

to the dynamic relationship between Islam and the state. To permanently suppress the idea of an Islamic state, in the 1980s the New Order government insisted that all parties and mass organisations accept the state ideology, *Pancasila*, as their own ideology. This posed a dilemma for some Islamic organisations that still hoped that Indonesia would become an Islamic state, since *Pancasila* explicitly accepts pluralism in religious matters. However, most organisations followed government policy, since it was the price of remaining legal.

- 16 Jamil et al 2001 say that previously *cadar* (face cover) were used among teenagers in Kampar and Siak.
- 17 There are various styles of veiling (including *jubah*, *jilbab*, *purdah* and *hijab*), but the most common style of veiling in Riau is the scarf pinned at the chin or drawn under the chin and pinned or tied at the back—popularly known as *jilbab*. *Jubah* or *purdah*, which hides the whole figure, is not popular among Muslim women in Riau. According to my observation during fieldwork, *jubah* is more commonly found among students in universities in Jakarta, rather than among students in universities in Riau. An informant who worked for a state university in Pekanbaru said that *jubah* is not popular because it is not suitable for Malay culture. She said it was more associated with Arabic culture. Moreover, according to her, the *jilbab* was more convenient and fashionable and matched Malay dress.
- 18 On 7 March 2005 the Municipal Government of Padang issued a decree, namely Instruksi No. 451.422/Binsos-III/2005, about compulsory veiling (*jilbab*) and Islamic dress for Muslim students (*pewajiban jilbab dan busana islami bagi siswa/siswi Islam*). This decree has raised a debate between those who agree and disagree with such a *syariah* law (<http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=823>).
- 19 The first implementation of flogging as a punishment was carried out in June 2005 in Bireun district. This was applied to a *penjudi* (gambler) (Liputan 6, 2005). The flogging punishment for gamblers is stated in Qanun (Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Regulation/Perda No. 13/2003).
- 20 One informant told me that at the practical level, however, there are cases where the *jilbab* is also requisite wear for non-Muslim women, particularly for those who work in the district office. Although I had no opportunity to visit it, she named a district where the *bupati* applied the regulation of veiling to all his staff. She shared her story of visiting that district office, where her male friend who worked there asked her to veil to respect the rules.

chapter four

Kejawen Islam as gendered praxis in Javanese village religiosity

Bianca J Smith

This chapter argues that ordinary Javanese village women contribute to the (re)production of their village religiosity as *kejawen* Islamic through the framework of ritual and the wider village religious environment. The crucial role women play in the (re)production and constitution of village religiosity in Java has escaped the focus of anthropological scholarship on Javanese religion, perhaps because it is mostly male scholars who have interpreted men as the more important agents of Javanese religion, and women merely as subordinate actors who play less significant religious roles in village society. Indeed, the social construction of men as formal, public leaders and women as carers of the informal, private sphere plays a role in shaping how we interpret gendered religious roles in Muslim Indonesia. Further, the way in which we interpret 'religion' also contributes to how we understand the role of gender in religious societies and cultures. As we shall see, Western understandings of religion as 'belief' do not tell us much about cultures of gendered religious praxis. The dialectic relationship between gender and religion is thus key to understanding women's practices and contribution to gendered religious societies.

This chapter is based on anthropological fieldwork during 2001–02 in a south Central Javanese village, which I have given the pseudonym Nurgeni. This chapter demonstrates how women are not only essential to the ongoing religious life of village society through their ritual practice and dialogue with the spirit world, but that women contribute to the (re)production and maintenance of village religion through their practise of these rituals that embody a particular village cosmology. I demonstrate how women are significant practitioners and co-creators of their particular village Islamic religiosity through gendered praxis at popular village rituals, particularly *rewang* (women's rituals) for *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals (*slametan* rituals are held for death and anniversaries of death, and *syukuran* rituals are held for other life-crises and celebratory events. I will explain and discuss these rituals in more detail later in the chapter). In doing

so, I illustrate how women participate in a symbiotic field of practice, which ensures the maintenance of the religious life of the village.

