (2004) directed by Hanny Saputra internalizes this interplay between talk of sexuality and talk of morality in its narrative. The film uses the constant struggle between talk of sexuality and talk of morality to negotiate Indonesian modernities. As I will show, this negotiation specifically takes place at the site of the representation of ‘the modern woman’. In *Virgin* ‘the modern woman’ is present in the figure of the ‘wild girl’, a woman who defies the norms of ‘proper behavior’ and enjoys sexual freedom.

*Virgin* shows the lives of three Jakartan high school girls as seen through the eyes and diaries of Biyan (Laudya Chintya Bella), a girl who desperately tries to keep her virginity in a climate where this is seen as old fashioned. In the film, Biyan’s two friends Ketie (Angie) and Stella (Ardina Rasti) lose their virginity quickly. Biyan wants
to keep hers, but as the girls become involved in all kinds of situations in which alcohol, sex, and money play a central role this becomes increasingly difficult.

Virgin was tremendously popular among Indonesian youth who seemingly could relate to what was being depicted in the film and who were attracted by the fashionable and ‘materialistic’ lifestyle that was being portrayed (cf. Barendregt 2007). The film particularly ties in with what Bart Barendregt (2007) calls ‘the new sexual reveille’ among Jakartan teens. Among young (Muslim) Indonesians, premarital sex is on the rise, even if it is outwardly condemned. Today, more young Indonesians are sexually active and more couples are involved in de facto relationships (The Conversation, 27.08.2013). Fuelled by scandals, which include sex tapes of drunken teens circulating on the Internet, the ‘modern lifestyle’ and the ‘loose morality’ of urban youngsters have in the past few years become topics of debate.

In response to youngsters’ alleged ‘loose morality’ several measures were taken. A measure that has recently has sparked outrage is the ‘virginity test’. In August 2013, it was announced by chief of education in one Sumatra’s districts that female teens attending high school there, should undergo annual virginity tests, beginning in 2014. He stated that the tests are a way to protect the girls from free sex and misbehavior. Similarly, a member of the regional parliament in Jambi, was suggesting that a virginity test should be a requirement for new students in junior high school, senior high school, and college (Herlinda 2013).

In this context, it not surprising that not everyone positively greeted Virgin. As Barendregt (2007) observes: “the film […] shocked many who did not appreciate the provocative language and vulgar behaviour being portrayed” (Barendregt 2007: 2). As a result, the film was banned in a number of provincial towns.

In the following analysis, I propose that Virgin constructs an ambivalent discourse about the ‘new sexual reveille’ and about the urban lifestyle of which it is part. On the one hand, the film fetishizes this lifestyle; it constructs it as a hip, cool and fun lifestyle. On the other hand, the film strongly rejects this lifestyle. Virgin frames it as a ‘Western-inspired lifestyle’, which leads to a pollution of the body and with it a pollution of the society.

This ambivalent discourse is in Virgin constructed through a threefold narrative pattern. In this pattern, sexuality talk leads to ‘vulgar behaviour’ (pornoaksi), which is in turn constantly criticized by morality talk that focuses specifically on the female body. The interplay between sexuality talk and morality talk takes place on two interlocking narrative levels. First, the threefold pattern of ‘sexuality talk – pornoaksi – morality talk’ informs the girls’ individual stories and the events that are happening
to them. And second, the pattern can also be found in the larger overarching narrative that is pushed forward by these events.

Figure 21: Biyan is licking crisps of a table, while Stella takes a picture with her phone

Figure 22: Disapproving looks of other café visitors follows the shot of Biyan (Figure 21)

Virgin’s three-part opening scene is illustrative for the threefold pattern of sexuality talk – pornoaksi – morality talk that informs the girls’ individual stories and events happening to them. In the first part of the opening scene, the girls are sitting in a café in one of Jakarta’s upscale shopping malls. The scene starts with sexuality talk as the girls discuss who has the biggest breasts. Ignoring the other visitors of the café, the girls lick their crisps off the table in a playful sexual manner (Figure 21) and put their mobile phones into their school uniforms to take pictures and compare the size of their breasts. When they find out that Ketie has the biggest breasts they all burst out in laughter. While the girls are laughing, the editing creates the impression that the girls’ behavior is not fun, but abnormal, even, or especially, for girls their
age. Figures 21-24 show how the shots of the girls having ‘fun’ are interspersed with shots that show shocked and disapproving looks of other young café visitors. The fact that these looks are coming from other young people constructs the idea that this not a normal way for youngsters to behave in public.

Figure 23: Stella is taking a picture of her breasts with her phone

Figure 24: Disapproving looks of other young café visitors follows the shot of the girls

Stella, Ketie and Biyan then start talking about virginity. Ketie has suddenly decided to give up hers: “Stel, Stel!! I want to give up my virginity!” Biyan is surprised and asks Ketie if she is kidding, but Stella is quick to answer: “Finally! What did I say? You won’t survive that long! Who do you want to do it with?” Ketie answers: “anyone who is willing to pay a lot!” Ketie thus wants to sell her virginity. Stella then proposes to sell Ketie’s virginity right away. Here, the sexuality talk leads to pornoaksi; it leads Ketie to having sex in the mall.

In the second part of the opening scene, the girls walk out of the café and into
the mall to pick out a man for Ketie. They look at the men who are passing by. The
dialogue and the editing here construct the girls as ‘active’, it is the girls who are
‘looking’ and the men who are ‘looked at’ (Mulvey 1975). When the girls try to pick a
man for Ketie, they are however not treating these men as (just) objects of sexual
desire. We instead hear them talking about them in a denigrating manner. When
Ketie points at a potential candidate, Stella answers: “no... he is the kind who is
afraid of his wife! He is so afraid of his wife that he cannot get it up!” When Biyan
points at another guy who looks like an artist to her, Ketie comments that he is just
“someone who smells”. Through the denigrating dialogue, the girls position
themselves above the men. In the end they finally pick out a man and negotiate a
price with him (ten million rupiah, about 630 euros). Subsequently, Ketie has sex
with him in the mall, that is, in the toilet for disabled people. The pornoaksi that
started with the girls in public touching and showing each other their breasts
culminates with Ketie’s sex act.

The fact that the scene takes place in a mall is significant. As I pointed out in
chapter 2, the mall is a symbol of consumerism and of an urban lifestyle. In the
remainder of the scene, we see how the film constructs a discourse that both
fetishizes and criticizes consumerism. When Stella asked Ketie earlier if she wants to
sell her virginity for sex or for money, Ketie answers “for money of course”. That
money is something desirable is emphasized when we later see a close up of the
pile of money that Ketie earned (Figure 25). While we see this close-up, we hear girls
cheering in excitement.

Figure 25: Close-up of Ketie flipping through her pile of money

Immediately after Ketie has received the money, the girls indulge in a shopping
spree. Through a number of audio-visual techniques this shopping trip is constructed as fun, fast, but superficial. We see the girls happily running around the mall (Figure 26). These shots are accompanied by an upbeat soundtrack, which underlines both the pace and the fun of the event. While running, Stella, Ketie, and Biyan are looking around for nice shops. We see their ‘hunt’ for good buys through point of view shots. These point of view shots consist of quick pans, which blur the space of the mall (Figure 27). These blurs do not only suggest the speed of the shopping spree, but also the girls’ own blurred vision in which (spending) money is all that matters. During the whole scene, jump cuts are used to add a sense of franticness to the shopping spree. This franticness is also created by the fact that the Stella, Ketie, and Biyan are all the time moving: shots of them running in and out of shops are interspersed with shots in which we see them buying everything they see (Figure 28). The scene ends with the girls looking ecstatically happy with their many shopping bags (Figure 29).

By showing how conspicuous consumption makes the girls incredibly happy, the scene fetishizes consumerism. The editing and the fast pace of the scene on the other hand also construct their behavior as superficial. We only see the girls frantically running in and out of shops, and spending their money carelessly in a seemingly very short amount of time. The scene almost becomes a parody of the consumption-oriented ‘shopping mall’ or ‘air-conditioned’ lifestyle (cf. Van Leeuwen 2011) of Jakarta’s urban middle classes.

Figure 26: Girls running around the mall while looking for shops to spend their money
Figure 27: A fast pan blurs the space of the mall

Figure 28: The girls shop more than the can carry

Figure 29: The girls running around with all their shopping bags

The morality talk occurs in the third part of the opening scene. After their day in the
mall, the girls drive home. In the car a song is played, which in the film becomes Biyan’s theme song and with which the girls sing along. The song goes:

Friends we are holding hands, but my perspective is different, friends we are running, but not in the same direction, I’m a virgin, I don’t regret this, I’m a virgin, I don’t care if people say I’m out-dated. For me virginity is important to hang on to. And I’m sure God will give me the most beautiful place. I choose my own way. With pride, I’ll carry myself.

Here, morality talk challenges the sexuality talk and what followed from it, the *pornoaksi*, as Biyan happily sings that it is acceptable – or better – to be a virgin. And as all events in the film are seen through the eyes and diaries of the lead character Biyan, each event ends with Biyan writing on her laptop, sharing with the viewers her reflection on events. The story of Ketie selling her virginity is also closed with Biyan sharing her reflections. We see Biyan writing on her laptop while we hear crying, her voice sounds: “Ketie I love you. But I don’t know whether I have to be happy or sad in knowing the loss of your virginity. Because for me, losing a virginity means losing your dignity as a girl. But, I do not understand, why did I join you in spending the money?” This event thus ends with morality talk that criticizes the *pornoaksi*, which was, in the first place, mobilized by sexuality talk.

The individual stories of the girls and the events happening to them in the film all follow the above demonstrated threefold pattern of sexuality talk – *pornoaksi* – morality talk. If we for instance look at Ketie, we see that, inspired by the money she made with selling her virginity, she fantasizes with the girls about more sex and more money (sexuality talk). She then decides to go into prostitution. One day, after having unsafe sex with a client in a hotel (*pornoaksi*) she thinks she might be pregnant. What follows is morality talk. Virgin here cross-cuts between Ketie who is sitting on the school’s bathroom floor feeling nauseous (Figure 30) and Ketie’s biology teacher who is lecturing on sexuality (Figure 31). She says:

Never carry out a sexual activity without love and responsibility. Because having sex without love is the same as committing a crime. Have you got any idea how it is, for someone as young as you, to get herself pregnant, then having to raise a child, take care of them and provide them with education? There are some teenagers who have been kicked out of their homes and shunned by their own families.

The teacher here thus explicitly challenges Ketie’s behavior by morality talk and even frames it as a crime. As Figures 30-31 show, the shots of Ketie and the shots of the teacher, between which the film cuts back and forth, form an opposition. While
the light falls precisely next to Ketie (Figure 30), the face of the teacher is fully lit during the full length of the scene (Figure 31), giving her an almost angelic presence. And whereas Ketie is seen through a high-angle shot that makes the viewer look down on her (Figure 30), the students are looking up to the teacher who is standing in front of the class. Ketie is shown sadly looking down, while the teacher is during her speech looking up, into the light. The opposition that is created here not only underlines the characters’ opposing perspectives on sexuality, but it also constructs the teacher’s view as good/right and Ketie’s view as bad/wrong.

Figure 30: Ketie sitting on the floor of the school’s bathroom

Figure 31: Morality talk by the biology teacher

The three-fold pattern of sexuality talk – pornoaksi – morality talk, which structures individual stories of Ketie, Stella, and Biyan is also reflected in a larger overarching narrative. At the level of the overarching narrative, a morality discourse against
sexuality talk and *pornoaksi* can be recognized which focuses directly on the female body.

In the beginning of the film all girls have their own dream, Biyan for instance wants to be a writer and Stella an actress. But when the girls start having ‘sexual things’ on their minds (sexuality talk), they start to lose themselves in a fast and seemingly hip Jakartan ‘modern life’ of partying and having sex (*pornoaksi*). The actions of Ketie and Stella are characterized by a lack of ‘bodily integrity’. They ‘mistreat’ their bodies as they constantly break down ‘bodily boundaries’, by letting ‘dirty’ things enter their bodies which, in popular discourse, should not enter a young girls’ body, e.g. drugs, alcohol or a man’s penis. The girls also violate bodily boundaries through smoking and having tattoos. Ketie and Stella pay a high price for *pornoaksi* and for disrespecting bodily boundaries. Ketie goes into prostitution and ends up pregnant, while Stella has sex with a film director who secretly tapes her and distributes the DVD. Stella is not only humiliated for the rest of her life, but can also forget her acting career. In the end, only the dreams of Biyan, who maintains bodily integrity, come true. Moreover, her diary, which contains all her moral reflections, is published and she becomes a successful writer. The film thus constructs a strong moral discourse in which teenage girls should maintain bodily integrity. *Virgin* articulates that when you maintain bodily integrity, your dreams will come true, but when you violate bodily boundaries punishment will follow.

We can understand the punishment via the body when reading *Virgin*’s politics in the light of Mary Douglas’ analogy between ‘the body and society’ (Douglas 1966). Douglas identifies the concern for purity as a key theme at the heart of every society. She sees an analogy between the body and society. But, instead of seeing the body simply as society, Douglas sees the body as a coding and transmitting machine: “the body communicates information for and from the social system of which it is part.” (Douglas 1966: 172) Hence, the body expresses the relationship of the individual to the group and contributes to the social situation at a given moment. When considering this analogy between the body and the society in the light of the ideas that conceptualize women as standing for and producing the nation, the punishment of the girls can be understood. Instead of keeping their body pure, the girls pollute and violate their body and with this, if we follow Douglas’ insights, the society. As women are held responsible for future of the nation, they endanger this future by polluting their bodies.

Important is that the girls pollute their bodies by adopting a ‘modern lifestyle’. By setting the story in Jakarta, the film links this ‘modern lifestyle’ with ‘Western modernity’, as in public debates, Jakarta is often criticized as being the overtly
‘Westernized’ metropolis, which is not a particularly healthy environment for Indonesian youth to grow up. An official statement on the banning of the film in a few provincial towns said that it was “feared that the film might be taken as a role model for teenagers trying to ape a ‘Western-inspired life style.’” (Barendregt 2007: 2)

The attitude toward modernity that is displayed via the representation of ‘the modern woman’ is ambivalent. Virgin fetishizes consumerism and a Jakartan modern lifestyle by dressing its characters in the hippest outfits, letting them use new media gadgets (mobile phones, laptops), and having them dance in trendy clubs. At the same time, the film suggests that a ‘Western lifestyle’ leads to a pollution of the body and with it a pollution of the society.

Virgin frames the dysfunctional family as a cause for the adoption of a ‘wrong’ lifestyle. After a night of partying, Biyan arrives home. In an eye-line match we see that upon her arrival home, she runs into her father having sex with another woman (Figures 32-33). When she goes upstairs, she finds her mother crying on the floor. A close-up of a torn family picture underlines the break-up of Biyan’s family (Figure 34). That the dysfunctional family is causing Biyan to (almost) lose herself in modernity is confirmed when she, later, is asked why she is behaving like this. She breaks down and blames her dysfunctional family (Figure 35).

Figure 32: Biyan arrives home
While *Virgin* rejects a ‘Western-style modernity’, it offers Islam as an alternative. In
Virgin, Islam is present in two ways. First, Islam is present in the morality discourse that the film articulates. Second, Islam is present through the figure that ‘saves’ Biyan. After experiencing the tragic break-up of her family, Biyan runs away from home and finds refuge with her Muslim ‘uncle’. When Biyan knocks on his door, the skimpy outfit she is wearing surprises him. He nevertheless warmly welcomes her into his home and comforts her (Figure 36). The Muslim man provides Biyan with a safe home and keeps her from losing herself in a modern life, and from, as she puts it herself: “becoming like one of the women my dad dates and who ruined my mom’s life.” Under his guidance, Biyan becomes the only girl in the film who makes the ‘right’ decisions and who consequently has a ‘happy end’.

His home is also the place where Biyan starts writing her moral reflections as closures to the film’s events (Figure 37). Also, at the level of the overarching narrative it is this man who discovers Biyan’s writing talent and who supports her in becoming a writer. And when her diary becomes a best-seller and she is interviewed on TV, she tearfully thanks him for saving her, saying in direct address – thereby inviting the viewers’ complicity: “You were the one with the power to determine the ending of this story.” (Figure 39) ‘Islam’ through the figure of the Muslim man both provides the base for morality talk and keeps Biyan from losing herself in a modern life.

By offering Islam as an alternative to a ‘Western-style modernity’, Virgin orchestrates specific national narratives. As Brenner (1999) points out, government officials and religious leaders have often warned Indonesians for ‘Western-style modernity’ and have promoted Islam as an alternative. According to them, modernity may offer a multitude of choices, but some of those choices are not suitable for Indonesia (Brenner 1999: 22).

Figure 36: Biyan finds refuge with her Muslim ‘uncle’, the school’s librarian
By articulating these national narratives, *Virgin* practices a biopolitics that revolves around both the pole of discipline and the pole of regulatory control. As we have seen, *Virgin* internalizes the tension between talk of sexuality and talk of morality and makes the constant struggle between the two central to the negotiation of modernity. And as we have also seen, these struggles and negotiations are taking place via the (individual) female body. The female bodies in *Virgin* are however not just individual bodies. They come to function in a larger project. In *Virgin*, the young female body is central to an ambivalent discourse that both rejects and fetishizes a particular modern lifestyle. In the film, young women’s bodies and sexuality thus serve as an arena in which symbolic battles over modernity are waged, suggesting that women’s attitudes and behavior are crucial in determining the course that Indonesian modernity will take. Control over the nation, can be gained through
control over the female body (Brenner 1999: 22). Biyan, Ketie, and Stella do then not only become the representations of the choices, dangers and anxieties of modernity. They become the focus of national narratives of modernization in the Indonesian society, as well as of persistent anxieties underlying those narratives.

This national function renders the representation of the modern woman highly contradictory. Virgin’s wild girls signify a departure from the New Order ‘housewife’ stereotypes. However, they become subject to a larger national project that revolves around the (desired) modernization of the Indonesian nation, which seems to be a patriarchal project. It is in fact striking that the only one who can in the end get ‘control over the female body’ is a Muslim man.

**Ayat-Ayat Cinta: violence, polygamy and ideal Muslim masculinity**

Ayat-Ayat Cinta is one of Indonesia’s most successful films. It broke visitor records and triggered a wave of Islamic-themed films. Following its success on the national market, the film was also released in other parts of Southeast Asia, resulting in packed cinemas in both Singapore and Malaysia.

Ayat-Ayat Cinta is based on the same-titled novel by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy and is set in Egypt. The film portrays the life of Fahri (Fedi Nuril), who is described by director Hanung Bramantyo as “an archetypical shy, smart, pious, but poor Javanese student”, who won a scholarship to complete his graduate degree in theology at Egypt’s esteemed Al–Azhar University (Bramantyo cited in Anand, *The Jakarta Post* 2008). The film zooms in on the romance between Fahri and four beautiful young women who all desire him as their husband. One of these female protagonists is fully veiled, something that was still very rare in Indonesian cinema at that time (Heryanto 2010). Through its multiple-angled love story and series of events, Ayat-Ayat Cinta invokes Islamic teachings as written in the Qur’an and hadith and translates them into ordinary language that is applicable to situations that young modern Muslims may encounter in their everyday lives. In Bramantyo’s words: “Ayat-Ayat Cinta is a movie that aims to show how you can be young, modern, and *gaul* (young/social/hip), while at the same time living by Islam” (Bramantyo cited in Anand, *The Jakarta Post* 2008). The film provides Islamic solutions for issues like romantic interactions, interreligious relationships, polygamy, xenophobia, global negative discourses about Muslims, and the position of women in Islam.

