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## Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia

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the Recited Qur'an, and  
Islamic Music in Indonesia

ANNE K. RASMUSSEN

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# Setting the Scene

## THE GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF A “PARTICULAR” ETHNOGRAPHY

During a visit to Indonesia in October of 2004, I was trying to make the most of my last day in the country. After a week in the relative calm of East and Central Java, where I had toured with the Kiai Kanjeng ensemble, the return to Jakarta assaulted my senses. Although I had lived there for two years (1995–96 and 1999) and had returned for shorter visits on several occasions in 2003 and 2004, the intensity of the traffic seemed overwhelming after traveling around the Javanese provinces.

I was hoping to be on time for a gathering of alumnae and teachers from the women’s college, Institut Ilmu al-Qur’an (IIQ), who were commemorating the death of Ibrahim Hosen, the founder and former director of the institution. Part of the memorial gathering, I was told, would be the collective recitation of the entire Qur’an. *Khatam al-Qur’an*, as performed in this particular setting, entails the recitation of the entire Qur’an by thirty reciters all at once. Although I had heard *khatam al-Qur’an* before and had recorded it in 1999 at the home of Ibrahim Hosen, the wonderful cacophony of thirty voices, each one reciting one of the thirty parts (*juz’*) of the Qur’an in a fast melodic patten, was something worth witnessing again. I made my way to Ciputat in a taxi from Depok, where I had met with some singers that were part of an Islamic music festival.

As I approached the house on foot, I could hear that the *khatam al-Qur’an* had finished just as I arrived. I was disappointed, but I was also hungry, and I knew that there would be refreshments at the event as well as several old acquaintances

to greet. Furthermore, I would meet up with Ibu Maria Ulfah. Somehow the trek would be worth it. I took off my shoes and entered the house. Polite greetings and chatter followed. Ibu Maria, who had just arrived from a wedding in which she had been engaged as a reciter, confessed that she, too, had missed the whole thing. She then began to explain to me, with some urgency, something that included the following bits of information:

“... spoken English ...”  
 “... video conference ...”  
 “... native speaker ...”  
 “... just a few minutes ...”  
 “... now!”

Although many consider me fluent in Indonesian, and I can usually make myself understood, cultural knowledge, or the ability to understand what is going on in a particular situation, when processed through the filter of Bahasa Indonesia, the Indonesian national language, often reveals itself to me in bits and pieces, particularly in a socially dense setting (as opposed to a one-on-one conversation).<sup>1</sup> We mingled a little more, and Ibu Maria once again tried to explain what it was that she wanted me to do.

I still had a few appointments in Jakarta that afternoon and evening, and I should have been on my way, but spending just a few more minutes at the gathering seemed harmless enough. Inevitably, one of the things that researchers can offer the communities within which they work is knowledge of the English language. However unglamorous it may seem to the anthropologist in search of more meaningful engagement, teaching English, translating the local spoken language into English and vice versa, reviewing translated documents, fixing the grammar and syntax of English song lyrics penned by hopeful songwriters, and various related tasks are among the valuable commodities of exchange that we can, and that I could, offer to our hosts in the field.<sup>2</sup> Although at the outset of this project, in early 1996, I initially resisted the role, I had become accustomed to the request to provide services as an English-language specialist.

We moved from the living area of the house into one of its wings, which Ibrahim Hosen's daughter, Nadirsyah Hosen, explained they maintained as a library. A long table was piled high with materials, mostly photocopied articles and notebooks; several metal bookcases occupied the center of the large space. There was a white board and markers, a couple of computers, and a television, which was on, although no one seemed to be watching it. A cart containing a sound system was rolled into the library and a microphone was produced. I was still under the impression that someone wanted to videotape me speaking English so that students could study the pronunciation and cadence of a native speaker. But the task at hand was far more interesting.

Several of the college students at IIQ were involved in an international forum that was to be held by videoconference in just a few days among female college students in the American Midwest and those in the Muslim world. The students had been preparing position papers that addressed American power, foreign policy, global security, and the war in Iraq. Among their questions were: Was America's export of democracy appropriate for all countries? Was it appropriate for America to police the world? What about preemptive strikes? What kind of a message do they send? What about the American government's disregard for the United Nations' rules of engagement and war? What about the enormous economic and cultural influence that America exerts on the world? All of these specific issues related to a larger and more speculative topic: "The Role of Women in Foreign Policy."

The young women were well prepared. They had taken on this work as an independent study under the tutelage of Nadirsyah Hosen, and their photocopied articles in English were marked up with translations and notes. After they turned on the microphone, the first student read her position paper on preemptive strikes and why Muslims have bad feelings toward America. She was poised and her pronunciation was generally excellent. The second read from a document that was not as well written but still did admirably. They then brought out a tiny portable cassette recorder to capture my comments.

I thought it best to reread their documents aloud and suggest alternate phrasings where appropriate. As I clearly pronounced the titles of the students' pieces, I found myself completely overwhelmed by a bundle of emotions. My throat tightened as I swallowed hard and tried to keep my composure. These young women, all of them students at an institution that may appear (to both Westerners and Indonesians) to promote conservatism and conformity veiled in the authority of an androcentric religious cultural system, were in the eye of the stormy questions of the day. These questions, although they may have been nascent when I began visiting this college for qur'anic studies in December of 1995, had none of the implications that that they did on this day in October of 2004. The United States was enveloped by the post-9/11 culture of fear; in Indonesia, three terrorist bombings (in Bali on October 12, 2002; in Jakarta, at the Marriott Hotel, on August 5, 2003; and at the Australian embassy, on September 9, 2004) tarnished the image of Indonesia in the eyes of the Western world, reducing tourism by six million per year and preventing even students and musicians from acquiring visas to the United States. We were all victims of the preemptive American war in Iraq.

As I had traveled nonstop around Central and East Java and Jakarta the past several days, it had seemed to me that everyone was pleased with the results of the recent democratic and direct election of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, often referred to as SBY (pronounced *ess bay yay*), in an election that had



been held on September 20, 2004, just a few weeks prior to my visit. Eighty percent of the population participated in the voting process peacefully and without incident.<sup>3</sup> The election, although not an automatic guarantee of *reformasi*, the reformation that was supposed to follow the thirty-two-year tenure of the autocratic president Suharto, provided some hope for political stability, a better economy, security from Islamic extremism, and reduction of “*korupsi, kolusi, dan nepotism*” (KKN, pronounced *kah kah enn*), or “corruption, collusion, and nepotism,” which, many believe, continues to impede the country’s progress. The election of Yudhoyono as the fourth new president in six years was certainly proof that, at the very least, a democratic election process was on solid ground. My own obsession in October 2004 was, of course, with the final laps of the race between John Kerry and George Bush for the American presidency, a contest that would inevitably have ramifications not only for me but also for the young women I was coaching.<sup>4</sup>

As an American in Indonesia it is impossible, even in the most fleeting and informal of exchanges, not to engage almost immediately in the political realities of our contemporary world. As someone who has spent considerable time in Indonesia, I find it difficult not to address the stereotypes and fears that many Americans have about Islam, Muslim Indonesia, and Muslim women in teaching and public presentations. Although I am essentially a researcher of cultural ritual and musical expressions of Islam in Indonesia, the political periphery inevitably became central to the project.

#### SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

This book is about Islamic performance in Indonesia and the roles that women play in the expressive and ritual culture of religion. The book is organized into six chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 2, “Hearing Islam in the Atmosphere,” describes the soundscape of a cultural-religious sphere that emanates from and broadcasts to various realms of Indonesian society. The third chapter, “Learning Recitation: The Institutionalization of the Recited Qur’an,” illustrates student-teacher relationships in a variety of contexts of teaching, practicing, and experiencing the recited Qur’an. Chapter 4, “Celebrating Religion and Nation: The Festivalization of the Qur’an,” describes the religious festivals and competitions that reward and encourage Islamic performance as an act of civic duty and patriotism. In chapter 5, “Performing Piety through Islamic Musical Arts,” I look at the various strains of Islamic musical arts—from devotional song to multimedia performance and commercial production—that occur in the contexts introduced in the first four chapters. Chapter 6, “Rethinking Women, Music, and Islam,” focuses on issues of gender and religious practice by revisiting many of the people and events introduced throughout the ethnography and by

evaluating issues of motivation, agency, and access in light of the literature on women in Islam, and on music and gender, and by taking into account the activist voices of Jakarta feminists.

As an ethnomusicologist I am concerned with sound, how it is generated and experienced, and the kinds of aesthetic and literal meanings that it generates. Music and musical performance are rich fields for interpreting both the ongoing Islamization of the archipelago and the indigenization of the religion in the region. Women are clearly players on the stage of Islamic creative and performing arts. Their activities as qur'anic reciters, moreover, in the culture of the Qur'an as it is lived in Indonesia, are indeed a distinctive feature of this region, where the word of God is embodied and enacted by women. Encoded in the sound of the recited Qur'an, considered to be something of exquisite beauty in and of itself, is its meaning, a phenomenon to which Indonesian women also have access. Knowledge of and about Islam through its texts is something that has always been associated with a learned elite in Indonesia. I contend that women, because they are so active as reciters, are part of that elite, even if they are only producing the message to be interpreted by others. In many cases, however, women are reading, reciting, questioning, and teaching these texts on a variety of levels, even if it is by their own example as devout working women rather than distilled into formal lessons or prepared messages. Pieterella van Doorn-Harder's recent work on the women of the two largest Muslim social organizations in Indonesia has contributed definitively to my sense that women contribute significantly to the study and interpretation of Arabic texts that have been considered authoritative in Indonesia for at least five hundred years. That they develop the skills to delve into these texts in Arabic—a language that is not accessible to most Muslims, except as ritual performance—means that they also are developing a proclivity toward questioning texts in Indonesian or even English, as the young women were doing in the opening scenario of this chapter.

#### GOVERNMENT PATRONAGE: SUPPORT AND CONTROL

Since Indonesian independence in 1945, the political climate in Indonesia has enabled an increasingly favorable context for the performance of Islam. Although the New Order of Suharto, president of Indonesia from 1967 to 1998, eschewed even the idea of an Islamic state, religious belief, albeit accommodating and pluralistic, was conceived as one of the five pillars of Pancasila (or Panca Sila), the guiding paradigm for Indonesia. Yet as Suharto's thirty-two-year tenure progressed, his outward expressions of piety became characteristic of his reign.

Contemporary scholars have remarked that Suharto's post-1965 New Order government (*Ordre Baru*) promoted Islamic practice in order to gain political support from Muslims without moving toward a scripturalist interpretation of

the religion as a blueprint for civil life (Madjid 1996; see also Abdurrahman 1996 and works by Hefner and Federspiel). Just one of the signals of the promotion of Islamic practice in the public domain is the way in which the speech of officials—from politicians to teachers, and from radio disc jockeys to news anchors—is peppered with Islamic greetings in Arabic, a marker that assumes a common denominator of religious affiliation and piety. The required greeting in a formal context is “Assalamu alaikum wa rahmat-illa Allahhi wa barakatu” (peace be upon you and the mercy of God and his blessings). Officials and community leaders, however, often continue their acts of language showmanship, if they are able, with several additional lines of formulaic and pious Arabic speech.

