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# reconstructing self and society: Javanese Muslim women and “the veil”

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Since the late 1970s the phenomenon that is often called “the Islamic resurgence” has had a profound impact on religion, politics, and society throughout the Islamic world and beyond. One of the most conspicuous symbols of this powerful and resilient movement is the style of women’s clothing that is frequently called, in a verbal shorthand, “the veil.”<sup>1</sup> In this article I explore the significance of modern veiling among Muslims in Java, Indonesia, by analyzing young women’s experiences of “conversion” to veiling within the larger context of the Indonesian Islamic movement. What prompts young Muslim women to veil in a society where veiling is neither deeply rooted in local tradition nor encouraged by a majority of the population? Why have some women been willing—even eager—to adopt a practice from abroad that many Indonesians see as restrictive or extremist?

In attempting to answer these questions I argue that the decision to wear Islamic-style clothing both effects and signifies a transformation of self for women in Java, and that this subjective transformation is informed by, and in turn contributes to, larger processes of social change occurring in contemporary Indonesia. By attending to the discursive strategies through which women describe their experiences of veiling, which I interpret in light of the broader goals, rhetorics, and sociopolitical background of local Islamic activism, I show how veiling reflects the dynamic interplay of the personal and the social as Indonesian Muslims face an uncertain modernity.

In Java veiling symbolizes a new historical consciousness that deliberately dissociates itself from the local past. Javanese women who adopt the veil often invoke the idiom of “becoming aware” as a means of distancing themselves from their own pasts and conceptualizing the process by which they have used their newfound knowledge and practice of Islam to bring about personal change. Their individual narratives implicitly draw upon the ideological premises and rhetorical strategies of the contemporary Islamic movement, which promote the renewal of society through the acceptance of Islamic discipline and commitment to an Islamic future. To the extent that this future is envisioned in opposition to local history and traditions, it may be considered “modern” as that term has been deployed in the West: it marks a significant shift in historical consciousness and a conceptualization of the present as sharply distinct from

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*In Java the growing trend among women toward wearing Islamic clothing (“veiling”) challenges local traditions as well as Western models of modernity. Analysis of Javanese women’s narratives of “conversion” to veiling against the background of the contemporary Islamic movement reveals that veiling represents both a new historical consciousness and a process of subjective transformation that is tied to larger processes of social change in Indonesia. In producing themselves as modern Muslims, veiled women simultaneously produce a vision of a society that distances itself from the past as it embarks upon a new modernity. [Islam, modernity, social transformation, veiling, women, Indonesia]*

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the past (see Habermas 1987, especially chapter 1). Veiling and its attendant values and practices, however, reflect a deepening religiosity rather than an advancing secularization, which links them to a vision of modernity that is also conceived in contrast to Western models—an alternative modernity.

## veiling in Java

In contrast to those countries in which the veiling movement is sometimes described as a “re-veiling” movement (Zuhur 1992) or a “return to the veil” (Hoodfar 1991; Mule and Barthel 1992), in many parts of Java veiling was limited until quite recently, even though most Javanese are Muslims.<sup>2</sup> In the cities of Yogyakarta and Solo, where my research is based, covering the head with a gauzy scarf or woven cap was generally reserved in the past for a small number of older, devout Muslim women, particularly those who had already made the pilgrimage to Mecca. The head covering, if it was worn at all, typically accompanied a tightly wrapped batik sarong and a close-fitting blouse (*kebaya*), often low-cut and of sheer material.<sup>3</sup> This style of dress tended to accentuate rather than hide the shape of a woman’s body, differing from the loose styles of Islamic clothing worn now by some women, which cover the head and body completely, except for the face and hands.<sup>4</sup> Young, urban women, who comprise the majority of those Javanese who have adopted contemporary Islamic dress, usually wore Western-style clothing before the current veiling movement and rarely covered their heads. In the early 1980s few women in Java veiled, but by the end of the decade Islamic dress had become a familiar sight. The most common name for this style of dress in Indonesia is *jilbab*, a term of Arabic origin; alternatively, the Indonesian terms *pakaian Islam* or *busana Muslim(ah)*, which simply mean “Islamic clothing,” are used as well.<sup>5</sup>

The trend toward wearing Islamic clothing is an outgrowth of both the Indonesian and the global Islamic movements and has risen in popularity along with the movement in Java. Javanese women who dress in this style, however, remain a distinct minority of the population, most visible around university campuses and at Islamic schools, although they are also found outside the academic environment.<sup>6</sup> Most Muslim women do not veil, and not all Muslim activists agree with the practice of veiling; some even oppose it strongly, arguing that the Qur’an calls for this covering style of dress only for prayer and that its adoption for daily wear is excessive. The controversies that surround Islamic clothing often focus on its culturally alien appearance in the Javanese environment: the modern form of Islamic dress that has recently gained in popularity is seen as an imported style that has more in common with Middle Eastern styles of dress than with those of local origin.<sup>7</sup> The fact that modern veiling is understood as a departure from local practice is crucial to understanding its significance in the Javanese context, as I will show. Opposition to veiling is frequently voiced by Indonesian Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Members of both groups argue that this style of clothing is not really “Islamic” itself but is instead “Arab”; it is perhaps appropriate, they argue, for the Middle East, but it is poorly suited to the cultural and climatic conditions of Indonesia. One can be a good Muslim, they insist, without adopting Middle Eastern clothing and customs. As a symbol, modern Islamic dress fails to evoke an image of the Indonesian past; it does not summon up any sense of nostalgia or local authenticity.<sup>8</sup> Rather, for some Indonesians it conjures up a picture of fundamentalist extremism that is as culturally dissonant for them as it is for many Westerners.

In still other ways the veil seems oddly out of place in Java, especially if one attempts to “read” it with the interpretations that have commonly been applied to the Middle East or South Asia.<sup>9</sup> It has been argued, for instance, that the veil can serve women as a form of symbolic shelter that, as a portable extension of the secluded space of the home, enables them to enter public, male space without being subjected to criticism or harassment (Papanek 1973). While this may be true in societies where there is a relatively clear demarcation of male and female spaces, the sharp delineation of a public “male” sphere from a private “female” sphere is not a normative

feature of Javanese society.<sup>10</sup> The notion that the veil has the practical effect of allowing women to move more easily through public space therefore cannot simply be transposed to Java; women there have rarely been confined to “private” or domestic spheres, nor is public space considered primarily a male domain as it is in some other Muslim societies (see, e.g., El Guindi 1981; Mernissi 1987). In Java veiling may actually hinder a woman’s freedom of movement; she may feel that certain places or actions are inappropriate for a woman who veils, leading her to restrict her own activities accordingly (cf. Ong 1990; Zainah 1987).

It is also doubtful whether some of the other practical or strategic effects of veiling that have been described for the Middle East (particularly Egypt) are applicable to Java. These include making it easier for women to earn a living outside the home while maintaining societal esteem and self-respect (El Guindi 1981; Hoodfar 1991; MacLeod 1991, 1992; Moghadam 1993; Mule and Barthel 1992). In a society where working outside the home is considered normal and acceptable for both sexes, and where few people question the propriety of situations in which women and men work together, most women do not need to advertise their purity and religiosity in order to avoid criticism for working. It appears that wearing jilbab is far more of a disadvantage than an advantage for those seeking secular types of employment. Because many Indonesians see veiling as extremist, some employers will not hire a woman who veils, or will insist as a condition of employment that she not wear jilbab in the workplace (cf. Nagata 1984). Wearing jilbab may also interfere with a woman’s career advancement. A civil servant told me, for example, that she had been teased by her office mates that a veiled woman would not be promoted through the ranks of the government bureaucracy (*nèk jilaban ora munggah pangkaté*); her swift reply was that it was “more important to get a promotion in the afterlife” (*lebih penting naik pangkat di akhirat*) than in one’s job. Despite these difficulties, a number of the veiled women to whom I spoke declared in no uncertain terms that they would only accept work in places where they would be permitted to dress in Islamic style.

The difficulty that veiled women experience in the job market reflects a more general suspicion of such women in the wider society. Wearing jilbab is still a marginal practice in Java, although it is gradually gaining greater acceptance. Many young women who adopt this style of dress do it against the explicit wishes of their parents (and sometimes of their teachers, husbands, or boyfriends) and at the risk of becoming the butt of criticism and gossip among friends, neighbors, and relatives. They are often branded as “fanatical” (*fanatiek*), sanctimonious, or merely misguided. In 1993 several women related stories that had been circulating a few years earlier about a rash of incidents in which women wearing jilbab in public places were rumored to be concealing poison in the folds of their clothing with ill intent. A cry of “Poison jilbab!” (*jilbab beracun*) had been enough to incite a crowd to attack and injure the women. Around the same time, they said, young men were snatching women’s headcloths and throwing stones at veiled women. Here, veiling served not as a means of protection for women entering public space but as a marker of their marginality and the reason for their harassment.

Because of the challenges that a woman who wears jilbab faces, the decision to veil is almost never made lightly. The remarks that women made about the psychological and practical obstacles to veiling that they had encountered indicated that it was a decision that required much soul-searching, determination, and even stubbornness on their part. Veiling marks a woman as “different” in Java, where norms of behavior are very strong and where defying convention has immediate repercussions for an individual’s relationships with others. Donning jilbab often leads to a marked change in a young woman’s social and personal identity as well as to a potential disruption of the social ties on which she has hitherto relied.<sup>11</sup> Given the social, psychological, and economic disadvantages that a woman who wears jilbab may encounter, one must ask what motivates Javanese women to veil and why the practice is becoming more popular, especially among young, educated women of the middle classes.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of these issues, I elicited personal accounts of “conversion” to veiling from approximately 20 women in Yogyakarta and Solo in 1993. Combined with more general ethnographic research conducted in Java over several years beginning in 1986, these data provide insight into the significance of veiling in the Javanese context. Yogyakarta, like Solo, is known as a city where women have traditionally enjoyed a good deal of autonomy and economic independence. With the exception of a few areas, this region of Java also has a reputation for the prevalence of more relaxed forms of Javanist Islam rather than of orthodox Islam.<sup>12</sup> The sight of young women dressed in long robes and large headcloths—sometimes riding motorcycles, wearing helmets over their headcloths—is therefore rather startling in this context and seems to demand an explanation.