Ayat-Ayat Cinta starts when Fahri has almost graduated. At that moment in his life, Fahri ponders the goals he set for himself at the beginning of his journey in
Egypt. He realizes that only one goal is yet unaccomplished: the pursuit of marriage. Three women are in love with Fahri. First, there is Maria (Carissa Putri), who is Fahri’s neighbor and one of his best friends. Maria is a Coptic Christian girl, who is attracted to the teachings of the Qur’an. She finds herself falling in love with Fahri, a fact she only reveals to her diary. Second, there is Nurul (Melanie Putria), a Muslim girl who is also a student at Al-Azhar. Third, there is Noura (Zaskia Adya Mecca). She is an Egyptian Muslim neighbor, who is publicly hit and abused by her father. Despite all the attention, Fahri is not aware of the fact that he is actually desired by these women. Right at the moment that he is about to give up on finding love, he meets Aisha (Rianti Cartwright), his bride-to-be, on the Cairo subway.

Through the analysis of several key scenes, I suggest that Ayat-Ayat Cinta constructs an ideal-type of Muslim masculinity that aspires to be modern, educated, pious, modest, compassionate, respectful towards women, and that is adapted to global sensibilities and lifestyles. As such, it departs from stereotypical images of Muslim men as hypermasculine, aggressive, and intolerant (see also Hoesterey and Clark 2012). Moreover, it is against these types of masculinity that Ayat-Ayat Cinta coins its gentler version of Muslim masculinity.

In Ayat-Ayat Cinta, this type of Muslim masculinity is produced through a pattern in which an opposition is created between aggressive hard-line Muslim masculinities and Fahri’s gentler Muslim masculinity. This opposition works to both delineate and to promote Fahri’s model of masculinity as the ‘right’ model of Muslim masculinity.

The scene in which Fahri meets his wife-to-be – Aisha – for the first time illustrates this pattern. In this scene, Fahri takes the subway in Cairo. A close up of a ventilator (Figure 39) and tightly framed shots of passengers (Figure 40), directly create the space of the wagon as a hot and cramped space. This is significant, as from here onwards the scene builds up tension – in the already cramped space – and points at men as instigating this tension.

Figure 39: Close up of a ventilator
While on the subway, Fahri runs into an Egyptian friend and they catch up on things. The non-diegetic piano music suddenly stops when two American women pass by. Fahri’s friend looks at the women and says to Fahri: “Fahri, Fahri… look, those are American infidels.” The sudden muting of the music draws attention to the friend’s comment and adds a dramatic effect to the introduction of the two women. Fahri does not respond to his friend’s comment and picks up their conversation again. By here racking the focus from the foreground, which shows the women, to the background, which shows the men talking about the women (Figure 41), the viewer’s attention is directed to the hostile comment. The hostility of the men towards the American women is further emphasized when we subsequently see the women making their way to the back of the train to find a seat (Figure 42). Figure 42 shows the men covered in shadows as they look aggressively at the women who are passing by. Tension is added by high-pitch noises that accompany the aggressive looks of the men. When one of the women almost faints from the heat, a fully veiled
Muslimah – Aisha – stands up to give the woman her a seat. She apologizes in English for the ignorant behavior of the men, as “they don’t understand.”

Figure 42: The American women make here way through the wagon as men look on

Figure 43: Low angle, medium close up of angry Egyptian Muslim yelling at the Muslimah

Figure 44: The angry Muslim man on the verge of hitting the Muslimah
All of this happens under the watchful eye of an Egyptian man who is recognizably dressed as a Muslim (Figure 43). He gets up from his seat and starts an argument with the Muslimah. He tells her: “oh Muslimah, why did you offer her your seat? They are infidels!” In turn, she responds: “I didn’t have the heart to stay seated.” The man yells at her: “but they deserve it! We’re intentionally not giving them our seats! Are you a Muslimah or not?” While the man is yelling at the woman we see him in medium close up from a low angle (Figure 43). The close distance shows his angry expressions very well, while the angle suggests the man’s power over the woman – it creates the impression that the man is dominant and threatening. The dialogue and the aesthetic choices here construct the Egyptian Muslim man as the stereotype of aggressive anti-Western Muslim masculinity. The Muslimah on the other hand defies the stereotypical image of a docile Muslim woman who listens to men. She stands up to the man and corrects him: “Islam teaches us to be kind to everybody.”

The man loses his temper and screams: “But not American infidels! Do you know what the Americans did in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq? They are accusing Muslims of being terrorists whereas in fact they are the terrorists!” When she tells him: “I don’t care about all of that”, the man tries to hit her (Figure 44). All passengers watch the scene unfold, but no one stands up for the woman. It is finally Fahri who, in this hostile environment, dares to come in between and grabs the man’s arm right before he hits the face of the woman (Figure 44). The Egyptian Muslim now turns to Fahri. At that moment, the camera becomes a bystander itself (Figure 45). As Figure 45 shows, this camera position works to create and emphasize a passive aggressive crowd composed of men that had previously looked aggressively at the American women (Figure 45). Although men who probably sympathize with the angry Muslim now encircle Fahri, he still continues to interfere, which emphasizes his bravery.
The Egyptian man angrily asks Fahri who he is. Fahri tells him: “I am an Indonesian and you have offended Rasullulah, you have defied the prophet and will be hostile against Allah in the judgment day.” When the Egyptian tries to attack Fahri, Fahri’s friend tells the man that Fahri is an Indonesian student from the prestigious Al-Azhar University. The man responds: “if you are indeed one of Al-Azhar, what do you know about the suffering of the Arab nation?” Fahri bases his answer in his knowledge of Islam and says: “if foreigners have entered a country legally their honor and safety must be protected.” Again, the man yells: “but they are not foreigners, they are Americans, infidels, terrorists!” Fahri recalls what he has learned through his education and corrects the man: “Muhammad said: he who hurts foreigners hurts me, and he who hurts me, hurts Allah. We may hate somebody’s bad deeds, but we still have to keep our fairness.” The man attacks Fahri and walks away. The Muslimah thanks Fahri and introduces herself as Aisha, a Muslim of German-Turkish origin. She tells Fahri: “you are a good Muslim, I rarely come across a Muslim like you.”

Central to this scene are anti-Western, or rather anti-American, sentiments. Particularly after 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war on terror’, these kinds of sentiments have made their way into public discourse in Indonesia as well as in other Muslim countries. The scene here links these sentiments to a particular type of Muslim masculinity, namely to the Orientalist – hard-line, aggressive, oppressive, violent, and intolerant – Muslim masculinity that is so pervasive in (Western) media today. Against this type of masculinity, the scene coins a different kind of Muslim masculinity, which is globally oriented, liberal, rational, open-minded, and compassionate.

Both masculinities are marked by piety, but in the former piety leads to violence, whereas in the latter piety is used against violence. This is also where Fahri’s model of masculinity gains significance: it shows that (1) piety can be used against aggression and intolerant forms of Islam, and that (2) piety and a liberal mind-set go very well together. By articulating these two discourses about piety, Fahri’s masculinity forms an alternative and a challenge to the violent militant strains of Islam that have gained ground after the fall of Suharto’s regime. At the same time, this Muslim masculinity blurs and problematizes the assumed boundaries between two forms of Islam – orthodox and liberal Islam – that are allegedly dividing Indonesia. This blurring of boundaries is also present in the very way Fahri behaves and dresses in the film. There is no doubt that Fahri is pious. He sticks strictly to Islamic teachings. Throughout the film he constantly consults the Qur’an and the hadith to make decisions. Simultaneously, he has been given a laid-back and
modern look that matches global youth culture. As shown in Figure 46, Fahri for instance does not wear Islamic attire, but casual jeans, T-shirts or blouses, and aviator sunglasses. He does not have a beard, but a nonchalant hair-do (see also Heryanto 2010). Even during his marriage he does not opt for Islamic dress, but instead wears a Western style business suit (Figure 55). This blend of piety and a liberal mind-set is in the subway scene also demonstrated by the fully veiled Aisha who stands up for the American women.

What is also significant about the subway scene is that it constructs the violent and intolerant Egyptian Muslim as someone who has strayed from Islam and who needs to be brought back its teachings. That Fahri here takes up this role is significant. The scene stresses that Fahri is not just a Muslim, but an Indonesian Muslim. As we have seen, Fahri here introduces himself to the angry Muslim with the words “I am an Indonesian”, while his friend too points at his nationality: “he is an Indonesian student from Al-Azhar.” This is something that recurs throughout the film. Later in the film, the Egyptian authorities even call him “Indonesia” instead of “Fahri”. In the global Muslim world, Indonesia is, because of its location and its moderate/syncretic Islamic traditions, often seen as a ‘secondary’ or ‘peripheral’ Muslim country. In this view, the center of Islam is to be found in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. By lecturing the Egyptian Muslim and solidly grounding his arguments in Islamic teachings, Fahri – as an Indonesian – here decenters Islam and assigns religious authority to Indonesian Muslims.

In the subway scene, Fahri’s pious, liberal, compassionate, and globally oriented Muslim masculinity is thus coined against an aggressive, narrow-minded, violent,
and intolerant masculinity. That Fahri’s masculinity is here the ‘right kind’ of Muslim masculinity is emphasized when he is in the end of the scene ‘rewarded’ for his attitude. Through publicly displaying his piety, his compassion, and his open mind, he wins Aisha’s heart.

The pattern that opposes a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ kind of Muslim masculinity recurs several times throughout the film. Notably, the pattern also constructs and promotes a Muslim masculinity which respects and honors women. This ‘women-friendly’ Muslim masculinity is constructed through the dynamics between subsequent three scenes.

In the first scene, Fahri walks through a narrow alley and sees a Muslim woman – Noura – falling over and dropping her shopping basket. The Muslim man she is with does not help her up, but instead publicly degrades her by asking her: “What kind of human are you? You can’t even carry this thing up!” The man looks down at her – clearly overpowering her – and then hits her in the face, yelling: “You prostitute!” (Figure 47). During the abuse, Fahri is placed in the foreground as we see him watching the action unfold in the background (Figures 47-48). Through this composition, Fahri is constructed as a prime witness to the abuse. A motion-less Fahri appears to shocked to interfere. Fahri ‘corrects’ himself the second time he witnesses the abuse. In the second scene, Fahri is looking out of the window at night and sees how the same man beats Noura. During the abuse, the man’s face is covered in shadows, which underscores the danger and threat he poses (Figure 49). Stressing the gravity of the violence, the scene shows a shot in which the man almost chokes Noura, while she begs him for forgiveness (Figure 49). The man subsequently leaves Noura bleeding and wounded on the street.

Figure 47: Noura falling over on the street
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Figure 48: The man hitting Noura

Figure 49: The man almost chokes Noura

Figure 50: Noura hiding from her ‘father’
Together with his friend Maria, Fahri comes to Noura’s help and arranges for her to stay the night at Maria’s place since Fahri himself cannot stay with a woman outside of marriage. While Fahri and Maria comfort Noura, it appears that Noura had a fight with her ‘father’, because he wanted to sell her as a prostitute. The abusive ‘father’ found out that Noura is actually not his own daughter, but that she was exchanged as a baby. Therefore, he does not want to care for her anymore. While Noura tells Maria and Fahri this story, we see shots of the ‘father’ looking for Noura, while she is trying to hide herself from him (Figure 50). The closed space in which Noura is trapped, her position in the corner and the man’s large looming shadow that is cast on the wall as he approaches her, underline both Noura’s fear and her ‘father’s’ intimidation. Fahri steps in and helps Noura to find her real parents, as in his own words “it here concerns the matter of the life or death of a Muslimah.” With the help of Fahri, Noura is re-united with her real parents and all her troubles seem to have disappeared.

In the two ‘abuse scenes’, the kind of Muslim masculinity that is represented through Noura’s ‘father’, again matches a stereotypical form of Muslim masculinity. Against this violent, abusive, and dominant type of Muslim masculinity, Ayat-Ayat Cinta coins its more gentle and compassionate Muslim masculinity. This masculinity is however not less patriarchal. In both the subway and the abuse scenes, it is a man – Fahri – who ultimately saves the threatened women. But as the third scene shows, the Muslim masculinity that is promoted in Ayat-Ayat Cinta honors and respects women and thereby clearly departs from the violent type of Muslim masculinity.

In the third scene, Fahri is interviewed. After defending the American women on the subway, one of them – Alicia – thanks Fahri and tells him that she is an American journalist who is in Egypt to conduct research on the position of women in Islam. Fahri promises to help Alicia with her research and they meet up for an interview.

The scene directly assigns authority to Fahri to speak about the subject. The scene does so through showing a close up of a paper that Fahri has written and that is titled ‘The Status of Women in Islam” (Figure 51). The first sentences of the paper read: “The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor a fully settled one. The position of Islam on this issue has been among the subjects presented to the Western reader with the least objectivity.” These sentences foreshadow the discourse that is constructed in this scene. Through its dialogue, the scene tries to contest the – Western – view that Islam is hostile to women. Alicia first asks Fahri: “So Islam really honors women?” The use of the word “really” and Alicia’s accompanying surprised facial expression underscore the idea that Westerners –
here represented through Alicia – have a negative impression of the position of women in Islam.

Fahri then challenges Alicia’s negative view and calls on the hadith: “Islam teaches us that heaven lies on our mother’s feet. This is a basic principle that is written in the hadith, and it explains that Islam really honors women.” When Alicia confronts Fahri with the issue of domestic violence and asks him whether or not the Qur’an states that men can hit women, Fahri interprets the Qur’an and answers:

Many Muslim men who are cowards read the Suroh Annisa [the women’s verses] too literally or they give it their own individual interpretation and use it as an excuse to hurt their wife. But in fact, the Suroh explains three steps on how to deal with a wife that doesn’t respect the marital commitment. And the first is to give her advice, the second is to warn her, and the third... then you can hit her, but not on the face, and without the intention of actually hurting her.

Fahri here states that men who hit women – like Noura’s ‘father’ – interpret the Qur’an in the wrong way. It is hence not the Islam that is to blame, but the way it is interpreted. This supports the discourse that was also present in the subway scene. In this discourse, violent Muslims are Muslims who interpret Islam the wrong way; they are Muslims who have strayed from Islam. And like in the subway scene, Ayat-Ayat Cinta suggests here that the solution can be found in devoutness, i.e. in closely studying Islamic teachings and texts. Fahri’s masculinity is then not only constructed as a type of Muslim masculinity that helps, respects, and honors women, but also as one that is grounded in a solid knowledge of, and education in, Islam.
The Muslim masculinity that is promoted in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* not only honors and respects women, but also aspires marriage. Right from the start, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* constructs the discourse that marriage is desirable.

In the beginning of the film, Fahri contemplates the targets that he set for himself at the start of his stay in Egypt. A close up of Fahri’s mind-map (Figure 53) stresses that only one goal is yet unaccomplished: *nikah* (‘marriage’). Making matters worse, a close up of the sheer amount of wedding announcements at Fahri’s university suggests that everyone else around him seems to be getting married (Figure 54). Fahri stares at this board, and when he gets home from university it becomes clear this greatly upsets him. While facing the wall on which his mind map hangs, Fahri starts an emotional prayer. During this prayer, the film uses an eye-line match to connect Fahri’s prayer to his mind map (Figures 52-53). In this eye-line match Fahri looks up (Figure 52) to the last unaccomplished goal on his mind map (Figure 53) while he is praying. The connection that is in this way established suggests that Fahri is praying for marriage.

When we subsequently see Fahri making a phone call to his mother in Indonesia, it becomes clear that Fahri is family-oriented, and that his desire to get married is also tied to a desire to please his parents. When his mother kindly asks him if he has already found a suitable candidate, Fahri answers: “I haven’t been able to fulfil your and father’s wishes yet, mother. It is hard, I haven’t yet found the woman that Allah has chosen for me.” After he hangs up the phone, we see him crying, which stresses the strength of his desire. That his wish to get married is nevertheless also personally motivated is emphasized when he later tells Maria that he is longing to find his soul mate.

Fahri eventually finds his soul mate in Aisha and they marry in a lavish Bollywood-like (cf. Heryanto 2010) ceremony. During the wedding we see shots of a jubilant audience, hear triumphant music, and see slow-motion shots of people throwing rose petals at a widely smiling Fahri (Figure 55). In this way, his marriage to Aisha is constructed as a victorious moment, which further adds to the idealization of marriage in the film.

*Ayat-Ayat Cinta* here constructs a discourse in which marriage is desirable and leads to happiness. The Muslim masculinity that is promoted through this discourse is family-oriented and aspires marriage. In the remainder of the film, Fahri and Aisha’s happiness is challenged by a polygamous marriage, against which the film signals a warning.
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Figure 52: Extreme close up of Fahri looking at his mind map

Figure 53: Fahri’s mind map of his goals

Figure 54: Close up of wedding invitations at the university
Fahri and Aisha’s happiness is short-lived. In a soap-like turn of events, Noura accuses Fahri of rape and Fahri is put on death row. The only person – Maria – who can testify that Noura did not sleep at Fahri’s place the night they saved her from her abusive ‘father’, is in a coma after a car accident. According to the doctor and Maria’s mother, the chances of Maria waking up are very small. Maria has always been secretly in love with Fahri. She was so heartbroken and depressed after she heard that Fahri married Aisha that she now lacks the will to wake up.

Aisha comes up with a plan to get Fahri off death row. She arranges with the court that Fahri can visit Maria in the hope that she will wake up in his presence. In the hospital, Fahri sits on Maria’s bed and talks about the memories they share. Maria responds, but does not wake up. Aisha then says to Fahri: “tell her you’ll marry her.” Fahri tells Aisha: “Aisha, polygamy is not that simple. There are many things to be accounted for. You are the one that I chose in the name of Allah. You are the only one that I chose... you are my soul mate, Aisha.” Aisha starts crying and tells Fahri: “soulmates are Allah’s secret, Fahri. A part of Maria is Muslimah, she needs you.” Aisha also tells Fahri that she is pregnant and that her child needs a father, so that it is important that he stays alive. While Fahri is very critical of polygamy, he puts the life of his unborn child first. He marries Maria as his second wife while she is in a coma. After he has put a ring on her finger, Maria wakes up. Maria testifies against Noura and Fahri is freed from jail. The polygamous marriage has thus saved Fahri’s life. Ayat-Ayat Cinta however constructs ambivalent discourses about polygamy.

The film first constructs the discourse that polygamy is painful and stressful to all of those involved. After Fahri is freed from prison, Maria moves in with Aisha and Fahri. From the beginning, it is clear that the situation in the house is awkward,
particularly for the women. The film constantly shows the sad looks of Aisha and Maria as they watch how their husband spends time with ‘the other woman’. This awkwardness soon turns into jealousy and frustration, and at a certain point Aisha packs her bags and leaves the house. In an emotional speech, Fahri promises Aisha that he will work harder to make the polygamous marriage work. When Fahri tells a friend that he finds two wives very stressful, the friend confirms that polygamy is very difficult and advises him to work hard to treat Aisha and Maria both fairly.