Religious fields, female specialists and cosmologies

Nurgeni is a small village located south of the city of Yogyakarta. Typical of other villages on the city outskirts, it engages a mix of what villagers describe as 'traditional' and 'modern' modes of being. Although villagers distinguish between the village as a place of 'tradition' and the city as 'modern', they perceive their village as upholding *adat* (in the form of traditional practices) amidst change and the modernisation of society. Particularly, these 'traditional' and 'modern' modes of being are mapped onto the religious identities of Nurgeni villagers, as they construct their Muslim identities through these social frames.

The majority of villagers were poor and worked in agricultural jobs, as labourers and petty traders, or in markets and factories. Many of my female informants were impoverished agricultural and market or factory workers aged between 18 and 82 years. I lived in an agricultural quarter of the village, which was dominated by a particular family whose women folk were known for their specialist knowledge and execution of local ritual (especially *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals). The materials presented in this chapter were gathered from the life stories of these kin women: Par, 82 years of age, her daughter Siti, her nieces Natha and Anisah, and their daughters and close female friends. Like many others in Nurgeni, the women described themselves as practitioners of *Islam Jawa*, which, to remain consistent with anthropological literature, I interpret as *kejawan* Islam.

Kejawan consists of cultural practices that engage the spirit world, a cosmology and sorcery that are distinctly Javanese. It also consists of a theology and philosophy, which is practised as a mysticism, or spirituality, popularly known as *kebatinan* (from the Arabic word *Batin*, 'inner world'). These practices and belief systems existed in Java before they incorporated Hinduism–Buddhism and Sufism into their spectrum, and still exist today in urban and rural environments, where they manifest as part of a local Islamic religiosity. *Kejawan* is an umbrella term to describe all things Javanese. The broader *kejawan* milieu refers to the local practices found in court, urban and village environments, commonly known as 'traditional' practices such as *slametan* and *syukuran* communal feasts; use of *dukun* (traditional healers—sorcerers, healers, mystics, spiritualists) and magic; veneration of the spirits of deceased saints, spiritual leaders, ancestors and loved ones at their graves; interaction with personal spirit guides; and worship of local spirits. *Kejawan* is 'rooted in cults of the guardian and ancestral spirits' (Stange 1979:39). The *kejawan* and

kebatinan associated with the courts emphasise high-level self-induced mystical knowledge and practice, but in the villages *kejawan* manifests as local 'tradition' and practice, and usually implicates everyone as part of *adat*, whereas those interested in pursuing a mystical life do so on a personal basis.

The women with whom I lived in Nurgeni carry out their lives in an integrated religious environment that consists of different kinds of Muslim practitioners who practise Islam in specific ways within a common social structure. The village religious environment is dominated by *kejawan* Islam. *Kejawan* Islam contrasts with, but is not separate from, normative Islamic orthodoxies, and contributes to the diversity of Islamic practice. Orthodox Muslims, whose lived experience of Islam is strongly anchored by Qur'anic teachings, form a minority in the village, and are those who engage with Islamic doctrine rather than local oral practices that most particularly interact with ancestral spirit worlds.

The ways in which these two identifiable groups of Muslims practise their religiosities form a local and popular version of village Islam in Nurgeni. I note here that the groups I identify, and which villagers also identify, are fluid and integrated. Within these identifiable groups are variations of practice, interpretation and so on. There are those who are mystics, specialists, pious, not so pious, atheists affiliated with Islam because it is compulsory to have a religion as specified in the constitution, and those who practise their own versions in their own ways independently of scripture, custom or social grouping.