The embrace of Islamic culture in the public arena has intensified religious life among all classes, most notably among the elite. For example, reflecting on his experience as a tour guide for Haj Plus, a deluxe package tour for the *haj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, Abdurrahman writes of the middle and upper classes as groups seeking religious and social identity through Islamic practices quite distinct from those of their peasant countrymen (Abdurrahman 1996, 117). “Pilgrimage Plus” tours include five-star hotel accommodations, shopping excursions, and spaces in which pilgrims can indulge in non-pilgrim-like behavior, such as smoking and wearing makeup. Other relatively new practices, apparent among Jakarta’s middle and upper classes, include the adoption of varied styles of veiling and Muslim fashion among women from many communities. *Busana Muslim* or *busana Muslima* (Muslim clothes or fashion, particularly for women) is now a big business for designers and forms a separate department in most clothing stores (see Tarlo and Moors 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007). Islamic music, formerly heard in ritual contexts and only among particular constituents, is now created and produced by the stars of the mainstream media and broadcast in five-star hotels and shopping malls. And religious music videos may be seen daily on many television stations and almost continuously during the month of Ramadan. Government-sponsored celebrations as well as competitions in qur’anic recitation and related arts “festivalize” religion in acts of nation building that appeal to national and local governments, commercial sponsors, and an interisland viewing audience that cuts across socioeconomic class.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the rigorous policies of censorship that were in place during Suharto’s tenure, evaluating of the effects of the so-called “guided democracy” of Suharto’s New Order has become a national pastime.<sup>6</sup> One recurring theme among Suharto’s international cadre of analysts, in the press, in academia, and even on the street, has been the escalation of religious practice since the latter part of Suharto’s New Order and continuing through the 1990s. As the subsequent period of *reformasi* unfolded, the position of the various post-Suharto governments regarding religious practice and government support of religious activities and institutions was also a subject of speculation and critique. In fact,

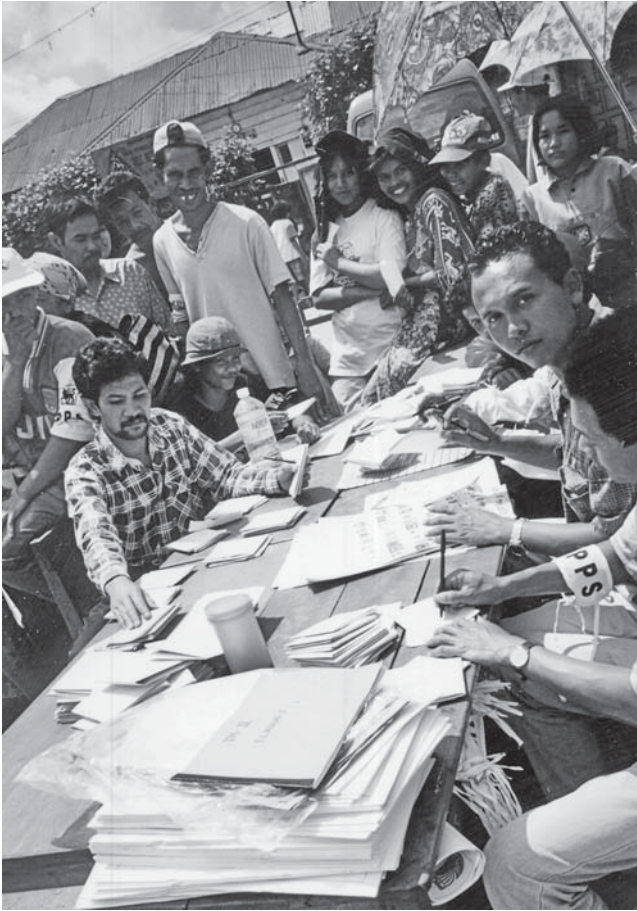


FIGURE 1. Counting ballots on election day, 1999, in North Sumatra.

anticipating and evaluating the changing presidential guard—from Suharto to B. J. Habibie to Abdurrahman Wahid, then to Megawati Sukarnoputri and finally to S. B. Yudhoyono—during the period of my ethnographic research (1996–2005) has been a productive catalyst for the discussion of government patronage and its intersection with religion among myself and the many consultants who have taught me about their lives and concerns. Although establishing clear relationships between the policies and rhetoric of the government, their effects on religious life, and people in the profession of religion is impossible, a dynamic theater of government and its patronage of, or reaction to, all things Islamic is a great source of speculation, evaluation, and debate.

## THE CULTURAL RANGE OF RECITATION

My project came to focus on the culture of the recited Qur'an, the Islamic music I heard in contexts where the Qur'an was performed, and the ways in which a variety of participants, especially girls and women, are involved in this performance complex. Even my first explorations revealed that this is a culture that is created and shared by women and men. Indonesian women and men are recognized throughout the Muslim world for their skills as reciters, particularly in the Egyptian melodic and performative style, *mujawwad*, or, as it usually called in Indonesia, *tilawa*. Connected to and overlapping with the culture of Qur'anic performance is an array of Islamic music, some of it rooted in distinctly Indonesian traditions and some of it displaying features shared by other Muslim communities in which women and men participate equally. My initial inquiry concerned the ways in which Arabic musical aesthetics and techniques were imported, theoretically beginning as early as contact was made with Muslim peoples over the well-worn trade routes of oral tradition, and then either preserved, revised, or completely reinvented.<sup>7</sup> The introduction and maintenance of an essentially foreign system of musical techniques and Islamic aesthetics, many of them grounded in the Arabic language, in a cultural region renowned for its gong-chime ensembles and collective interlocking musical techniques is a phenomenon that has been largely underanalyzed in a vast literature on Indonesian music. Although musical aesthetics, instruments, and techniques may be traced to Muslim communities from throughout South and Southeast Asia, I discovered that the mechanisms for teaching and learning this specifically Egyptian and essentially musical-linguistic practice had been institutionalized only relatively recently in postindependence Indonesia, albeit almost exclusively through oral praxis.

In the course of this original inquiry I learned something about the power of sound. Qur'anic Arabic, the intervallic structure and special intonation of Egyptian melodic modes (*maqamat*), the timbre of nasality (*ghunna*), the extension of syllables or even unvowelled consonants (*madd*) that enables dramatic melodic and melismatic flourish, intense vocal production, extreme range, and the predictable rhythm of a familiar, if variously understood, text all reference an Islamic ideal. In doing so, these musical conventions allude to the original sites of Arab Islam with multisensory efficacy, both for those who practice and participate in Islamic ritual as well as for those who do not. Thus, the *sound* of the recited Qur'an indexes much more than literal text or religious tenets. It is a sonic and symbolic package of cross-cultural histories and relationships as well as a signifier of contemporary identity and practice. Islamic sound arts, which encompass language performed in a combination of Arab and local musical styles, is referenced and invoked variously in all kinds of Indonesian

Islamic music, where, I suggest, it also operates as a summarizing symbol of spirituality, history, and identity.

Although scholars who focus on the many indigenous traditions of Southeast Asia—traditions of music, dance, material arts, ritual, and theater—may be surprised at the enumeration of Islamic arts, scholars of the Middle East and of Islam may recognize many descriptive points that resonate with their own experiences in Muslim contexts throughout the world. This work is not meant to be comparative or to evaluate the presence, continuity, or change of Muslim expressive culture in Indonesia vis-à-vis other communities in the Muslim ecumene in any comprehensive way. Rather, my intent is to describe the way in which Islam-inspired “performance” occurs among the communities of professionals and amateur men, women, and children in this largest Muslim and also democratic country.

#### MUSIC IN MUSLIM INDONESIA

Although infamous in the West for its strict regulation of musical activity, the religion of Islam, with its obligatory rituals and cultural traditions, actually generates and contributes to an international Muslim music culture. Frequently depicted as a homogenous people, Muslims have been mischaracterized in the popular imagination of the contemporary West as music-phobic, in part because of their regulation of musical activity in various contexts and historical periods up to and including the present. (For more on this topic, see the works by Sawa, al-Faruqi, Lambert, Shiloah, Nasr, Farmer, Danielson and Fisher, and Baily). Rather than being excised from religious and social culture, however, musical techniques and aesthetics, particularly those involving the performance of the Arabic language, are in fact preserved and promoted throughout the Islamic world community (*umma*) through the melodically recited Qur’an and a multitude of devotional and ritual practices ranging from prayer to song. The aesthetics of Arabic music, then, transmitted through the recited Qur’an and other religious musical genres, are carried through time and space encompassing what Monson, in her work on African and African-American musics, might call “global riffs” (Monson 1999). I came to recognize that an Arab music style such as it exists in qur’anic recitation is an aesthetic discourse—a set of “global riffs”—that is activated and appreciated in a variety of musical media, from the group singing of praise songs, called *sholawat* (A. *salawat*), to polished professional productions of Islamic music videos or, as they are known in Indonesia, *video klips*. Those individuals who recite, have studied recitation, or at least have had experience singing Arabic religious songs have special access to both the production and the appreciation of this Arab aesthetic. Accompanying the Arab musical aesthetic in Indonesian Islamic performance are musical discourses that are



rooted in regional folk traditions (many of which are seasoned with Arab, Malay, Indian, and Chinese spices), cultivated court practices, arts education institutions, government festival and fanfare, indigenous popular musics, and the global music media.

Following conventions of Western scholarship, I use the term *music* to refer to that which is musical. In any discussion of Islamic music, however, it must be acknowledged that the word *music* (I. *musik*; A. *musiqā*) usually connotes instrumental music or singing that is accompanied by instruments. In the course of my interaction with performers and their publics I have even heard the term *musik* used to refer to the instruments themselves, as, for example, in the expression “Apakah kita pakai musik, tidak?” (Shall we use instruments or not?). A further nuance of the music/nonmusic distinction is that the use of percussion instruments or their addition to singing does not automatically push that performance into the category of music. A de facto indicator of metricity,<sup>8</sup> the use of percussion instruments (membranophones, idiophones, or even body percussion such as clapping) adds another layer of musical texture involving the organization of meter, tempo, and usually patterned form to sung melody. However, the use of percussion to accompany song and to add aspects of metricity, form, and style is a feature of religious music in many parts of the Islamic world, and frame drums are a key component of Sufi musical practice. Thus an ensemble of singers who accompany themselves with percussion instruments does not necessarily constitute an objectionable category of music in many Islamic contexts.

It is clear that the distinction between song (I. *lagu*; A. *ghina*) and music with instruments (I. *musik*; A. *musiqā*) is operative in Indonesia, and that in certain contexts—for example, the *hafla al-Qur’an* at the Jakarta Islamic Center, which I describe in chapter 3—instruments, even the *rebana* frame drum, are thought to be inappropriate. But in the vast majority of the situations I witnessed, the presence of music (that is, song with accompaniment by both percussion and melody instruments) is generally accepted and enthusiastically appreciated among people in the business of religion. Thus my interest in music, my profession as a musicologist and practicing musician, and my frequent use of the term “music” in public presentations and throughout the course of my fieldwork among Indonesians was never problematic.

Although my original intent was simply to study the culture of the recited Qur’an, I found music to be a part of almost all of the rituals, programs, competitions, and festivals to which I was invited. In addition, I quickly discovered that the performance of music, often with dance, is a multifaceted and very conscious category of constructive creation and consumption among the religious specialists and practitioners that I came to know and their audiences. The manifestation of many kinds of musical performance—from ritual chant to group singing, staged concerts, marching bands, and theatric choreographies—considered to be

“Islamic” in Indonesia bumped up against the boundaries that I had previously learned were normative, albeit contested, regarding music in Islamic contexts (see, for example, works by Nelson, Shiloah, and al-Faruqi). Recitation is not music, as any number of sources will attest. Furthermore, the term *music*, as understood in the English language, does not begin to represent the real differences and conceptual nuances between song, instrumental music, and musical function that operate in languages other than English and within Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern Islamic milieus. With these distinctions carefully respected, however, this book describes a world in which qur’anic recitation and “musical” performance (both vocal and instrumental) exist side by side and are sometimes made by and for the same actors. Additionally, this discourse on music—including musical styles, repertoires, performers (male and female), instruments, and contexts—is explicitly connected to the exploration and expression of multiple Islamic identities in contemporary Indonesia. Readers interested in the performing arts of the Muslim Middle East and Asia will recognize that this is not an original scenario; the Muslim world is replete with musics that are related to religious ideology and praxis. This account is meant to complement and expand the evidence we have, both historical and contemporary, of musical practice in one area of the Muslim world and to explore the routes and roots of these ideas and practices within and among Muslim world communities.