Aisha accepts Fahri’s promise and returns home with him. Maria welcomes her back and gives her a hug. The women try hard to be kind to each other and Fahri follows his friend’s advice. From that moment, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* constructs a utopian image of polygamy. A montage accompanied by an upbeat soundtrack creates the impression that the women have become friends. They have fun together, there is no jealousy anymore, the three of them go out for dinner, and they even go happily to the hospital together to check on Fahri and Aisha’s unborn child. It is the ideal image of a polygamous marriage. Polygamous marriages are often criticized for being extremely painful and stressful for women. At this point, the women are however perfectly happy and are enjoying each other’s company. The film here thus articulates a discourse that states that when all of those involved try hard, a polygamous marriage can work.

This discourse is marginalized when the utopian situation turns dystopian. It all starts when Aisha hospitalized, because there are complications with her pregnancy. It turns out that these complications were caused by the stress that she experienced in the first months of her pregnancy. All Fahri’s attention goes out to Aisha now, and it is Maria who suffers from this. Maria gets a heart attack because of all pain and sadness. When examined in the hospital it appears that Maria has a heart-problem: she suffers from a hole in her heart, a condition that is caused and worsened by stress, and from with she in the end of the film dies. In her dying moments, she apologizes to Fahri and Aisha for all the stress and troubles she has caused in their marriage: “forgive me Fahri, Aisha, I apologize for all my faults, now I realize that to love and to possess are two different things…forgive me Fahri…Aisha forgive me.”

The film here thus signals a strong warning against a polygamous marriage. The stress and pain of the polygamous marriage cause Aisha to have severe complications with her pregnancy and lead to the death of Maria, who literally and metaphorically dies from a broken heart. Significantly, it all goes wrong at the moment that Fahri cannot balance the attention that he gives to his two wives. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* thus not immediately rejects polygamy, but it does points to its dangers.
Significantly, Maria dies when Aisha is almost due. In this way Maria cannot distort the unit of the nuclear family.

*Ayat-Ayat Cinta* thus constructs an ideal-type of Muslim masculinity that aspires to be pious, compassionate, open-minded and respectful towards women, and that is adapted to global sensibilities and lifestyles. As shown, it is also a type of Muslim masculinity that aspires marriage; that is family-oriented, and that functions best in a nuclear family. The film grounds this masculinity in a thorough knowledge of Islam. It is through Fahri’s education in Islam that he is able to make the ‘right’ decisions. Through promoting this type of Muslim masculinity, the film offers an Islamic alternative to secular modernities and its accompanying models of citizenship and subjecthood. This model of Muslim masculinity gains particular national – and biopolitical – significance in three ways. First, it works to protect the nuclear family, and safeguards by extension the reproduction of the nation. Second, it blurs the boundaries between modernist and traditionalist or orthodox and liberal strains of Islam (cf. Introduction) that are allegedly dividing Indonesia. And third, the Muslim masculinity that is promoted is an open and outward-looking model that is adapted to a globalizing world and that emphasizes the place of Indonesian Muslims in this world. This type of Muslim masculinity is highly useful to an Indonesian project of modernization. It eases internal tensions, i.e. tensions between forms of Islam that imagine a different future for the modern Muslim nation. At the same time, it also eases external tensions, i.e. tensions between a Muslim nation and a global world that might be antithetical to Islam. Easing these external tensions is of crucial importance if Indonesia is to interact successfully and productively on a global stage.

**The national function of post-New Order femininities and masculinities**

The post-New Order films *Berbagi Suami*, *Virgin*, and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* show a public fascination with what it means to be modern and engage with the question whether or not Indonesians are on the ‘right’ path to the ‘right’ kind of modernity. The films negotiate modernity through their representations of femininity and masculinity and simultaneously make the representation of gender central to addressing and negotiating ‘sensitive’ topics like polygamy, teenage sexuality, and domestic violence. This development is highly contradictory. On the one hand, the films, by discussing taboo-matters of gender and sexuality, signify a positive development as they open up the debate for new ways of thinking about sexuality and gender issues
in post-authoritarian Indonesia. On the other hand, the representations of these issues form the ground for biopolitics and the propagation of ‘right’ modern behavior.

Through their representations of gender, *Berbagi Suami*, *Virgin*, and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* are engaged in biopolitical governance. In constructing men and women’s professional, private and sexual lives as arenas in which battles over modernity are waged, the three films map much of the public anxiety about modernization on men and women, suggesting that their behavior is crucial in determining the course that an ‘Indonesian modernity’ might take (see also Brenner 1999). As shown, the films’ portrayals of masculinity and femininity revolve around both the pole of discipline and around the pole of regulatory control. The films seek to discipline male and female bodies and mentalities in a way that secures, governs, and controls a larger future modern Indonesian nation and that protects the quality of life within this nation. As a result of these practices, gendered bodies are subjugated to a larger national project that revolves around the desired modernization of the Indonesian nation.

Through converting gender identity to national identity, post-New Order representations of gender obtain their own national function. While the stereotype of the housewife had a specific national function during the New Order, namely to teach women how to be a good citizen, post-New order representations of masculinity and femininity promote ‘right’ male and female modern Indonesian identities in an era of modernization and Islamization. In *Berbagi Suami*, *Virgin*, and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, representations of gender function as a site where the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of modernity takes place. As shown, it is via the pollution of the young female body, that *Virgin* displays an ambivalent, but highly critical attitude toward ‘Western modernity’. And while *Virgin* rejects a Western-style modernity, all three films suggest Islam as an alternative. It is *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, which through its representation of Muslim masculinities, most clearly imagines what a Islamic modernity should look like. As we have seen, the film rejects a hardline and closed-off model of Islamic modernity. Instead, it promotes an open and outward-looking model that is adapted to a globalizing world and that blends both orthodox and liberal strains of Islam.

By showing how discourses of gender serve a national function in Indonesia, this chapter articulates a critique of gender-blind theorizations of the nation. Simultaneously, it shows how not only women, but also men, become subject to biopolitics. Whereas *Berbagi Suami* and *Virgin* confirm dominant ideas that women – via the domestic domain and the family – stand for the nation itself, which needs
male protection (cf. Yuval-Davis 1997; De Mel 2001), Ayat-Ayat Cinta presents us with a more complex picture. Ayat-Ayat Cinta shows that men, as much as women, are held responsible for the family, the reproduction and the health of the nation, and a peaceful and successful project of modernization.

The involvement of men can be understood when we see how the nuclear family becomes central to the adoption of a ‘right’ kind of Islamic modernity. All three films suggest that the nuclear family forms the base of a successful and ‘right’ project of modernization. And since both men and women, young and old, are part of the nuclear family, masculinity as well as femininity is subjected to a biopolitical form of governance and regulation. By pointing out the role that heterosexual masculinity plays in the safeguarding of the family, and in extension the nation, this study contributes to the existing body of work that is concerned with bringing the notions of gender and nation together, but that has largely ignored non-military and non-violent masculinity.

This study has however focused exclusively on heterosexual masculinity and femininity. To provide a more complete picture of the national function of gender representations in post-New Order cinema, more research is required, and particularly research that zooms in on different genders, e.g. homosexuality, transgender. In this context, James Hoesterey and Marshall Clark’s (2012) observations about – the rejection of Muslim homosexuality in – 3 Doa, 3 Doa (2009) form an relevant starting point, and also underscore my observations about the importance of the idea of the nuclear family.

Importantly, the national function of post-New Order representations of gender renders their break with the New Order representations contradictory. When we for instance look at femininity, we see that the post-New Order representation of ‘the modern woman’ departs from the stereotypical New Order representation of the housewife. The modern woman, whether as wanita karier or wild girl, may seem to be the opposite of the stereotypical domesticated New Order woman. Contrary to the New Order stereotypical image of the docile (house)wife, the ‘modern woman’ in post-New Order cinema is constructed as financially independent, ambitious, and as a person with sexual desires. The analysis of the films has however shown how the modern woman is still subject to a patriarchal project of modernization.

This chapter then problematizes the much celebrated identity politics that the fall of the New Order regime has allegedly brought about. The fall of the New Order regime opened up a space for identity politics (Widodo 2008) and for a critical attitude toward New Order gender stereotypes. As I have shown, the contestatory force of stereotype-defying representations of gender is challenged by the ways in
which these representations become subject to biopolitics. Their instrumentality to
this kind of governance marks the emergence of ‘new’ representations of gender
highly contradictory.

The ways in which identity politics are here encapsulated by a governmental
project also raises questions about the practice of critical politics. How to resist
when identity politics become subject to (biopolitical) governance? Are identity
politics a useful tactic of contesting structures of power? What strategies for politics
does Islamic-themed popular and visual culture offer? The encapsulation of identity
politics is not unique to films. As I showed earlier, in Gigi’s Nationalism (chapter 3)
and in Islamic self-help books (chapter 4), the practice of identity politics and the
newly attained presence of Islam in the post-authoritarian media and public sphere
also became part of governmental politics.

In contemporary political thought, thinkers have been long suspicious of identity
politics since they rest on normalizing notions of recognition, and often result in a
balkanization of political action (Cheah 2013: 82; McNay 2009: 65). Governmental
reason throws the contestatory force of identity politics further into question. The
analysis of post-New Order films and self-help books shows how identity politics
enables, rather than challenges, the governmental logic that works through a
differentiation of the social realm.

Let me here briefly revisit the questions with which I ended my chapter on Islamic
rock music (chapter 3):

What relations of power are underpinning Islamic-themed popular and visual culture?
How to view Islamic-themed popular cultural products? Do they constitute sites of
creative experimentation and contestation, or do they attempt to discipline people into
responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply? And if so, how do both go together?
How are an ethics of possibility and an ethics of probability (cf. Appadurai 2013, see
chapter 3) balanced?

In the last three chapters, we have seen that Islamic popular and visual culture
constitutes both a site for creative experimentation and contestation, and a site that
attempts to discipline people into desired modern citizens. Both are in constant
tension. On the way hand, we see how through popular culture and visual culture
Muslims, whose shared interests, identities and ideologies were oppressed and
marginalized during the Suharto regime, now participate in public discourses about
the course of modernity. We also see how Islamic popular and visual cultural
products critically and creatively experiment with Islamic modernities. They attest to
Appadurai’s ethics of possibility (cf. Appadurai 2013, see chapter 3). On the other hand, we see how these processes work in a governmental logic. They are appropriated by structures of power, which seek to control what kinds of future are envisioned as wrong and right. In this sense Islamic popular and visual culture attests to Appadurai’s ethics of probability (cf. Appadurai 2013, see chapter 3). Are there ways to escape or circumvent this logic? How to contest dominant structures of power? How can Muslims practice identity politics – without immediately being encapsulated by the system? What forms can contestations of power structures take?

Lois McNay (2009) points out that one troubling political consequence that ensues from governmental politics is that it disarms conceptions of individual autonomy, which commonly underpin much political thought on resistance and political opposition. In governmental reason, individual autonomy is not the opposite of, or limit to governance, but rather lies at the heart of control (McNay 2009: 65) The possibilities for critical politics, for contesting dominant structures of power, are diminished by a power that seems to have the capacity to absorb and thereby disarm forms of resistance (Ibidem).

Nevertheless, scholars have discussed two options for the practice of critical politics. One option revolves around a politicized reading of Foucault’s (1984a) ethics of the self, which is a historical and practical form of reasoning that takes the form of a permanent self-critique and experimentation (Foucault 1984: 44). This relation to the self is a liminal process, which seeks to explore ways of being beyond the already known (McNay 2009: 67) It is an experimentation with the possibility of going beyond what seems natural in the self. In Foucault’s words: “the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.” (Foucault 1984b: 50; McNay 2009: 67) As McNay points out, in the light of Foucault’s powerful analysis of governmentality, it is reasonable to ask how a politicized reading of ethics of the self can actually from a basis for critique. How can an individualized process of ethical self-formation have sufficient resources to present a challenge to a form of power that operates through the management of individual autonomy? (67)

Another option that has been discussed revolves around rights discourse (cf. (Patton 2005; Brown 2000; McNay 2009) Although Foucault is ambivalent about rights discourse (cf. Foucault 2003: 39-40) as basis for critical politics, it might assist in the mitigation of injustice. Foucault has asserted that the more frequently the discourse of law and right is mobilized to counter the subjugations of normalizing
biopower, the more it is weakened as a form of opposition. Disciplinary power invades right discourse itself with the consequence that it too becomes normalizing (McNay 2009: 70). Rights are however important as they serve as a catalyst for bestowing a certain de facto legitimacy upon marginal identities and practices. Rights can constitute a crucial ‘episode’ in a longer struggle, whose end is the creation of new ‘cultural forms’ (cf. McNay 2009: 71).

Vis-à-vis these two options, I will, in the next chapter propose another possibility for the practice of Muslim politics and the contestation of dominant power structures. This form of politics surpasses the problematic identity politics that were recognized in the post-New Order films and self-help books in that it does not invoke a notion of an absolute block or challenge to the workings of power. Instead, I will show that it mobilizes a ‘critical history’ that works to unpack and fragment the workings of power and history.
Chapter 6

Unearthing the past and re-imagining the present: Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world
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Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world

Popular and academic discourses have often constructed Islamic communities as hostile to visual culture. Though admired for their traditions of verbal imagery, Muslim communities are frequently depicted as aniconic (avoiding images), iconophobic (afraid of images), and iconoclastic (destroying or disapproving images), particularly when it concerns pictures of living things (George 2010: 10). In the late twentieth century, art historian Oleg Grabar did much to draw attention to Islamic art and aesthetics (Grabar 1987). But, he also admitted that “Islamic culture finds its means of self-representation in hearing and acting rather than in seeing” (Grabar 1987: 3), a view that has been echoed by leading observers of Islamic art Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom (cf. Blair and Bloom 2003: 153; George 2009: 591).

Particularly after 9/11, the widely reported outcry over the images of Prophet Muhammad in the Danish cartoons, the petition against Wikipedia after an article about Muhammad was published that included portrayals of the Prophet, and the Taliban’s ban on the depiction of living things in public have further reinforced the idea that ‘Islamic culture’, wherever found, is hostile towards image-making and visual culture (George 2009: 591).

However, as Finbarr Barry Flood (2002) has rightly pointed out, there is no “timeless theology of images in the Islamic world, but instead a rich tradition of aesthetic appreciation, awe, fascination, [and] revulsion” (Flood 2002: 650, cited in George 2010: 11). Muslims continuously rethink and rework their visual culture in response to the shifting currents of history, culture, (geo)politics, and social life, while negotiating their various affiliations to ethnicity, class, gender, nation and kin (George 2010: 11).

Contemporary Indonesian art shows how visual culture is indeed a site of (Muslim) politics, creativity, contestation and conflict, a site where issues associated with Islam are mobilized to come to terms with the present state of the world. Today in Indonesia both Muslim and non-Muslim artists (such as Titarubi, Arahmaiani and Murti) are embarking on an approach to Islam and art that deviates from the calligraphy and the abstract images that are usually associated with the pairing of Islam and art (Bianpoen 2009). The work of these Indonesian artists typically lacks Islamic signs and figures, favoring a figurative art. Nor does their work praise Islam –
as calligraphy and nonfigurative work often does – but it rather mobilizes (issues related to) Islam to articulate political, social, and cultural dissatisfactions with the state of the world. And it is often through tactics such as provocation, parody, self-reflexivity, and humor that critique is expressed.

But how are aesthetics in these artworks mobilized as a way of negotiating and contesting political, cultural, and historical circumstances? How are politics and aesthetics (Rancière 2004) intertwined? What kind of critique is articulated and what tactics are employed here? And how might we understand these politics? Is it possible to read these politics of (Islamic) aesthetics as resistance? If so, how is this resistance structured? And how is being critical a part of being modern?

This chapter explores these questions. Through conducting a visual analysis of two art works, I propose that a Benjaminian socio-historical politics underlies the objects’ aesthetic strategies. Through their aesthetics the works evoke fragments from the past to question the construct of the present. The works keenly fragment the past and translate these fragments into images. These visual historical fragments are reassembled within the present to challenge present (dominant) narratives that are antithetical to Muslims. I suggest that these aesthetic strategies form the base of a (Muslim) politics.

In the previous chapters, I have suggested that the possibilities for critical politics – for contesting dominant structures of power – are diminished by a power that seems to have the capacity to absorb and thereby disarm forms of resistance (McNay 2009: 65). The self-help books and the Islamic-themed films under study both invoked a notion of an absolute block or challenge to the workings of power. They provided alternative representations and coined these against images of a secular modernity, against stereotypical New Order representations of gender (chapter 5), against images of aggressive and intolerant Muslims (chapter 5), and against assumedly dangerous printed content (chapter 4). I suggested that the contestatory potential of these representations is thrown into question by the ways they become subject to a governmental logic (cf. Foucault 2008a [1977-1978]). In this chapter, I propose that the contemporary Islamic-themed artworks that I analyze mobilize different strategies. The works do not just provide alternative representations, but they also work to destruct the logic of a dominant present that neutralizes the images that they contest. I propose that this is a more effective way of questioning and contesting dominant structures of power.

While powerful political and popular discourses construct the idea that ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ are on a cultural collision course, a closer look at Indonesian art presents us a more subtle and complex picture. This observation is not only relevant for the
study of Indonesian art, but should also be seen within a larger context. Most studies that have analyzed Muslim politics and visual culture have focused on the politics of representation to unpack the relations of power that underlie the construction of meaning about Muslims and Islam. Two types of studies can be broadly distinguished here. First, there is a large body of Said-inspired work that examines how Muslims are represented by Western visual culture (see for example Shaheen 2001; Kabir 2006; Saeed 2007). Second, there is a smaller body of work (see for example Khatib 2006; Bangura 2000) that analyzes how Muslims speak for themselves, how they represent themselves. Though often presenting excellent analyses, both sets of studies point at a methodological and theoretical quandary. These studies tend to either operate within a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or they align heterogeneous stories without being able to say much more about them than that they exist. This raises the question how to be critical and how to theorize Muslim politics while evading these traps.

Indonesian Islamic-themed contemporary art provides a useful case to look into these questions. Drawing on the works of Walter Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]) and Pierre Nora (1996 [1989]), I show that instead of stimulating either a single history of power structures or many histories of this structure’s failure, the politics in Indonesian art allow a different ‘history’. After analyzing the two artworks, I propose that it is a specific relation between politics and aesthetics (Rancière 2004) that in the works gives way to a ‘critical history’. This history opens up new possibilities for the practice of a Muslim politics while also offering a more productive approach to study Muslim politics and resistance.

**Contemporary Indonesian art and Islam**

Contemporary art constitutes an important part of Indonesia’s visual culture and the art scene is currently more dynamic than it has ever been (Supangkat, Godfrey, Cruickshank 2010). It has however received relatively little scholarly attention (but see: George 2009; 2010, Ingham 2008, Jurriëns 2010; Rath 2005) especially when compared to its Asian counterparts (like China, India, and Japan). The body of work on Indonesian art and Islam is even smaller, as most observers have devoted their attention to Middle Eastern artworks. Kenneth George’s (2010) work on Pirous is an exception. Yet, approaches to Islam and art that differ from calligraphy and nonfigurative work remain underexplored. This paper offers a starting point for the discussion of these interpretations.
These interpretations are part of a global trend that is currently opening doors for a wider spectrum of ‘Islamic art’. In the past few years, artists and curators worldwide have been exploring a fresh interpretation of Islamic themed art that moves away from abstract work. In 2006, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example held a prominent exhibition of artists of Islamic heritage living in the West (Bianpoen 2009). In the exhibited works, themes associated with Islam were subject to political projects and unorthodox experimentation (cf. Cotter 2006). Indonesian adherents of this trend are also increasingly exhibiting their work at a global stage (e.g. New York, Berlin, Sydney, Singapore, Venice) thereby contributing to this renewal of Islamic themed art.