Indeed, religious practitioners in Nurgeni who describe themselves as *kejawan* Muslims understand Islam as a broad set of practices, which take place as part of a cosmos that is created by Allah. Village cosmology explains the existence of different dimensions in the cosmos, which spirits, Satan, guides and ancestors inhabit. For the women with whom I lived, the world is a rhythmic field of *cikal bakal* (ancestors), *danyang* (village guardian spirits), *sedulur papat* (personal guardian spirits), *setan* (Satan) and ghosts, deities and the afterlife, all of which are part of the greater cosmos, which gives life to everything in existence, otherwise known as Allah. My informants' understandings substantiate Koentjaraningrat's (1985:327) observations and descriptions of *Agami Jawi* (*kejawan* Muslims).¹

It is important for me to note that Muslims in Nurgeni interrelate in a dialectic that shapes the wider plural cosmos with which they engage and (re)produce. This religious environment is often referred to as 'syncretism'. Anthropology has moved beyond the limitations of describing Javanese religion as syncretic because all religions are syncretic. What we are dealing with is an active cosmos with which agents interact and which they maintain through particular practices and belief systems. These practices and knowledge together constitute and

maintain a particular plural cosmos that shapes the religious life of the village. The cosmos is 'a social, natural, physical order which involves not simply the physical environment but a metaphysical environment, which relates to the management of cosmic forces' (Miller & Branson 1989:95). I prefer to describe village religiosity as an integration and interrelation of differing wholes, practices, wisdoms and knowledge that have roots in various places and sources that are historically, politically and socially situated. Within this plural cosmos (of religious integration) is an interrelation that takes place between actors as part of a wider village religiosity, which maintains a common social structure and a fluid cosmos. Thus, agents within this structure have access to varying religious discourses with which they can choose to interact and from which they construct their identities as self-reflexive actors.

I use the notion of a plural cosmos to suggest that, in the case of Javanese religious culture, 'we are confronted with several landscapes of belief, some indigenous, others Muslim, transposed with their respective values from India and the Middle East' (Headley 2004:13). Beyond this, if we are to understand that there is a pluralistic cosmology in the village that this chapter examines, then we also have to understand that individuals are in constant engagement with this multifaceted cosmos, which is created, maintained and (re)produced by their ongoing strategic agency. Indeed, as anthropology has shifted from the idea of a singular culture to understand the notion of culture as a multifaceted plurality without boundaries, where 'the colours on our map are merging one to another' (Kahn 1995:130), which requires constant engagement and (re)production, then so too can we move to the understanding of the cosmos as a plurality, a symbiotic field with which strategists creatively engage to ensure its maintenance.

I note here the extensive range of literature on cosmology (in classical and contemporary forms) from the *kraton* (Javanese palace), as well as that of high-level *kebatinan* or Sufi mysticism and Islam with which religious specialists, mystics, *dukun* and the like may or may not engage. There is thus not one single Javanese Islamic cosmology, but, rather, as Koentjaraningrat (1985:332) asserts:

There are several *Agami Jawi* myths of creation, [and] they all include Hindu-Javanese cosmological ideas and the Muslim belief in Adam as the first prophet on earth... The several Javanese concepts of creation, however, may be classified into three categories, namely, the myths with a dominant Hindu-Buddhist character, those with a syncretistic *Agami Jawi* Muslim character, and those with a magico-mystical character.

Yet here my concern is with a particular plural cosmology in Nurgeni, which is for the most part oral. This plural cosmos is constantly being strategically

dealt with by villagers who (re)produce it because (re)production is an active process of creation.² My purpose is to describe the ways in which village women understand the world in which they live and their place in it as religious agents.

Women narrating village cosmology

Par and her female family members explained how they understand that Allah created everything in and of the universe. Because Allah created and creates everything, they understand that *semua diijinkan Allah* (Allah permits everything). Allah, they explained, is an energy that lives in everything in animate and inanimate ways. When I asked key informants Siti and her husband about God, they explained how Allah was in the chair in which I sat, the pen that I held and the paper upon which I wrote, and was urging me to write what they were telling me. Allah is a life force in the earth, sky, water, fire, wind and space, and humans emanate out of this force or energy to live in a physical world, which is part of a cosmos that also has unseen worlds where ancestors, different kinds of spirits, *setan* and deities dwell.