Reciters were generally enthusiastic about music and recognized the social processes inherent in music making and its reception as positive. On many occasions they were keen to demonstrate their knowledge of Arab music and to point out that both the musical techniques and the aesthetic spirit (*ruh*) of Arab music were one and the same with qur’anic recitation and related genres of solo and group singing. Although the community I came to know was aware of other kinds of Indonesian music, its members generally were not involved in the Indonesian music that is best known outside the archipelago, the impressive gamelan ensembles and the related arts of dance and musical theater such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theater), *wayang golek* (puppet theater with rod puppets), and *wayang orang* (dance drama). In spite of the reciters’ apparent disconnection from Indonesian classical or traditional music, however, the Islamic music that reciters did embrace or at least acknowledge usually reflected local musical aesthetics and techniques as well as elements of Arab music, language, and culture. One of the unique aspects of Indonesian Islamic music, in fact, is its combination of two very different musical systems: that of island Southeast Asia and that of the Arab Near East and Arabian Peninsula. Scholarship on both Indonesian music and that of the Arab world and the Middle East is vast; the following section is meant to provide a brief outline of some of the striking differences between these two musical worlds and, in some cases, to point out where they overlap.



THE SEPARATE WORLDS OF  
INDONESIAN AND ARAB MUSIC

Percussion ensembles, whose musical textures are characterized by interlocking parts created by the performance of complementary ostinato patterns of musicians who work cooperatively, characterize many of the regional musics of Indonesia. The Indonesian music that has received the most scholarly attention, that is best known outside the country, and that has been successfully institutionalized in the country's national arts academies and conservatories is gamelan music. Integrally related to singing, dance, drama, and puppet theater, gamelan ensembles are comprised mainly of bronze metallophones, knobbed pot gongs, and large hanging gongs. The intricately carved and brightly painted or stained frames and trough resonators that support the heavy cast-metal idiophones are as impressive as the instruments themselves and are an integral aspect of these majestic ensembles. Various kinds of gamelan ensembles exist. The gamelan *degung* of West Java, for example, includes about seven instruments: a gong, two sets of kettle gongs, two kinds of metallophones, drums, and a *suling* flute. Various kinds of gong kettle ensembles in West Sumatra include *talempong*, which are played by one or two players who are seated behind a row of kettle gongs atop a rope lattice, or by several musicians in processions who perform in hocket to create interlocking melodic patterns.

The magnificent gamelan ensembles of Java and Bali have been the most influential within and outside the country. Although the musical repertoire and the instruments of the ensembles themselves are quite different, the musical life of Bali was originally connected to that of Java during the Majapahit empire of the mid-fourteenth century under its leader Gajah Madah. When the Hindu-Javanese court of Majapahit fell to Muslim powers centered in Demak toward the end of the fifteenth century, many Javanese Hindus fled to the courts in Bali. It is from this point that Balinese and Javanese gamelan developed separately despite their common roots. Through conversion to Islam, music and related arts were adapted to Islamic ideology and practice in the Javanese coastal areas such as Demak and Cirebon, as well as in the important courtly centers of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, which were established in the seventeenth century.

The largest of the Javanese gamelan ensembles includes two full sets of instruments for the two tuning systems *slendro* and *pelog*. The *slendro* scale is a pentatonic scale comprised of five roughly equidistant tones, whereas the *pelog* scale is made up of seven tones whose intervals range from smaller than the Western half-tone (e.g., the distance between the notes C and C#) to nearly a whole tone plus a half-tone (e.g., the distance between C and D#). While *slendro* and *pelog* scales are found consistently throughout Indonesia, the exact tuning of these scales, including the tonic note and the intervals themselves, varies, even from

ensemble to ensemble within the same city, comprising a completely unique approach to tuning and temperament.

Another completely distinct characteristic of the gamelan ensemble is the way that time and form are organized and controlled. Gamelan music is said to have a colotomic structure. In other words, compositions are cyclic rather than linear in form: metallophones generally play the skeletal melody that repeats over and over, the larger kettle gongs and the huge hanging gongs punctuate that melodic cycle at regular intervals, and smaller metallophones, pot gongs, and a handful of non-metallophone instruments (the wooden *gambang* xylophone and the stringed *kecapi*, or plucked zither, for example) play elaborating patterns. Temporarily, more accurately, tempo levels called *irama* are controlled by the drummer, who leads the group through a series of shifts in form and density. As the skeletal melody slows down, the elaborating instruments multiply the density of their phrases, creating an ever-busier texture as the *irama* level increases.

The impressive ensemble of tuned bronze percussion is rounded out by the bamboo *suling* flute, the two-stringed bowed spiked fiddle, the *rabab*, the *kecapi*, and singers. With the exception of the distant and somewhat legendary connection of the Wali Songo to these court musics and the infamous *gamelan sekaten*, a special set of instruments brought out and performed on the Maulid (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), the culture of gamelan music is considered by some to operate and to have developed largely outside the realm of Islam. The assumption that gamelan culture escaped Islamic influence is challenged by the mere presence of these kinds of instruments—the flute, bowed lute, and plucked zither—all of which exist in numerous varieties throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. Not only are these instruments related to their cousins in name and construction, but the performance practice, especially that of the flute and fiddle, are remarkably similar to performance styles in the Middle East. Rather than contributing to the cooperative interlocking texture created by the majority of players in the ensemble, the melodic lines of these instruments, as well as of the female singers (the *pesinden*), hover above the remarkable metric regularity in free heterophony that is not harnessed by the discipline of a regular beat. Furthermore, the timbres of these instruments and that of certain singers' voices is also akin to the timbres produced in Middle Eastern music.

For the most part, however, the ensembles and performance practice of Arab and Middle Eastern music are remarkably different from those of Indonesia. The earliest musical influences on Indonesian music from Arab cultures certainly came from the Arabian Gulf region, but with the advent of mass media in the twentieth century, most of the musical influences from the Middle East have been from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean or the Levant. This is a music culture that is indebted to the historical developments of Mesopotamia and the cosmopolitan traditions of the Persianate world during the so-called Golden Age

of Arab civilization (the ninth through the thirteenth centuries), as well as to Ottoman culture, which was the dominant cultural force in the region from the sixteenth century onward. Most scholars and performers of this music agree that vocal artistry, from the singing of epic poets to the cantillation of the Qur'an, is the central pillar of this musical system and that even an instrumentalist's approach to monophonic, soloistic melody (without chords or polyphonic accompaniment) is informed to a great degree by the voice.

Instruments in the Turko-Arab and Persian worlds are small and portable and, with the exception of double-reed folk oboes and drums, have delicate timbres. Ensemble music in these traditions happens indoors in private contexts for and by professional and amateur connoisseurs, a social factor that has been shaped by the skepticism surrounding public performance of music in Islamic culture. Bowed fiddles (the *rabab* and *kemanche*), plucked lutes (the 'ud and various long-necked lutes, such as the *saz*, *buzuq*, and *tanbur*), lap zithers (like the *qanun* and *santur*), end-blown flutes (like the *nay*), and a wide variety of drums and frames drums are usually played in small ensembles of no more than five to ten musicians. The large orchestra (*firqa*) is a twentieth-century development influenced by the Western European orchestra and electronic mass media. Instrumentalists in the small ensemble or *takht*, which includes just one musician on each instrument, all play the "melody." Melodies can be short and repetitive, particularly when used for the strophic songs, or they can be quite long and through-composed, incorporating very little melodic material that is repeated. Although musicians in an ensemble play the same melody, each one is free to interpret it with certain variations and ornaments, together creating a texture that musicologists refer to as heterophony. Solo improvisation in free meter, often unaccompanied, is a hallmark of this music, and it is here that the system of melodic modes comes into play. Arab, Persian, and Turkish musics all have their own modal systems that recognize hundreds of separate scales and the manner in which each individual scale is executed. Knowledge of these modes is demonstrated most deftly through the art of improvisation, or *taqasim*, a subject that is taken up more thoroughly in chapter 3.

To summarize, the differences between the music of the Arab Muslim world and that of Indonesia are notable, making the contemporary combination of musical instruments, musical aesthetics, and musical styles that occurs under the rubric of *seni musik Islam*, or Islamic musical arts, in Indonesia all the more remarkable. Fusion, a term often used to describe contemporary music projects by artists of the avant-garde involving crossover and convergence, has been the primary operating principle of *seni musik Islam* since its inception. Yet in addition to fusion, it is also important to recognize the gradual diffusion of musical instruments and musical styles that has occurred with Islamization. For example, the double-reed oboe, thought to be of Arab origin, exists in many forms in

the archipelago, from the *sarune* of North Sumatra (etymologically related to *surnai*, the name of this instrument in India, or the *zurna*, the Turkish variant of the double-reed oboe) to the *preret* of Lombok. The *saluong* of West Sumatra, a rim-blown flute that is played at an oblique angle, is remarkably similar to the Arab *nay*.

Even the modal inflections of the Arab *maqam* system are distinctly recognized in certain areas of Indonesia. The tonal system and the approach to singing inherent in Arabic-language performance no doubt infiltrated first coastal and then inland communities in Indonesia through a great number of Islamic devotional songs such as *sholawat* (A. *salawat*), *marhaban*, and *qasida*, many of them from the collection the *Burda* of al-Busiri or the *Mawlid* of al-Barzanji, as well as various genres of Sufi chanting, *dhikr* (also *zikr*), and recitation. Finally, while the influences of India on Islamic music and culture are quite pronounced, particularly in the Hindu and Buddhist philosophical, linguistic, iconological, and performance practices of Indonesia, it is also important to recognize that India was the source of numerous Muslim musical and ritual practices.

With its focus on Islamic music, this book targets an aspect of Indonesian culture that has been seriously understudied. At the same time, the work joins a literature that expands our knowledge of Islam as a source of and reason for creative forms of expressive culture rather than a deterrent to them. Many scholars of Muslim Indonesia, both native and nonnative, insist on the legitimacy and authenticity of Indonesian Muslim practices vis-à-vis those of their Middle Eastern and Arab neighbors, whose actions, texts, and leaders are often taken as normative authority. Robert Hefner, author of numerous scholarly works on Islam in Indonesia, writes that “the study of Islam in Southeast Asia . . . presents an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the Muslim worlds’ diversity and to challenge unitary characterizations of Islamic civilizational identity” (1997, 4). This documentary ethnography is an answer to Hefner’s call.

#### WOMEN IN MUSLIM INDONESIA

Western scholars, authors, journalists, and artists, when considering “music and Islam,” “women and Islam,” “human rights and Islam,” “democracy and Islam,” “violence and Islam,” or any number of other categories, tend to paint with very broad brushstrokes and treat Islam as if the religion had both individual agency and universal application. Rooted in the orientalist frameworks of European intellectual, political, and artistic history, the tendency to “otherize” and essentialize Muslims and Islam with, as Hefner writes, “unitary characterizations” has been rejuvenated lately by conflict, terrorism, and war, involving the United States and various Middle Eastern nations and ethnic, religious, and self-proclaimed fundamentalist Islamist organizations. The

association of fundamentalism with Islam and Muslims has further intensified stereotyping to the point of caricature. Writing on certain parallels between fundamentalism and feminism, Minoo Moallem charges:

The representation of Islamic fundamentalism in the West is greatly influenced by the general racialization of Muslims in a neo-racist discourse rooted in cultural essentialism and a conventional Eurocentric notion of “people without history.” Islamic fundamentalism has become a generic signifier used constantly to single out the Muslim other, in its irrational, morally inferior, and barbaric masculinity and its passive, victimized, and submissive femininity. (Moallem 1999, 322)

My work describes historical conditions and contemporary frameworks of Islamic belief and practice that are distinct from those commonly studied in the Middle East and Arab world. In representing the words and actions of the project’s consultants, I show how people respect, defer to, and sometimes even invent concepts, practices, and conditions that they believe to be authentically Arab/Middle Eastern or Islamic and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, where these individuals “draw the line” by resisting or ignoring such constructs in favor of a distinctively Southeast Asian cultural heritage and contemporary mindset. It is this ethnographically based particularity that I aim to represent for both the Western reader and a Muslim audience outside island Southeast Asia, for, as Robert Hefner writes, “Indeed many Middle Eastern Muslims are unfamiliar with Southeast Asia or uncertain as to the precise character of their fellow believers’ faith” (1997, 4).