For this study two works have been selected. The first work is a performance artwork by Wilman Syanur titled *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* (2009). It depicts a dummy of Obama being driven around in a *becak* while campaigning for world peace. The second work is Arahmaiani’s *11 June 2002* (2003), which depicts a hotel room where Arahmaiani was detained as a ‘possible terrorist threat’ while travelling via Los Angeles to Canada.

What unites these two works is an Islamic theme; they mobilize issues associated with Islam to come to terms with the present state of the world. Specifically, these two works were selected because their politics revolve around the same topic. The two objects negotiate and contest current geopolitics and the volatile position of Indonesia and Muslims in a post-9/11 world. Moreover, the works engage in different politics to formulate their critique. In this way, the objects enable an examination of different strategies and facets of this Muslim criticality.

**Membuat Obama and the politics of juxtaposition**

In ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1968 [1940]), Walter Benjamin rejects the past as a continuum of progress. To explain his alternative vision of the past and progress, Benjamin employs Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* painting (1920) as ‘the angel of history’, a figure that has his back turned to the future. As Benjamin writes: “Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet [...] That which we call progress, is this storm” (Benjamin 1968 [1940]: 257, his emphasis). Benjamin here criticizes Marxist historical materialism, which was concerned with forecasting a revolutionary future. Instead he suggests that historical materialism’s real task should be to look at, and save, the past.
This is important as Benjamin observes that in the present, consciousness exists in a mythic state against which historical knowledge is the only antidote. Benjamin’s aim is to “destroy the mythic immediacy of the present, not by inserting it into a cultural continuum that affirms the present as its culmination, but by discovering that constellation of historical origins which has the power to explode history’s continuum.” (Buck-Morris 1989: 10) For Benjamin, it is thus dangerous to see the past as a logical narrative that is whole. Instead, we should see the past as fragmented. History picked up certain fragments – that are of interest to those in power – while leaving others behind to be forgotten. For Benjamin, it is these fragments that must be reoriented within the present in order to question its construct. Only in this way does history refrain from the overwhelming ideology of myth (Plate 2005: 15).

In the following analysis, I suggest that among these fragments, amidst the ruins of history, the two artworks seem to be rooting around, looking for useful elements to assemble a new object that shows the pieced-together nature of the present. Each work here has its own way of looking at the rubble, and its own tactics of putting the fragments together. The works take up fragments and reassemble them within the present to question the construct of this present. The ‘ur-history’ i.e. the history of the origins of the present (Benjamin 1999 [1982]: 1045) that is in this way created, unravels unified ideological narratives and forms the base of a Muslim politics.

The first work, Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (‘the making of Obama and artificial peace’, Figure 1), is a performance artwork made by Wilman Syanur (b. 1973), a sculptor from Bandung who graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Institut Seni Indonesia in Yogyakarta. He is not explicitly framed – by himself or by others – as ‘Muslim’. In 2009, Syanur created Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat for the 10th edition of the Jogja Biennale (Dec 11, 2009 - Jan. 10, 2010), which was titled ‘Jogja Jamming, Visual Arts Archive Movement’. The curatorial concept of ‘jamming’ stimulated the two hundred participating artists to literally jam, crowd and occupy Yogyakarta’s city streets with their artworks. In addition to the Biennale’s four main venues (Taman Budaya Yogyakarta; Jogja National Museum; Sangkrit Art Space; Bank Indonesia Yogyakarta) works were exhibited on two hundred public-space locations, including Jalan Malioboro, Jalan Ahmad Yani, Jalan Panembahan Senopati, Jalan Kusumanegara, and Jalan KHA Dahlan (The Jakarta Post, 14.12.09). In this way the event thus invited not only the Biennale audience (often middle class people and students), but also other city residents to see and enjoy the artworks. Syanur’s
artwork was one of the Biennale Art Awards winners and was later that year (Jun. 17-27, 2010) also exhibited at the National Gallery in Jakarta.

Figure 1: Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (2009), fiberglass and painted becak, Jogja Biennale (Dec 11, 2009 – Jan. 10, 2010)

Figure 2: Syanur driving the becak through the streets of Yogyakarta
Figure 3: Close up of the Obama dummy

Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (Figure 1) shows president Barack Obama sitting in a becak (pedicab). Fitting with the jamming theme of the biennale, Syanur drives the becak through the streets of Yogyakarta (Figure 2). During Obama’s tour around town, the work’s aesthetic construction was modified. As I suggest below, the artwork practices a Benjaminian politics at two moments: first at the moment we witness the initial aesthetic construction of the artwork and then at the moment that these aesthetics are set into motion and the aesthetic construction changes.

When first looking closely at the artwork’s (initial) aesthetic construction (Figure 1-3), we see that the work takes up two fragments from the past. By placing Obama in a becak, a symbolic Indonesian vehicle, the artwork first takes up a fragment from the president’s own past. Obama spent four years of his childhood (1967-1971) living in Menteng, a neighbourhood of Jakarta. The work also invokes Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign. Attached to the front of the vehicle are two American flags that make clear that although Obama is sitting in a becak, he still represents the United States. The dummy wears the president’s characteristic smile as he makes a peace sign (Figure 3). Positioned on the left side of the vehicle is a blue collecting box that contains banknotes, while on the front a sign is attached that reads ‘campaign for peace’. It thus becomes clear that the president is here campaigning for peace. On the becak’s side panel (Figure 1), the words ‘yes u can’ are painted
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referring to Obama’s famous ‘yes we can’ slogan. By substituting ‘we’ for ‘u’, the artwork points out that it is not the collective, but Obama himself who can establish world peace, a point made stronger by the expressions painted above: ‘Save Iraq’, ‘Save Gaza Strip’, ‘Viva Afghanistan’, ‘Viva Palestine’. These expressions also refer to Obama’s 2008 campaign, when he toured Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and the West Bank. During this trip, Obama met with international leaders to talk about his plans and solutions for the region, while the world could witness a spectacle of international peace-making.

It seems as if Obama is here successfully campaigning for world peace, he is driven around town – and returning to Indonesia – as a celebrated man. His confident smile and comfortable posture in the becak, underscore this impression. But the images are also ambiguous. The president’s smile comes to seem treacherous and artificial when looking closer at the side panels of the becak. The background to the slogans features a landscape with a smoking volcano (Figure 1), which seems to refer to the ongoing military conflicts and the unstable situation in the Muslim countries that are mentioned in the expressions – conflicts that persist despite or because US military intervention. The aesthetic construction of the artwork then produces an ironic and critical commentary on the president and the current geopolitical situation: Obama, who himself once lived in the world’s largest Muslim country, who is celebrated as a Nobel Peace laureate, is still involved in military conflicts in other Muslim majority countries. The work here responds to several things that were going on at that moment. It was the end of 2009; one year after Obama was elected for the first time. Indonesian president Yudhoyono announced that Obama would visit Indonesia for the first time since his election. This news was hailed with pride, especially when Yudhoyono revealed that Obama could still speak some Bahasa (The Jakarta Post 2009). But there were also rumours that his trip would be cancelled. Also, at that time, Obama had just been nominated for the Nobel Peace prize, and stated only a few days later that the U.S. would send an extra thirty thousand troops to Afghanistan (Journal Bali 2010).

In addition to the works’ context and content, its striking techniques merit discussion. The work resembles the tactics of Benjamin’s rag picker, who sifts through piles of refuse and collects what has been thrown away, and from this creates a new object. Benjamin introduced the figure of the rag picker in his writings on the work of Charles Baudelaire (2006 [1937]). Rag pickers first appeared in Paris when the new industrial processes gave refuse a certain value (Benjamin 1937; 2006: 53). They made a living by sifting through piles of refuse to collect material for
salvage. Paper could be turned into cardboard, broken glass could be melted and reused, and even dead cats could be skinned to make clothes. As Benjamin writes:

Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. [...] He sorts things out and selects judiciously; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects [...]. (Baudelaire 1857 cited in Benjamin 2006 [1937]: 108)

For Benjamin, the historical figure of the rag picker holds critical potential. The rag picker shows the flipside of the industrial revolution. His very presence – his poorness – demonstrates that the pile of refuse is filled with the promises of the revolution. Beautiful promises have become ‘rags of speech’ and ‘verbal scraps’; words of the past that have been thrown into the trash to be picked up at by the rag picker. Benjamin comments:

If we wish to gain a clear picture of him [...] what we will see is [him] picking up rags of speech and verbal scraps with his stick and tossing them [...] a little drunk, into his cart, not without letting one or another of those faded cotton remnants - ‘humanity,’ ‘inwardness,’ or ‘absorption’-flutter derisively in the wind (Benjamin 1999: 310).

The rag picker collects what has been thrown away, the lost and the forgotten, and creates a new object, while pointing out the deceit and inequality of the industrial revolution. By sifting through a pile of refuse, the artwork invokes tactics that are similar to that of Benjamin’s rag picker.

The specific pile the work is sifting through here is both history and Obama’s own pile of refuse. From this pile, Obama’s presidential rag cart picks up two allegedly ‘thrown-away/forgotten’ fragments: Obama’s own past in Indonesia and the (promises of his) 2008 presidential campaign. The work suggests that Obama has forgotten his own past, while constructing his ‘peace promises’ as ‘rags of speech’ and ‘verbal scraps’; deceitful words of the past that have been thrown into the trash. In this way, the work criticizes the president himself as well as his uncritical supporters, including Indonesians, who are of course the main audience for the show. But it also criticizes the present geopolitical situation where the U.S. stokes violent conflicts in Muslim regions. The artwork here thus invokes fragments of the past to critique the dominant narratives (at least in 2009), which optimistically celebrated what Obama represented, and his promise for world peace. The work also shows that a different selection of historical fragments constructs a different
present. In the alternative present that is constructed here, the president is not on a campaign for peace, but on a ‘tour of deceit’, something that becomes clearer as the tour continued.

While driving on Jalan Laksa RE Martadinata, Syanur suddenly lets the becak fall over. Syanur and Obama tumble out of the vehicle (Figure 4) and Obama breaks into pieces. The crash of the becak and Obama’s fall generate a threefold meaning. First, Obama’s tumble out of the Indonesian vehicle emphasizes the alleged forgetting of his own past in Indonesia. Second, throwing Obama out of the becak and on the street, functions as a rejection: Indonesia should not embrace as one of its own this man who is still involved in conflicts in Muslim countries. And third, the crash of the becak indicates that Obama’s present ‘tour of deceit’ can no longer be accepted and should be brought to a halt. Importantly, it is then not, as we saw earlier, the past that is here broken up into fragments, but the already constructed alternative version of the present in which Obama is on a tour of deceit.

Figure 4: Syanur and Obama tumble out of the becak, Obama’s foot falls off
Figures 5-6: Pieces of the president lie scattered on the ground and are reassembled

Meanwhile, the president’s body parts are scattered on the street (Figure 5). With the help of bystanders, Syanur picks up the pieces (Figure 6) and drives them to the PKU Muhammadiyah hospital in Yogyakarta, an Islamic hospital. When Syanur later poses with a newly repaired and visibly bandaged Obama in front of this hospital (Figure 7), it is suggested that it is in this Islamic hospital that the president has been put back together again. A narrative is constructed in which in Obama finds healing through Islam and is in this way able to get back into the becak. In the final aesthetic construction of the work, Obama is driven around again (Figure 8), although the traces of the crash remain visible via the bandages. Through the alteration of aesthetics, the artwork has here staged a humorous intervention – people standing alongside the road were laughing and clapping – in the alternative version of the present in which Obama is on a ‘tour of deceit’. This tour, and thus this alternative present, was literally called a halt by letting the work crash and fall apart – thereby ridiculing Obama. The newly repaired work now imagines and fantasizes yet another version of the present. In this version, the president continues his campaign for peace, but has turned to Islam to repair the damage that his tour of deceit has caused. The work suggests that despite his war mongering, Indonesians are not ready (yet) to throw Obama into the trash. If he repairs his tour of deceit, he can still be one of them.
Figure 7: A repaired and visibly bandaged president posing in front of the PKU Muhammadiyah hospital

Figure 8: The newly fixed Obama is driven through the streets again
Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat practices a critical Benjaminian politics through the alteration of aesthetics. These politics may best be described as a politics of temporal juxtaposition. The work actualizes fragments from the past to question the present and to highlight its constructed nature. This happens both in the artwork’s initial aesthetic construction as well as at the moment aesthetics are on the move. In both cases a new object is created that is a pieced-together creation in which the lines of temporal juxtaposition show through. In the initial aesthetic construction, two past fragments – Obama’s own past in Indonesia and his 2008 presidential campaign – are juxtaposed with the present. And in the final aesthetic construction, three temporal layers are juxtaposed, namely: the past that was imagined in the initial construction, the present that was rejected – the traces of which are visible through the bandages, and the newly imagined present in which Obama has (re)turned to Islam. It is through this politics of juxtaposition that the work points out that there is no beautiful unified whole, no seamless blending of past and present (Plate 2005: 16); the fragments are merely temporarily frozen into an image of juxtaposition.

11 June 2002 and the politics of memory

After September 11, airport security changed drastically. The scanning and screening of passengers ostensibly to lower the probability of new terrorist attacks has become routine, but does not go uncontested. Critics have claimed that measures are excessive and infringe on the rights of travellers. While every traveller is confronted with security measures, the repercussions of heightened security are perhaps most felt by Muslims, who are in practice those most often targeted by security.

Arahmaiani’s installation 11 June 2002 (Figures 9-14) responds to this situation. The Bandung-born artist Arahmaiani (b. 1961) is known for her performance art pieces, which in her early career often put her at odds with Suharto’s New Order regime (1966-1998). After a performance in which she criticized the military, she was held for a month and barely escaped the infamous camp for political prisoners. Today Arahmaiani is a key figure in the Indonesian art scene and one of the most prominent Indonesian female artists to traverse the global art world. She has exhibited widely in Southeast Asia, Japan, Europe, Australia and the US. She is also an avowed Muslim.
In 2002, Arahmaiani was invited to speak at the University of Victoria. 11 June 2002, which was on display during the Venice Biennale in 2003 (Jun. 15 - Nov. 2), is based on her memory of a stopover in Los Angeles while on her way to Victoria, Canada. On 11 June 2002, Arahmaiani was arrested by US immigration officials at the LA airport for not having a visa for the stopover. After being interrogated for four hours, she was supposed to be locked up in a cell, but after lengthy negotiations it was decided that she was to be detained in the hotel room she booked. During her overnight stay, a male guard was instructed to closely watch her to ensure nothing
would happen. The guard, himself a Muslim, stayed inside Arahmaiani’s room. The strict Islamic rules on the physical proximity between unmarried men and women were violated, much to the shock of the artist. The situation was all the more offensive since Arahmaiani has been active against militant interpretations of Islam for a long time. 11 June 2002 (Figures 9-14), which depicts a hotel room, recalls Arahmaiani’s memory of these events.

In what follows, I suggest that the installation is what Pierre Nora (1996 [1989]) called a ‘lieu de mémoire’, a site where memory crystallizes and secretes itself (Nora 2006 [1989]: 7). As a lieu de mémoire, the installation criticizes a present in which Muslims are suspected terrorists, while pointing at the fragmented nature of our past, thereby soundly echoing Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]). The emphasis of the work on the discontinuity and selectivity of history forms the base of the politics it practices.

Lieux de mémoire are thus sites of memory. They are sites in three senses of the word – material, functional, and symbolic (Nora 2006 [1989]: 18) – and these aspects always coexist. 11 June 2002 embodies all three. Arahmaiani’s memory materializes in a site which functions to communicate her memory. The site also references and symbolizes the larger plight of Muslims as frequent targets of policing. But these are not the only factors that construct the installation as a lieux de mémoire.

What is equally important is that lieux de mémoire occur at a particular historical moment. As Nora asserts, the acceleration of history – the increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past – confronts us with the realization that something has ended that we saw as self-evident: the equation of memory and history. For Nora, memory and history appear to be in fundamental opposition (Nora 2006 [1989]: 8). Nora’s idea that there is a rigid split between memory and history has been challenged by a number of scholars (e.g. Samuel 1994; Thelen 1989; Burke 1989), who propose a more fluid transition between memory and history. Yet, memory and history are different (Nora 2006 [1989]: 8). Memory is life, sustained by living societies founded in its name. History is not life, but is the reconstruction of what is no longer. It is the way in which our forgetful modern societies organize the past (Ibidem). At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is suspicious of memory, and its mission is to empty it out its subjectivity (Nora 2006 [1989]: 8-9).

Lieux de mémoire occur in this moment, when memory is torn and survives only as a reconstituted object beneath the critical gaze of history (12). We realize that the process that carries us forward and our representation of it (history) are not of the same kind anymore, and therefore we deliberately create lieux de mémoire. They
originate with the sense that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep these memories away (Ibidem). These lieux that come from the fund of our memory are constructed as small fragments of history torn away from the main flow of history. As Nora writes:

Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces lieux de mémoire – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned: no longer quite life, not yet dead, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded. (Nora 2006 [1989]: 12)

Lieux de mémoire are thus created by the play, by the push and pull of memory and history. They are in between memory and history, connecting to both while differing from both (13). The trait of lieux de mémoire that sets them apart from history is that they are not realia; they are not historical sites or events in themselves. Contrary to historical objects, lieux de mémoire are their own referent (22-23).

As suggested above, for a lieux de mémoire to come into being, there must be a will to remember; the memory the lieu defends must be threatened. 11 June 2002 clearly speaks of a will to remember. The memory embodied in the installation is threatened as it constitutes a fragment of history that is likely to be buried because, as Benjamin would say, it is of no use to those in power. The fragment that is torn away from history here does not merely try to ‘complete’ history, but it rubs (the dominant order) of history against the grain.

11 June 2002 thus constitutes a lieu de mémoire. But how is this lieu de mémoire constructed? What is torn away from history, from memory? What is taking place in this fragment of history? How does the installation root around in the ruins of history? And how to understand this rooting as a political practice? I explore these questions through analyzing the installation as a lieu de memoire, i.e. as a material, functional and symbolic site of memory. When observing first the material construction of the site, a contradiction is recognized between two permeable material layers. The first material layer constructs the hotel room as a cheerful site that expresses a love and desire for America. Looking at the room (Figures 9-12), we observe that the room is a light one-room space with a window. Beside the window sits a bed neatly made up with white sheets decorated with pink and red hearts. The heart-pattern is repeated on a shower curtain, and there is a red rose on the bedside table, which further strengthens the ‘love theme’. A large American flag looms in the far corner and insignia of a US consumer world are strewn around, including two shiny retro Coca Cola vendor machines, Coca Cola
bottles, and Coca Cola wall signs, all of which contextualize the room (Figure 11). One of the wall signs emphasizes America’s successful global throttle, reading in German ‘Erfrische Dich’, meaning ‘refresh yourself’ – a (1924; 1925; 1964) Coca Cola slogan from decades ago.