The majority of the women who spoke with me were university students or recent graduates in their twenties.<sup>13</sup> Most came from lower-middle- or middle-class backgrounds. The women’s religious backgrounds were mixed; some had been brought up in religious households, but a number appeared to have had parents who were considerably less devout than they themselves had become. Many of the women were or had been active in Islamic student groups or other religious activities, such as attending or leading prayer meetings and group discussions (*pengajian* or *kajian*) of the Qur’an and other Islamic texts. Some were active members of the large, pan-Indonesian Association of Islamic Students (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, or HMI). Because their participation in organized religious activities was higher than that of the general population, I will occasionally call them (and others) “activists,” although the type of religious activity indicated by that term varies widely.<sup>14</sup>

The women who spoke to me were intelligent, strong-minded people who consciously and intellectually struggled with the contradictions of everyday life and who had their own, highly personal reasons for choosing the routes that they had chosen. Most women chose to veil partly out of religious conviction, insisting that wearing jilbab was a requirement, or at least a recommendation, of Islam.<sup>15</sup> Beyond this, however, their narratives exhibited certain themes that showed that adherence to religious doctrine was not the sole impetus to veil. Their motivations for veiling were simultaneously personal, religious, and political; as I will try to make clear, even the most personal and emotionally laden stories of conversion to jilbab contained within them elements of a larger story that encompasses the contemporary Indonesian Islamic movement.

### **the Islamic movement in Indonesia**

The veiling movement must be understood within the social and political contexts of contemporary Indonesian Islam. Indonesia is heavily influenced by Islam—close to 90 percent of the population (roughly 190 million) is Muslim—although it has never been declared the nation’s official religion. Since President Suharto’s so-called New Order regime came to power in the mid-1960s, the state has attempted to maintain a delicate balance, acknowledging and in certain respects encouraging Islam’s religious and cultural influence among the population while restraining its political influence by alternately co-opting and suppressing potential sources of Islamic political power.<sup>16</sup> Although the state does not officially promote Islam over other religions, it has accommodated Islamic interests by supporting a wide variety of Islamic institutions (see Hefner 1993b). The state’s efforts to drain Islam of its potentially subversive political power, however, have been unyielding.<sup>17</sup> The state’s ban on veiling in public schools, for example, which was eventually overturned after much protest (see below), suggests that the state may have linked veiling with forms of Islam that it deemed threatening.

It should be kept in mind that during the same period in which the regime has both fostered and domesticated Islam, it has also aggressively pursued a policy of economic development and “insertion into the global capitalist economy” (Tanter and Young 1990:17; see also Robison 1986), opening its doors wide to foreign investment, trade, and tourism. The New Order ushered

in an era of industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth that has been accompanied by an increasingly skewed distribution of wealth, a burgeoning urban consumer culture, and an increase in the population's education levels, among other changes. It has also spurred the growth of a small but powerful monied elite, a sizable middle class, and a large urban underclass. The period since the late 1960s has been, in short, one of far-reaching social and economic change in Indonesia. In the face of these dramatic transformations, the state has urged its citizens to exercise restraint and to hold fast to "traditional" Indonesian cultural and religious values, while participating fully in the processes of economic development. Meanwhile, many of those in power have ignored their own messages of self-restraint by enriching themselves at every opportunity and eagerly appropriating the international signs of wealth and status through conspicuous consumption.

Among the middle classes—an amalgam of civil servants and military officers, small merchants and manufacturers, professionals, and academics (Dick 1990; Tanter and Young 1990)—responses to these changes have been mixed. While there is considerable support for the regime among the middle classes, particularly among the upper echelons (Aswab 1990; Robison 1990), there is also frustration. Many people believe that average Indonesians have not been given a fair opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the nation's economic development in a climate that favors big capital, which is controlled by local Chinese entrepreneurs and foreign investors as well as by a relatively small number of indigenous Indonesians. Growing cynicism toward the blatant opportunism of government functionaries and resentment of the elite's unabashed displays of wealth and power fuel the sense that social justice is not being adequately served by the present system. Another source of disenchantment stems for some people from their perceptions of moral decline and social disintegration, especially in the cities (see Hefner 1993b: 13–14). Robert Hefner (1993b) argues persuasively that these factors have helped to spur an Islamic revival among the middle classes. Some see Islam as the key to maintaining an ethical and disciplined society in the midst of modernization and the breakdown of the older social order.<sup>18</sup> Although the Islamic revitalization has spread well beyond the middle strata to the elite as well as to the lower classes, the movement is grounded most firmly in the urban middle classes.<sup>19</sup>

The younger generation has been at the forefront of this efflorescence of Islamic practice and devotion; in the 1970s university students led the upsurge in Islamic activity among the urban population at large (Hefner 1993b:12–13). The past two decades have witnessed a sharp upturn in Islamic activism on campuses: Islamic student organizations, seminars, and study groups have sprung up in increasing numbers. The atmosphere in the student groups tends to be relaxed and democratic; members of the larger organizations often form smaller cells of about 10 to 20 students (*usrah*) for mutual support, discussion, and prayer, creating a strong sense of community and camaraderie (Billah 1991:302; cf. Zainah 1987). Members are encouraged to read and discuss Islamic texts so as to better comprehend their meaning and their relevance to daily life. The groups advocate a return to the Qur'an as a source of guidance for everyday living, repudiating the secularization, materialism, and alienation associated with urbanization and economic development (Billah 1991). But they do not promote a return to "tradition" as such—a key point that I will elaborate shortly.

Among students the Islamic movement has been closely linked with a desire for democratization in Indonesian society. It has provided students and others a language for articulating a variety of grievances and aspirations that no other movement or organization has adequately provided since the New Order began in the mid-1960s (see Billah 1991, esp. 296–297).<sup>20</sup> Over the course of the present regime, political and social dissidence and ferment have been effectively suppressed by a powerful state and internal military apparatus. Student protests are rarely tolerated and the press is censored. In the absence of other viable political movements, the Islamic movement has provided the only broadly based collective action to flourish in the

New Order.<sup>21</sup> Attracting followers with highly diverse—and often mutually incompatible—beliefs, spanning the political spectrum from left to right, it provides them with an institutional and ideological framework to give form and voice to their desire for change.<sup>22</sup>

Although members of the movement are by no means all from the same class background, the preponderance of urban, lower-middle- to middle-class people among activists is understandable. They have the economic and educational resources, as well as the time, to learn about contemporary Islam and the goals of the Islamic movement through reading books and magazines and through participating in prayer meetings, retreats, and discussion groups, unlike many people of the rural and urban lower classes. At the same time, they lack access to the wealth and positions of privilege enjoyed by the bureaucratic and business elite and therefore tend to be less happy with the status quo. The women who spoke to me about their decisions to wear jilbab seemed to be typical of this group. As the daughters of teachers, small businesspeople, and low-ranked civil servants, they represented a class of people who have been fully drawn into the state-sponsored processes of “development,” but without reaping its spoils. The wave of consumerism that has swept up the monied elites in the New Order has merely washed over the members of this class, leaving them adrift in its wake. While the Islamic movement certainly does not appeal to all members of the lower-middle and middle classes, it does offer an alternative—or at least a complement—to New Order ideologies of capitalist development that some find attractive.

Without question the direct connection of the Indonesian movement to similar movements that have gained momentum throughout the Islamic world over the past two decades adds to the movement’s appeal. Mass communications make that connection palpable and instantaneous. Indonesians can see themselves as part of a vast extended community and powerful international movement through television and print media, sometimes quite literally; for example, a 1992 article on women in Iran in the weekly Indonesian news magazine *Tempo* (1992) included a photograph of a smiling young Indonesian journalist in jilbab, on site in Tehran, holding a poster of Ayatollah Khomeini and flanked by three Iranian women in long black cloaks and veils. Indeed, the Islamic movement in Indonesia clearly owes a good deal to its counterpart movements elsewhere in the Muslim world.<sup>23</sup> By identifying with the international Islamic community, Indonesian activists validate their sense of being part of the modern world without the need to adopt a Westernized way of life; for many Indonesians that lifestyle lacks morality and religious faith and is materialistic and self-indulgent. The Islamic movement offers its followers an alternative modernity; instead of encouraging a retreat to older Indonesian lifestyles, which few people would see as a realistic or appealing choice in the present era, the movement enjoins Indonesians to become part of a modern, global community of fellow Muslims who imagine themselves to be united in a shared set of beliefs and values (a religious equivalent, perhaps, of Anderson’s [1991] “imagined community”) and in their common resistance to non-Muslim cultural, political, and economic domination.