With its parallel focus on women, this book explores a second domain of life (the first being music): the role of Indonesian women in Islamic ritual and the performing arts and, through both of these media, their role in education. A remarkable aspect of Indonesian Islamic practice—one that some might find objectionable or simply disbelieve—is the involvement of women in the work, rituals, and popular expressions of Islam. While the Western imagination hides the Muslim woman under a black cloak, and scholarly works confine women’s activities to a sphere of segregated interiority, my ethnography describes professional female reciters of the Qur’an, teachers, judges, media stars, religious aficionados, ritual specialists, singers, and professional staffers in the state Ministry of Religion. This rank of professionals may not seem so extraordinary in the modern, urban setting of Jakarta, but the Jakarta community is bolstered by another set of young female practitioners in training, girls from more remote cities, towns, and villages throughout the Indonesian archipelago. Outside the urban sphere, young women work with mentors, female leaders of religious and community life who serve in a variety of roles. For example the *nyai*, the wife of the leader of the *pondok pesantren*, or *kiai*, can be a figure of great prestige who may

serve as a teacher, religious authority, moral model, and parental protector for hundreds of female student-residents (*santri*). As a member of the prestigious lineage of *ulama*, religious scholars designated as such on account of both descent and marriage, the *nyai* is the social and moral leader within vast, populous networks of religious boarding schools that constitute significant social and political communities unto themselves. Other kinds of women leaders in rural areas include teachers of all kinds and employees of the state, particularly local branches of the Ministry of Religion (Departemen Agama).<sup>9</sup> Women who are respected specialists in religious knowledge, including Qur'anic recitation, also serve as de facto leaders of women's study groups called *majlis taklim*, a well-established institution of women's education and social action (van Doorn-Harder 2006). Thus, although women's agency in public religious life may appear to be a modern development, my work shows that it is deeply rooted in the fabric of traditional social systems that are geographically vast and historically extensive.

I submit that the prominence of women in Indonesian Islamic public life may more closely reflect an original version of Islam than a supposedly more "authentic" Middle Eastern version of religious practice. I take my cue for this thesis from recent works by scholars of Southeast Asia, both native and nonnative, who challenge the assumption, perpetuated for years, that Arab or Middle Eastern Islam is normative. Scraping off the layers of assumptions, laws, and practices that may be attributed to Arab culture and history is very much in line not only with scholars of Southeast Asia (and other cultures) who are seeking new interpretations of the non-Arab Islamic world, but also with Muslim feminists. In her introduction to *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female "Public" Space in Islamic/ate Societies*, Asma Afsaruddin writes, "Muslim feminists and modernists tend to stress that the position of Muslim women was much more egalitarian in the early years of Islam before the final codification of the *shari'a* by the tenth century by male legists who sought to circumscribe women's public activities in the interests of maintaining patriarchal social order" (Afsaruddin 1999, 23). Although Islam originated in the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, it is crucial to remember that the secondary and tertiary religious tenets that decorate the framework of the faith (particularly those affecting women) are based on cultural practices of subsequent generations in the Arabian Peninsula and in tenth-century Mesopotamia and are therefore not necessarily in original doctrine (for more on this subject, see Ahmed 1992, 1999). An uncanny confluence for this study, objections to women and prohibitions regarding their behavior and objections to music and prohibitions regarding its use emanate from the same cultural context and historical time frame and from some of the same critics (Shiloah 1995, 1997). By accepting the premise that the objections to both expressive culture and active women are created by men outside the context of the Qur'an and the traditions of

the Prophet, we open ourselves up to an understanding Islam in Indonesia as “authentic” rather than “exceptional.”

Scholars of women and gender in Southeast Asia generally promote the view that “complementarity” and “equality” characterize the interaction between men and women in this region, especially when compared to the neighboring areas of South Asia, China, and the Muslim Middle East (see Ramusack 1999, 79). Barbara N. Ramusack, in her survey of early accounts of the region, summarizes the representation of women as either “bright butterflies” or “shrewd traders” (83). She writes, “Many outsider sources on women in Southeast Asia comment on their relatively high social position and limit it to their economic autonomy, the veneration of fertility in indigenous religious, and bilateral kinship systems in which descent and property may pass through both the family and male lines” (83).<sup>10</sup> Beyond this stereotype in Southeast Asian historiography, there is specific evidence that testifies to the theory of egalitarianism. Ramusack cites the attention given to the Minagkabau of Sumatra, the matrilineal and matrilocal Muslim community that adapted its particular form of *adat*, or cultural custom, to the strong Islamic currents that infiltrated the island beginning around the fourteenth century. Further accounts of the status of daughters, the acceptance of premarital sexual activity, and the notion that sexual relations are ideally to be a source of pleasure for both partners, as well as the evidence of women’s literacy, political leadership, economic strength, spiritual powers, and deification as ancestors, testify to the potential “level playing field” for Southeast Asian men and women.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, however, scholars interested in gender in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia in general have also identified a need to revise, in the words of editors Ong and Peletz, “dominant scholarly conceptions of gender in Southeast Asia [that have] focus[ed] on egalitarianism, complementarity and the relative autonomy of women in relation to men” (1995, 1). The trappings of patriarchy—stemming in part from the codification of *shari’a* law as well as from eighth- to tenth-century treatises, newer discourses initiated since the late nineteenth century as part of the reformist zeal of *ijtihad*, the postcolonial creation of the nation-state in 1945, and the most recent modernist and Islamist calls for reform—are indeed operative here. However, many of the features of Indonesian Islam, including the discourse and the action of the people with whom I worked, suggest that an underlying framework of egalitarianism that is distinctive to the southern and western periphery of the Indian Ocean is at least to be acknowledged.

In this ethnography I introduce women who work alongside men as reciters and as teachers, judges in competitions, administrators, and advisors. While modern discourses that theoretically represent global and positivist Muslim paradigms include admonitions against the physical presence of women, particularly regarding the female body and voice, I found that these ideas are not part



and parcel of the reciters' world that I describe. I do not ignore the presence among Indonesians of ideas that link women to a bundle of concepts and characteristics including shame, pollution, emotion, irrationality, weakness, danger, lack of control, imperfection, and embarrassment. However, within the community of male and female religious specialists with whom I worked, such ideas were not only missing, but they were openly contested. As I describe in chapter 6, the voices and the bodies of women are not a source of shame, and the permissibility of participation is not conditioned by deemphasizing their femininity, as may be the case in other cultural contexts where women act as and work alongside men. Muslim women in Indonesia need not hide or constrain their appearance, nor must they imitate male dress. Muslim fashion in Indonesia is usually tailored, often form fitting, and made from beautiful, colorful *batik* and *ikat* materials trimmed with piping and lace.<sup>12</sup> Long dresses or flowing pants and contoured tunics are complemented by matching head scarves that are folded and pinned in an array of styles. No one in this community wears a formless black *chadora* or *burka*, and no one, except a tiny minority affiliated with conservative sects, covers her face.

The contemporary experiences of women are addressed throughout this study, and, except where noted, women participate in every aspect of religious life and performance that I describe, whether their presence is exceptional or normative. To evaluate their actions and their agency one overarching set of questions permeates the ethnography. As my interest in and respect for the students and teachers at the institutions where I worked grew, and as I followed these individuals to huge government-sponsored competitions in recitation and accepted invitations to the Islamic boarding schools where many girls pursue secondary education, I became curious about their motivation.<sup>13</sup> How does Islam, or any religion for that matter, offer women professional and personal avenues of empowerment? What inspires young women to pursue Qur'anic studies? What is the incentive for women to pursue a career as a professional reciter, or *qari'a*, of the Qur'an? How does an Islamic education prepare women for life in the fast lane of global postmodernity? What other options might or might not be open to this community?

As I tried to elicit women's positions on such questions, I was required to respond to their curiosity about my worldview and my experience as a girl, woman, daughter, wife, mother, salaried professional, and spiritual person. As I attempt to find common ground between us, I am continuously haunted by the question of how I can possibly be in a position to understand or even relate to their world. I have also been challenged by my desire to see them as "like me" or able to become like me as well as my subsequent realization that they are not and they will not. In an exploration of the problematic issues of representation, Jane Sugarman identifies the tendency of Western-trained ethnographers to unwittingly reproduce the power structures of the West over the non-West. Sugarman writes:



The issue has been particularly acute in studies of women and/or gender, where it has been noted that European and Euro-American women scholars have often imposed their own social aspirations upon their women subjects, producing through their writings a generalized “third world woman” who, in her passivity and subjugation within various societal institutions, comes to represent everything that they as “first world women” are not. (Sugarman 1997, 33)

Bringing the third-world woman closer to her archetypal, liberated Western counterpart can mistakenly involve the imposition of progress. The notion that women are freed from the shackles of their traditional lives through knowledge and engagement with the West and its culture of enlightenment comforts the feminist seeking to ameliorate the situation for her sisters around the world. Rather than finding the *modus operandi* and rationale for women’s empowerment within their own social structures and historical worldview, researchers tend to focus on modern education, access to information, and participation in the public sphere as keys to success. In her introduction to the collection of essays *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Lila Abu-Lughod argues for finer distinctions in the interpretation of the public/private dichotomy. She asks whether “women’s emergence from the private, domestic sphere [is] always to be seen as radical and new.” She continues, representing the views of the volume’s contributors, “We are suspicious about the way modernity is so easily equated with the progress, emancipation, and empowerment of women. . . . We ask not just what new possibilities but what hidden costs, unanticipated constraints, novel forms of discipline and regulation, and unintended consequences accompany such programs” (Abu-Lughod 1998, 2).

The intensification of religious practice among women of the Muslim world, manifest in acts such as dressing in Islamic fashion, joining Muslim student associations, and attending women’s study groups (*majlis taklim*), is too easily interpreted as “resurgence,” “revival,” or a “return.” Such processes suggest that women, by becoming more religious, are recapturing an older, more traditional, and more authentic way of life that is native to their culture, when precisely the opposite might be the case, as Suzanne Brenner posits in her study of Javanese women, their adaptation of the veil, and their embrace of a more pious lifestyle. Brenner writes, “One is struck, in fact, by how thoroughly and self-consciously modern this movement is in its language and organizational structure. Many Islamic activists participate in orientation seminars or retreats, known by the English loanword *training* or *batra* (basic training)” (Brenner 1996, 679). The myriad religious education seminars and retreats that have become popular among both children and adults are testimony to Brenner’s assertion that an intensified Islamic lifestyle is not necessarily a “natural” state but something that people make an effort to create, embrace, and master. Brenner argues further that women’s

adoption of an Islamic lifestyle is an act of resistance not only to the West but also to the nation-state itself:

The New Order image of the ideal modern Indonesian woman combines Western ideologies of bourgeois domesticity (woman as fulfilled consumer-housewife) with local “traditional” ideologies of femininity (woman as self-sacrificing wife and mother) and bureaucratic images of dutiful citizenship (woman as supporter of the regime and educator of the next generation of loyal citizens). For women who are unenthusiastic about these New Order visions of womanhood Islamist alternatives can be attractive because they stress moral and spiritual agendas over bureaucratic or consumerist ones. (Brenner 1996, 678)

“State Ibuism,” a phenomenon explained in depth by Julia Suryakusuma (1996) whereby the power and activities of women are exploited for the projects of men, is not merely a scholarly construct but is rather acknowledged and institutionalized throughout the Indonesian bureaucracy, which typically features wives’ organizations (*dharma wanita*) at every level of institutional structure. These ladies’ organizations have their own offices, uniforms, officers, and agendas and are expected to serve as appendages to their husbands’ places of employment.<sup>14</sup> Even the term *Ibu*, which connotes “wife,” “mother,” and “lady” and is used as a title for all three stations in life, collapses the expectations of the state that are incumbent upon women into one neat package. I do not argue that female ritual specialists who recite the Qur’an, the students they teach, or the singers and musicians involved in and represented by certain genres of Islamic music are the new feminist collective of Indonesia, yet I recognize the ways in which women are prepared, both by the institutions and the individuals I describe, with useful skills that are respected by and useful to their communities. More importantly, we see the ways in which the consultants for this project individually negotiate the androcentric modern world of which we are all a part. Finally, an attempt is made in this work not to offer a finite closed-case scenario but rather to allow for the dynamism inherent in the political and social reality of contemporary Indonesia and in the multiple positions that are articulated through the actions of individuals and groups.