Displaying cheerfulness and uncomplicated love for consumer America, the room is an ironic site for detention, contrasting with the cruelty of Arahmaiani’s confinement. A second material layer, which is constructed through the presence of Arahmaiani’s personal items, does capture this cruelty. Strewn across the bed are a black lace bra and black pantyhose (Figures 9-10). Socks lay on the carpet. A variety of toiletries are added to the sink: Marvital tampons, Lux soap, Dreaming shampoo and a powder compact. Above the bed photographs are hung (Figures 15-17) that depict Arahmaiani undressing herself, slipping into a bathrobe, brushing her hair and reading the Quran in bed. The Quran itself is placed on the pillow (Figure 13). The display of these photos and other intimate personal items here work to construct the guard’s intrusive gaze and emphasize the violation of the Muslim female body during Arahmaiani’s overnight stay in the room.

Figures 15-17: Intimate pictures that are hung above the bed in 11 June 2002

The material construction of the site is thus characterized by a sharp contradiction. The first material layer constructs a cheerful room that displays a blatant love and desire for America. The America imagined here is not today’s America, but an America of the past, that is created through the retro vendor machines and the old Coca Cola slogan. Moreover, this ‘past America’ is a promising and optimistic America; it is the trouble-free consumer society that successfully exported its commodities abroad. But this more innocent vision of America is contradicted by Arahmaiani’s American nightmare that is constructed through the second material
layer. For Arahmaiani, this is the America of the present. America is here imagined not as an optimistic and promising America, but as an America of surveillance, of paranoia, of the violation of privacy, and of the discrimination against Muslims. If Arahmaiani was not arrested, she would have stayed in the same room, but there would not have been a guard to observe her. This first material layer, in which the guard’s intrusive gaze is absent, thus represents ‘the way it should have been’ – it is the America that should have been. The second layer shows what the room, and by extension America, instead became: a place of paranoia and surveillance. The installation here juxtaposes two different temporalities; two historical fragments; two visions, (1) that of an America that ‘was’, and that ‘should have been’ and (2) that of an America that ‘is’, but ‘should not be’.

The lieu de mémoire is both a material and a functional site. It can have numerous functions, but here I would like to highlight just one. The installation functions to communicate Arahmaiani’s memory to an audience, which can be both Muslim and non-Muslim. The very way in which Arahmaiani’s memory is communicated, keeps the memory alive and ties it to the present. To communicate the memory of Arahmaiani’s ‘America of surveillance’, the installation tries to turn the spectator into a voyeur. By entering the installation and observing Arahmaiani’s intimate items and photographs of her body, we practice (or at least are invited to practice) the guard’s gaze. In this way, the audience is (involuntarily) positioned to continue the violation of Arahmaiani’s body in the present moment. Arahmaiani’s (living) body itself is absent in this process. It is only through the (dead) materiality of the site that this process comes into being. The installation thus restates its entity as a lieu de mémoire. While Arahmaiani’s memory is materialized in the installation and moves away from the realm of living ‘unviolated’ memory (cf. Nora 2006 [1989]: 8), it is not yet dead either. It is through the interplay between the spectator and the specific material arrangement of the site that the memory revives. Paradoxically, to make the memory visible and to keep the memory alive, the Muslim female body is put on display (again) and continues to be violated by a larger audience.

The gender politics and the violated female Muslim body also play a role in the construction of the installation as a symbolic site. In the way the installation communicates Arahmaiani’s memory, a particular body politics is practiced. We can understand these politics by reading the work’s tactics in the light of the analogy Mary Douglas sees between the body and society – an analogy that I also recognized in Islamic-themed films (chapter 5). In Purity and Danger (1966), Douglas identifies the concern for purity as a key theme at the heart of every society and observes an analogy between the body and society. But, instead of seeing the body
simply as society, Douglas sees the body as a coding and transmitting machine: “the body communicates information for and from the social system of which it is part” (Douglas 1966: 172). The body expresses the relationship of the individual to the group and in this way is embedded in, and contributes to, the social situation at a given moment. In the installation, the female Muslim body becomes a social body. Arahmaiani’s body constitutes the central locus for a critique of the (American) present moment in which, in the name of security, Muslims are labelled and treated as terrorist suspects. As she appears uncovered and policed by a Muslim guard, this ‘violation’ of Arahmaiani’s body symbolizes discrimination. The representation comes to stand for the reality a larger group of Muslims face in a post-9/11 world.

The fragment of history that 11 June 2002 as a lieu de mémoire constructs and embodies is a perceived historical moment. And contrary to those lieux de mémoire that cherish a memory that history would sweep away, this installation is highly critical of the historical fragment that it itself constructs. The installation constructs a historical moment characterized by surveillance, paranoia, and prejudiced views about Muslims, a critique mainly directed at America. But the installation also reflects ambivalent discourses currently constructed about the direction of modernity in Indonesia. In these discourses America often functions simultaneously as the ultimate example of a glossy modernity and as a capitalist, consumerist dystopia that is violent and antithetical to Muslims – hence something to aspire to and be wary of. The critique of America is in 11 June 2002 articulated through the female Muslim body. This shows that the female Muslim body is not – as was the case in chapters 4 and 5 – only a site through which women are governed. It is also a site for affirmative politics. Yet, this is ambiguous. By practicing these politics the female Muslim body is here continuously violated.

Through its politics of memory, the installation, like the first case study, echoes Benjamin by pointing out that we must see the past as fragmented. It stresses that there are fragments that are taken up in a unified narrative of history and there are fragments that are likely to be forgotten. 11 June 2002 does not merely root around in the ruins of history to question the present, but it creates this ruin itself. As a lieu de mémoire, a site in between memory and history, the work shows what (according to a symbolic Muslim community) is not taken up in history, but what should be registered. Based on a memory, the installation creates a fragment of history that it does not find itself in history. The work, as Benjamin encouraged, embodies a lost fragment of history, a fragment that is of no use to those in power. By creating this ‘extra’ fragment of history, the work ruins the wholeness of the narrative of history.
Muslim politics and aesthetics: practicing a critical history

Through their aesthetics the two artworks practice critical politics. These politics are twofold. First, the works are contesting current geopolitics and the volatile position of Indonesia and Muslims in a post-9/11 world. The works challenge realities and narratives that have come into being after 9/11, and that are antithetical to Muslims. Through a politics of juxtaposition, *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* (2009) criticizes the current geopolitical situation of U.S. (and Western) hostility toward Islamic countries. And through a politics of memory *11 June 2002* (2003) responds to post-9/11 realities in which Muslims are cast as Islamic terrorists.

A second critical politics is identified in the very way in which the two works contest these post-9/11 realities. We have seen that the works evoke fragments from the past to question and critique the construct of the present. *Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat* and *11 June 2002* are evoking fragments from the past to point at the instability of the truth of the present. By juxtaposing multiple and different temporalities in the same object, the artworks underscore the multiple, different, and simultaneous temporalities of contemporary Indonesian society.

Currently, the unequal speed of modernization makes the archipelago seem like a temporally fragmented entity. The works do not necessarily prefer ‘the modern’, as the critique of the United States – the ultimate example of capitalist modernity – shows.

Furthermore, as pieced-together creations the works embody the aesthetics of an ‘ur-history’, a history of the origins of the present (Benjamin 1982: 1045). For Benjamin, this ur-history frees the present from myth. And indeed, the reactualization of fragments from the past here fractures and unravels unified ideological narratives that ostensibly transfigure the present. Consequently, just like the future – formerly a visible, predictable, well-marked extension of the present – has become invisible and unpredictable, so do the artworks suggest that we have moved from a visible past to an invisible one; from a solid and steady past to our fractured past (Nora 1996 [1989]: 17). By emphasizing the selectivity in the act of reassembling fragments from the past the works suggest that (the writing of) history is merely a question of representation.

But to me this is not what makes the politics of these works meaningful. The politics of the works mainly revolve around the act of making visible. They visualize a present that has been (too) invisible, exactly because the historical fragments that make up this present have been buried, as they are of no use to those in power. In the artworks, Muslim politics and aesthetics are then intertwined in a Rancière-ian
way, although this relationship is driven by a Benjaminian logic, which turns the practice of critical politics into the practice of a critical history.

For Jacques Rancière (2004), core to the bond between politics and aesthetics is a making sensible, a making visible. For Rancière our social order is an anti-democratic police order that strives to maintain the existing patterns of power. This police order establishes a distribution of the sensible, a law, that divides a community into groups, social positions and functions (Rancière 2004: 3). The distribution of the sensible separates those who take part from those who are excluded. Importantly, this distribution works through establishing possible modes of perception. ‘Sensible’ refers to what is apprehended by the senses. The distribution of the sensible thus sets divisions between what is visible and invisible; audible and inaudible; sayable and unsayable.

The essence of politics then lies in interrupting the distribution of the sensible. Politics is the struggle of an unrecognized party for equal recognition in the established order. It is an attempt to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004: 3). Aesthetics is bound up in this battle, because the battle takes place over what is permissible to say or show. Art is one way in which the distribution of the sensible can be reconfigured. Aesthetics can literally render visible what is invisible in the distribution of the sensible, hence aesthetics can help to contest naturalness and obviousness. For Rancière, aesthetics is thus at the heart of the political and vice versa (Rancière 2004: 3).

As shown in the analysis, the works’ critical Muslim politics are rooted in their aesthetics and revolve precisely around the act of ‘making visible’. Politics and aesthetics are thus intertwined in a Rancière-ian way. The works visualize a present that is imagined to be (too) invisible in the police order because it is unsympathetic to this order. The police order that the works are contesting here is an order that is profoundly global and that, in this historical moment, is antithetical to Muslims. Through their aesthetic-politics the artworks attempt to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible that is keeping this global police order in place.

What is important, is that the artworks are not only interrupting the distribution of the sensible by offering alternative aesthetics (like the films in chapter 5 did), by creating aesthetics that are different from those that work in favor of the police order. They are not coining images of friendly Muslims against images of violent Muslims. The works interrupt the distribution of the sensible in a much more fundamental way. As I suggest below, through aesthetically constructing an ur-history, the works simultaneously create and destruct.
For Benjamin, all creation entails destruction, or as he says overtly: “construction presupposes destruction.” (Benjamin 1982: 470) Destruction lies at the heart of creation, and to get to truth, the boundaries imposed at creation must be taken apart. Creation does not come simply through putting things together, but in clearing away, in taking things apart, resituating walls, moving mountains, and then rearranging the terrain in order to lead through – a sort of rag picker’s art, though Benjamin never puts it that way.

Benjamin then sees aesthetic creation as a two-part process; new meanings are created while other meanings are destroyed (Plate 2005: 29). The artworks are here not only creating new meanings (alternative aesthetics), but they are simultaneously cutting up notions that seemed whole and logical in the distribution of the sensible. The works do not just provide alternative representations, but they also work to destruct the logic of a dominant present that neutralizes the kinds of images that they contest. The artworks destruct the history that justifies the present (global) police order, where after they reshuffle the pieces and paste them together in a new way. As creative activities that simultaneously create and destroy, the works then do not just target singular outcomes of the distribution of the sensible (repressing aesthetics). Rather they doubt the whole historical narrative that is constructed by the distribution of the sensible and that justifies the system.

The practice of an aesthetic-critical politics is here then turned into the practice of a critical history. And since this critical history questions the very foundation of the (global) police order, the construction of such a critical history opens up new possibilities for the practice of Muslim politics. The artworks do not suggest an abandonment of the writing of history. Instead, they propose a different history. Echoing Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]), the artworks point at possibilities for both artists and scholars to imagine and write histories that help to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible and contest the (global) police order that is imagined to be antithetical to Muslims. The works call for a critical ‘ur-history’; a history that unearths the past and that sketches a history of the origins of the present (Benjamin 1999 [1982]: 1045). Through imagining this ‘ur-history’, the artworks practice a critical politics that is more promising than the politics practiced by the Islamic-themed films (chapter 5) and that presents a more effective way of questioning and contesting dominant structures of power – in other words, that presents a more effective way of being critical.

Partha Chatterjee (1997) has suggested that being critical is an essential part of being modern, as he writes: “true modernity consists of determining the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in particular circumstances; that is applying the
methods of reason to identify or invent the specific technologies of modernity that are appropriate for our purposes.” (Chatterjee 1997: 8) By articulating a critique of America, the artworks critically contest the vision of America as the ultimate example of a glossy modernity – and particularly 11 June 2002 strongly articulates this critique. Both works suggest that the paranoid and violent version of the modern that this type of modernity today represents is antithetical to Muslims and is not “appropriate for our purposes” (8). But what kind of modernity is ‘appropriate’ and for which purposes? And are there other explanations for the critique of America? As we have seen, the critique of an imagined ‘Western-style modernity’ recurs several times in my case studies (cf. chapter 3, 5). Why does this critique recur? And how to understand this critique? I will engage with these questions in the closing chapter of my dissertation.
Chapter 7

Conclusion: Changing paths
Chapter 7 Conclusion:
Changing paths

“Why does our path keep changing? I want to see where we are going…”
- Mira (Mira Zayra) in Para Pencari Tuhan (‘God Seekers’)

“To be able to go forward, you must sometimes stop and just think for a while”
- Asrul (Asrul Dahlan) in Para Pencari Tuhan (‘God Seekers’)

Making sense of modernities

In one of the last episodes of Para Pencari Tuhan that I watched with Eka and her family, Asrul (Asrul Dahlan) has just returned from pilgrimage. He feels incredibly happy. In the last year, life has been finally been treating him well. Due to the success that Asrul and his wife Mira (Mira Zayra) had with their soupstall, they have gone from rags to riches. But their fate is flipped when their soupstall goes up in flames. They lose all of their income and are right back at where they started. While tears are running down her cheeks, Mira asks Asrul “Why does this happen to us? Where do we go from here? Why does our path keep changing? I want to see where we are going…” Asrul is silent for a while. He cries. He sighs. Then he smiles. “To be able to go forward, you must sometimes stop and just think for a while”, he answers Mira.

Mira’s longing to see and to know ‘where we are going and why’ captures much of the Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products that I have been studying in this dissertation. Whether decorations in shopping malls, rock music, self-help books, films, or a dummy of Barack Obama in a becak, they all seem to wonder where Indonesia is going. They form sites for creative experiments with Islamic modernities, but they also constitute sites that attempt to discipline people into desired modern citizens. They all imagine Islamic modernities, and fantasize Islamic futures at a moment that Indonesia is simultaneously Islamizing and modernizing. Like Asrul, I would like to pause here for a while, look back, and revisit the question that I asked in the introduction: “How are Islamic modernities imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture?” I would also like to add a question that I think is equally important: why are these modernities imagined?
If we look at the different case studies, we see that they together construct a highly ambivalent discourse about modernity and about an Islamic modern future. On the one hand, the case studies display a positive attitude towards modernity. *Gigi’s Tuhan* for instance constructed a discourse in which Islam and modernity are reconcilable. Underscoring Andrew Weintraub’s (2011) observation that Islam is not monolithic or unchanging (Weintraub 2011: 2), *Gigi’s* song pointed out that Islam is a flexible religion that can adapt itself to a modern world. As we have seen, *Tuhan* suggested that although under forces of modernization the assumed boundaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ places are increasingly breaking down, *Allah* can be found everywhere. Modernity should therefore not be feared. The shopping mall during Ramadan offers a very tangible example of how a glossy, luxurious, modern urban future and Islam go together. The ways in which consumption and Islam go hand in hand stress the malleability of Islam. At the same time, the case study attests to Muslims’ critical and creative appropriations of the space of the mall. The mall and the modern experience it offers become embedded in Ramadan’s rituals. For middle class Muslims, the mall for instance comes to function as a convenient place for a collective experience of the *iftar*.

The self-help books and the films on their turn also construct an optimistic discourse about modernity. In this discourse, modernity offers Muslims a multitude of choices, possibilities, and opportunities. This discourse responds in a positive way to the ‘second wave of Islamism’. As I explained elsewhere (p: 11), the second wave of Islamism is a religious renewal in which Indonesian Muslims blend into modern urban spaces, engage in public debates, become mobile, educated, and make use of global communication networks and technologies (Göle 2002: 174). Middle class Muslims here become professionals and consumers, who are embracing, and operating in, the modern market (Barendregt 2006: 172). The self-help book *Rasullulah’s Business School* responds to these developments. The book stresses that today everyone with the right skills and the right mentality can participate in modernity and can become a successful and rich entrepreneur. For the book, the desire for wealth and Islamic piety not only go together, but also strengthen each other. This resonates with the aspirational piety and consumerist longings that Ariel Heryanto (1999: 173) has observed in today’s Muslim middle classes. I have shown that *Virgin* too comments on the ways in which people blend into modern urban spaces. The film shows that Jakarta’s modernity offers Indonesian youngsters the opportunity to participate in global youth culture: youngsters can dress in the latest fashion and can make use of new media gadgets, such as smartphones and laptops. The film fetishizes consumerism and a modern Jakartan lifestyle: the film constructs
this lifestyle as hip, cool and fun – although this lifestyle later also forms the ground for the girls’ punishment. *Twitografi Asma Nadia* offers girls a different lifestyle. This self-help book promotes a fashionable Islamic lifestyle. *Twitografi Asma Nadia* sees opportunities for Muslims girls to learn and to travel, and stimulates a pious, ambitious, and cosmopolitan mindset. In a similar vein, the Islamic blockbuster megahit *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* emphasizes the benefits of modern urban higher education. Coining the pious and educated Fahri as the ideal modern Muslim man, the film suggests that it is through modern education that Muslims can obtain solid knowledge of Islam, which is valuable in a globalizing world.

The case studies thus articulate a positive attitude toward modernity. Taken together, they offer Muslims an array of modern lifestyle possibilities. They construct images of Muslims as, among others: happy and conscious consumers, model citizens ready to fight the ills of the nation, devoted followers of Islam, pious students, fashionable girls, dedicated wives, husbands, mothers and fathers, successful career women, and ambitious entrepreneurs.

But on the other hand, the case studies also articulate a negative attitude towards modernity, and express a fear and skepticism over the condition of the present. *Gigi’s Perdamaian* for instance frames modernization as leading to a dystopian future of Indonesia. In the construction of this dystopia, *Perdamaian* exaggerates very specific elements of modernization. It extrapolates those elements that are in Indonesia linked to a capitalist Western-style of modernity and frames them as leading to the dystopian future of Indonesia. In *Perdamaian*, the figure of dystopia becomes a metaphor for the direction modernity can take in Indonesia, and the direction *Perdamaian* warns for is a capitalist and consumerist road to a modern future. This warning for the future is mapped onto the condition of the present. The song expresses confusion and anger about the current rise of consumerism, and the ‘wrong’ uses of capital. *Virgin* also displayed a highly critical attitude towards modernity. In the film, the lead characters Biyan, Ketie, and Stella become the representations of the choices, dangers, and anxieties of modernity. While the film fetishizes a currently hip modern Jakartan lifestyle, it also suggested that through adopting this modern lifestyle, the lead characters are polluting their bodies, and by extension society. By setting the story in Jakarta, *Virgin* links this modern lifestyle to ‘Western-style modernity’, as in public debates, Jakarta is often criticized as being the overtly ‘Westernized’ metropolis, which is not a particularly healthy environment for Indonesian youth to grow up. And whereas in *Virgin* the female body becomes a site through which a highly critical attitude toward Western-style modernity is expressed, in Arahmaiani’s artwork *11 June 2002* the female Muslim body
constitutes the central locus for a critique of America. We have seen that in 11 June 2002, America simultaneously functions as the ultimate example of a glossy modernity and as a capitalist, consumerist, security-paranoid dystopia that is violent and antithetical to Muslims – something that was also underlined by Obama’s becak adventure.