If the Islamic movement offers an alternative to Western models of modernity as well as to local traditions, it also provides an alternative set of options to the gender ideologies promoted by the state and the Indonesian mass media, which draw on both.<sup>24</sup> 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. Although some conservative Islamists call for women to remain in the home, echoing and often surpassing the state’s domestic designs for women, I do not believe

that this is the dominant message being absorbed by female activists, nor did I see evidence of a wholesale turn to domesticity among veiled women in Java.<sup>25</sup>

The relationship between Islamist gender ideologies and those of the New Order more broadly is quite complex—one sees elements of incorporation of, as well as resistance to, state ideologies in Islamists' views. Wearing jilbab, however, sometimes brings women more directly into conflict with the state. Veiled women have strongly resisted the regime's efforts to prevent them from covering themselves in Islamic style. In 1990, after "months of stormy protest" (Hefner 1993b:32) and, according to several of my informants, some well-publicized court cases, the government's ban on wearing jilbab in public schools was lifted. A few women told me that they objected vehemently to the state's policy of making them remove their head coverings for official photographs, a policy that remained in effect. One said that she had simply tucked her headcloth behind her ears for her driver's license photograph in order to comply with the regulation that both ears be visible. Another woman, Wati, related an emotional story about the painful consequences of refusing to remove her head covering for the photograph that the state requires in order to grant a diploma. Because she refused to bare her head and failed in her efforts to have the requirement waived, the official graduation photograph could not be taken; she neither received her high school diploma nor was permitted to take the examination for entrance to the national university system. Wati's father became angry with her for her stubbornness, forcing her out of their home and cutting her off financially. "He didn't consider me his child any longer," she recalled. She was accepted in a private university in Jakarta even without her diploma because she had been ranked first in her high school; luckily, she said, someone took her in, giving her housing and food for a time. But her parents did not want her to stay in Jakarta and told her to come home. Wati gave in to their wishes, returning home and agreeing reluctantly to have her picture taken for her diploma with her head bared. When she went home, her father continued to tease her about her clothes, asking, "Why didn't you bring your camel, too?"

### Islamic discourses of modernity

The international Islamic movement is often called an Islamic "resurgence" or "revival." I have avoided using these terms here, however, because they suggest a return to the past that I believe misses a central aspect of the movement's ideological basis in Java.<sup>26</sup> The activists with whom I spoke used the word *gerakan* (movement[s]) to refer to the current wave of Islamic activism rather than any term that might suggest a revival or repetition of past events (see also Abdul et al. 1991). This is important because the movement represents a conscious *disjuncture* with the local past in terms of its practices as well as in certain key ideological premises. One is struck, in fact, by how thoroughly and self-consciously modern this movement is (cf. Bernal 1992; El Guindi 1981; Horvatic 1994) in its language and organizational structure. Many Islamic activists participate in orientation seminars or retreats, known by the English loanword *training* or *batra* (an abbreviation of the English term "basic training"); recruiting and training core members of the movement is known as *kaderisasi* (forming of cadres). Larger organizations such as HMI have formal bureaucratic organizational structures, which set them apart from older, more traditional Islamic institutions in Java (Billah 1991:290–291). University students who wear jilbab casually pepper their speech with contemporary, Western-derived expressions, speaking of their desire to "actualize [their] potential" (*mengaktualisasikan potènsi*) and of their *motivasi* (motivation) and *ambisi* (ambition) for veiling. While some might cite the wives or the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad as their models in dress or behavior, they are more forward-looking than regressive in their attitudes and lifestyles.

The emphasis on modernity in the movement has a dual purpose. First, it asserts the viability and dynamism of Islam and of its principles and prescriptions as a basis for living in the modern world. It challenges the notion that the only way to be modern is to accept a Western model of

modernity, even as it selectively borrows from Western models in presenting Islam as “modern.” Leaders of the movement emphasize the importance of presenting Islam in a way that is sophisticated, fresh, and challenging in order to make it an appealing alternative to capitalism, socialism, and other “isms” (Billah 1991:311–312). Rejecting the colonial past (as the origin of Western imperialism), as well as the postcolonial present (as the continuation of Western dominance), the movement imagines a society reinvigorated by its acceptance of a truly Muslim way of life.

Second, while maintaining Islam’s validity as an alternative to Westernization, the stress on modernity also serves to distance the movement from older, more traditional Javanese cultural practices and values, including localized forms of Islam. While the goals of the Islamic movement are far from unitary, many of its followers share a common vision (albeit one that takes many forms) of a new society constructed on the principles of Islam. This new society is almost never conceived of as a return to a golden age of the Javanese past, for *adat* (or *tradisi*), indigenous custom (or tradition), is perceived as one of the greatest enemies of contemporary Islam, almost as great an enemy as modern Western hegemony and the colonial past. Adherence to local custom leads to practices and beliefs that are heterodox and sinful, activists believe. *Adat* blinds people to the true ways of Islam, encouraging them to act in dangerously polytheistic ways (*syirik*, from *shirk*, Arabic; see Woodward 1989) such as, among Javanese, making offerings of flowers and incense at graves to “feed” (*caos dhahar*) ancestors while simultaneously chanting Qur’anic prayers asserting the omnipotence and oneness of God. Activists believe that the tenaciousness of Javanist tradition poses a major obstacle to the realization of an enlightened Muslim society.

This critical stance toward *adat* is captured in a photograph from a promotional calendar that was distributed by an Indonesian business in the mid-1980s. In the foreground are two young women, probably university students, in modern Islamic dress. They are attending Sekaten, a large public festival sponsored by the Sultanate of Yogyakarta to celebrate Maulid, the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday. The ceremony, although commemorating an Islamic holiday, is uniquely Javanese. The background of the picture shows a procession of men in Javanese ceremonial garb bearing a very large cone made of rice and other food. The two women in *jilbab* are conspicuously sporting cameras, walking away from the procession, and wearing mildly disapproving looks on their faces, all of which pointedly distance them from the royal ritual at hand. The careful styling of the photograph appears deliberately intended to suggest that this ritual is, for them, an antiquated Javanese curiosity, not a legitimate religious ceremony. The cameras show that they are there as tourists or detached spectators, not as engaged participants. The need to be a good Muslim, then, means detaching oneself from heterodox practices even when one is in the midst of them. The modern Muslim eschews such practices and replaces them with the right-minded ones of “pure” Islam, which are supposedly uninflected by local custom or belief.

The significance of this rejection of Javanist tradition should not be underestimated, for it challenges deeply ingrained patterns of ritual practice, personal belief, and interpersonal relationships. It is seen by many Javanese, especially of the older generation, as highly disruptive to the social and cosmological order. Because Islam and *adat* (or *kejawèn*, a term used for Javanist mysticism and ritual, which combines elements of Java’s diverse religious and philosophical influences) have become thoroughly intermingled in Java, to insist on their separation and on the absolute primacy of Islam over *adat* shakes the foundations of Javanist belief and practice. In Java, where the ancestral past is often imagined as the source of all that is culturally valuable, this challenge to the authority of tradition is a fairly radical move that undermines the very legitimacy of Javanese culture. From modern Islamist perspectives, however, there can be little reconciliation between Islam and *adat*, because the former is believed to originate in the Qur’an while the latter is not. One writer has explained this succinctly in commenting on the

Indonesian Islamist movement: "The Quran urges humanity always to search for the truth and always to question the truths that have been received from the ancestors, always to be open to correction of mistaken beliefs and to test that which in the past has been considered as truth" (Billah 1991:316). This uncompromising stance flies in the face of more tolerant Javanist interpretations of Islam, which generally permit a comfortable accommodation between Islamic orthodoxy and local traditions.

In its efforts to purify the religion of its local modifications and accretions and to return to Qur'anic "basics," however those are defined, the current movement is heir to more than 80 years of Islamic reformism in Indonesia. One of the earliest modernist Islamic organizations in Indonesia, and also the one that has been most influential over the years, is Muhammadiyah (along with its sister organization, Aisyiyah). Inspired by the modernist Islamic movement that originated in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East (Noer 1973:296–297), Muhammadiyah was founded in Yogyakarta in 1912 with the aim of fostering a new, modern form of Islam that would be free of the corruptions associated with medieval Islam as well as those attributed to the continued influence of local, sometimes pre-Islamic practices and beliefs in Indonesian Islam (Nakamura 1983; Noer 1973; von der Mehden 1993:13–14). Although some of the goals of younger activists are quite similar to those propounded by long-standing organizations such as Muhammadiyah, the new fervor of the present movement suggests that the younger generation of activists is not satisfied with the older reformist program of Muhammadiyah and similar organizations; these, although influential throughout the country through their many schools, universities, mosques, and hospitals, have not brought about the changes in society that some activists currently seek.<sup>27</sup> In view of the relatively long tradition of Islamic modernism in Indonesia, the sense of newness—of a rupture with the past—that marks the current movement also suggests that the idea of such a rupture itself may be fundamental to the ideologies and strength of the movement and to its ability to inspire the dedicated participation of its followers.

Contemporary Islamist understandings of the relationship between past and present have a clear resonance with Western discourses of modernity yet refigure them in critical ways. Habermas's (1987) discussion of modernity in the Western philosophical tradition points to the inherent connections between the concept of modernity itself and the historical context of Western rationalism. Since the 18th century the "modern age" has signified in Western society a particular historical consciousness, marked by a conceptualization of the present as discrete from the past. It posits the current age as an epochal beginning that opens itself up to the newness of the future; breaking sharply with the continuity of the past, the modern era brings into being a thorough transformation and renewal. "Modernity," he writes, "can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape" (Habermas 1987:7; emphasis in original). Modernity, in this sense, is characterized by the self-consciousness of those who define themselves and their age against the past and in anticipation of the future; to turn toward the future is simultaneously to deny the past's hold on the present.

By nullifying the legitimacy of Javanist tradition as a source of truth and as a model for action, Islamic activists invoke a conception of history that resonates with these views of modernity—and that no doubt draws upon them, for Western notions of modernity have been disseminated in Java in a wide variety of forms since the colonial period (see, e.g., Anderson 1990; Coté 1992; McVey 1990; Noer 1973; Shiraishi 1990). The past can no longer be relied upon as a guide to the present; doubt is cast on the validity of Javanese "truth" as it has been passed down over the generations. The notion that the Islamic movement will inaugurate a new, brighter era in Indonesia is central to its ideology as well as to its appeal: people are attracted to it precisely because it offers a vision of the future that promises to differ positively from the

past. While the movement calls for a “return to the Qur’an,” this does not imply a return to the era of Islam’s inception; the truth that is embodied in the text is not considered to be derived solely from, or limited to, any period in history.