These women and their partners do not perceive Allah as gendered. They also understand that Allah is neither male nor female. Natha, her female friends and their husbands explained that human spirits also have no gender. Human bodies, however, are sexed and gendered in order for spirits to experience life on earth. It is not only humans that manifest as opposites in the form of male and female, but everything in the universe can be polarised: refined/unrefined, night/day, hot/cold, male/female spirits and so on. The women explained how these polarising forces form a whole that cannot exist without either part, just as they described male and female roles in popular *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals: male cannot exist without female and vice versa (more on this later in the chapter). The aim is to find a balance between the two.

Women understand that each physical formation has unique abilities as a mediator of Allah. Whether one is male, female, rich, poor, educated or famous is part of Allah's plan. Humans have specific roles to perform on earth as manifestations of Allah, yet they also embody personal destiny, which allows them opportunities to change their experiences and circumstances. These women described a sense of agency through their knowledge of the cosmos and their place in it as Muslims.

These *kejawan* Muslim women understand that different dimensions exist as part of Allah's universe. There are the souls of the dead, ancestors, deities, spirit guides, village guardian spirits and evil spirits known as *setan* and ghosts. People interact with these worlds for particular reasons, and at particular times,

and this depends on one's personal history. In order to understand the religious worlds women in Nurgeni actively create through participation and the (re) production of ritual, it is necessary to contextualise the broader theoretical frames for interpreting religion in cultures of gendered religious practice.

The anthropology of religion: belief and practice

Anthropological understandings of religion are based on Western notions of reason and rationality and scientific discourse, which were stimulated by and grew out of the Protestant Reformation of the 15th and 16th centuries, to be consolidated in the British and French Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries respectively. As modes of Western philosophical thought, these notions of reason and rationality guided the development of anthropology as it sought to interpret cultures and religions of non-Western peoples.

In some cultures the word 'belief' does not imply falsity, as it does in the English language. Rather, questions of belief simply do not arise because it is *known* that spirits, gods, magic and other forces exist: these are religions of practice, which emphasise an *orthopraxy*. Don Miller and Jan Branson (1989:97) elaborate:

Religion is practised rather than thought; known rather than believed; efficacious or not rather than true or false. It does not mean that people are never sceptical or cynical or inquisitive. But positive, individual allegiance is often not involved and *religion is part of everyday experience*. It is not a discrete let alone privatised, phenomenon.

Despite the term religion not having a universal definition attributed to it,³ many anthropologists still interpret religion as a category of 'belief' (as is seen, for example, by the question 'do you *believe* in God or spirits?').⁴ To 'believe' in religion embodies notions of imagination, distance and uncertainty. The idea that people 'believe' in religion thus fails to explain how people *feel* and experience their religious worlds. Kenneth Morrison (2000:27) asserts that 'to say that people believe in such and such is, in effect to say nothing about how they constitute their world' (see also Needham 1972). I understand that how practitioners choose to know, feel and practise religion is always subjective and culturally situated—it is an orthopraxic way of life that is felt.

Early anthropological theories of religion and magic did not explore other-than-physical dimensions of religion and magic as such, but rather treated them as illegitimate modes of knowing and being. Suggestions that people 'believe' in religion and practise ritual based on those beliefs locks Western understandings

of non-Western religious societies into an imagined reality. Susan Greenwood (2000:23–4) explains that:

The problem is that anthropological theories that stem from the post-Enlightenment rationalistic tradition cannot explain magic in its own terms, and thus do not pay sufficient attention to the otherworld. Anthropology was the first social science to point out that reality is culturally constructed and that there are multiple ways of experiencing the world; but anthropology is itself a child of Western culture, and it has given little credence to informants' accounts that do not accord with some rationalistic worldview of Western science.

The Western focus on belief, coupled with a concern for rationality and logical understanding, has also contributed to the conceptual separation of religion from sorcery and mysticism. Analysing sorcery or mystical practices as categories different from 'real religion' is inappropriate for interpreting fluid and complex religious spheres of activity because these categories 'are at best intellectual constructs rather than descriptions of reality' (Bowie 2000:26).