#### MODERNITY AND TRADITION

The terms “traditional” and “modern” are frequently tossed about in scholarly discourse, particularly when that discourse concerns women. These terms must be flagged for special consideration in the Indonesian context, however, as they refer to specific historical streams and significant religious communities that are largely unknown outside the country, even to Muslims and scholars of Islam. Indonesian modernists, usually affiliated with the group Muhammadiyah, are

people who believe in getting “back to the basics” of religion, largely through the process of *tajdid* (new readings of classic texts), and this approach has obvious appeal for feminists and scholars of gender. Yet in the view of many Indonesians, the modernist, stripped-down version of Islam goes too far in the direction of sterilization and Arabization, lobotomizing the cultural personality of Indonesian Islam, which has traditionally allowed a legitimate place for both the work of women and the work of music. The notion that Indonesian Islam developed haphazardly may also be attributed in part to anthropologist Clifford Geertz.

Geertz identified three social classes of Javanese in his book *The Religion of Java* (1960): *abangan* (nominal Muslims who also believe in a variety of spirits and pre-Islamic practices and ideas), *santri* (pious Muslims), and *priai* (palace elite). Although *The Religion of Java* is widely read in Indonesia, where these categories are recognized among a diverse population, his interpretation has been called into question. In his ethnography *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta*, Mark Woodward writes, “While the details of his theory have been criticized by several Dutch and Indonesian scholars . . . his contention that the vast majority of Javanese are only nominal Muslims has never been seriously examined” (1989, 2). Although, as Woodward notes, “most other scholars accept Geertz’s typology with only minor alterations,” Geertz’s tenets have been brought into question in the decades since the publication of *Religion in Java*, and his typology has been deconstructed by contemporary scholars such as Bachtiar, who is the author of the introduction to the Indonesian translation of Geertz’s work. Lynda Newland summarizes the critique:

As the commentary in the Indonesian version of the book maintains (Bachtiar 1989), Geertz wrote about Islam primarily from the focus of modernist Muslims. Rather than analysing the mystical Islam of the peasants as another variant of Islam, he represented it as an unsystematic conglomeration of images, as “unconnected visual metaphors giving form to vague and otherwise incomprehensible experiences” (Geertz 1976:17) originating from a pagan animism which absorbed “into one syncretized whole elements from both Hinduism and Islam” (1976:5). The prevailing assumption in this use of syncretism is that world religions have been incorporated by Javanese into local versions that are somehow less authentic and more related to customary practice than religion. As I have previously argued, this has reinforced a particularly enduring representation of Javanese Islam as “not really Islam” (Newland 2000). (2001, 13)

Critics of Geertz’s presentation of *The Religion of Java* such as Woodward (1989) concur that Geertz took the reformist paradigm represented by the organization Muhammadiyah as the base line for normative Islam, and that he considered the praxis and ideology of “traditionalists,” represented in the equally significant organization Nahdlatul Ulama, for example, to be among the many variations from the Muslim norm in Indonesia.

The organization Muhammadiyah, with some twenty-nine million adherents, was established in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan, who was inspired by Muhammad Abduh of Egypt, with a rationale that Islam in Indonesia, and particularly in Java, was syncretic, heretical, and rife with mysticism. In contrast to Muhammadiyah is the organization Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, the largest Muslim organization in the country, with about forty-five million members (see also Hefner 2003, 162, for statistics on membership). Followers of NU are known to be more tolerant (and proud) of local cultural practices, although they are still ready to embrace the modern, multinational Muslim world. Although I did not realize this at the outset of my research, in 1996, the difference between these two local worldviews is, in one way, a distillation of the issues at the heart of this study. The two leaders, Amien Rais of Muhammadiyah and Abdurrahman Wahid of NU, were both presidential candidates during my Fulbright year in Indonesia (1999); one of them, Wahid, became president and was later succeeded by his vice-president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, a woman, in July 2001.

The ideology of both organizations has had implications that reach beyond their membership. Stemming from NU, Indonesia's traditionalist Muslims are some of the country's most liberal Muslim intellectuals and activists; members of Muhammadiyah, while hardly radical in their views, have seen their method of "getting back to basics" embraced by certain Islamist groups—characterized alternately as conservative, extremist, fundamentalist, or fanatic—which multiplied toward the end of the Suharto regime and following the power vacuum left behind in the wake of Suharto's fall in 1998. The climate of anti-occidentalism that spun into orbit after September 2001 and that has accelerated with America's second Gulf War in Iraq and the ongoing "war on terror" also fuels Islamist sentiment in the region and threatens to undermine the pervasive culture of civic and religious pluralism in Indonesia.

Practices that endure in traditional Indonesian Islam and that are often part of the collective culture of adherents of NU include the veneration of saints and teachers; the visitation of graves; the preparation of offerings; rituals of sharing such as the *slametan* meal; the repetition of qur'anic verses for healing and prayer; collective chanting and song; rituals surrounding birth, death, and times of transition; identification with the Wali Songo, the nine saints who transmitted Islam to Indonesia; and the acknowledgment or even practice of a mystical approach to Islam, *tasawuf*, which ranges from poetic expression in song to organized Sufism. I should caution here that this list constitutes a repertoire of customs, many of them considered pre-Islamic and rooted in traditional, Javanese mystical practices called *kejawen*, that may be acknowledged and accepted within the NU community as ideology but not as practice and may be experienced only occasionally on visits to ancestral homelands or through popular culture and art.

Since their inception, both organizations have promoted the learning and interpreting of religious texts by women (van Doorn-Harder 2006), a topic to which I return in chapter 6. I concur with feminist scholars (such as Brenner, Moallem, and Mahmood) in their assertion that women's Islamic moves are "modern"; however, my particular ethnography reveals that the presence of active Muslim women is part and parcel of local, "traditionalist" practice. The exclusion of women due to ideas about inferiority or the inappropriateness of their physical bodies in the public space and soundscape was, in the course of my fieldwork, more often the result of newer, imported, and invented "modernist" ideas. On first reading this may be confusing to students of Indonesia or of Islam because we tend to associate "active" women with "modern" societies and "passive" women as "traditional." My ethnographic research revealed, on the contrary, that the "traditional" camp, while perhaps "old-fashioned" (*kuno*), was repeatedly cited as tolerant, moderate, and more likely to lean toward egalitarianism, particularly with respect to public works and public performance.

#### FIELDWORK

My introduction to Indonesia's Islamic soundscape and the culture that it encompasses began with a firsthand experience of the environment. The first time I went to the country was in 1989, when my fiancé and I went to visit some American friends who were living there. As a graduate student in ethnomusicology at the University of California, I was well prepared by teachers and fellow students who were familiar with the country and, once in Java, I managed to coerce my friends into following an agenda that involved some sort of music and dance almost every day. I could hardly wait to get out of the high-rise Hilton Hotel Apartments where our college friends Pete and Dawn enjoyed, somewhat awkwardly, the expatriate life provided by Pete's job at ESSO (Eastern State Standard Oil Company). I stepped out on their balcony the night we arrived and heard the sounds of Ramadan from the neighborhood (*kampung*) behind the hotel. Within the hour I had convinced the gang to explore the alleyways, where I tentatively poked my head into the small mosques (*mesjid*) and prayer spaces (*musholla*) where chanting and singing were ongoing. I suppose that, unlike those who selectively tune out the sounds of Ramadan, I was primed—in part because of my studies of Arab and Middle Eastern music with Professor Ali Jihad Racy at the University of California—to tune them in. That first experience behind the Jakarta Hilton stoked a fire of curiosity within me about Islam in Indonesia.

Like the work for my dissertation and related publications, which have nothing to do with Indonesia but instead concern the musical life of the Arab American community, this project evolved from a mounting curiosity combined with a succession of open doors. This particular project started in late 1995 and early

1996, when my husband, Dan Millison, had the opportunity to work as an environment specialist for a department of the Indonesian Ministry of Environment known as the Environmental Impact Management Agency, or BAPEDAL (Badan Pengendalian Dampak Lingkungan). For our first stint in the country I was able to negotiate a leave of absence so that our four-year-old son and I could join my husband in Jakarta for the year.

After several months of savoring and contemplating the soundscape (as well as studying gamelan and Bahasa Indonesia, the national language), I went into the city center for the Festival Istiqlal, a month-long government-sponsored Islamic festival held at the huge national mosque, Mesjid Istiqlal, in downtown Jakarta.<sup>15</sup> That November afternoon in 1995 I missed the *busana Muslim* fashion show but stumbled upon a contest taking place in one of the courtyards where men from every province in the country were offering up their versions of the call to prayer (A. and I. *azan*). One after another, reciters, or muezzin, the term for the person who executes the *azan*, sang out the call to prayer in powerful, strong, melodious voices (although some were certainly less powerful, strong, and melodious than others). Two banks of judges dressed in black robes marked numerical scores on forms that were submitted to a head judge for calculation. I tentatively approached a group of judges during the break. Although I could hardly articulate my incredulity in Indonesian, they must have appreciated the look on my face, for they accommodated my curiosity with good-natured hospitality. Were we really listening to muezzin after muezzin after muezzin in some sort of *azan* Olympics? Were they really giving these muezzins numerical scores? Based on what criteria? Intent? Spirituality? Sincerity? The ability to convince people to come and pray? “Muslimness”? Here was the sacred call to prayer, the ultimate symbol of Islamic oral culture preserved in an unbroken chain since the time of the prophet Muhammad, being evaluated as if it were an opera aria performed by hopefuls auditioning for a role in a production at the Metropolitan Opera.

A comparison of the Muslim call to prayer to an opera aria may seem crude for at least two reasons. First, ritual performances like the call to prayer and Qur’anic recitation are thought to emanate from a divine source; humans are just the channel through which the sound flows. Second, conceptualizing Islamic vocal performance as musical is always problematic due the vexed relationship between instrumental and vocal music in the Islamic religion. But the criteria employed by the judges for this competition revealed that concrete and measurable aspects of vocal technique, creativity, and performance are as important for religious ritual in Jakarta as they are for operatic theater in New York. The judges, all of them professional reciters of the Qur’an themselves, were observing and scoring breath control, diction, melodic construction, ornamentation, and performance demeanor and, in doing so, were placing this activity squarely within the realm of a humanly generated musical art.