In short, the Islamic movement is based on an essentially modernist vision. But the movement also recasts modernity in a religious light: instead of involving a process of increasing secularization, as Weber (1946, 1958) and other social theorists have conceived modernization to entail, the process is reversed as the secular spheres of life become reinvested with religious content (cf. Hefner 1993b:3). Although Weber saw the disintegration of religious worldviews in Europe as a movement toward rationalization and modernity (see Habermas 1987:1), the assumption of Islamic activists in Java is that one can have modernization and, indeed, rationalization, without secularization. The modern structure of the movement’s organizations and its emphasis on the intellectual exegesis of Islamic texts in order to apply them to modern life demonstrate that the movement is committed to a rational program of religious and social transformation. Its popularity among university students and other educated people is undoubtedly tied to this modern, rationalistic approach to religious reform.

### **narratives of conversion: becoming aware**

The desire to be modern has had a noticeable impact on the veiling movement. Some people who promote the wearing of jilbab stress the need to be fashionable in clothing style, as illustrated in the following passage from a recent booklet on Islamic clothing:

To ensure that people will not have the impression that Islamic clothing is old-fashioned or conservative, the Islamic community [*umat Islam*] should strive to demonstrate its intellectual ability, skill and expertise in the field of fashion, so that Islamic clothing will always be “in” and “up-to-date” [*supaya pakaian muslimah senantiasa, “in”; dan, “up to date”*<sup>28</sup>], allowing us to wear it with full faith and piety. [Rachmat et al. 1993:38]

The point is to be fashionable not for fashion’s sake but in order to retain one’s own motivation to veil and to attract others to wearing Islamic dress. Keeping Islamic clothing “up-to-date” reinforces the idea that the Islamic movement has a modern, future-oriented agenda rather than a conservative, stagnant program looking only to the past for its inspiration.

The movement to wear jilbab thus draws its strength from the broader ideological underpinnings of the Islamic movement. While not all Islamic activists agree on the necessity or even the desirability of veiling, those who do choose this style of dress often view it as a self-conscious move toward personal and social change. Islamic clothing is a departure from Javanese styles of clothing as well as the Western styles that have increasingly replaced them; it signals a rupture with—even an erasure of—both “Javanese” and “Westernized” dimensions of the local past. In this it stands as a symbol of the movement as a whole. This rejection of the past may help to explain the resistance that some young women have encountered from their parents and others in their decision to veil: many parents who do not object to their daughters’ wearing of Western dress are openly dismayed by their decision to wear Islamic dress. Jilbab may be seen by some parents as threatening because it seems to announce that the standards of morality, religious practice, and social behavior passed down from parents to their children are perceived by the children themselves as faulty.<sup>29</sup>

According to the conventions of Javanese hierarchy, knowledge and moral guidance should be passed from parents to children—not vice versa—while the latter are expected to reciprocate with deference and acknowledgment of their parents’ superior wisdom. In contrast, quite a few of the Muslim activists who spoke with me, male as well as female, felt that their parents did not properly comprehend or observe the commandments of Islam. Yuni, a graduate of a banking academy, had worn jilbab but had then reluctantly given it up because her parents were strongly opposed to it. They argued that it would interfere with her ability to find decent employment as well as with her social interactions; they feared that she would fall in with the “wrong kinds”

of religious groups and that she would restrict herself too much to the company of other devout Muslims. Perhaps more than anything else, they worried that she would be too “different” from other people—“Javanese people don’t like to stand out,” she reflected. She had been “terrorized” by her parents, she said, to the point where she could hold out no longer, but she vowed that one day she would wear Islamic clothing again. “Lots of parents don’t want their children to wear jilbab,” she commented. “Maybe their knowledge isn’t high enough [ *mungkin ilmunya kurang tinggi*]. But the Javanese believe that children shouldn’t try to be teachers to their parents,” she shrugged, explaining why she had not been willing to force the issue. She added on a more hopeful note that her mother’s attitude toward veiling was slowly changing; by attending Islamic prayer meetings and sermons she was “beginning to understand the laws [ *hukum*] of what women have to do.”

Other activists similarly believed that their parents’ incorrect attitudes and religious laxity were due not to bad intent or willful disregard but to their relatively incomplete understanding of Islamic doctrine. As the activists saw it, their parents were not aware (*sadar*) of the “laws,” including the obligation for women to cover themselves thoroughly. “Maybe their information wasn’t complete back then,” as one young woman put it. The women hoped that their parents would not be punished by God for their unfortunate lack of awareness; as several explained, one is guilty of sinning only if one is *aware* that one is violating a religious duty. God would be gentle with those who were truly but not willfully ignorant of the rules of Islam, they felt. When I pointed out that their parents had enjoyed access to the very same Qur’an that the young women themselves used, and inquired where the new, higher knowledge or “awareness” of its tenets had originated, they suggested that “it probably came from outside the country” or “maybe it was only brought here after the Iranian Revolution.”

The idea that genuine understanding of the religion and of proper standards of behavior and dress have only now become accessible to most Indonesians, and only with the guidance of Muslims from outside Indonesia, reveals two distinctive features of the current movement. First, it demonstrates the extent to which activists perceive their movement as being discontinuous with the local past, in keeping with the modernist vision that I have already discussed. Second, it shows just how fully they are aware of their connection to, even dependence upon, non-Indonesian (particularly Middle Eastern) sources of Islamic authority and the global Islamic movement more generally. The widespread insistence that parents lack the knowledge that their children have acquired is striking in its open defiance of Javanese conventional wisdom regarding the proper hierarchical nature of the relationship between parents and children (see Siegel 1986); it is actually a reversal of that hierarchy. Moral authority is seen as coming not, as Javanese convention would have it, from parents and their forebears but rather from sources that are personally, culturally, and geographically remote. Children’s obedience to the particularistic authority of the family is thus replaced by obedience to more abstract forms of authority: Islamic leaders from inside and outside Indonesia; religious books and tracts; and the global community of Muslims. The ultimate moral authority, of course, lies with God and the Qur’an.

The sense of being supported by a higher moral authority allows children to defy parents who forbid them to veil or to otherwise participate in Islamic activities. It also permits them to complain of their parents’ ignorance or neglect of religious duty, and even to urge their parents to become more observant, without a feeling of shame at violating cultural precepts. In the moral economy of the Islamic movement the fear of sin and its consequences outweighs the fear of cultural shame. This distinguishes the younger generation of devout Muslims from many of their less religious or more traditionalist parents, creating a palpable generation gap between them.

Awareness (*kesadaran*) is a central motif in the narratives of veiled women and of the Islamic movement more broadly. This theme was invoked by Javanese women to speak about their parents’ lack of understanding of the commandments of Islam as well as to discuss their own

life histories. They spoke of their own ignorance of “true” religious doctrine before their exposure to the Islamic movement through prayer meetings and sermons or through participation in the “basic training” programs of Islamic student organizations. For some this awareness had come slowly through repeated contact with Islamic activists, attending religious discussions and sermons, reading books, or listening to family members or friends who sought to convince them of the need to wear jilbab and to lead a more devout life. Others had arrived at a state of “awareness” more quickly. In either case many seemed to believe that even though the true doctrine of the faith had always been contained in the Qur’an, the greater understanding of the present was what had brought that doctrine to light in Indonesia.<sup>30</sup>

For women who had taken up jilbab, the sense of newfound awareness that the Islamic movement had brought them was both an enlightening discovery and a heavy responsibility, for with it came the emotional burden of constantly worrying about whether or not they were sinning. Because they felt that complete innocence of what constitutes sinful behavior nullified (or at least softened) the penalties for sinning, it was precisely the new awareness of Islam’s “rules” that seemed to put the younger generation at a greater risk of divine retribution than their parents had faced. Awareness is always accompanied by a sense of obligation: when one knows that one is breaking a rule, one must rectify one’s behavior or face the consequences. Awareness is only valuable, they believed, when it leads to an adjustment of belief and action.

“Awareness,” then, does not just imply the attainment of knowledge. It suggests a new way of being in the world and a new subjectivity—one in which the individual person believes that she is ultimately responsible for her own actions. Through the teachings of the Islamic movement the woman who has become newly aware of her responsibilities as a Muslim learns that she alone is fully accountable in this world and in the afterlife for all that she has done and thereby recognizes the necessity of choosing her own path in life. She circumvents the authority of traditional social hierarchies through her deference to a new locus of authority. She believes that she is directly answerable to God; this enables her to see herself as separate from her parents and others upon whom a young woman would ordinarily be expected to depend for moral and behavioral guidance. Although veiling tends to be linked in popular Western views with the heavy dependence of females on their parents or husbands, the opinions that I heard expressed by Islamic activists in Java belied that assumption. As one woman who had taken up jilbab over her irreligious husband’s protests told me defiantly, he might be going to hell, but *she* was not going to be dragged down with him. When I asked another who was not yet married whether she thought she would stop veiling if her husband objected to it, she replied, “It would be better to get a divorce than to take off my jilbab.”

This awareness of individual responsibility to God does not lead to the bourgeois “individualism” of Western modernity (see Weber 1946: esp. 320–321, and 1958), but to a conformity with God’s law as it is established in the Qur’an. This conformity is understood as a *choice* that an individual makes of her own will but in keeping with the dictates of a higher authority and as part of a larger community of Muslims. Most women agreed that the decision to wear Islamic clothing must be voluntary in order to be meaningful: it must stem from a woman’s own awareness of what is right and her own willingness to transform her behavior. This gives the act of veiling a weight that it would not have if a woman felt coerced to dress in this manner; it is wrong, the women maintained, for anyone to force another to veil. Nevertheless it was apparent from some women’s narratives that their decision to wear Islamic clothing had come in the wake of strong pressure to do so from friends or siblings. This raises questions about the limits of personal agency in the exercising of “choice.”