The case studies are thus utterly ambivalent about modernity. On the one hand, modernity offers a bewildering array of choices, opportunities, and lifestyles. On the other hand, modernity signals social decline and a deprivation of morals and values. We can understand the ambivalent discourse and the strong ambiguity toward modernity when we turn to the work of Partha Chatterjee (1997) and place the case studies’ negotiations of modernity in both a historical perspective and in the context of our current global condition.

In *On Modernity* (1997), Chatterjee suggests that we should always consider modernity in relation to the condition of postcoloniality. According to Chatterjee, the advent of modernity is in postcolonial contexts often perceived with a sense of skepticism (Chatterjee 1997: 14). Chatterjee seeks to understand why this is the case. In the context of India, he asks:

> Why is it the case that […] the foremost proponents of our modernity have been so vocal about the signs of social decline rather than of progress? […] There must be something in the very process of becoming modern that continues to lead us, even in our acceptance of modernity to a certain skepticism about its values and consequences. (14)

Chatterjee finds an explanation for this skepticism in the ways in which the history of modernity has in postcolonial contexts been intertwined with the history of colonialism. He writes:

> ‘we’ [referring here to India, but can also be read as concerning other former colonies] have never been quite able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse unfettered by differences of race or nationality. Somehow, from the very beginning we had a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledges and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of […] modernity; never would we be taken seriously as producers. (14)

Hence, the same historical process that has shown the former colonized the value of modernity, somehow also made them ‘victims’ (for the lack of a better word) of modernity (20). Because the history of modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism, postcolonial contexts have often been cast, and cast
themselves, as consumers of modernity rather than as producers. This sentiment intensifies in the world arena of modernity. Chatterjee explains:

We must remember that in the world arena of modernity, we are outcasts [...]. Modernity for us is like a supermarket of foreign goods, displayed on the shelves: pay up and take away what you like. No one there believes that we could be producers of modernity. The bitter truth about our present is our subjection, our inability to be subjects in our own right. (20)

The coming into being of ‘multiple modernities’ is thus not free from relations of power, and the imagining of the futures is not free from experiences of the past. According to Chatterjee, there is in postcolonial contexts often skepticism over the present, because it is marked by subjection, by the inability to be subjects in one’s own right. As he comments:

All that needs to be noticed is that whereas Kant, speaking at the founding moment of Western modernity, looks at the present as the site of one’s escape from the past, for us it is precisely the present from which we feel we must escape. This makes the very modality of our coping with modernity radically different from the historically evolved modes of Western modernity. (14)

Whereas the modern present for Kant signified an escape from tutelage and from dependence (10), modernity is for the former colonized linked to feelings of dependence that intensify or resurface in the global arena of modernity. According to Chatterjee, the attitude toward modernity of the former colonized, therefore, cannot but deeply be ambiguous (20). It is also for this reason that it is attractive for postcolonial contexts to escape from the present and idealize the past, which was at least there own creation (20). Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture too shows a desire to escape from the present, however not to the past, but to the future, which can again be Indonesia’s creation.

According to Chatterjee, for formerly colonized societies to become subjects in their own right again, they need to “reject the modernities established by others” (20) and be the creators of their ‘own’ modernity. He asserts:

[Our] ambiguity does not stem from any uncertainty about whether to be for or against modernity. Rather, the uncertainty is because we know that to fashion the forms of our modernity, we need to have the courage at times to reject the modernities established by others. In the age of [Indian] nationalism, there were many such efforts, which
reflected both courage and inventiveness. Not all were, of course, equally successful. Today, in the age of globalization, perhaps the time has come once more to mobilize that courage. Maybe we need to think about ‘those days’ and ‘these days’ of our modernity. (20)

The products of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture that I studied here reject the ‘modernities established by others’ by displaying a highly critical attitude towards what they imagine as Western-style modernities. And while rejecting imagined Western-style modernities, the case studies offer Islamic modernities as alternatives. Islamic popular and visual culture thus echoes Chatterjee’s call to reject the modernities established by others to become a creator of one’s own modernities again. But how ‘Indonesian’ are the modernities that Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture imagines?

When I look at the case studies, I observe a tension between an imagined ‘Indonesian Islamic style of modernity’ and an imagined ‘Middle-Eastern/Arabian style of Islamic modernity’. We might read these styles as representing two strands of Islam that are prevailing in Indonesia today and that are in a dialogical relationship with each other. On the one hand there is a reformist (Sunni) Islam, which strives towards a purification of faith – often taking Arabian/Middle-Eastern styles of Islam as example (cf. Eliraz 2004). On the other hand there is a syncretic Islam, which is seen as a distinctively Indonesian (Javanese) strand of Islam. It is impossible to make a hard distinction between local and global Islam – since what is seen as local, is already globalized and part and parcel of the global. It is equally problematic to make a hard distinction between traditionalist and modernist Islam, or to see them as opposed. However, as I argued elsewhere (p: 13), at a moment in which Indonesia is caught in processes of modernization, both strands of Islam publicly articulate different modern Islamic futures. Islamic popular culture and visual culture may, via the politics of representation, evoke different conceptions of Islamic modernities to support either liberal or conservative agendas, or a combination of both.

In this context, Gigi’s Nationalism draws on a national imagination to argue for a kind of modernity that is based in the nation’s own resources. On their turn, the self-help books promoted modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. The books encouraged the construction of subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the unequal spread of wealth (although Wonderful Family forms an exception here), while actively negotiating the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences that exist in the archipelago. By contrast, Gigi’s
Perdamaian gestures to Mecca. In addition, the song’s rejection of a capitalist or consumerist style of modernity is mapped onto past and present conflicts in the global Islamic world.

There were also case studies that displayed both styles at the same time. These case studies provide a middle ground between an Indonesian and an Arabian imagination, and between a conservative and a liberal orientation of Islam. We have for instance seen this in the shopping mall. In the malls’ spatial practices during Ramadan, Arabic, and Indonesian imaginations seamlessly and creatively go together. I proposed that the heterotopic moment of Ramadan (cf. chapter 2) imagines a modern Islamic world that exists between Indonesia and an Arabic world, while negotiating a modernity in which capitalism and Islam go together.

In a similar vein, Ayat-Ayat Cinta creatively ties both styles together. It does so through the model of masculinity that it promotes. I suggested that Ayat-Ayat Cinta constructs the masculinity of its lead character Fahri as an ideal-type of Muslim masculinity that aspires to be modern, educated, pious, easy-going, modest, compassionate, respectful towards women, and that is adapted to global sensibilities and lifestyles. This gentle type of masculinity is coined against conservative and aggressive masculinities that are in the film embodied by Egyptians. But Fahri is not a ‘laissez-faire Muslim’. The film grounds his masculinity in a thorough knowledge of Islam. It is through Fahri’s piety and his solid education in Islamic theology that he is able to make the ‘right’ decisions in the film. Through promoting this type of Muslim masculinity, the film offers an Islamic alternative to secular modernities and its accompanying models of citizenship and subjecthood (see also Hoesterey and Clarke 2012). At the same time, Fahri’s masculinity blurs the assumed boundaries between modernist and traditionalist, or between orthodox and liberal strains of Islam. It offers Muslims a model of modern citizenship in which Islamic piety and a global young lifestyle go hand in hand. In Heryanto’s (2010) words, it offers Muslims “an alternative between the persona of the young militant Muslim with technological weapons and that of the old-fashioned, provincial and orthodox Muslim.” (Heryanto 2010)

As I also argued in the chapter on film (chapter 5), this type of ‘in between’ or ‘middle ground modernity’ has particular relevance for an Indonesian project of modernization. On the one hand, it eases internal tensions, i.e. tensions between forms of Islam that imagine a different future for the modern Muslim nation. By promoting piety and avoiding orthodoxy, this kind of ‘in between’ or ‘middle ground modernity’ may in the end be the best defense against reactionary radicalism. As Heryanto notes “many Muslims and non-Muslims alike continue to suffer from
economic marginalization. Their frustration helped the recruitment for militia groups for various actions, some using Islam jihad as a rallying cry." (Heryanto 2010) As the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, these radical groups are gaining ground in Indonesia and are often very vocal. They do however not appeal to large segments of the population (cf. Hefner 2009; Van Bruinessen 2002). By promoting piety and avoiding orthodoxy, a ‘middle ground modernity’ finds a gentle way to adapt to stricter religious sensibilities. At the same time, this type of ‘in between’ or ‘middle ground modernity’ that is adapted to global sensibilities also eases external tensions, i.e. tensions between a Muslim nation and a global world that might be antithetical to Islam. Easing these external tensions is of crucial importance if Indonesia is to interact successfully and productively on a global stage.

It might then be the ‘middle ground’ modernity of the Gucci-clad Muslim youngsters (cf. Vatikiotis 2006); the modernity of the anak-anak gaul (hip youngsters), who spend their Friday nights in the upscale shopping malls, not in the trendy wine or cigar bars, but in the new coffee houses, that offers Indonesia the most promising modern Islamic future. This is a future that is not exclusively Indonesian, nor exclusively global. It is an Islamic modernity that is ‘at large’ (cf. Appadurai 1996), that is mapped onto a global Islamic world, but that is accustomed to local peculiarities.

**Modernities and the means of mediation**

To study how Islamic modernities are imagined in Indonesian popular and visual culture, I have looked at a wide range of different cultural products and forms: shopping malls, rock music, self-help books, films, and contemporary art. In the previous section, I elaborated how these different case studies all imagine Islamic modernities. But how do their different forms matter in the ways they imagine these modernities? How do the means of mediation, e.g. different genres, media and visualities matter when it comes to the imagination, negotiation and contestation of Islamic modernities?

These are questions of genre and medium specificity. The concept of ‘medium specificity’ is a contested one in media theory. Identified with modernism, the concept has been traced back to the late eighteenth century in a 1766 essay by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ‘Laocoön’, in which Gotthold argued that to be successful, a work of art must observe their distinctive, inherent properties (Dunn 2009: 1159). Today medium specificity theories generally concern themselves with
the idea that different media have ‘essential’ and unique characteristics that form the basis of how they can and should be used (Sutton & Maras 2006: 98).

The problems with the medium specificity thesis are well documented and are at least twofold. This first problem finds its roots in the way we generally define a medium. As Mary Ann Doane (2007) writes: “We tend to think of a medium as a material or technical means of aesthetic expression (painting, sculpture, photography, film, etc.), which harbors both constraints and possibilities, the second arguably emerging as a consequence of the first.” (Doane 2007: 130) In this definition, a medium is a medium “by virtue of both its positive qualities (the visibility, color, texture of paint, for instance) and its limitations, gaps, and incompletions (the flatness of the canvas, the finite enclosure insured by the frame).” (Ibidem) Inherent to this definition is the idea that there is something that each medium does best, which in medium specificity research often leads to the tendency to offer “form recommendations rather than descriptions” (Maras and Sutton 2006: 99). The idea that there is something ‘that each medium does best’ also becomes problematic when considering it in the context of mixed or hybrid media, which combine the qualities of different media.

The second problem with the medium specificity thesis is its normativity. The discussion of the essence or specificity of a medium is very quickly liable to become normative (Maras and Sutton 2006: 100). Critics for instance establish the ‘essence’ of a particular medium from their own historical, cultural, and personal perspective, and then begin to use that definition in order to exclude all manifestations that run counter to it (Ibidem). As Maras and Sutton (2006) point out: “All too rapidly medium specificity arguments seem to become medium purity arguments. This is a dangerous tendency when seeking to describe media in their early stages of emergence, or when seeking to study a mixed or alchemical media form such as hypermedia.” (Ibidem)

To circumvent these problems, Rosalind Krauss (1999; 2000) has offered alternative understandings of media and medium specificity. Krauss sees a medium as “a set of conventions derived from (but not identical with) the material conditions of a given technical support, conventions out of which to develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic” (Krauss 1999: 296, cited in Doane 2007: 131). Medium specificity then describes the crucial recursiveness of that structure that is a medium: “For, in order to sustain artistic practice, a medium must be a supporting structure, generative of a set of conventions, some of which, in assuming the medium itself as their subject, will be wholly ‘specific’ to it, thus producing an experience of their own necessity” (Krauss 2000: 26, cited in Doane
2007: 131). Krauss here thus proposes a more restricted specificity that takes an individual work and its activation of particular conventions as its point of departure, and not the medium itself (Doane 2007: 131). Following Krauss, I would like to look back and reflect on the specificity of the form of each of my case studies, and I would like to do so without making larger claims about what ‘essentially’ defines the media that support these cultural expressions.

If we start with the two non-mass mediated forms that I have studied – shopping malls and art – we see that their different forms stimulate different ways of engaging with the modern. We also see that their forms are shaping their different negotiations of modernities.

Shopping malls are real physical spaces, to which one physically has to go and immerse oneself for an experience of modernity. As I have suggested in chapter 2, the form – i.e. the architectural structure of the mall – plays a key role in the kinds of modernities it imagines. Because the space of the mall is closed off from real-world nuisances – through for instance the absence of windows and the policing of its borders – it is able to imagine and represent an arguably ‘perfectly’ modern world, which particularly involves the middle class. In addition, I have shown that through the relations of difference that the mall sets up with its surrounding (chaotic, hot, eclectic, busy) spaces, this kind of modernity becomes a sensuous and a bodily-experienced modernity.

In the debate about Islamic modernities, the artworks 11 June 2002 and Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat articulate a critique of the United States. As we have seen, the works construct ambivalent discourses about the United States, in which America functions as both the ultimate example of a glossy modernity and as a capitalist, consumerist dystopia that is violent and antithetical to Muslims. In the artworks, the narrative through which this critique is expressed is partly contained in the aesthetics and the performance of the works, and partly in the context in which the works exist.

To fully put together the critique, one has to know the context. One for instance has to know about Arahmaiani’s travel story, about the rules in Islam for male-female interaction, about the ongoing military conflicts in Muslim countries, and about Obama’s spectacle of international peace-making. The works thus demand a certain degree of knowledge and participation from the audience. Hence, not only form matters, but the implied audience of the works matters too. Arahmaiani’s 11 June 2002 was exhibited at the Venice Biennale. And although the performance of Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat took place on the streets of Yogyakarta (for everyone to see), the work was displayed at the Jogja Biennale, the
National Gallery in Jakarta, and in various upscale shopping malls throughout the country. These spaces of exhibition imply an educated middle class and/or student audience, which are expected to have the contextual knowledge to put together the work’s critique.

In my study of self-help books, I have suggested that Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. What is significant is that the books very clearly and explicitly delineate these subjects as having certain desired features, e.g. they are hard working, responsible, ambitious, and cosmopolitan. This clear and explicit delineation stems from both the genre and the form of these books.

Since the books are self-help books and thus aim to help people, they must give clear instructions. They cannot be mysterious about what they want from readers. Therefore, desired behavior is often explicitly described. Because the books are largely non-fictional, readers may skip the parts that deal with problems that they do not have. Readers may also read the book in an entirely different order. Instead of developing the ‘helpful’ and desired subject position over the course of the book, Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia therefore construct their desired subject position in each of the separate sections – which leads to a clear but repetitive promotion and delineation of modern citizen-subjects. And while the printed word on the page of these books may give readers something to look at, the books are neither visual nor auditory media – although Wonderful Family does contain a few images and forms an exception here. The books may create images in readers’ minds, but without the visual element, readers are easily distracted and, relying on their reading alone, may find it hard to decipher, absorb and retain too much information (Dunn 2009: 1163). To compensate for this distraction greater repetition and redundancy must be built into the books advice (Ibidem). This repetition too results in the explicit and recurrent promotion of the ‘right’ modern behavior in Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, and Twitografi Asma Nadia.

In my study of Gigi’s rock music, I have pointed at the affective dimensions of their use of sound. As Anne Dunn (2009) asserts, sound is often more immersive, in its effect and affect, than vision. We can use vision in distancing, critical ways; this is much harder to do with hearing – hearing “does not keep the world at a distance, but admits it.” (Bull 2000: 118, cited in Dunn 2009: 1164) Music enters into to body and becomes a bodily experience. As Motti Regev (2007) points out: “music, in ways unlike any other form of art, moves the body. It does so either ‘internally’, by
vibrating inner organs and arousing emotions, or ‘externally’, by prompting actual movements of the head, hands, feet or the whole body.” (Regev 2007: 335) In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu (1979 [1996]) asserts the specificities of music. He writes: “music is bound up with ‘interiority’ (‘inner music’) of the ‘deepest’ sort” (Bourdieu 1979 [1996]: 19).

The affective dimensions of Gigi’s rock sound play an important role in the ways the band imagines modernities. As we have seen, in Perdamaian the anger and unruliness of Gigi’s rock sound for instance accommodates to, and strengthens, the discourse that discourages the ‘wrong’ style of modernity. And as I have shown, in Nationalism the use of sound and voice articulates feelings of optimism, and calls out to an audience in wholehearted enthusiasm to get ready to serve Indonesia. In his study of musical nationalism, Regev (2007) notes that with “musical nationalism, membership in the nation is calibrated to specific genres and styles, and through them to specific forms of corporeality, of feeling ‘intensely present’” (Regev 2007: 335). Because music enters into the body, it makes people feel ‘intensely present’ (Frith 1996: 144, paraphrased in Regev 2007: 335). In this way, Gigi’s affective call to help establish an Indonesian modernity, positions the audience – through their bodies – as members of a national community that aspires the coming into being of a modern nation.

The music video, as a medium, further constructs the affective ways in which imaginations of modernities are here mediated to an audience. Characterized by a relatively short-duration (around three to four minutes), music videos need to tell ‘their story’ in a short amount of time. Gigi’s music videos do so through the use of fast editing and information-rich visuals. These visual tactics – in combination with the band’s unruly rock sound – stimulate the senses intensely, and thereby strengthen the affective ways in which Gigi’s music communicates their anger and enthusiasm about particular forms of modernity to their audience.

As I have suggested, the films Berbagi Suami, Virgin, and Ayat-Ayat Cinta show a public fascination with what it means to be modern and engage with the question whether or not Indonesians are on the ‘right’ path to the ‘right’ kind of modernity. In my analysis, I proposed that the three films negotiate modernity through their representations of masculinity and femininity. I have shown how these representations are constructed through different audiovisual and narrative techniques – many of which are specific, though not exclusive, to the medium film. I however do not want to repeat too much of the analysis here. But there is one aspect about the ‘form’ of film that is particularly important for the ways in which modernities are imagined and negotiated in Berbagi Suami, Virgin, and Ayat-Ayat
Cinta. The films constantly attempt to align us with their views on what constitutes ‘the right’ and ‘wrong’ kinds of modernities. The films attempt to do so via our emotional involvement with the characters. Through the use of audiovisual and narrative strategies, we are encouraged to identify with Biyan or Fahri, to relate their emotions, and to relate to their points of view (for instance on what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, on what constitutes Islam, or on the ways women or foreigners should be treated). In this way, we are as spectators positioned vis-à-vis different styles of modernities, and are invited to align with the styles that the films consider to be ‘right’. This is a particularly powerful way of mediating modernities, because there is – for instance compared to the art works – less room for ‘participation’, less room to create a completely different narrative, to not agree and align with the films ‘heroes’ and ‘heroines’.