Describing religion as 'belief', and magic, sorcery and mysticism as non-religious, implies the idea of a fragmented religious culture in which religious activities are performed devoid of interaction and integration with other practices that are based on false 'belief' on the one hand and efficacious practice on the other. In Javanese culture, where orthodox, scriptural Islam (as world religion) co-exists with *kejawen* practices (as indigenous religion), paradigms of 'belief' and practice as separate fail to explain religion as practice. I argue that religion in south Central Javanese society is an integration of *practice*, which men and women as gendered agents form as local religious expression. That is, in their gendered ways, men and women integrate village religion. My viewing all practices as part of an integration of wider religiosities gives me insight into the nature of religion as practised, known and experienced.

The notion of orthopraxy is key to understanding how women are absolutely significant to the village religious environment because it is religion that is practised rather than thought, it is part of everyday experience. For example, women 'practise' their *kejawen* Islamic religiosities rather than 'believing' in them or subscribing to doctrine—they arrive at their religious understandings through praxis. This orthopraxis engages the otherworld, which is alive and is known and felt. Its existence is not questioned. And it is through this praxis or action, this knowing and participating in the forces of the cosmos, that women keep alive or (re)produce the religious life of the village.

Indeed, it should now be clear that I am describing a culture of religious praxis rather than organised religion, and that because women not only participate in

but also contribute to village culture through their daily life practices, they are therefore significant to its (re)production and (re)creation.

The intersection of *kejawen* Islam, gender and ethnography

In this chapter I am concerned with exposing the ways in which women not only maintain village religion as *kejawen* Islamic, but how they co-create it by constantly strategising with the forces of the cosmos through popular village practices (*slametan* and *syukuran*), which would not exist without their contribution. This is important because it is mostly male scholars who write ethnographies on Javanese religion and in doing so usually construct men as religious leaders or specialists, while ignoring women's fundamental contribution to religion. More particularly, these ethnographies ignore the role gender plays in the constitution of religious societies. Although male ethnographic accounts of Javanese religion do not omit women, as indeed women are present and visible in these ethnographies, they do, however, fail to examine women's strategic role in village religiosity. Beyond this, the village religion I write of is a particularised practice of Islam and women are crucial to its maintenance; therefore, we cannot understand the diversity of Islamic practice in Indonesia without examining how, at the level of praxis, women strategise with and (re)produce their local religion, which they describe as *kejawen* Islam.

Further, there is little research that focuses on '*kejawen* women' as a group of religious practitioners. Instead, I found that what I understand to be *kejawen* women are described in literature as 'nominal' Muslims—as 'traditional' Javanese women whose practices and belief systems are strongly animist and Hindu-Buddhist. It appears, then, that feminist ethnographers have more often than not separated 'Javanese tradition' from 'Islam' in their analyses of religious culture, and that Javanese tradition does not qualify as religion because it engages 'supernatural powers'. Indeed, Laura Cooley (1992:233) and Jutta Berninghausen and Birgit Kerstan (1992) contrast 'Islam' with 'Javanese beliefs' without examining the complex relationship between the two as different modes of Islam. They describe Javanese religion as syncretistic and they fail to identify village women's practices as religious when they write, 'various pre-Islamic customs have remained alive despite [the village] adherence to the Islamic religion' (Berninghausen and Birgit Kerstan 1992:67).

It is my understanding that descriptions and categorisations of these women as 'syncretistic', 'traditional' and 'nominal Muslims' come from Clifford Geertz's representation of Javanese Muslims as being either 'pure' or 'nominal'. Indeed, Saskia Wieringa (2002:vii) employs the term *abangan* to mean 'nominally Muslim, strongly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist and animist religious ideas'.

Similarly, Norma Sullivan (1994), who is responsible for disclosing women's important role in *rewang* for *slametan* rituals after decades of male scholarship that described it as a male ritual, describes these women as 'nominal' Muslims, those who fit Geertz's *abangan* group of the non-devout. My female informants, as *rewang* practitioners, however, do not describe themselves as non-devout Muslims (or nominal).