### **rebirthing the self**

For many of the young women who related their experiences, the act of first donning jilbab had been transitional, signifying the moment when their inner awareness and altered subjectivity

tivity were reflected outwardly in their clothing. It seemed to mark both a new start and a point of no return, for once they had begun to wear jilbab for more than the occasional prayer meeting they knew that they were committed to it and that they would risk severe criticism and feelings of personal failure as well as of sin for renegeing on their commitment: "The first time I wore jilbab, I realized, 'Hey, if I don't wear this tomorrow that means I'm not being consistent.' So I decided I would always wear it." With the clothing also came the duty, they felt, to ensure that their behavior matched it; this led to a greater self-consciousness and self-regulation than when they had been in their unveiled state. One had to be mentally and religiously prepared for this commitment, they emphasized; this was confirmed by unveiled women, who said that they would like to wear jilbab but "weren't ready yet."

The events that had led up to each woman's decision to wear Islamic clothing varied markedly from individual to individual. Each of the women, however, indicated that changing her clothing in this way had changed her feelings about herself and her actions. For several women the decision to take up jilbab had been precipitated by a period of profound anxiety; that anxiety had then given way to a feeling of relative calm and a sense of renewal after they had begun to wear jilbab. The immediate cause of the anxiety for three of the women had been an overwhelming fear of dying and, in particular, of what death might mean for them if they had failed to fulfill the requirements of Islam. The new awareness of sin they had acquired had led to a deep distress about how they might suffer in the afterlife as a consequence of their own sinning. They had worried that their practice of Islam did not adequately match their awareness of what the religion demanded of them. They experienced deep confusion, self-doubt, and a sense of being out of control. Donning jilbab and behaving in ways that they believed conformed to the rules of Islam had alleviated their anxieties about death and given them a new feeling of control over their futures in this life and the next. Bringing their practice into line with their awareness of Islamic doctrine gave them a sense of new life: it was a conscious remaking of self through Islamic devotion and discipline.

The experience of psychological and spiritual rebirth, whether preceded or not by a wrenching emotional crisis, is seen by members of the Islamic movement as the event that should properly follow the experience of becoming aware. (Admittedly, not all women experience as dramatic a transformation as the three women mentioned above.) The aim of awareness is to foster personal and social change, with personal reconstruction as the first step toward the construction of a new society. In the mass-market Indonesian book *Muslim Women toward the Year 2000*, the author draws specifically on the metaphor of rebirth to call for women to reexamine their identities and to strive toward an Islamic ideal:

The most important and most relevant question for a woman who is aware in this day and age is "who am I?" With that question, she tries to understand with full awareness [*ia berusaha memahami dengan penuh kesadaran*] that she cannot remain the way she is now. . . . She wants to be self-determining. She consciously adorns her identity with awareness and freedom. . . . She wants to develop herself. She always aims to be reborn. In that rebirth, she wants to be her own midwife [*Dalam kelahiran kembali itu, ia ingin menjadi bidan bagi dirinya sendiri*]. She does not want to let Islam release its reins on her. [Ibnu 1987:116]

An article in the tabloid *Indonesian Woman (Wanita Indonesia)* (1993) describes another woman's experience of rebirth through accepting Islam. The woman was a movie actress in her twenties who had not been a Muslim before her "rebirth" experience (she had, moreover, previously appeared almost naked in a cinematic sex scene, the article points out). Her self-renewal came not through adopting jilbab (although a cover photograph shows her with a scarf draped over her head in Islamic style) but through becoming aware (*insyaf*) of her sins and vowing to put a stop to them while at the same time embracing Islam. The article, which features a photograph of the actress with the large caption "After Wallowing in the Mud of [religious] Ignorance" (*Setelah Berkubang di Lumpur Kejahilan*) stamped across it, explains that, while the

actress was giving birth to her first child in 1991, she had been overcome with an extraordinary feeling of anxiety:

"I was terrified. I was really afraid that I was going to die. Because if I were to die, what would be the price for all of my sins?" Yurike asked herself. Images of her past sins appeared before her, such as getting drunk, wandering about at night, enjoying the hubbub of discotheques, and so on. It was as if Yurike heard the "whisper of heaven" at that moment.

Safe from death when she gave birth, Yurike felt that she too had been reborn. It seemed as if there was a breath of fresh air in her spiritual life, as pure as her baby's nature. [*Wanita Indonesia* 1993]

Stories of psychological and spiritual rebirth, then, while reflecting uniquely individual personalities and experiences, also follow certain formulaic prescriptions for a true process of "conversion." Lack of faith (which may be linked metaphorically or experientially to fear of death and punishment in the afterlife) gives way to a complete rebirth experience (awareness leading to faith), and the newly reborn woman ideally becomes a fulfilled member of the Islamic community.<sup>31</sup>

The tales of rebirth underscore a larger theme that runs throughout narratives of conversion to the Islamic movement and to veiling: that of self-reconstruction through self-discipline. It is based on the belief that individuals' lives are flawed and in need of correction. Reconstruction is, to put it succinctly, awareness put into practice: learning that one is imperfect, one remakes oneself in a more perfect image. People "learn" that they have been leading incorrect lives by attending Islamic sermons and the "basic training" of student groups as well as by reading the increasingly popular mass-market publications on Islam. They also discover their shortcomings through the advice and sharp criticism of siblings and peers. Internalizing the notion that they are not acting in accordance with the standards set by Islam, they vow to improve themselves by controlling their own behavior. Some do so initially out of uneasiness or fear; others are motivated by more positive considerations, believing that by learning how to be good Muslims they will improve the quality of their own lives as well as the quality of their society.

The theme of self-reconstruction echoes at the level of the individual person the concept of social reconstruction that underlies the Islamic movement in Indonesia. The movement, as I have maintained, aims to distance itself from the autochthonous, colonial, and postcolonial past in order to provide the foundations for a new Muslim society. That new society starts with the creation of "aware" Muslim selves. Veiled women's narratives of self-reconstruction follow a similar trajectory as they focus on the faults of their own individual pasts (and frequently those of their parents), their efforts to remake themselves in the present, and their hopefulness for the future. Making a firm commitment to Islamic discipline enables a woman to break symbolically with her own personal history and past identity: it gives her the opportunity to create herself anew. The break is particularly acute if she adopts jilbab, the external means by which she internalizes Islamic discipline and reveals her Muslim identity to others. By wearing jilbab, a young woman declares a certain self-mastery, even if she is, in the end, submitting herself to the greater authority of God and Islam. Her refusal to give in to pressure from parents or others who try to prevent her from wearing jilbab demonstrates her belief that she alone is responsible for her moral actions and their consequences. Endowed with awareness, she relinquishes some of her dependence upon others for the right and responsibility to determine her own life course based on her new knowledge of Islam.

Naniek, a 27-year-old woman who was married, pregnant with her first child, and trying to complete her bachelor's thesis in anthropology when I met her, related the events that had led to her adopting jilbab. At first, she said, she was "anti-jilbab," because her brother and his friends from an Islamic group were always faulting her for not wearing it. She felt "pushed into a corner" and annoyed by their attitude, especially when they told her that a woman who did not veil was deliberately tempting men (cf. Mulhandy et al. 1986). Neither of her parents was a religious Muslim; her mother, a civics teacher, disapproved of her brother's constant pressuring, while her father, an unemployed devotee of Javanese mysticism, was indifferent to the whole matter.

Around the same time she received more positive encouragement from a friend who veiled. Her friend told her things about Islam and about jilbab that touched her, and gave her books about jilbab to read. She wanted to learn more about Islam and began to go to prayer meetings but did not yet want to wear Islamic clothing.

One day Naniek was suddenly overcome with the fear that she would soon die, although she was not ill. She realized that there were teachings of Islam that she had not yet observed, including the requirement to wear jilbab. This worried her because Islam teaches that if you know what you are supposed to do but fail to do it, you are a hypocrite and must suffer the consequences. She woke up in the middle of the night in terror, thinking "What can I do? I don't have any [Islamic] clothes." She confided her change of heart to her brother, who immediately treated her differently, giving her cloth to make the garments she needed as well as moral support. A few days later (she recalled the exact date), she began to wear jilbab. As soon as she accepted it, wearing Islamic clothing became easy for her, and "the clothes just came by themselves" even though she had little money. Her fears of death subsided.

"When I started wearing jilbab I was rather extreme about it [*saya justru jadi ékstrim*]<sup>1</sup>—I searched for the style that would be the most correct. I wore a big headcloth, socks, and wouldn't wear pants. But then I got tired of wearing that style—it was too confining." Naniek's mother was unhappy with her decision to veil; she did not forbid it, but thought it strange, advising her, "You don't need to parade it [Islam] around—don't let religion get in the way of your relationships with people." She also told her, "You're a woman—you should show yourself off a little." ("Maybe she was afraid I wouldn't sell," Naniek mused.) Naniek remained firm in her decision, even though some of her friends were put off by her clothing. Many people were still suspicious of her now, especially when she attended Javanese rituals in jilbab. She had even insisted on veiling at her own wedding, against her parents' wishes.

Naniek had been wearing jilbab continuously for almost seven years. I asked her if she had ever considered giving it up. Occasionally on very hot days, she admitted, she thought about it—"my faith [*iman*] goes up and down"—but she wanted to keep on veiling. She did worry, however, that wearing jilbab would interfere with her research among village women, some of whom might be intimidated by a style of dress that marked her as an educated, middle-class urbanite and strict Muslim. "If I'm just not able to wear it any more, well, so be it" (*Kalau tidak sanggup pakai lagi, ya sudah*), she said.

Naniek declared that she liked wearing jilbab because it was her own choice to do so (*pilihan sendiri*): she had "chosen something that's definite, a path that's certain [*sudah memilih suatu hal yang pasti; sudah memilih suatu jalan yang tertentu*]." The fact that Naniek's parents had neither pushed her to wear jilbab nor prohibited her from doing so, however, was occasionally difficult—sometimes, she acknowledged, she wished that they would make all of her decisions for her, so that she would not have to make so many choices herself.