One of the judges, Moersjied Qori Indra (Pak Moersjied), opened the door that led to my further enlightenment. He invited me to the Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an (IIQ), an all-female college dedicated to qur'anic studies in Ciputat, South Jakarta, where he taught classes in the melodies of the Qur'an (*lagu al-Qur'an* or *naghmah al-Qur'an*).<sup>16</sup> For the next eight months, until my departure from Indonesia in July 1996, I attended weekly classes as well as small group and private lessons at IIQ. I engaged in formal interviews and conversations with the director, Kiai Haji Ibrahim Hosen, at whose home this chapter begins. I chatted with many IIQ faculty in the institute's office and made the acquaintance of Kiai Haji Sayyid Mohammad Assyiri, one of the premier reciters in Jakarta. While at IIQ I met reciters and scholars who visited from elsewhere (for example, Malaysia and Iran). I accompanied my two main teachers, one male (Drs. Haji Moersjied Qori Indra) and one female (Dra. Haja Maria Ulfah), to many of their engagements. These teachers are in high demand as professional reciters in contexts that vary from official government events to the nightly evening-long prayers held during the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, Pak Moersjied and Maria Ulfah are called upon regularly to judge the numerous competitions in qur'anic recitation, *musabaqah tilawatil Qur'an*, that are held in every corner of Indonesian society, from neighborhood mosque to government ministry or national television studio.

At the end of the school year, I spent several days as a guest of Moersjied's family at the *pondok pesantren* (religious boarding school) where they resided, al-Ittifaqiah in South Sumatra. My visit coincided with their annual graduation ceremonies as well as with the inauguration of a government program that attempts to combine the efforts of the local military with the perceived needs of Islamic boarding schools (ABRI Masuk Pondok Pesantren—literally, “The Army Enters the Islamic Boarding School”). By the end of my first residence in Indonesia, my interest in studying what they call *seni baca al-Qur'an*, the art of reciting the Qur'an, had blossomed into a full schedule of classes, lessons, interviews, excursions, and invitations to competitions and evening activities.

When I returned for a full year of research in 1999, the situation had changed significantly. Due to an economic and political crisis of unforeseen proportions, Jakarta collapsed upon itself in May of 1998. Civil war in the city ensued. Many Chinese were tortured and expelled; symptoms of the chaos included rape and rioting. People either fled the city or stocked up on supplies and hunkered down. Due to the extreme situation in Jakarta, the start of my research period was postponed by the Jakarta Fulbright office and began in January of 1999 rather than at the beginning of the 1998–99 academic year. So in January of 1999 Dan and I again moved to Jakarta, this time with two sons: Luther, who had just turned one, and Hansen, who was six and a half. My stomach was in knots the entire



twenty-eight-hour journey from Virginia to Jakarta. I was certain that I was dragging my family into an unnecessarily dangerous situation.

Since our previous departure from Indonesia, in July of 1996, the thirty-two-year tenure of Suharto had summarily ended and the country had plunged into the new, hopeful, confusing, and dynamic era of reformation (*reformasi*). Suharto had stepped down and his vice-president, B.J. Habibie, had stepped in as interim president. Optimism and opportunism prevailed. The press had opened up, and censorship of everything from movies to ideas had relaxed. Political parties multiplied and identity politics, no longer dictated by the Javacentric elitism of Suharto, were a source of exciting debate. My research project, which I originally thought was going to deal with musical practice, cross-cultural exchange, and religious identity, suddenly became more political than I had previously imagined.

The formal sponsor for my research was Dr. Azyumardi Azra, *rektor* (president) of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, one of fourteen state Islamic universities (Institut Agama Islam Negri, now simply IAN Institut Agama Negri). My most significant activities at the university were through its research institute PPIM (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, the Center for the Study of Islam and Society), where I received insight and feedback on the questions and answers that eventually came to organize my research. My primary contact at the PPIM was Dadi Darmadi, a graduate of IAIN with a master's degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he had studied with Frederick Denny.<sup>17</sup> Most of the consultants for the project were either students or people involved in qur'anic studies, and it was immeasurably useful and comforting to have discussions with Pak Dadi and his colleagues, all of them trained in the Western academic art of critical thinking, fluent in contemporary scholarship, and yet grounded in various aspects of Indonesian traditional life. I helped edit several articles for the journal they publish, *Studia Islamika*, and gave a few lectures to classes at the university.

My day-to-day work, however, was with the Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an, the women's college that had welcomed me so enthusiastically in 1996. At IIQ I regularly attended classes and cotaught a graduate course on Arab music and culture as well as another course on Arabic song for a group of young women. Although my Fulbright grant was for research rather than research and teaching, I found that teaching (something besides English) and performing were the most meaningful commodities of exchange that I was able to offer. Teaching provided me structured time with students and faculty, and it gave everyone a chance to figure out what I was interested in and what, if anything, was interesting about me. In addition to a regular schedule of activities (as regular as a schedule can be in a city like Jakarta), I was invited to the campus for numerous presentations, rituals, and special events, particularly competitions and festivals, and during this election year such events were plentiful.



The work I did in Jakarta yielded invitations to other parts of the archipelago: East and West Java, North, West, and South Sumatra, and later, in 2003, to Sulawesi and Kalimantan. I participated in conferences, visited several Islamic boarding schools, connected with musicians (particularly those involved in Islamic music), took in performances of *wayang kulit*, the renowned shadow puppet theater of Java, and studied gamelan in a couple of different groups. This second and most intense research period, from January 1999 to January 2000, involved email communication, primarily with colleagues in the United States. It very infrequently, however, relied upon use of the internet or cell phones (and even then only as an alternative to landline telephones), something that would change dramatically after the dawn of the “Year 2K” and SMS (short message service) text messaging, a mode of connecting that quickly became the electronic superhighway for Asian communications. Several subsequent and shorter visits to Indonesia in 2003, 2004, and 2005, in addition to my ongoing research out of the United States when my family was based in Manila, Philippines, were characterized by a significant internet presence of the people and institutions that interested me and by regular, often daily text messages via cell phone with my associates in Indonesia.

#### MARIA ULFAH

Over the course of the year, Maria Ulfah, or Ibu Maria, as I shall sometimes call her in this ethnography, became my closest consultant and friend. The work of Kiai Ibrahim Hosen and the IIQ was supported every day in every way by Dra. Haja Maria Ulfah, M.A., then the second director of IIQ and the person in charge of the institute’s financial matters.<sup>18</sup>

Ibu Maria invited me to participate in her classes and to teach classes of my own at IIQ. She insisted that I tag along to family events as well as to several professional conferences and meetings. Nearly all of the exciting competitions in qur’anic recitation that I describe in chapter 3 I attended because of her advice and assistance. I have recorded her recitations, her teaching and coaching, and her commentary in myriad contexts. A highlight of my research year was when Maria Ulfah became the guest scholar of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), which held its annual meeting in Washington, D.C., in 1999. While I helped to organize the visa applications and accompanied Ibu Maria and her husband, Dr. Mukhtar Ikhsan, a medical doctor, during nearly every minute of their two-week trip to the United States, it was Michael Sells, then professor of religion at Haverford College, who brought about the invitation. We put together an academic dream tour for Ibu Maria that included stops at Harvard, Boston College, Brown University, Haverford College, and Princeton University, in addition to the MESA meeting. Together, Maria, who did not speak much English



FIGURE 2. Ibrahim Hosen, founding director of Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an, Jakarta, with Maria Ulfah, spring 1996. A guest is presenting them with a gift.

at the time, and I presented a little bit about her life as perhaps the most important female reciter in Southeast Asia, if not the world, and about the breathtakingly beautiful art of the melodic, *mujawwad* style of recitation that Maria Ulfah demonstrated at length at all of our events.

Our visits were hosted by various departments at these institutions; we were alternately welcomed by religion, music, Middle Eastern studies, and Arabic programs, as well as by a variety of Islamic students' organizations. It was fascinating to see the reception by African-American Muslims, American converts to Islam, Pakistanis, Palestinians, and other non-Southeast Asian Muslims to this gentle, cheerful, and charismatic woman with the enormously powerful voice. Many of them had never heard nor were even aware of female reciters of the Qur'an, and for women, especially, Ibu Maria's presence and guidance was empowering. Although Islam is the third largest religion in the United States after Christianity and Judaism and may well assume second-place status before long, Muslim America is multicultural. There is no single or even predominant cultural model for religious rituals, clothing, food, or music for Muslims in the United States, so Maria Ulfah, as an exemplar of what women are and can be in Islamic culture, providing a model that for many was inspirational. Some scholars have suggested, in fact, that Indonesian Islam has

much to offer the world, and Maria Ulfah's visit to the United States certainly exemplified that potential.

In many instances during our travels, Maria and I found American Muslims to be more "serious" than we had anticipated. At our presentation at Harvard University, for example, several members of the audience (whom we had not yet met) filed out of the auditorium in the middle of the presentation. After worrying throughout the rest of the presentation that they had been offended or bored, we learned that they had all departed for afternoon prayers (known as *asr*). In Indonesia, people probably would have waited until it was convenient rather than rushing off in the middle of a public assembly to perform prayers precisely at the designated time. The incident easily could have been avoided had the organizers of our presentation scheduled it to avoid conflicting with the afternoon prayer time. Although the event ended well, the departure of two rows from the audience right in the middle of our dialogue was extremely disconcerting. Another incident that surprised us occurred in Washington, D.C., when Maria Ulfah was interviewed for the magazine *Saudi Aramco World* and I served as translator (Durkee 2000). Before we began the interview, the interviewer, an American Muslim, indicated that we should bow our heads and pray, which seemed somewhat unusual. Maria Ulfah later remarked about the incident with a glint in her eye and an inquisitive smile. Although consistent and unitary characterizations of Islam plague the popular and journalistic representation of the religion, the variety of puzzling behaviors that we experienced when on tour in the United States was, in and of itself, an argument against the notion of Islam as a unitary world religion and against the common culture of the *umma*, the world's community of Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

While in the United States, Maria Ulfah and Dr. Mukhtar Ikhsan were treated with the utmost respect and hospitality. Although a curiosity to some, Maria was clearly a star to others. I was thrilled to take them to stay with both my father, David, in Brookline, Massachusetts, as well as with my mother, Sandra, in Middleboro, Massachusetts, since Maria had met both of my parents when they had visited Indonesia on previous occasions. It is difficult to overemphasize the importance to an anthropologist of being a part of a family. This may be an afterthought for the male anthropologist, but especially in the case of female anthropologists, being connected to parents, to a husband, and to children—while certainly not a prerequisite for "deep ethnography"—can legitimize one's presence as much, or perhaps even more than, a title or a research grant. Of course, having a husband and kids erases any possibility of the "lone woman" problem, but even more than that it establishes common ground between people where normally such a thing may seem elusive (see Whitehead and Conaway 1986). My kids came to countless events where, as my older son complained, it was always hot and the food was always greasy. On some afternoons, IIQ students would

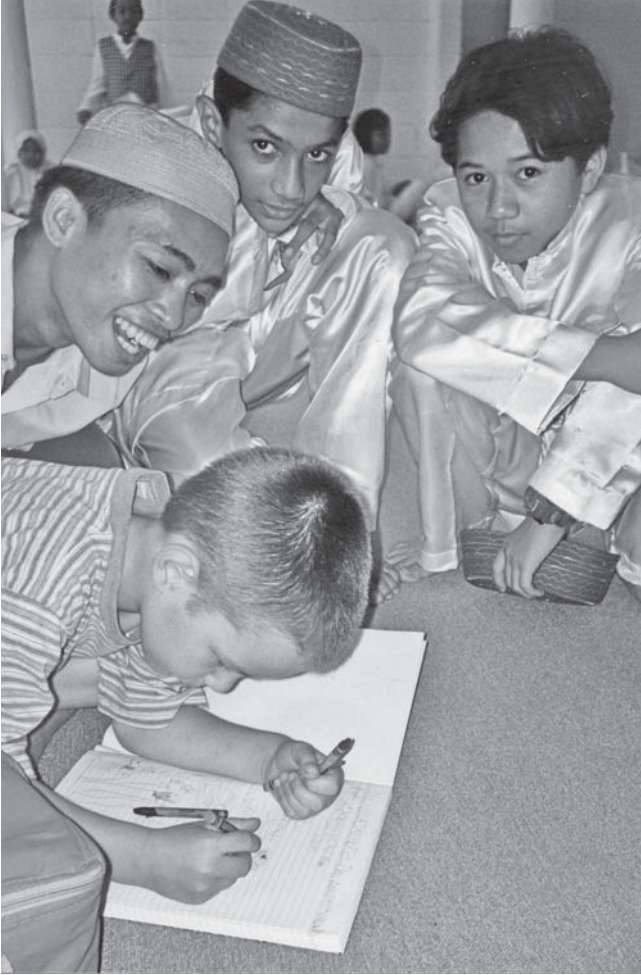


FIGURE 3. Hansen Millison, age six, and young boys drawing at a children's religious festival in Jakarta, February 1999.