Western feminist anthropologists, in particular, have followed Geertz's lead by under-exploring the nexus between women and varieties of local Islam in Java (Newland 2000).⁵ In their examinations of ordinary women's religious practices, they have not explicitly made the link between Sufism and *kejawen* as a local form of Islam, as other scholars have. Despite Islam being a major and pervasive element of Javanese culture for 500 years—and that the majority of Javanese describe themselves as Muslims—its diversity has traditionally been largely misrepresented in anthropological literature. This misrepresentation is something that William Roff (1985) and Mark Woodward (1989; 1996) describe as an anti-Islamic bias; a marginalisation that 'can be attributed to a complex combination of protestant understandings of the nature of religion, colonial policy, and the influence in recent decades of Weber's understanding of Islam as a religion of ethical prophecy' (Woodward 1996:14). These influences affect the interpretative processes involved in exploring religion and have framed the ways scholars interpret religion cross-culturally, particularly where they distinguish between 'real religion' on the one hand and sets of 'beliefs' on the other. The perceived separation between Islam as 'real religion' and 'traditional Javanese beliefs' as a category of 'the supernatural' taps into Western notions of belief and practice, which were discussed earlier in the chapter.

Slametan and *syukuran* rituals as gendered praxis

Through my examination of *kejawen* Muslim women's participation in village religion and their active (re)production of it, I argue that gender is integral to the village religious environment and its maintenance, a view that is significantly different from that of researchers of Javanese religion based on perceived male practices. Because this chapter examines women's contribution to village religion, I focus on popular village rituals to understand how women construct and (re)produce their religious identities through praxis. *Slametan* and *syukuran* rituals are popular gendered rituals that are central to the religious life of Nurgeni. I argue that they serve as frames for diverse religious integration. As men have mostly researched *slametan* as a male ritual, my chapter contributes to knowledge of women's religious role at the rituals, which, like men's, is complex.

Understanding how *kejawan* Muslim village women (re)produce their village religiosity entails analysing their community practices because they perform religion as gendered praxis as part of village society. Here I examine two popular rituals in village society, *slametan* and *syukuran*, because the rituals are central to village religious culture and practice and are meaningful expressions of religion for the women who practise them.

*Slametan and syukuran in ethnography*⁶

Andrew Beatty (1999:28) has rightly claimed that 'ever since the appearance of Clifford Geertz's book, *The Religion of Java* (1960), we have assumed we know what the *slametan* is about. As is often the case in anthropology, one well-wrought account freezes discussion for a generation.' This point could be no more relevant than in the case of the nexus between *slametan*, gender and the role of Islam in village religiosity.

Although Beatty's book *Varieties of Javanese religion* (1999) has redefined how we can interpret *slametan* as a ritual frame for integration where varying religious participants 'agree to differ', he has failed to examine the role of women in this integration, as have male scholars before him (see Geertz 1960; Hefner 1985; Jay 1969; Koentjaraningrat 1985; Woodward 1988; 1989). This means that the way we understand *slametan* is based on male religious practices. Yet, as Norma Sullivan (1987; 1994) revealed in her examination of the ritual, there is also a female aspect of *slametan* called *rewang*.

Male anthropologists overlook women's role in *rewang* because it is an all-female ritual at which women cook special *slametan* food and prepare *sajen* (offerings), which are transferred into the male ceremonial space, where they are blessed. If male anthropologists draw on Durkheim's notion of 'sacred and profane', then it is easy to understand why they perceive women's role in *slametan* as irreligious. Yet where male anthropologists have explicitly dealt with the question of religion and Islam in relation to the rituals, Sullivan has not. Rather, Sullivan's examination of *rewang* focused on its economic rather than religious aspects. I understand, then, that we are still lacking knowledge about what these rituals mean for village religious life if women's religious roles have not been explored. Before I turn to an examination of *rewang* in ethnography, I explain what the rituals are and how they have been represented as male religious practice.