This acknowledgment, I believe, reflects the ambivalence that some young Javanese women feel at the multiple and often conflicting options that modernity offers them. Whereas in past generations parents made most major decisions for their unmarried daughters, including where they would go to school and for how long, as well as when and whom they would marry, young urban women who have come of age since the 1970s have had considerably more leeway to exercise their own wills in these matters. The decline of absolute parental authority, while welcomed by young women on the whole, has left them with a greater responsibility for deciding the course of their own lives, a responsibility for which society has not entirely prepared them (cf. Ong 1990). Adopting jilbab and the behavioral codes that accompany it is one way for a woman to feel that she is at least partly in control of her life and of the choices that may otherwise threaten to overwhelm her. For Naniek, taking up jilbab and a devout lifestyle gave her a new sense of mastery over herself and her future. The fact that she had done so under pressure from her brother and out of fear for her immortal soul did not prevent her

from seeing this as an act of personal choice. If she had a daughter, she said, she would encourage but not force her to wear Islamic clothing; she felt that it was meaningful only if it had been one's own choice to do so.

### **the discipline of veiling**

For some women, veiling is a gesture of autonomy, a claiming of the right—and an acknowledgment of the obligation—to regulate their own behavior rather than to be regulated by others, and to determine their own fate in this life and the next. Yet greater autonomy does not necessarily mean greater freedom: veiled women often become more constrained in their actions than they would otherwise have been. Jilbab promotes rigorous self-discipline and self-consciousness; it serves as a perpetual, bodily reminder to the wearer of her commitment to be a dutiful Muslim. A woman realizes, moreover, that by wearing jilbab she is placing herself under the constant scrutiny of others. She knows that if she is caught in any kind of behavioral misstep she is likely to be doubly censured—first, by other religious Muslims who insist on a lifestyle that conforms completely to their understanding of Islamic doctrine; and, second, by people who are not particularly devout but who are eager to point to the hypocrisy of those who are. The pressure to be chaste and beyond reproach in every aspect of their behavior that veiled women place on themselves, and that their peers also place on them, is often far more severe than what they might expect from parents or other figures of authority. Even minor transgressions are noticed and criticized. A woman who had covered her head with only a small scarf, for instance, was admonished by a veiled friend, “Oh, your neck’s showing. Sexy, isn’t it?” This “sank in,” she said, and she switched to a larger headcloth that completely covered her hair and neck. Stories like these are very common, showing how relentless the pressure that veiled women place on one another can be.

Consequently, women who wear Islamic clothing tend to be very careful of their behavior, along with their dress. Some feel that they must refrain from going to movies, gossiping, or engaging in any other frivolous activities (cf. Zainah 1987); veiled women are especially cautious about their interactions with men lest they be accused of flirtatiousness or, worse, sexual impropriety. Acts that they engaged in comfortably before they wore jilbab—riding on the back of a male friend’s motorcycle or shaking a man’s hand in greeting—often become taboo to them. Several women mentioned that when they first began to veil they constantly fretted about whether they were behaving consistently with their new style of dress. One student said, “When I started wearing jilbab my behavior changed. I kept wondering, ‘Is this a sin or not? Is this wrong or not?’ I always felt afraid.” Another recalled that she had even worried about whether she was properly performing simple acts like sweeping; every act seemed fraught with the potential for making her a sinner. The women relaxed a little after they became accustomed to their new clothing and the altered identity that it brought them, but they remained vigilant and circumspect in their behavior.

The discipline that a woman imposes upon herself by wearing jilbab is bound to no particular institution or figure of authority with the sole exception of an omniscient and transcendent God. Sandra Bartky draws on Foucault to examine the operation of such diffuse forms of discipline in the engendering of femininity in Western society; some of her observations are also suggestive for understanding the discipline of jilbab: “The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular” (1990:74). Although it is not “femininity” as such that is inscribed on the veiled woman’s body, and certainly not a sexualized femininity of the kind that Bartky has in mind, it is the “panoptical” nature of the veil’s discipline, its at once omnipresent and diffuse character (Bartky 1990; Foucault 1979), that makes it so powerful. Even when no one is really watching her, the veiled woman feels that she is under surveillance—from neighbors and friends, from God, and from her own conscience, which may be the harshest disciplinarian of all. The external

embodiment of discipline through this form of dress helps to ensure the internalization of disciplinary practices.

Barky suggests that women willingly undertake the disciplinary practices of femininity (such as perpetual dieting, wearing make-up, and moving in “feminine” ways) because it provides them with “a sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity” (1990:77). I propose that wearing jilbab gives Javanese women a similar sense of self-mastery and identity in a time of great social flux; this was reflected in the confidence and determination that I saw in many veiled women. By mastering their own bodies through adopting Islamic discipline they seemed to acquire a relatively secure sense of their place in the modern world as Muslims and as women. The strong encouragement that they received from their devout Muslim peers contributed to their feeling of having mastered something that was important to them as individuals and as members of the Muslim community.

But is veiling simply “a certain technology of power over the body” (Foucault 1979:29) that disciplines young women’s bodies and spirits to suit the demands of modern power? While such a conclusion might be tempting, it is not sufficient to explain why some women choose to veil. Although veiling does take place within a web of power relations, and although women in particular, as Ong (1987, 1990) and Abu-Lughod (1990) have shown, may be caught in the struggle between competing sources of power, to reduce veiling to an effect of totalizing forms of power on individuals elides both individual agency and the symbolic role of veiling in processes of self- and social production. In a provocative critique of Foucault’s explorations of power as an explanatory principle in social analysis, Sangren (1995) concludes that the value of Foucault’s model is undercut by his dissociation of power from intention. To treat individuals primarily as the vehicles or products of power, but not as its agents, misrecognizes the fact that individuals, too, exercise power in producing themselves as subjects as well as in producing social collectivities, institutions, representations, and ideologies. Sangren believes that alienation is inherent to this process, however, so that “realities represented or assumed differ from the realities produced” (1995:22).<sup>32</sup>

Sangren’s discussion is useful for gaining insight into the significance of veiling in Java. Although the Javanese women with whom I spoke saw veiling as an act of religious obedience and devotion (*ibadah*), their personal narratives revealed that adopting the discipline of jilbab was also a key moment in producing themselves as modern Muslim women *and* in producing a certain historical consciousness based in Islamist as well as modernist ideologies. As an external signifier of internal experience, donning jilbab was an act by which these women created for themselves a clearer sense of personal identity and self-mastery. In trying to make sense of the experiences that had led to their taking up the veil they conceptualized those experiences as a progression from lack of awareness to a state of being aware; on the basis of that awareness, they were then able to “reinvent” themselves through adopting a new Islamic discipline. Women who veil believe that it helps them to establish control over their lives; by failing to consider the element of individual agency one misses this self-productive aspect of veiling. In producing themselves through veiling, however, women simultaneously produce and reproduce certain ideologies and configurations of power that may ultimately have effects that they have not intended or imagined. What figured as personal “choice” in veiled women’s narratives did not mask the extent to which some of those choices had been made out of anxiety or pressure from others, or constraints put on their behavior that were not, for example, placed on their male counterparts in the Islamic movement.

The complex relationship of veiling to certain forms of power can also be seen in the ways that it both incorporates and resists state ideologies. Since its inception amid the mass violence and political chaos of 1965–66, the New Order regime has stressed stability and order as the foremost requirements for a secure state and prosperous society. “Development,” the regime’s primary objective, can only take place, the regime insists, if Indonesia’s citizens are willing to

make sacrifices and exercise self-discipline for the common good. The state's messages of self-discipline and self-sacrifice are broadcast even more loudly to women than to men; Indonesian females are constantly bombarded with a model of womanhood that stresses self-sacrifice and the suppression of personal desire for the sake of the family and the nation. I believe that notions of self-discipline and self-control associated with veiling both draw upon and reinforce these state-generated ideologies. While women may consciously or unconsciously draw on state ideologies of self-discipline in deciding to veil or in asserting the value of Islamic discipline, however, they may also turn those ideologies on their head, one might say, by using jilbab to resist the power of the state. For example, women's bodies become the symbolic locus of conflicts between Islamists and the state, conflicts that threaten to disrupt the uneasy mutual accommodation of the state and the Islamic movement, when women wear jilbab in defiance of state edicts or are forced to remove their headcloths in order to gain the ordinary privileges of citizenship such as a driver's license or a high school diploma. In short, if one wishes to look at veiling as an inscription of power relations on women's bodies, as many people have, then one must also recognize the potential of veiling for destabilizing or refiguring those relations of power.

Javanese women's narratives of conversion to veiling, and to the Islamic movement more generally, reveal how deeply their personal and social identities can be shaped by this experience. At the same time, the success of the movement as a whole, which aims at a more encompassing level of social transformation, is predicated upon precisely this form of individual conversion on a mass scale. An act through which individual subjects are produced, veiling also contributes to the social production of a community of Muslims who envision themselves at a transitional point in history—at the moment when a flawed past gives way to a better future based on the teachings of Islam. The goal of constructing a new society that takes Islam as its guide can only be achieved, members of this community assert, through the actions of individuals. In the act of veiling, personal and collective politics are merged: one remakes one's own mind, body, and behavior as a first step in remaking society.