venture up from the IIQ *asrama* (dormitory) in Ciputat to our Cilandak town house just to hang out and play with our boys. In June and July of 1999, we all went on vacation with Maria's family, taking advantage of a pulmonology conference that Ibu Maria's husband, Pak Mukhtar, attended in Malang, East Java. Maria, her husband, and her youngest son, Rifki, along with my family and Anne Elise Thomas, a former student who was visiting us from the United States, traveled with our bulky Arab instruments (an 'ud and a *qanun*) by train and minivan to four of the best-known *pondok pesantrens* in East Java, giving concerts of

Arab music at each one. During each visit our kids were smothered with pinches and hugs while Dan made polite conversation with the men. Although my residence as a researcher in Indonesia ended long ago, people still know me as “Tbu Anne,” a wife and mother, in addition to “Professor Doktor Anne K. Rasmussen,” as I was often introduced.

#### PRESTIGE AND POWER

As a Fulbright scholar in 1999, I was given credibility by fellow academics and intellectuals through my affiliation with the Islamic University. Even when the affiliation meant nothing and I was just an American with a title on my calling card, it still seemed that I was a prestigious guest that my hosts would welcome and show off. Although being American is altogether the wrong reason that fieldwork should be “made easy,” my exoticism frequently greased the wheels of interaction. I was grateful for the opportunity it afforded to “make myself known to them” (Kisliuk 1997, 27). Sometimes the prestige and power of the colonial West that the ethnographer inevitably embodies had surprising consequences.

In July of 1999, for example, Maria Ulfah brought us to the *pondok pesantren* al-Mudhofar in her hometown of Lamongan as a component of our East Java road trip. Our family members were the guests of honor at an event hosted by the *pesantren*, and we were invited to stay at the complex of Lamongan’s mayor, Bupati Faried. That night, Anne Elise and I offered a musical performance of Arab music on *qanun* and ‘*ud* along with Maria Ulfah, who sang. Students from the *pesantren* recited and sang, and the grand finale featured the group Dewan Kesnian Lamongan, essentially a cover band that imitated the instrumentation (gamelan instruments, keyboard synthesizer, electric guitar and bass, *rebana* frame drums, and Javanese *kendhang*), musical repertoire, and poetic texts of the well-known Emha Ainun Nadjib and the Kiai Kanjeng ensemble (see chapter 5).

Later that year, when I was back in Jakarta, some of the people from the *pondok pesantren* al-Mudhofar came to Jakarta and stayed with Maria Ulfah’s family. When I met with them they reported that the local government in Lamongan was so impressed that their *pesantren* had received American guests that they were given a grant to build a second floor onto one of the campus’s main buildings. I was delighted that our visit had produced such tangible results for Maria Ulfah’s hometown *pesantren*. As ethnographers whose “deep hanging out” is enabled by the hospitality and tolerance of our consultants, we are always challenged by what to give in return. Money? Gifts? An enthusiastic smile, perhaps? Yet the report from Lamongan confirmed the bittersweet power of the ethnographer’s attention and showcased the unequal power relations inherent in the global history in which we all participate.





FIGURE 4. Performance with Maria Ulfah and her colleagues at Pondok Pesantren Tebuireng, East Java, October 2004.

#### PERFORMING IN THE FIELD

As was the case with my earlier fieldwork among Arab Americans, I believe that many people in Indonesia found me interesting and worthy of their time because of our common connection to music. In Indonesia my foreignness and my academic credentials certainly carried some weight, but my activity as a musician and my connection to Arab music, history, and culture (in addition to my imperfect knowledge of the Arabic language) was, I think, the reason that many people found me interesting. It was through musical exchange that I was often able to broach the topics that eventually led to the questions that organize this research. Thus, many of these music-making encounters are described in the pages that follow because they contextualize description and hypothesis. The interviews, meetings, and social gatherings I describe were often held with the expectation that some kind of “musicking” (Small 1998) would occur—either the exchange of performances, the demonstration of my little musical show, or the discussion of musical topics through performative illustration involving both singing and playing.

For example, early in the spring of 1996 I began to collect and listen to cassettes of an Islamic musical genre called *qasida moderen* by the singer Nur Asiah Djamil and her group Nada Sahara (Note of the Desert). Three years later, in September of 1999, colleagues that I met through the National Ministry of Religion, Yusnar Yusuf and Gamal Abdul Naser Lubis, took me to meet Nur Asiah Djamil in Medan, North Sumatra, an event that was something of a pilgrimage for me. I had no way of assessing her orientation toward music just by listening to her cassettes; but our discussion—which could have been a dry interview in which I asked questions and she answered—naturally transformed into a reciprocal lecture-demo. She talked and sang; so did I. She played a set of side-blown flutes (*suling*) tuned to Arab *maqamat*; I played the *'ud*. We tried to figure out what we could play together, and later that night we performed an impromptu set of Arab compositions and improvisations for a gathering of about fifty men and women who had been organized on my behalf. This gathering or party, referred to by Indonesian Muslims with the Arabic term *hafla*, was about sharing performance.

Much later, in October of 2004, I undertook research with the ensemble Kiai Kanjeng.<sup>20</sup> I had met with their leader, the poet, singer, cultural leader, political critic, and religious leader Emha Ainun Nadjib, on three previous occasions in both Jakarta and Yogyakarta, but I had never seen a live performance by “Cak Nun,” as Emha is affectionately known among his followers, and his group. Pak Emha, suspecting that there would be the possibility of musical collaboration, I suppose, invited me to go on tour with the group, so that’s exactly what I did. I stayed with Pak Emha and his wife, Ibu Novia Kolopaking, in their compound in Yogyakarta, Central Java, for a couple of days, then traveled with the band by plane and minivan, and sat in with them during their performances in Jember, Madiun, and Jakarta. Pak Emha also organized a formal workshop that was filmed by his crew in which I presented and taught Arab music, and Novi Budi-anto, the leader and main composer for Kiai Kanjeng, took apart the interlocking rhythmic patterns of the *rebana* frame drum ensemble that interested me. While a meaty interview at the Ministry of Religion can be a satisfying experience for the researcher, making music with musicians is both a thrill and an extremely productive medium where collaborative knowledge is created. For the musician and ethnomusicologist, becoming a “bit player” in the very contexts she is trying to understand and document is inevitable (Titon 1997, 96).

Not all of my musical encounters were as satisfying as my collaboration with Nur Asiah Djamil and Kiai Kanjeng. When I was called upon for *collaborasi* with amateur performers I often found myself in the middle of an unplanned performance that was fully amplified and completely out of tune. These spontaneous musical collaborations, although far from polished, were almost as useful as the performances that were truly satisfying because such

exchanges always provided insight into the variety of ways in which people organize, experience, and appreciate music and the ways that people interact with one another musically.

### THE GLOBAL POLITICS OF ISLAM

After the completion of my Fulbright year in January of 2000, a three-and-a-half-year hiatus followed. Later, during a sabbatical in 2003, I returned to Indonesia three times for a total of eight weeks. I made two more trips there in the fall of 2004 and 2005. Upon my initial return after the Fulbright grant, I worried that the country was on the cusp of the “axis of evil” we had been hearing about in the American press. Although not a member of the satanic triumvirate—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—identified by George W. Bush, Indonesia had become infamous for its majority Muslim population.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, a paradigm shift occurred with regard to American’s awareness of Indonesia. Formerly known for the island escape of Bali, the Sumatran tiger, and the few exotic references to *wayang kulit* in the film *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Indonesia, for most Americans, was hardly a blip on the radar screen. As Islam, frequently characterized by the Western press as a monolithic and looming entity, became a scapegoat in the American collective psyche, Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, indexed a set of new meanings. Impressions of Indonesia further deteriorated as acts of terrorism were committed on their own soil by the radical faction known as Jemah Islamiyyah. With these events—the Bali Bombings of September of 2001, which claimed the lives of three hundred (mostly Australian tourists); the Marriot hotel bombing in Jakarta in August of 2003, which killed twelve people, most of them Indonesian security guards and cab drivers; and the bombing of the Australian Embassy in September of 2004, which claimed solely Indonesian victims—Indonesian Muslims became complicit in the terrorism waged against the West, the phenomenon that became the center of U.S. foreign policy and the newly established U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

In this historical moment, journalists, politicians, and individuals have gone to great lengths to make distinctions between 1) the vast majority of peace-loving Muslims all over the world who insist (and we must believe) that Islam is a religion of peace, and 2) terrorists who refer to themselves as Islamic and claim that the deeds they do are performed in the name of their religion. However, the culture of fear and sensationalism continues to overshadow representations of Islam and Muslims in the Western press and popular media, and this tendency, I believe, has overpowered the urgency to try to recognize the differences and relationships between religion and culture.<sup>21</sup>



The term “Islam” has become a red flag in the West, in part because of the lopsided terminology we employ to conceptualize and compartmentalize the world. Following Asma Afsaruddin, scholar of Arabic and Islamic studies, I believe it is important to see Islam in Indonesia as a shared set of cultural practices and historical traditions, and I adopt the descriptor she suggests, *Islamicate*. The term *Islamicate* can reference communities and geographical locations that are informed by Muslim ideas, histories, and practices but that aren’t necessarily being described in the context of the Muslim religion. *Islamicate* can suggest the same kind religious history as does the term *Western*, which, when used to describe Europe and the United States, encompasses the notion of a shared Judeo-Christian heritage. As Afsaruddin asserts, “There is no counterpart on the Islamic side to the epithet *Western* as used to describe societies of modern Europe and North America today. *Western* in reference to these regions evokes *inter alia* their shared Judeo-Christian heritage, whose primacy, however, has become greatly attenuated and superseded by politico-cultural values that are essentially a-religious” (1999, 4). In the West, we have become immune to the ways in which the adjective “Islamic” is used to bring attention to a headline for articles that describe people whose activities have nothing to do with religion. If an Indonesian student is pictured riding a motorcycle in Jakarta, he is described as an “Islamic” student. If children are pictured in public school they are labeled as “Islamic” children. Using descriptors like “Christian” or “Jewish” to identify Americans in reports that have nothing to do with religion would, of course, be preposterous. Leila Ahmed reminds us how inappropriate this usage would be:

It is unusual to refer to the Western world as the “Christian world” or as the “world of Christendom” unless one intends to highlight its religious heritage, whereas with respect to the Islamic Middle East there is no equivalent non-ethnic, non-religious term in common English usage, and the terms *Islamic* and *Islam* (as in the “world of Islam”) are those commonly used to refer to regions whose civilizational heritage is Islamic as well as, specifically, to the religion of Islam. (1992, 7)

Modern history and contemporary politics in Indonesia have proven again and again that although the Indonesian body politic respects religious leaders, there is no groundswell of support for a Muslim state or for the use of Islamic law (*shari’a*) to structure the government or guide legal code, except perhaps in private family matters. Officially, the country is a secular democracy, a confusing statement for many Westerners to absorb if they have already memorized the fact that Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim nation.