Slametan and *syukuran* are communal feasts that bring communities, neighbours and families together to restore balance and harmony, or *slamet*, between the seen and unseen worlds and between individuals and society. The rituals' foods (which women cook) are blessed (by men) and distributed among

the community. In Nurgeni in south Central Java, *slametan* rituals are performed at times of death and anniversaries of death; *syukuran* rituals are performed for other rites of passage (birth, circumcision, marriage, pregnancy) and for any other reason a host sees fit, for example, moving house, wishing success, farewelling a friend, clearing black magic or any celebratory desire—hence *syukur* (Arabic for 'to express thanks').

My interpretations differ from those of Beatty (1999), Geertz (1960) and Sullivan (1994), in whose field sites there was no distinction between *slametan* and *syukuran*. The majority of ethnographies on *slametan* to date are based in east Central Java or East Java, with the exception of Sullivan and Woodward's, which explore urban and court Central Javanese culture respectively. Even though Sullivan's field site is only 15 kilometres north of my field site, each site presents a different religious make-up, and the rituals are practised in specific ways in particular contexts. My field site presents an interrelation of varying expressions of Islamic identities and I represent how the rituals are practised in that particular location only.

Slametan as male communal ritual

Slametan is a central rite of Javanese religion: a ceremonial meal consisting of special symbolic food, a *sajen* offering, a formal speech by the host, and prayers to God and local spirits. It is a community event that symbolises mystical and social unity. The desired result of a *slametan* is a state of safety and well-being or *slamet*—to be free from trouble, impediment and imbalance. Geertz (1960:16) describes *slametan* as 'a kind of social universal joint, fitting the various aspects of social life and individual experience together in a way which minimises uncertainty, tension and conflict—or at least that is what it is supposed to do'. The rituals embody an awareness of the linkage between seen (physical, material) and unseen (metaphysical, spiritual) worlds, and facilitate communication between the two worlds.

For Javanese practitioners the rituals are integral life practices that embody significant meaning and purpose. Participants of *slametan* 'see it as integral to their lives as social beings and to their sense of themselves as Javanese; they regard it as the epitome of local tradition' (Beatty 1999:25). Yet these descriptions of *slametan* imply gender neutrality. When we analyse what takes place at these rituals, in male ethnographies we find descriptions of a male ceremony called *kenduren*.⁷

In ethnography, the male prayer and ceremonial meal at *slametan* is generally referred to as *kenduren* or *kenduri*. Indeed, Hefner (1985) claims that without *kenduren* the *slametan* cannot exist, and Geertz has equated *kenduren* with the

slametan itself. *Kenduren* carries perceived importance because it is a formal religious ritual that establishes communication with God and spirits for the sake of seeking *slamet*. It involves male members of the community who gather at the host's house under the leadership of a religious official, in Nurgeni known as *Pak Kaum*. In Nurgeni *kenduren* is performed for *syukuran* rituals and consists of a brief prayer made to *cikal bakal*, the village *danyang* and Allah in the context of the reason for holding the event. By contrast, *tahlilan* (a verse (*tahlil*) chanted from the Qur'an) is performed for *slametan* death rites (although sometimes people perform both *kenduren* and *tahlilan* for one event) and lasts between one and one-and-a-half hours. At *tahlilan*, *Pak Kaum* prays to Allah and the deceased's soul, wishing it a safe journey in the afterlife. Rather than describing these male rituals, I want to focus here on the women who possess specialist knowledge and cook the special food that is fundamental to the functioning of the ritual, because their role has been grossly under-represented in ethnography, and, as we shall see, without women the ritual cannot exist.