## conclusion

The veil serves as a highly visible symbol of Muslim identity around the world. One of my primary concerns in this article, however, has been to show that the significance of veiling is ultimately drawn from the local historical and cultural contexts in which it is practiced—a claim that nevertheless does not ignore the interplay of local and global contexts through which local understandings of Islam are produced (see Bowen 1993). As a symbol of the modern Islamic movement, the veil represents for some Javanese Muslims both self-reconstruction and the reconstruction of society through individual and collective self-discipline. The notion of reconstruction here does not mean reviving the indigenous past; it means tearing down and building something new, distancing oneself from local history in order to create a more perfect future for oneself and other members of society. The goal is to effect religious and social change through the individual and collective actions of members of the Islamic community. In covering the sins of the past, so to speak, veiling here signifies a new historical consciousness and a new way of life, weighed down neither by Javanese tradition nor by centuries of colonial rule, defined neither by Western capitalism and consumerism nor by the dictates of the Indonesian political economy. It stands for a new morality and a new discipline, whether personal, social, or political—in short, a new, Islamic modernity.

I have asserted that veiling should be seen as an active process of both self- and social production. During a period of rapid social change filled with ambiguous messages about how a young woman should behave, the discipline of veiling provides those women who choose to adopt it with a sense of identity, self-mastery, and purpose. In articulating their own experiences

of conversion to veiling, young Javanese women draw upon the idioms of awareness and transformation commonly invoked in Islamist discourse; the individual woman's subjective transformation through the discipline of veiling is thus imagined as a step toward the transformation of society at large. Against those who assume veiling to be a sign of women's lack of autonomy in patriarchal societies, I have shown that Javanese women who veil emphasize their own individual responsibility for their actions, frequently undertaking this practice in defiance of the wishes of parents, husbands, and other figures of authority. In doing so they are claiming the right to act as autonomous persons in a society that has historically denied young, unmarried women such rights. I would caution, however, that to recognize women's agency is neither to deny the social and political constraints and pressures that may limit or guide their choices, nor is it to overlook the fact that the choices they make may have unintended personal and social effects.

Although veiling is a marginal practice that continues to be regarded with suspicion in Javanese society, even among some devout Muslims, the resistance that veiled women encounter often seems to strengthen rather than weaken their resolve and their sense of identity as Muslim women. Seeing themselves as pioneers in the struggle toward a revitalized society, they refashion themselves to fit their image of modern Islamic womanhood.

## notes

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1. When I use the term *veiling*, I am referring to the practice in which a woman covers her head (usually also covering her hair and neck—although rarely her face) and all of her body except her hands. My use of the term *veil* is thus a convenient shorthand for “women’s Islamic clothing.” The garments that constitute such clothing vary considerably, ranging from a simple headscarf worn with pants and a long-sleeved blouse, to a full cloak completely covering every part of a woman’s head, face, and body. Most commonly, modern Islamic clothing in Java consists, first, of a large headcloth fastened below the chin so that it frames the face but completely hides the hair, ears, and neck; this is usually worn together with a long, full dress or a loose tunic and pants, all with long sleeves and high necklines. A small number of women in Java cover their faces as well but many people who observe Islamic dress codes consider this unnecessary. The wide variety of Islamic styles worn by Javanese women allows them to express both personal taste and ideological bent through their dress; it has also led to a burgeoning fashion industry in Islamic clothing. Women of a more conservative inclination may wear a large headcloth and choose somber, unadorned robes of grey, beige, or black; other women may wear smaller headcloths and livelier colors and designs—a bright pink headcloth with a matching pink striped tunic over blue jeans, for instance. Islamic activists can glean a good deal of information about a woman’s beliefs, sometimes even to the point of knowing with reasonable certainty to which activist group she belongs, from her clothing.

2. An English traveler and resident of Java observed in 1934 that “Javanese women go bareheaded, with their dark hair, always immaculately neat, brushed smoothly back and gathered into a big knot at the nape of the neck” (Ponder 1988[1934]:22). Styles and intensities of Islamic practice, however, vary greatly across Indonesia. In some areas known for their devotion to Islam, covering the head has been more common for women and may have a longer history. Even in Java there are significant regional differences with regard to Islamic practice. For this reason, my remarks in this article are primarily intended to represent practices in the part of central Java where I have conducted research, especially the cities of Yogyakarta and Solo (Surakarta).

3. This was the standard ensemble worn by older Javanese women. In recent decades women in Java have turned increasingly to Western-style dress in place of the sarong and kebaya. The choice of which style to wear is a personal one, although Javanese dress is almost never worn by women who work in offices, schools, universities, or in other institutions in the modern state and private sectors, except on ceremonial occasions. In the cities, women who wear Javanese dress on a daily basis tend to be in their fifties and older. It is still commonly worn, however, by both younger and older village women.

4. Islamic dress usually covers everything designated as *aurat* (‘*awra*) or those parts of the body that must be covered during the daily prayers. For women, this includes everything but the face and the palms of the hands. For men it is defined as the portion of the body between the navel and the knees (Shodiq and

Shalahuddin 1983:51). There is a debate, however, as to what constitutes *aurat* with regard to everyday clothing; this is not spelled out clearly in the Qur'an. The term *aurat* (or *ṣawra*) has many meanings, which include, according to Leila Ahmed, "blind in one eye, blemished, defective; the genital area; generally parts of the body that are shameful and must be concealed; women's bodies; women's voices; and women" (1992:116). For day-to-day dress most Indonesian women who wear Islamic clothing generally follow the rules of dress for prayer but do not bother to cover any part of their hands, and only some worry about covering their feet completely. Women who interpret these rules strictly, however, wear socks, closed shoes, and, occasionally, even gloves.

5. It is not clear to me why in Indonesia the word *jilbab*, which is found in the Qur'an, is preferred to the Arabic *hijab* (or *higab*), which is commonly used in the Middle East as well as in Malaysia to refer to Islamic-style clothing (see Ong 1990; Zainah 1987). Although the term *jilbab*, as it is used in Indonesia, is not precise—some people use it to refer only to the head covering itself (see, e.g., Echols and Shadily 1989:244), while others use it to designate the whole ensemble—it is generally understood as describing the newer style of Islamic clothing imported from the Middle East and worn mostly by younger women as opposed to the more traditional sarong, kebaya, and loose headscarf or woven cap worn by older Indonesian women. Here I shall use the term interchangeably with "women's Islamic clothing." For a comprehensive listing of the various meanings of *jilbab*, see Rachmat et al. 1993:31–34.

6. In the central part of Java, an island of well over 100 million people, the city of Yogyakarta, which has many universities and academies, has a large concentration of women who wear Islamic dress. In the western part of the island, the city of Bandung, and in particular the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), also has a large number of Islamic activists and women who wear Islamic clothing. Veiling is also commonly seen in Jakarta at the University of Indonesia and elsewhere and in many other parts of Indonesia. Veiling is still considered voluntary in Islamic student organizations in Yogyakarta (see Billah 1991:304–305), although peer pressure to wear it can be strong in some circles. There has not been a significant movement for Islamist men to wear Middle Eastern-style robes in Java.

7. Aihwa Ong notes a similar process of cultural borrowing that has accompanied the Islamist (*dakwa*) movement in Malaysia: "Almost overnight, large numbers of university students, young workers, and even professionals began to enact—in prayer, diet, clothing, and social life—religious practices borrowed from Islamic history, Middle Eastern societies, and South Asian cults" (1990:267).

8. In this sense the significance of the veiling movement in Java seems to differ somewhat from that of its Middle Eastern counterparts. Several authors who have written about veiling in Egypt point out quite convincingly that because the modern, urban style of veiling is distinctly different from older, traditional styles, and is worn by women from different social classes, it should be considered a "new veiling" rather than a "re-veiling" (e.g., Ahmed 1992; El Guindi 1981; MacLeod 1991). Yet even as a modern phenomenon it is still recognizable as something with local roots: the new veiling has been described as "a revival of tradition, played out in the specific context of Islamic and Middle Eastern symbols and signs" (MacLeod 1991:12); "the active appropriation of a cultural symbol for new purposes" (1991:14); and as "a symbol of cultural authenticity" (Badran 1994:206). The sense of "tradition" or local authenticity that is suggested here, even when it is resignified with modern meanings, sets it apart from the veiling movement in Java.

9. Several scholars have analyzed the significance of the recent veiling movement in Middle Eastern countries (e.g., Ahmed 1992; El Guindi 1981; Fernea and Gaunt 1982; Hoodfar 1991; MacLeod 1991, 1992; Moghadam 1993; Mule and Barthel 1992; Najmabadi 1991; Tohidi 1991; Zuhur 1992). While these studies raise very useful points for comparison with the Indonesian situation, one must take historical, political, and cultural differences into consideration in interpreting the meaning of the movement in each country.

10. Cf. Nagata 1984, Ong 1990, and Wazir 1992 on Malay society, which shares certain common cultural and historical features with Java and other parts of Indonesia. For Java, however, there are some partial exceptions to this generalization. In some of the more orthodox Islamic areas (such as the north coastal town of Kudus) the separation of male and female spaces seems to be more marked and there is a closer association of women with the home and of men with the public domain. This region was also known in the past for its tradition of secluding young, unmarried women (*pingitan*) (Weix 1990:47), especially those of the elite classes (see also Coté 1992).

11. Cf. Zainah 1987 on Malaysia; see also Hefner 1993a for similar observations on conversion to Christianity in Java.

12. By "Javanist" Islam (*Islam Jawa*) I mean localized forms of Islam that liberally mix Javanist ritual practices and beliefs (which draw on Java's many religious and philosophical influences, such as animism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, and theosophy, with those that are more clearly "Islamic." This is in effect what Clifford Geertz (1960) calls the "*abangan* variant" of Javanese Islam. Geertz contrasts this type of Islam with what he calls the "*santri* variant," the latter characterized by the strong concern of its adherents with Islamic doctrine and by "a marked intolerance for Javanese beliefs and practices they take to be heterodox" (Geertz 1960:127). As the city where the modernist Muslim organization Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912, Yogyakarta does have a local history of Islamic reformism and, like Solo, contains pockets of Islamic orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the region of central Java that includes both Solo and Yogyakarta is often contrasted with more heavily "Islamized" parts of Java such as the north coast of the island.