This ethnography is not meant to describe the Muslim mainstream in Indonesia. My work is with a community of religious specialists, people who have involved themselves professionally in the business of religion. Many of my Indonesian friends outside my research world find my interest in and knowledge of Arab

and Islamic arts curious. Many of the people we met through my Fulbright connections, my husband's work, and the activities and schools in which our children were involved, although Muslim themselves, never interacted with the community of religious specialists and musicians that I describe. Thus, this work describes one among a range of discourses that were operative during the time and context in which I worked.

If one assumes that music and cultural performance, when situated among people in particular contexts, mean something, then my task is to identify the diverse discourses comprised of language, music, and, more broadly, performance that are employed as well as the ways in which they are combined and developed. As Jane Sugarman writes in the introduction to her comprehensive work on the rich song culture that unfolds in the context of Prespa Albanian weddings:

For any community it should be possible to identify a range of discourses that have arisen in different periods and historical circumstances and that, through a dense web of interaction, construct an individual's subjectivity in multiple and contradictory ways. Although many discourses circulate within a community, each individual chooses which of them to invoke and how he or she will be situated within them, and the precise interpretation of any discourse is open to continual debate. Such an expansion and complication of the concept of culture holds much promise for understanding the complex ways that performance forms with traditions of long standing have served over time as sites of identity construction. (Sugarman 1997, 29)

I have been extremely fortunate to have ongoing relationships with many of the consultants for this project, and a final encounter with my research community seems doubtful. Thus this book, an account of my ethnographic work between 1996 and 2005 and much more work performed between 2005 and 2009 reading, thinking, presenting ideas to colleagues, and writing and revising, is inevitably a work in progress.

## NOTES

### PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Adnan Adlan, the host of this event, was a gregarious and hospitable man who gave me a warm welcome on this visit to Sumatra. I also had the honor of performing with him among the members of IPQAH in 2003. Adnan Adlan died suddenly in Sweden in the fall of 2003, when a delegation that included Maria Ulfah, her husband Dr. Mukhtar, and Dr. Yusnar Yusuf were on a professional tour during Ramadan.
2. Evidence for this bold assertion is manifest in the phenomenal documentary recording project undertaken jointly by the Indonesian Society for the Performing Arts (Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia) and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies of the Smithsonian Institution, which has resulted in a series of twenty compact discs with comprehensive liner notes in Indonesian and English (Yampolsky 1991–99). See also Sutton 1991, 1996b.
3. A website for Maria Ulfah may be found at [www.mariaulfah.com](http://www.mariaulfah.com).

### 1. SETTING THE SCENE

1. I began studying Bahasa Indonesia the week I arrived in the country, in July 1995. My formal studies during 1995–96 were accomplished first at a community center and then at the Indonesian Australian Language Institute in Jakarta. In 1999 I continued private studies with a teacher from the Indonesian Australian Language Institute. I have also studied French, German, and Arabic, languages I have also used in my work.
2. The notion of the “field” to which the anthropologist or ethnomusicologist must travel to conduct fieldwork has expanded to include a greater variety of sites (including the home as the field) and a multitude of modes of operation, including, for example, the acts of reviewing notes, translating materials, and the writing process itself. Furthermore,

the act of being “in the field” has come to incorporate newly mediated “fields” such as the internet, email, SMS text messages, and other sites for and contexts of exchange. See, for example, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Barz and Cooley 1997).

3. As a point of comparison, voter turnout for the American presidential elections that same year (2004) was 53 percent.

4. It is difficult to determine whether or not the current events that seem so pertinent in the course of ethnographic fieldwork will be relevant by the time students and colleagues read one’s published work. Although they may seem myopically situated ten years hence, it is my belief that the political events that occurred during the ten years or so during which this research was conducted will be relevant for some time. What is difficult to predict, however, is whether the turnover in the Indonesian presidency or the outbreak of war and incidents of terrorism will occur as frequently as they seemed to during the time I describe. If this turns out to be the case, the specific moments I cite here, specifically the second Gulf War and the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, will certainly become quickly dated and perhaps less significant.

5. Singers and instrumentalists in the Western world (Andy Williams, Dolly Parton, and Wynton Marsalis, to name only a few) similarly get busy producing Christmas albums when the leaves start turning. Whatever else their motivation may be, such musicians know that it is simply good business to capitalize on the season by releasing festive recordings, as well as by participating in the countless holiday specials that air on network and cable television stations in the United States.

6. During Suharto’s regime, criticism of the government and its leaders resulted in censorship, the most famous example of which was the censorship of *Tempo Magazine*, which was founded in 1971 but forced to cease publication in 1994. The magazine, edited by founder Goenawan Mohamad, resumed publication in 1998.

7. Ricklefs introduces his *History of Modern Indonesia* with the assertion that although the “spread of Islam is one of the most significant processes of Indonesian history,” it is also “one of the most obscure” (2001, 3). He dates the earliest Muslim gravestone to 1082 and evidence of the first Islamic kingdom to the grave of Sultan Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin al-Basir (d. 1211).

8. One could argue that percussion instruments could be played in a nonmetric or random fashion, but that is usually not the case. An exception might be the case in which a percussion instrument functions as a signal, as, for example, in the beating of the drum called *bedug* at a mosque to indicate prayer time or a social gathering.

9. The Departemen Agama, abbreviated DEPAG, is the Indonesian Ministry of Religion. It is also translated as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Department of Religion, or the Department of Religious Affairs.

10. In making these claims Ramusack refers to Andaya 1994 and Van Esterik 1982.

11. Here, Ramusack (1999, 85) draws on Reid 1988 and Crease 1998, as well as on works by Barbara Andaya (1994, 2006a, and 2006b).

12. Known as one of the richest textile cultures in the world, Indonesia boasts *batik* and *ikat* as two of the main styles of textile technique. *Batik* is a kind of “tie-dye” process in which intricate patterns are drawn or stamped in wax on plain material, which is then

dyed. The process may be repeated to produce many patterns in many colors on the same material. *Ikot*, on the other hand, is a weaving technique. Indonesians wear and recognize the colors, patterns, textures, and techniques that typify the materials of each region. Styles of dress are also distinctive and geographically situated. People often wear the native cloth and clothing styles of their region to weddings and other formal occasions; learning to recognize these differences is an important exercise for the newcomer to Indonesia. See, for example, the ethnography *Islam in Java* (Woodward 1989) for a male researcher's account of the significance of distinctive cloth patterns and styles of dress. The diversity of textile culture has been honored in the development of the Muslim fashion industry, and in fact it has been a boon to it rather than a hindrance (Tarlo and Moors 2007).

13. Anna M. Gade devotes a chapter of her book *Perfection Makes Practice* (2004) to issues of motivation.

14. In Manila, Philippines, for example, I attend the Qur'an study group held in the Dharma Wanita Room at the Indonesian embassy. Most of the women in that group are wives of embassy employees.

15. The mosque, designed by a Christian architect, holds ten thousand worshippers and is one of the largest mosques (by some accounts, *the* largest) in Southeast Asia.

16. No matter how nuanced, ethnographic narrative always leaves out the messy details. Although Pak Moersjied invited me to IIQ and gave me an address, a phone number, and the times of his class, I was intimidated, mostly by the prospect of venturing into a new neighborhood in impossible traffic, but also perhaps by the possibilities that this open door held for me. When I didn't show up on the first day of his class, Pak Moersjied called me and made me promise to come to his next class. I will always be grateful to Pak Moersjied for reiterating his invitation.

17. At this writing, Dadi Darmadi is pursuing a PhD in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies at Harvard University.

18. A more complete biography of Maria Ulfah unfolds in subsequent chapters.

19. Maria Ulfah has worked as a reciter and qur'anic specialist throughout Europe and Asia and in many places in the Middle East. She travels most frequently during the month of Ramadan, when she is called upon to visit Muslim communities that are often multicultural in composition, especially in Europe. Like the scholars of Islam whose work I have read, Maria Ulfah is also familiar with myriad variations in Islamic practice as well as sensitive to people's reactions to her as a representative of the religion in Indonesia. We frequently discussed the differences in practice that she encountered during her travels.

20. *Kiai Kanjeng* is actually the name of the set of gamelan instruments that the musicians play. The ensemble, described in more detail in chapter 5, is an eclectic mix of *sarons* (bronze-keyed trough xylophones), some *boning* pots (sometimes a full set), *suling* (flute), *rebana* (frame drums), Javanese *kendhang* (drums), *ketipung* drums for *dang dut* songs, drum set, keyboard synthesizer, electric bass and guitar, violin, *qanun* (Arab seventy-two-string zither), and *gambus* or 'ud (eleven-string fretless lute).

21. From 2003 to 2006 my family was based in Manila, Philippines, for my husband's three-year appointment as an environment and energy specialist with the Asian

Development Bank. Living part-time in Southeast Asia in an eclectic international community of expatriates, I had a greater opportunity to see news of Indonesia through the instruments of the mainstream international press—CNN, BBC, IHT—than I might have at home in Williamsburg, Virginia.

## 2. HEARING ISLAM IN THE ATMOSPHERE

1. Indonesian cities are distinctive for *kaki lima* (literally, “five feet”) carts that are wheeled up and down the streets and alleyways by vendors of foods such as saté (wooden skewers of grilled meat), *bakso* (a meatball soup), and ice cream, household goods such as brooms, and services such as knife sharpening. Each salesman has his own distinctive call to signal what service or goods are for sale; some use a bell or a wood block to signal their passing.

2. A field recording of the call to prayer may be heard on this book’s website. For description and analysis of the call to prayer, see Marcus 2007, Sells 1999, and Rasmussen 2008.

3. *Takbiran*, *khatam al-Qur’an*, and *wirid* may be heard on this book’s website (tracks 1, 2, 19, and 20).

4. Frishkopf writes, “As nearly all sound in Islamic ritual centers on the performance of language, I employ the neutral term ‘language performance’ (LP) (Frishkopf 1999: 43–57) to cover all elementary genres of sounded language (whether classed by the analyst as ‘speech,’ ‘declamation,’ ‘chant,’ ‘recitation,’ ‘hymnody,’ or ‘singing’ in Islamic rituals)” (Frishkopf n.d.).

5. Both Weiss (2006, 1–17), who titles the introduction to her book “Preliminary Soundings,” and Woodward (1989, 20) describe the evocative soundscapes of their “field sites,” including the performance of Islamic language.

6. The Arabic *akbar* (greater), from *kabir* (big, great), is also translated as “great” or “greatest” in English translations of the call to prayer.

7. Like many Indonesian words that derive from Sanskrit, *asrama* is related to the Indian term *ashram*.

8. At the College of William and Mary, students are allowed to ring the bell of the Wren Building, the oldest academic building in the United States, on the last day of classes. This ritual is especially important for graduating seniors. The continuous ringing goes on all day long. At first the sound is striking, and later it is somewhat annoying, but by the afternoon you become so used to it that you notice it only when it stops.

9. See Shiloah 1995 and 1997, Sells 1989 and 1999, Schimmel 1975, Nasr 2000, and Frishkopf 1999, 2008, and n.d. for discussions of the performance of religious texts. For an account and analysis of storytelling and poetry in the Arab world, including the process of composition, see especially Reynolds 1995.

10. Maria Ulfah, personal communication, December 2003.

11. Oral tradition prevails in musical training and appreciation as well. In my research with Arab American audiences I discovered that musical connoisseurs were not defined by the size of their recording collections or their mastery of historical facts but rather by their ability to listen. Such connoisseurs, called *sammi’a*, from the Arabic word for hearing (*sam’*), are central to the musical life of the community (Rasmussen 1998).