Where do we go from here?

The question ‘where are we going?’ was central to the rock songs, films, self-help books, malls, and art works that I have studied in my dissertation. Up to this point, the ‘we’ in this sentence stood for Indonesia, the modern Muslim nation, and the global Muslim world. In the last section of my dissertation, I want to make this ‘we’ stand for ‘scholarship’, and think about where scholarship at the intersections of modernities, Indonesia, and Islam could go in the future. Taking cues from my case studies, I would like to suggest four directions that research could take. I summarize these directions under the headings: audiences, bodies, spaces, and flows.

Audiences

Islamic popular culture not merely displays visions of global modern Islamic futures. Since it is targeted at the generasi muda Islam, Indonesia’s ‘next generation’ of urban middle class Muslim youngsters, it plays a key role in the aspired Islamization of Indonesia and the shaping of a modern Muslim nation. As I have pointed out in the introduction, popular culture is a field of contestation. Imaginations of Islamic modernities are always negotiated, never fully under control of the producer or wholly contained within the text. It is therefore important to study what the role of Islamic popular culture is in processes of constituting Muslim identities among the generasi muda Islam, including possibilities of resistance and selective appropriations. The case study of the shopping mall for instance showed people’s
conscious and creative appropriations of the space of the mall, which challenged the popular view that Ramadan signals a shift from a pious practice to a euphoric spectacle of conspicuous ‘Islamic’ consumption.

These observations raise a number of important questions for further research. These questions first concern people’s motivation for consumption. Because why do so many Indonesians enjoy these products? Why do people read Islamic self-help books? Or see Ayat-Ayat Cinta over and over again? What generates pleasure, fun, or other emotions? Questions also concern people’s negotiations of these products. How does the *generasi muda Islam* consume, appropriate, and negotiate the modernities that Islamic popular and visual culture presents to them? How do they engage with the romantic stories of Islamic-themed films? What do youngsters think about the new forms of religious ‘pop’ authority that can be found in today’s media sphere? And considering that through the image bank of visual culture, young Muslims are provided with the opportunity to imagine their modern Muslim identities: what kinds of modern identities do they create and perform? And how is new media technology appropriated to construct a modern identity? How do people appropriate media technology and communication networks to feel part of the *Ummah* (the transnational Muslim community)?

One particular direction research might take here involves the immensely popular social media. Indonesia is currently one of the top five social-media markets in the world (Lake, *The Jakarta Globe*, 2014). It may seem quite a feat for Jakarta to be named the world’s number one ‘Twitter city’, considering that it is the capital of a nation in which only a quarter of the Indonesians have Internet access at home (Ibidem). There are a number of reasons for the adoption of social media platforms among Indonesians. The country’s youthful demographic has seen social media assume its position as a leading activity on the Internet. Another key contributor is the accessibility of mobile Internet devices, mostly smartphones, which have doubled in usage over the past years backed by increasingly affordable data plans (Ibidem). The popularity of social media among urban youth begs the question what the relations are between new media technologies and modernity. How are social media used to participate in modernity? How do people construct a modern identity through sharing, liking, and tweeting? How do Twitter-literate Indonesians engage in debates online? How do Islam and social media go together?

Intriguingly, macet (traffic jams) in Indonesia’s fast developing cities have become a contributing factor in Indonesia’s obsession with status updates and retweets. Hence, we should also turn the question around, and not only look at how media products stimulate negotiations with modernities, but also probe into the question...
how spatial changes and development evoke media use. The most popular times for
Indonesians to login into their virtual communities is just before and after the
conventional nine-to-five work day begins – the hours many of us could think of
other places where we would rather be (Lake, *The Jakarta Globe*, 2014). This makes
one wonder: how are social media integrated into modern working lives? What
‘modern’ negotiations take place over social media use?

**Bodies**

Several of my case studies suggest that the gendered body is a central locus for
negotiations of modernity. In the films, the self-help books, and contemporary art,
the gendered body forms a contested terrain on which struggles over modernity
take place. I have shown that the body here functions as a metaphor for society. Like
the body, the notion of the society and the nation rely on a demarcation of what
does not belong to it. In practice these lines are difficult to draw, but they are
nevertheless postulated.

In my case studies, gendered bodies were mobilized in an Indonesian project of
modernization. At the same time, we see that in Indonesia – like elsewhere –
projects of self-enhancement and bodily transformations have become central to a
consumer lifestyle. As Foucault noted, the body is molded by “a great many distinct
regimes” (Foucault 1971: 153, cited in Hancock et al 2000: 3). It is an outcome of
the play of power, and power “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches
their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses,
learning processes and everyday lives.” (Foucault 1978: 39, cited in Hancock et al
2000: 3) Our bodies have become malleable and “we have become responsible for
the design of our own bodies” (Giddens 1991: 102, cited in Hancock et al 2000: 3).

When considering the malleability of the body together with its significant role in
processes of modernization, questions of self-stylization and the plasticity of the
gendered Muslim body become urgent. My case studies have pointed out how
regimes of power try to govern people via their bodies, but how do people govern
themselves? How is the physical gendered body a locus and a focus for the
affirmation and performance (Butler 1990) of modern Muslim identities? How are
modernities (re)produced and contested through embodied acts and bodily
practices? How do coolness and ‘modernity’ come together in young Muslim
bodies? What body aesthetics can we distinguish? How do little tactics of personal
style contest regimes of power? How do fashion and faith go together? How is the
body a site of inscription of religious and social values? How are Islamic
consumption (cf. Jones 2007; 2010) and the gendered body connected? And how do the Islamic industries play into the self-enhancement wave?

Zooming in on the Indonesian Muslim fashion industry and its creative appropriations by fashionable young Muslims could provide a compelling way into these questions. The Indonesian Muslim fashion industry is currently booming. By 2020, Indonesia hopes to be the Paris of Muslim fashion. The country aims to become the global and creative leader in the Muslim fashion industry – which is worth nearly one hundred billion US dollar by some estimates (New York Post, 2013). The 2020 fashion plan is initiated and supported by the Indonesian government, which is actively championing and investing in young designers and the garment trade – an industry that employs more than three million people and annually contributes about fifteen billion US dollar to the national economy (Ibidem). As Mari Pangestu, the minister of tourism and creative economies comments: “We can be a trendsetter. We have the vision and mission that Indonesia can be the capital of Muslim fashion.” (Mari Pangestu, cited in New York Post, 2013)

Indonesian Muslim fashion is a far cry from the conservative black abayas worn in the Middle East and challenges stereotypes of Muslim fashion as conservative, uninventive, and uncool. As the 27-year old Indonesian fashion designer Nasution comments: “To make Muslim wear that makes people look cool has always been my mission” (Nasution cited in New York Post, 2013). The colors in Indonesian collections range from fresh and light pastels to demure earth tones and lime green turbans, which are combined with wild print jackets. There is also some shape revealed while keeping the body covered (Dita Alangkara, Huffington Post, 2013). This kind of fashion is not restricted to the catwalk. Many young Indonesian Muslim women wear bright and creative headscarves along with brand-name jeans, long-sleeved fitted shirts, and sneakers. How do these women negotiate their dressing practices? How are acts of self-stylization conductive to modern identities?

Looking into the Indonesian Muslim fashion industry and the ways in which Indonesian men and women appropriate fashion offers an opportunity to study the body at the intersections of consumption, gender, aesthetics, modernity, and Islam.

Spaces

In my study of shopping malls, I suggested that space is not an inert stage where modernity is performed, but that space is instead an active participant in producing and fantasizing Islamic modernities. Spatial practices are shaping and interrogating modernities and, vice versa, modernities are shaping spatial production. The
analysis of the presence of Islam in the mall points out what Lily Kong (2010) has also observed, namely that: “religion [is] neither spatially nor temporally confined to ‘reservations’, practiced only in officially assigned spaces at allocated times.” (Kong 2010: 757) Instead there are many ways in which everyday spaces can be implicated in religious meaning-making, and there are many ways in which everyday spaces challenge religious life, beliefs, practices, and identities. (Ibidem)

In Indonesian cities today, there are many ‘unofficial religious spaces’, that like the mall accommodate and contest religious meaning-making and religious values. I am here for instance thinking of the streets near Yogyakarta’s universities where Muslim and non-Muslim students hang out until midnight, the trendy coffee bars where young Muslims huddle over their lattes, Muslim golf courts, Islamic markets, places of Islamic banking, and even homes, which are now subject to trendy ‘Islamic interior design’. How are in these unofficial everyday religious spaces, Islamic practices constructed, contested, and enhanced? And how do these informal and banal Islamic practices in turn shape the cities’ spaces? What does the ‘informal’ Islamic city look like? And how does the informal Islamic city intersect with the modernizing city?

Another way in which studies on space, modernity, and Islam could fruitfully intersect, is by looking at processes of urbanization in the archipelago. Urbanization and rural-urban migration in Indonesia have increased tremendously following processes of modernization and development (Resosudarmo and Suryadarma 2011). At the same time, the income gap between the rich and the poor is widening. This divide is becoming increasingly visible in the modern urban spaces of Indonesian cities (Priyambodo 2013; Fabi 2013). As Kusno (2006) notes, city spaces and city architecture are reflecting the growing conflicts between circuits of poverty and luxury consumption in Indonesian cities (Kusno 2006: 91). Today, Islam-based organizations like Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, among others, are attempting to interfere in these circuits of urban poverty. As Kong (2010: 765) asserts, here a field for religious geography opens up; to study how religion plays a role in the management of urbanization processes. What role does Islam play in urban areas where globalization, capitalist development, and reindustrialization have been accompanied by unemployment, poverty and exacerbated inequalities? What role can Islam – through Islam-based organizations – play in alleviating urban social problems, in enhancing urban social welfare, and in addressing urban social justice? (Kong 2010: 765)
Flows

Ayat-Ayat Cinta was not only a hit in Indonesia. Following its success on the national market, the film was also released in other parts of Southeast Asia, resulting in packed cinemas in both Singapore and Malaysia. Also, Gigi does not only perform in Indonesia, but also in Malaysia, while Indonesians in turn listen to Malaysian Muslim pop stars and bands.

Bart Barendregt (2006) has suggested that young Asian Muslims do not longer mind the political boundaries between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore (Barendregt 2006: 170, editor’s introduction). For Barendregt, the consumption of ‘pop Islam’ in these nations clearly bespeaks a cultural commonality – and can form the basis of a regional ‘transculturalism’. (Ibidem) Islamic-themed popular and visual culture is flowing back and forth between Southeast Asian countries. Yet, as Ariel Heryanto (2010) asserts, writings on ‘intra-Asia’ popular cultural flows have mainly focused on East Asian popular culture, for instance on the Korean Wave or on J-Pop (cf. Iwabuchi 2004; Chua 2004; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). Heryanto asserts: “Seriously missing in these analyses are two major alternative streams. The first is those works with strongly Islamic content, and the other is a range of pop cultural forms […]], which are heavily indebted to Bollywood.” (Heryanto 2010)

The intra-Asian cultural flows of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture beg a range of questions that deserve our attention. What processes are underpinning the crisscrossing of these Islamic products? How do the Islamic cultural industries of Southeast Asian countries collaborate to produce ‘pop Islam’? How do different regional audiences consume these products? What meanings and viewing pleasures are generated? Which elements of mediated Islam work well across different cultural contexts? And can we indeed speak of regional ‘Islamic’ transculturalism in Southeast Asia?

As Heryanto notes, Ayat-Ayat Cinta’s popularity lies partly in its style, which struck a cord with urban youngsters. “Despite its richly and markedly Islamic elements, in many sections the film resembles features of Hollywood and Bollywood movies, as well as Indonesian television dramas.” (Heryanto 2010) In a similar vein, Gigi’s music videos mobilize global rock aesthetics together with an Arabian imagination. This raises questions about the aesthetic practices of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. How to conceptualize these aesthetics? Can we think of global ‘Islamic’ aesthetics? Do the same aesthetic tactics recur in Malaysian and Indonesian Islamic popular and visual culture?

These questions that concern the production, circulation, consumption, and
aesthetic practices of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture become increasingly important as the ‘Islamic’ cultural flows between Southeast Asian nations continue to intensify.

Looking back and taking cues from my case studies, I have here suggested that questions of flows, audiences, bodies, and spaces are urgent and can inspire future research that is located at the intersections of modernities, Indonesia, and Islam. In one of the opening quotes of this dissertation, Para Pencari Tuhan’s Haifa looks back at her life, and tells her husband Ustad Ferry that “there’s no way all these events have passed us without giving us wisdom.” Her husband looks at her and responds: “yes, it has been quite a journey, but now we can prepare for the road ahead”. In my dissertation, I have shown how, like Haifa and Ustad Ferry, Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture evaluates current and past developments and prepares for the road ahead. The visions of the future that popular and visual culture offers while taking different roads are diverse, and the future itself will tell us which futures Indonesia will eventually find at the end of the road. But so far, and let me end with Ustad Ferry’s words: “it has been quite a journey.”
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English summary

Indonesia is home to the world’s largest Muslim population and in the midst of modernization and Islamization. This confronts Indonesian Muslims with the questions what it means to be modern and Muslim, and whether or not Indonesia is on the ‘right’ path toward the ‘right’ kind of modernity. Popular and visual culture provides perfect tools to reflect on these questions and to publicly fantasize modernities. Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products both display and construct Islamic modernities, thereby feeding into a global future of the Islam and offering visions of these futures. In my study, I zoom in on these products and ask how Islamic modernities and futures are imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture.

Islamic-themed popular and visual culture is a relatively new phenomenon in Indonesia as expressions of religion in popular culture were banned during the Suharto regime (1966-1998). Now, in the post-Suharto era (1998-), Indonesia’s large Muslim community takes advantage of the newly liberated public sphere to participate in public discourses related to the alleged path of modernity. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs imbue cultural products with religious as well as economic value. The dialectics between a public Islamic revival and a commodification of Islam results in a booming Indonesian Islamic popular and visual cultural sphere, that is a key site to experiment with Islamic modernities, a site where global modern Islamic futures are imagined, negotiated, and contested.

These futures display a strong consciousness of global (negative) discourses of the Islam, which are circulating in our post-9/11 world. Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture offers Muslims constructive solutions while showing how religiosity, openness, tolerance, and modernity go hand in hand. I suggest that this specific version of an Indonesian Islamic modernity may in the end be the best defense against reactionary radicalism. In Indonesia, the widening gap between the rich and the poor is helping the recruitment for radical Islamic groups – although these groups are often very vocal, they do not appeal to large segments of the population (cf. Hefner 2009; Van Bruinessen 2002). A version of modernity that promotes piety and that avoids radical orthodoxy may here provide a fruitful alternative for a modern future of the Islam.

But Islamic-themed popular and visual culture not merely displays visions of global modern Islamic futures. Since it is targeted at the generasi muda Islam, Indonesia’s ‘next generation’ of urban middle class Muslim youngsters, it plays a key
role in the aspired Islamization of Indonesia and the shaping of a modern Muslim nation.

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Figure 1: chapter overview

Modernity and modernization are rather abstract concepts. To make these concepts more tangible, I take one middle class Muslim girl’s encounters with modernity as a lead in selecting case studies. I identified three ‘spheres’ in which her negotiations with modernity take place: the leisure sphere, the media sphere, and the creative sphere. I selected five case studies (see also Figure 1) that take place in these spheres and that I examine for their engagement with modernities. These case studies are: (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan, Islamic rock music, Islamic self-help books, Islamic-themed films, and contemporary Islamic-themed art. I propose that these case studies form sites for creative
experiments with Islamic modernities, but simultaneously constitute sites that attempt to discipline people into desired modern citizens that are fit to participate in globalized Indonesian modernities. I also propose that Islamic-themed popular and visual culture negotiates different styles of modernities, and that these negotiations must understood in the context of Indonesia’s postcoloniality and in the context of our current global condition.

Chapter 2
Urban Islamic spectacles: transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan

As the intersections of Islam with consumption and capitalism are central to Islamic-themed popular culture, I start by exploring this junction. I do so through analyzing (visual decorations in) the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan. In recent years, the holy month of Ramadan has in Indonesia allegedly shifted from a period of piety to a euphoric spectacle of consumerism. This shift can be observed in the remarkable transformations that urban spaces of Indonesian cities undergo during Ramadan. Drawing on fieldwork data, thereby particularly focusing on the space of the shopping mall, this chapter analyses how space is produced (cf. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) and transformed during Ramadan. I suggest that space is not an inert stage where modernity is performed, but that space is instead an active participant in producing and fantasizing Islamic modernities. In this chapter, I also point out that visual culture plays a notable role in the transformation of space during Ramadan. I show how Islam, through discursive representations, carves out a public space of its own. The production of space is charged with ideological symbols and moves through social imaginations.

I suggest that the case study of Ramadan enables a critical reading of two themes that can be recognized in previous studies concerned with the production of space: (1) the separation of space and time, and (2) the linear production of space. Through theorizing the space of the mall as a heterotopia (cf. Foucault 1986 [1967]) and Ramadan as a specific heterotopic moment, I propose a conceptual model that systematically integrates time in the study of space and that can help to study non-linear spatial productions.
Chapter 3

‘A place where grace and sins collide’: Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernity

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on three of the largest outlets of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture: music, self-help books, and film. In chapter 3, I look at Islamic rock music.

In Indonesia’s post-authoritarian mediasphere, Islamic piety and coolness by no means exclude each other. Today Islam has found its place in an urban youth culture that places ‘coolness’ as its core value. The Indonesian rock band Gigi represents this new ‘coolness’ in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture. By taking Gigi as a case study, and by analyzing three of their music videos, I explore how Islamic popular culture engages in debates about the desired course of modernity, and how it forms an arena where Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated, and contested. In this chapter, I particularly zoom in on the following questions: In what kinds of debates does Islamic popular culture participate? What kinds of modernities does it imagine? How ‘Indonesian’ are these modernities? What transnational imaginations and politics underpin their construction? Through my analysis, I also raise questions about the ‘capacities’ of Islamic-themed popular and visual culture. How to view Islamic-themed popular and visual cultural products? Do they constitute sites of creative experimentation and contestation, or do they attempt to discipline people into responsible modern citizens? Or do both apply? By drawing on Arjun Appadurai’s (2004; 2013) ideas about cultural capacities, I show that in the ways Gigi imagines Islamic modernities, their music gives way to an ‘ethics of possibility’ and an ‘ethics of probability’ (cf. Appadurai 2013: 188). This means that on the one hand, popular culture provides the tools to imagine, fantasize, and stimulate the coming into being of desired Islamic modernities, but that on the other hand, these constructions are never free from relations of power.