13. Of the women who had already completed their studies, one was a lecturer at a religious institute and a part-time actress, another the owner of a small business, and a third a housewife; another was living with her parents and seeking employment. Another woman had returned to the university for an advanced

degree after working as a civil servant. The youngest was a high-school student of 16; the two oldest were in their mid-thirties. Four were married; two had children, and another was pregnant with her first child. Most of the women had been raised in Javanese towns or cities.

14. I should mention that some of the women also used this word in its Indonesian form, *aktivis*, to refer to themselves and other members of the movement. Not all women who wear jilbab can truly be called activists, but, particularly among the ranks of university students, there is a tendency for these women to participate in a wide range of Islamic activities, especially those run by various Muslim youth organizations.

15. Although this might seem obvious, it contrasts with what MacLeod found among lower middle-class Egyptian women, who, she notes, rarely gave religious reasons for wearing hijab or attributed their desire to wear it to their increased religious devotion (MacLeod 1992:549).

16. The state has urged and even legally required all Indonesians to embrace a religion under the explicit assumption that this is an effective measure to prevent the revival of communism (which was brutally eradicated in the early years of the regime) and to counter other perceived threats to order and stability among the population. Belief in God is one of the basic pillars of Pancasila, the state ideology. The government's stress on religious belief is inculcated through the educational system and the mass media; the state also sponsors neighborhood prayer meetings and mosques and coordinates the pilgrimage to Mecca for thousands of Indonesians each year.

17. In 1985 new legislation required all sociopolitical and religious organizations in Indonesia to acknowledge the official state ideology, Pancasila, as their sole ideological basis (*azas tunggal*), on pain of losing their legal right to exist. This was a bitter pill for Islamic and other religious groups to swallow. Insisting on the supremacy of the state ideology over other credos, including those of Islam and other religions, ensured that no religious organization or political party could legally deny or challenge the supremacy of the state (see Zifirdaus 1990). It also brought about violent protests and acrimonious divisions among Muslim leaders over the issue of whether to accept the government's decree (Hefner 1993b; Zifirdaus 1990).

18. Muslim urbanites, Hefner proposes, "are inclined to respond to the anomie of urban life with precise ethical prescriptions rather than diffuse existential anxiety. Indeed, for them, Islam seems uniquely prepared to speak to the challenges of urban existence" (1993b:14).

19. Islamic practice is clearly on the rise among all classes in Indonesia today, from the urban and rural poor to the elite class of businessmen and bureaucrats. The movement has sympathizers at all ranks of government, including cabinet ministers and others in positions of real power (see Hefner 1993b). Indeed, if the Islamic movement appealed exclusively to the middle classes, it would not have had such a noticeable impact on Indonesian society, nor would it have spurred so great a reaction from the state. Among those who can truly be classified as activists, however, the lower-middle and middle classes seem to be particularly well represented. Women who wear jilbab, at least in Java, also appear to come primarily from these groups.

20. Indeed, several authors have noted that the politics of the movement have more of a populist than a fundamentalist bent; there appears to be more concern among activists with encouraging broad democratization and social justice in Indonesian society than with Islamicizing the state and its laws (Abdurachman 1990; Hefner 1993b; von der Mehden 1993).

21. For the most part, the state treads carefully in dealing with the movement, which is, of course, partly the regime's own creation through its policies of cultivating religion over the past three decades. The government monitors the movement very closely and acts quickly to quash any open elements of radical (especially antistate) activity that it detects (see, e.g., Zifirdaus 1990:465–466). Nevertheless, the concessions that the state has made to Islamic interests, especially since the late 1980s, indicate that the movement has acquired considerable power of its own (Hefner 1993b); as one author puts it, "the state does not merely 'take' but also 'gives' to the Islamic groups" (Bambang 1990:493–494).

22. Some activists wish to see social and religious rather than political change; they object more to the cultural and economic hegemony of capitalist development and to the moral and spiritual decadence that they associate with it than to the current political system in Indonesia. I wish to emphasize that the Islamic movement in Indonesia is heterogeneous; for this reason it is difficult to summarize its goals in any but the broadest terms. In their introduction to the book *Gerakan Islam Kontemporer di Indonesia* (The Contemporary Islamic Movement in Indonesia), Imam Tholikhah and Abdul Aziz note this heterogeneity; the book also gives individual profiles of several of the better-known submovements, including several in Yogyakarta (Abdul et al. 1991).

23. The Iranian revolution of 1979, for example, had a significant impact on the consciousness of Muslims in Indonesia and in other parts of Southeast Asia, as a symbol of the victory of Islam over Western hegemony (von der Mehden 1993:77). Indonesian students have also been exposed to the global Islamic resurgence through contact with other Muslims on university campuses from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur, and from Canberra to Chicago (see, e.g., Zainah 1987:18–19, on contacts between Indonesian and Malaysian Islamic youth organizations in the early 1970s) and, for a greater number, through reading the works of contemporary Middle Eastern writers, which have become increasingly available to Indonesians in translation since the late 1970s (von der Mehden 1993:16, 87).

24. For discussion of the images of women conveyed in the modern Indonesian mass media, see Heider 1991; Saraswati 1993; Sen 1993.

25. I found a number of veiled women to be wary of such restrictive interpretations of gender roles and reluctant to accept them. Although some women said that they would stay at home if their husbands felt strongly about it, it was apparent that they would not accept such a decision easily. A 25-year-old geography student and HMI activist told me, for example,

I really want to work, I don't want to be just a housewife. I wouldn't accept it if my husband told me that I had to be a housewife just because that's a woman's duty. If there were a good enough reason, I might stay at home. But I really don't want to.

Like most young women in Java, those who were not yet married hoped ultimately to find husbands and to raise families, but they did not seek their personal fulfillment solely in marriage and motherhood. For many, the overriding concerns, on the contrary, addressed the use of their secular and religious education to improve themselves and society and the reconciliation of potential conflicts between their religious beliefs and career goals—an issue that is especially salient for women who wear jilbab, given some of the difficulties that they encounter in the job market. Their professional aspirations did not differ in any obvious way from those of other educated Javanese women I have met.

Lucy Whalley's conclusions about Islamist women among the Minangkabau of West Sumatra are similar to mine for Java. She "did not find evidence for a transformation to patriarchal ideology in Minangkabau" (1993:298), nor did she find most women restricting themselves to the roles of wife and mother. Our observations for Indonesia differ to some extent, however, from those reported by Ong (1990) in her insightful article on the Islamist movement in Malaysia. Ong suggests that female participants in the Malaysian dakwa movement are reconciling themselves to a retreat from the modern economy just as they have been given the opportunity to participate in it. In Islamist discourse, she notes, "the redirection of women's agency from labor force to moral force tapped the visceral and spiritual unease of upwardly aspiring women filled with ambivalence about careers and the solitude of modern life" (1990:271). She makes a strong case for seeing Islamist messages of domesticity for Malay women as part of a broader ideology of an emergent middle class that has its origins in state policies.

26. I recognize that there are sound historical reasons for calling the current wave of Islamic activism a revival or a resurgence (see, e.g., Chandra 1986, who argues that the second term is preferable). Over the centuries since it was introduced to the region, Islam has periodically become politicized and revitalized in Southeast Asia, as in other parts of the Islamic world; hence the current movement is not, strictly speaking, a new phenomenon. I choose not to use these terms, however, because I believe that they fail to capture the spirit of the movement as it is interpreted by activists in Java. That spirit is not one of a return to the past or to a cyclical process of revitalization, but of embarking upon a new future that breaks with the past. While the term *movement* is not entirely satisfactory, either—it may imply more unity and integration than is actually the case in Indonesia, given the diversity of Islamists' views and goals—I use this term for lack of a better one. I concur, however, with Roff (1987), who points out that what we speak of as a single Islamic movement is, at the same time, a plurality of movements.

27. Some people criticize the earlier modernist movement for having relied too heavily on Western ideas about modernization, thereby encouraging a shift from one source of corruption of the religion, indigenization, to another source, Westernization (e.g., Ibnu 1987:67). Others argue that earlier modernist Muslim leaders in Indonesia spent too much time on political maneuvering and ideological struggle without paying sufficient attention to the issues most vital to the strengthening of Indonesian Islam (see Hefner 1993b:6–7). For further discussions of the break between the older modernist program and the newer, "neo-modernist" views that have arisen in Indonesia since the 1960s and 1970s, see Barton 1991, Hefner 1993b.

28. The English terms *in* and *up-to-date* were used in the original.

29. Whalley found similar generational differences in response to Islamic dress among the Minangkabau, a Muslim ethnic group: "The wearing of new Muslim dress by young women signifies a promotion of radical Islam to members of an older generation, who perceive it as a challenge to their faith and religious traditions" (1993:254).

30. Taking an interesting angle on this, one woman announced that she had heard that Western scientists working with computers had proven beyond a doubt that the Qur'an was the word of God (*firman Allah*)—that it could not have been written by human beings. Modern technology, in this instance, enables confirmation of the truth of God's commandments even for unbelievers: the wisdom was there from the past but it took the clear lens of the modern era to reveal it.

31. Cf. Hefner (1993b), who remarks that Indonesian *dai*, popular Muslim proselytizers, "use deeply emotional accounts of their conversion experience rather than complicated exegesis of doctrine to move people to a deeper faith" (1993b:16, fn. 46).

32. Through his analysis of a Taoist ritual (*chiao*), Sangren shows that "in establishing what is conceived of as an ongoing engagement with divinity," devout Chinese "empower themselves as agents of their own production. In worship and testimony, individuals exercise real power, and this power is manifested in their conviction that such activities are effective in establishing control over their lives." He adds, however, that "the nature of the power so produced differs from that represented in the process of its production. To account for this disjunction and to show how words or discourses have power, it is necessary to incorporate into our analyses the alienating and ideological elements of representations of power" (1995:25).

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