Chapter 4

‘How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?’: Self-help gurus and governmentality

In chapter 4, I study Islamic self-help books. Central to this chapter is not so much the question what kinds of modernities are imagined, but rather what ‘ideal’ modern Muslim subjects are imagined and promoted through Islamic-themed popular culture.
The global Islamic revival of the last three decades has in Indonesia fragmented traditional forms of religious authority whilst producing new figures of public piety (Hoesterey 2012: 38). Recently, Indonesia has seen a boom of Islamic self-help literature. Through Islamic self-help books, pop culture preachers and self-help gurus offer Islamic guidance to Indonesian Muslims. In this chapter, I will analyze three books: Wonderful Family (2012), Rasullulah’s Business School (2011), and Twitografi Asma Nadia (2011). I explore how these books provide families, entrepreneurs, and young women with inspirational stories and practical manuals for living in a modernizing Indonesian society. I suggest that while ‘helping’ readers, the books mobilize governmental tactics to promote and construct specific modern Islamic citizen-subjects that are fit to participate in Indonesian Islamic modernities. I propose that these subjects are not just gesturing towards a distant modern future. Rather they point our gaze back to the disputes and contradictions that exist in a present Indonesian society. The books encourage the construction of subjects that are aware of, and that intervene in, the (unequal) spread of wealth, while actively negotiating cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

Chapter 5
‘So Islam really honors women?’: Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

In chapter 5, I study how the questions raised in chapter 4 are gendered. I do so by looking at Islamic-themed films. Representations of gender in Islamic-themed films have in the past few years stirred national debates about polygamy, the position of women in Islam, sexuality, and domestic violence. In this chapter, I critically scrutinize these representations. I suggest that we need to view these representations in the light of Indonesia’s recent history. During Suharto’s New Order, representations of masculinity and femininity were part of the regime’s national project, and as such served a national function. State sponsored media products linked good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities, thereby creating highly stereotypical images of women. The fall of the New Order regime opened up a space for identity politics, and for a critical attitude toward New Order gender stereotypes, although regulation and (self)censorship continue to exist today. The newly liberalized cultural scene nevertheless provides ample opportunities for the creative industry to construct different representations of gender, and to tackle taboo-issues, like sexuality, polygamy, and (domestic) violence.

But how are representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity in post-New
Chapter 6

Unearthing the past and re-imagining the present: Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world

In this chapter, I look at Islamic-themed contemporary art. After 9/11, popular and academic discourses have often constructed Islamic communities as hostile to visual culture. Contemporary Indonesian art shows how visual culture is a site of (Muslim) politics, creativity, contestation, and conflict, a site where issues associated with Islam are mobilized to come to terms with the present state of the world. But how are aesthetics in these artworks mobilized as a way of negotiating and contesting political, cultural, and historical circumstances? How are politics and aesthetics (Rancière 2004) intertwined? What kind of critique is articulated and what tactics are employed here? And how might we understand these politics? Is it possible to read these politics of (Islamic) aesthetics as resistance? If so, how is this resistance structured? And how is being critical a part of being modern?

In this chapter, I explore these questions by analyzing two art works: Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (2009) by Wilman Syanur and 11 June 2002 (2003) by Arahmaiani. Through conducting a visual analysis of these art works, I propose that a Benjaminian socio-historical politics underlies the objects’ aesthetic strategies. Drawing on the works of Walter Benjamin (1999 [1982]; 1968 [1940]) and Pierre Nora (1996 [1989]), I suggest that through their aesthetics the works evoke fragments from the past to question the construct of the present. The works keenly fragment the past and translate these fragments into images. These visual historical
fragments are reassembled within the present to challenge present (dominant) narratives that are antithetical to Muslims. I suggest that these aesthetic strategies form the base of a (Muslim) politics.

**Chapter 7: Conclusion**
**Changing paths**

In the conclusion, I first revisit the question that I ask in the introduction: “How are Islamic modernities imagined, negotiated, and contested in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular and visual culture?” I also explore a question that I think is equally important: why are these modernities imagined? I suggest that the case studies construct a highly ambivalent discourse about modernity and about an Islamic modern future. On the one hand, the case studies display a positive attitude towards modernity. On the other hand, the case studies also articulate a negative attitude towards modernity, and express a fear and skepticism over the condition of the present. I propose that we can understand this ambiguous discourse by seeing it in the light of Indonesia’s postcoloniality and in the context of our current global condition.

To study how Islamic modernities are imagined in Indonesian popular and visual culture, I look at a wide range of different cultural products and forms: shopping malls, rock music, self-help books, films, and contemporary art. In the conclusion, I reflect on the question how the different forms of these case studies matter in the ways they imagine modernities. How do the means of mediation, e.g. different genres, media and visualities matter when it comes to the imagination, negotiation, and contestation of Islamic modernities?

The question ‘where are we going?’ is central to the rock songs, films, self-help books, malls, and art works that I analyze in my dissertation. Throughout my dissertation, the ‘we’ in this sentence stands for Indonesia, the modern Muslim nation, and the global Muslim world. In the conclusion, I make this ‘we’ stand for ‘scholarship’, and think about where scholarship at the intersections of modernities, Indonesia, and Islam could go in the future. Taking cues from my case studies, I present a future research agenda and suggest four directions that research could take. I summarize these directions under the headings: audiences, bodies, spaces, and flows.
Indonesië is een overtuigend Islamitisch land. Circa negentig procent van de Indonesiërs is moslim en dat maakt Indonesië tot het grootste moslimland ter wereld. Momenteel beleefde Indonesië een sterke en snelle economische groei, en is het in toenemende mate aan het moderniseren. In de afgelopen jaren is er vooral in de grote steden een koopkrachtige Indonesische jonge middenklasse ontstaan, die zich een moderne levensstijl toegeëigend.

Tegelijkertijd is Indonesië aan het Islamiseren: de Islam wordt steeds zichtbaarder in de publieke ruimte en de nieuwe middenklasse is vaak religieuzer dan andere groepen in de samenleving. De middenklasse toont haar religiositeit graag publiekelijk, bijvoorbeeld door middel van Islamitische mode, of door mee te doen aan allerlei Islamitische evenementen zoals Islamitische muziekfestivals, winkeltours, golftoernooien, of halal diners in luxe hotels. Door deze ontwikkelingen – modernisering en Islamisering – wordt de nieuwe Islamitische middenklasse, maar ook andere Indonesische Moslims, steeds geconfronteerd met de vraag wat het betekent om moslim en modern te zijn. Ook vragen als: ‘hoe ziet een moderne Islamitische toekomst van het land er eigenlijk uit?’ en ‘welke richting moet het land opgaan?’, worden urgent. Want wat voor soort moderniteit past eigenlijk bij Indonesië? En welke niet?

Indonesische populaire en visuele cultuur biedt een perfecte mogelijkheid om publiekelijk over deze vragen te fantaseren. Indonesische Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur laat ons beelden zien van een moderne Islamitische toekomst en onderhandelt daarbij over verschillende soorten moderniteit – over de verschillende richtingen die het land in kan slaan. In mijn studie zoom ik in op deze Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur en vraag ik hoe de moderne Islamitische toekomst wordt verbeeld in deze culturele producten. Welke soorten (Islamitische) moderniteiten zien we in Indonesische Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur? Waarom zien we deze soorten moderniteiten? En hoe wordt daarover onderhandeld?

Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur is een relatief nieuw fenomeen in Indonesië. Tijdens het regime van president Suharto (1966-1998) was er naast een ban op uitingen van etniciteit, ras en klasse ook een ban op uitingen van religie in populaire cultuur. Suharto was bang dat deze uitingen van identiteit de vorming van een uniforme gedeelde ‘Indonesische’ identiteit aan zouden tasten, en dat het mogelijk voor onrust zou zorgen in een multireligieus en multi-etnisch Indonesië. Na
de val van het regime in 1998 zijn deze uitingen weer mogelijk. Wat we na 1998 zien, is dat de grote moslimgemeenschap in Indonesië gebruik maakt van deze nieuwe vrijheid om mee te doen in publieke debatten rondom de moderne toekomst van het land. Tegelijkertijd zien ondernemers en mediaproducenten hun kans schoon. Zij zien in de grote moslimgemeenschap vooral een markt met een enorm potentieel en maken Islamitische versies van diverse mediagenres en producten. Zo zien we nu bijvoorbeeld Islamitische glossy’s, films, soapseries, boeken en TV drama’s.


Deze versie van een Indonesische Islamitische moderniteit waarin openheid centraal staat, maar waarin er niet wordt ingeleverd op religiositeit, zou weleens een goed antwoord kunnen vormen op vormen van radicale Islam. Naarmate de kloof tussen arm en rijk in Indonesië groeit, sluiten steeds meer arme moslims zonder veel toekomstperspectief zich aan bij vocale radicale bewegingen – hoewel deze door een zeer klein deel van de bevolking worden gesteund. Een versie van moderniteit waarin religiositeit en tolerantie hand in hand gaan kan moslims een vruchtbaar alternatief bieden.

Indonesische Islamitische visuele cultuur laat echter niet alleen maar beelden van een Islamitische moderne toekomst zien. Omdat de populaire en visuele cultuur zich specifiek richt op de generasi muda Islam, de ‘nieuwe generatie’ van jonge middenklasse moslims, speelt het een belangrijke rol in de gewenste Islamisering en modernisering van Indonesië.

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Figuur 1: overzicht van de hoofdstukken
(Figuur 1), welke ik onderzoek op hun onderhandelingen met moderniteit. Deze casestudies zijn: (visuele decoraties in) de shopping mall tijdens Ramadan, Islamitische rock muziek, Islamitische self-help boeken, films met een Islamitisch thema, en hedendaagse kunst die vanuit een Islamitisch perspectief onderhandelt over een wereld na 11 september. In mijn proefschrift laat ik zien hoe al deze casestudies een plek vormen voor creatieve experimenten met Islamitische moderniteiten, maar tegelijkertijd ook proberen mensen te disciplineren tot ideale moderne burgers die goed mee kunnen doen in een globaal-georiënteerde Indonesische Islamitische moderniteit. Daarnaast laat ik zien hoe Indonesische populaire en visuele cultuur over verschillende stijlen van moderniteit onderhandelt en zich tegen bepaalde stijlen verzet. Ik leg uit dat deze onderhandelingen begrepen moeten worden in de postkoloniale context van Indonesië alsmede in de context van huidige processen van globalisering.

Hoofdstuk 2
Urban Islamic spectacles: transforming the space of the shopping mall during Ramadan

Door dat in Indonesische Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur Islam, consumptie en kapitalisme samenkomen, begin ik mijn proefschrift met een onderzoek naar deze samenkomen. Ik doe dat in dit hoofdstuk door te kijken naar (visuele decoraties in) de shopping mall tijdens Ramadan.

In de afgelopen jaren lijkt Ramadan in Indonesië steeds meer een consumptiespektakel te zijn geworden. Het lijkt niet meer te draaien om religiositeit, maar om het consumeren van goederen om Ramadan te beleven en te vieren. Deze ogenschijnlijke verschuiving van religieuze feest naar consumptiespektakel is te zien in de manieren waarop de ruimte van de shopping mall wordt gebruikt tijdens Ramadan. Door data te analyseren die ik heb verzameld tijdens Ramadan in Yogyakarta, onderzoek ik hoe de ruimte van de shopping mall verandert tijdens Ramadan. Ik maak daarbij gebruik van Henri Lefebvre’s (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]) theorie over ‘the production of space’. Aan de hand van deze theorie laat ik zien dat de ruimte van de mall niet enkel een passief platform biedt waarop moderniteit zich laat zien, maar dat de ruimte van de mall juist actief meewerkt in de productie van Islamitische moderniteiten. Tegelijkertijd laat ik zien hoe visuele cultuur een belangrijke rol speelt in de veranderingen die de shopping mall tijdens Ramadan ondergaat. Via visuele cultuur vindt Islam zijn weg naar de publieke ruimte. En via visuele cultuur raakt deze ruimte vervolgens vol met ideologische symbolen.
Door de ruimte van de shopping mall te bestuderen onderzoek ik twee thema’s die gevonden kunnen worden in literatuur die zich bezighoudt met ‘the production of space’. Deze thema’s zijn: (1) het onderscheid dat in literatuur wordt gemaakt tussen tijd en ruimte, en (2) de lineaire productie van ruimte. Door de shopping mall te zien als een heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]) en Ramadan als een heterotopic moment, stel ik een nieuw theoretisch model voor. Dit model integreert tijd systematisch in de studie van ruimte en helpt bij het bestuderen van niet-lineaire ruimtelijke veranderingen.

Hoofdstuk 3
‘A place where grace and sins collide’: Islamic rock music and imaginations of modernity

In hoofdstukken 3, 4 en 5 richt ik me op drie belangrijke genres van Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur: muziek, self-help boeken en films. In hoofdstuk 3 bestudeer ik Islamitische rock muziek.

In Indonesië sluiten ‘cool zijn’ en religiositeit elkaar niet uit. Integendeel, Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur wordt juist gekenmerkt door ‘coolness’ en de Indonesische rock band Gigi is daar een voorbeeld van. Door Gigi in dit hoofdstuk als casestudie te nemen en door drie van hun videoclips te analyseren, bestudeer ik in welke debatten over moderniteit Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur meedoet, en wat voor soort verschillende moderniteiten er worden verbeeld in culturele producten. Ik zoom daarnaast in op de volgende vragen: hoe ‘Indonesisch’ zijn de moderniteiten die worden verbeeld? Wat voor transnationale verbeelding ligt aan deze moderniteiten ten grondslag? Wat zijn de ‘capaciteiten’ (Appadurai 2004; 2013) van Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur? Hoe moeten we deze culturele producten eigenlijk zien? Vormen ze een plek waar creatieve experimenten met verschillende soorten moderniteiten plaatsvinden? Of proberen ze mensen te disciplineren tot ideale moderne burgers die goed mee kunnen doen in een Indonesische Islamitische moderniteit? Of zijn beide van toepassing?

Door gebruik te maken van Arjun Appadurai’s inzichten over ‘cultural capacities’ (2004; 2013) laat ik zien dat we in Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur zowel een ‘ethics of possibility’ en een ‘ethics of probability’ kunnen herkennen (Appadurai 2013: 188). Dit betekent dat Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur aan de ene kant de tools biedt voor het verbeelden van Islamitische moderniteiten, en dat het de totstandkoming van deze moderniteiten stimuleert. Maar aan de andere kant zijn deze constructies nooit vrij van machtsrelaties.
Hoofdstuk 4
‘How to become a Muslim billionaire, just like Prophet Muhammad?’: Self-help gurus and governmentality

In hoofdstuk 4 bestudeer ik Islamitische self-help boeken. In dit hoofdstuk staat niet zozeer de vraag centraal wat voor soort moderniteiten er worden verbeeld, maar meer wat voor soort ideale moderne moslim subjecten er worden gepromoot in Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur.


In dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik drie self-help boeken: Wonderful Family, Rasullulah’s Business School, en Twitografi Asma Nadia. Ik bestudeer hoe deze drie boeken families, entrepreneurs en jonge vrouwen voorzien van motiverende verhalen en praktische handleidingen, die ze moeten helpen met het leven in een moderne Indonesische maatschappij. Ik laat zien dat de boeken, terwijl ze advies geven, verschillende gouvernementele tactieken gebruiken om specifieke moderne Islamitische burger-subjecten te creëren die goed mee kunnen doen in een globaal-georiënteerde Indonesische Islamitische moderniteit. Ik laat ook zien dat deze subjecten niet naar een verre Islamitische toekomst wijzen, maar dat ze juist de aandacht verschuiven naar problemen en contradicties die vandaag de dag in de Indonesische maatschappij te vinden zijn. De boeken promoten de constructie van subjecten die zich bewust zijn van, en interveniëren in, de ongelijke verdeling van rijkdom en middelen, terwijl ze actief onderhandelen over de culturele, etnische en religieuze verschillen die Indonesië rijk is.

Hoofdstuk 5
‘So Islam really honors women?’: Muslim masculinity and femininity in Islamic-themed films

In hoofdstuk 5 bestudeer ik Indonesische films met een Islamitische thematiek. In de afgelopen jaren hebben representaties van gender in films geregeld nationale discussies opgeroepen over polygamie, de positie van vrouwen in de Islam, seksualiteit en huiselijk geweld. In dit hoofdstuk onderzoek ik deze representaties.


**Hoofdstuk 6**

*Unearthing the past and re-imagining the present: Contemporary art and Muslim politics in a post-9/11 world*

In dit hoofdstuk bestudeer ik hedendaagse Indonesische kunst met een Islamitische thematiek. Na 11 september hebben populaire en academische discoursen
moslimgemeenschappen vaak geconstrueerd als ‘anti-visueel’. De heftige discussies rondom de Deense Mohammed cartoons en de ban die de Taliban heeft op bepaalde religieuze beeltenissen in visuele cultuur hebben hier onder andere aan bijgedragen. Hedendaagse Indonesische kunst laat echter zien hoe visuele cultuur een plaats is voor moslim politiek, creativiteit en conflict, een plek waar kwesties die gerelateerd zijn aan de Islam worden ingezet om de huidige staat van onze post-11 september wereld te bevatten en te bevragen. Maar hoe onderhandelen deze kunstwerken via hun esthetiek over de huidige politieke, culturele en historische omstandigheden? Hoe gaan politiek en esthetiek (Rancière 2004) samen? Wat voor soort kritiek wordt er geuit op de huidige omstandigheden? En hoe kunnen we deze politiek begrijpen? Zouden we deze politiek kunnen lezen als een vorm van verzet? Van wat voor soort verzet is hier dan sprake? En hoe is kritisch zijn een belangrijk element van ‘het modern zijn’?


Chapter 7: Conclusion
Changing paths

In de conclusie reflecteer ik op de vraag die ik in de introductie stel: “Hoe worden Islamitische moderniteiten verbeeld en onderhandeld in Indonesische Islamitische populaire en visuele cultuur?” Ik ga ook in op een vraag die van even groot belang is: waarom worden deze moderniteiten verbeeld? Ik laat zien dat de casestudies een ambivalent discours over moderniteit en een moderne Islamitische toekomst construieren. De casestudies zijn zowel positief als negatief over moderniteit. Ik stel voor dat we deze contradictie moeten zien in het licht van zowel de postkoloniale situatie van Indonesië alsmede in the context van huidige processen van globalisering.
Ik kijk in mijn proefschrift naar verschillende casestudies, shopping malls, Islamitische rock muziek, Islamitische *self-help* boeken, films met een Islamitisch thema en hedendaagse kunst. In de conclusie reflecteer ik op de vraag hoe de verschillende genres en vormen van deze casestudies een rol spelen in de manier waarop ze over moderniteit onderhandelen.

In het laatste gedeelte van mijn conclusie presenteer ik een onderzoeksagenda voor de toekomst. Kijkende naar de bevindingen van mijn proefschrift, stel ik voor dat onderzoek naar moderniteit, Indonesië en Islam vier richtingen kan inslaan. Ik vat deze richtingen samen met de termen: *audiences, bodies, spaces* en *flows*. 
Indonesia is home to the world’s largest Muslim population and in the midst of modernization and Islamization. This confronts Indonesian Muslims with the questions what it means to be modern and Muslim, and whether or not Indonesia is on the ‘right’ path toward the ‘right’ kind of modernity. Products of popular and visual culture - like the Obama artwork that is featured on the cover of this book - provide perfect tools to publicly fantasize Islamic modernities. This book zooms in on these products and asks how Islamic modernities are imagined, negotiated and contested in popular and visual culture.

Artwork: Membuat Obama dan Perdamaian yang dibuat-buat (2009) by Wilman Syahnur