Rewang and ritual food

Women in Nurgeni not only prepare special food at *rewang* for *slametan* and *syukuran* in the form of *bese* (food baskets) for blessing, but they are also responsible for preparing *sajen* offerings. Beyond this, certain women, whom I introduced earlier in the chapter, possess specialist knowledge about these rituals, without which the rituals could not exist. They are a group of *rewang* specialists who prepare *sajen* and perform an essential prayer to spirits as part of the wider religious life of the village. By participating in a dialogue with the unseen world, these women are contributing to the maintenance of village religiosity because ritual praxis embodies a cosmology that depends on a knowing of the otherworld.

Indeed, *rewang* is religious because at *kejawan* Muslim *rewang* specialists draw on Allah, the world of village guardian spirits and ancestors. Interactions with these spirits are seen as essential to the ongoing religiosity of the village: that is, women desire village harmony, and communication with spirits is vital to ensure this. By using *menyan* (a type of incense) and prayer, the women ask the spirits for peace, harmony and safety in the community, and other requests depending on the reason for holding the event. These women *know* the otherworld and know how to engage with it, which is essential to the success of a ritual that is based on an interaction with and knowing of the otherworld.

Beatty (1999), Geertz (1960) and Woodward (1988) have offered ethnographers and anthropologists significant insights into the complexities of male religious aspects of *slametan*. Their ethnographies show how the *slametan*

functions as a communal ritual, where purpose lies in enshrining a social harmony—a harmony consolidated by males of differing religious perspectives whose intent is the same.

Although these ethnographers are aware of the important role of food in the rituals, they fail to examine the women who cook it. Villagers told me that the male ceremony cannot exist without *rewang* and vice versa, thus indicating that the two aspects integrate into a whole or, as Sullivan (1994:157) puts it, 'a synthesis of male and female parts in a communal whole'. She goes on to define *rewang* as 'the "all female" part of the *slametan* in which women work together on basic everyday food materials and through this collective labour turn them into "special" *slametan* food' (Sullivan 1994:157).

However, closer examination of Beatty, Geertz and Hefner's ethnographies reveals allusions to the spiritual importance of *slametan* food and offerings. For these anthropologists, food carries spiritual significance when blessed in male religious and spiritual spaces and not in female ones. Food is religiously important because, first, it is blessed and, second, invoked spirits eat its aroma.

Woodward (1988) suggests that *slametan* food is linked to other Muslim cultures and that it does carry religious significance. He asserts that *apem* (rice flour cakes) are almost always used in ritual food (*apem* are used in most *slametan* and *syukuran* food baskets) and are often used as offerings to the dead in Asian Muslim cultures (Woodward 1988:73). Unfortunately, his linking of religiously important *slametan* foods to other Muslim cultures does not stretch into women's *rewang* worlds in which such food is made. As I discuss later, *rewang* is just as spiritually and religiously important as *kenduren* or *tahlilan*.

Division of labour

Not until Sullivan's exploration of women's role in *rewang* had ethnography revealed in detail the gendered aspects of the ritual. Although male religiosity has dominated studies of *slametan*, feminist ethnographers still have work to do in their explorations of women's role in *rewang*, which I perceive to be just as controversial or religiously complex as the role of men. Sullivan's contribution to knowledge of *rewang* has mainly concerned women's economic role in the division of labour of the ritual. She asserts that *rewang* and *kenduren* function as separate rituals for the wider *slametan* event, which does not begin until women begin food preparations, sometimes several days before the male prayer, and 'within such a context the "all male" ceremony should be seen as the final, brief act in a drama which is played over several days' (Sullivan 1987:264–5).

Sullivan has linked women's role in *rewang* to their broader role in society as mothers and wives, who conduct their lives more often than not in informal spheres. Women's place in the kitchen at *slametan*, then, reflects wider gender discourses that ascribe women to informal family spheres, yet, as I show later in this chapter, women do not necessarily view their practices in this way.

Anne Stoler (1977) asserts that women's economic role in the *slametan*—as producers of special symbolic food—casts them as just as important, if not more so, as men as inter-family mediators in the village community. This is because women exercise control over *slametan* food and who receives it, which effectively locates them in powerful decision-making positions that form and perpetuate social relations. Sullivan (1987:275) elaborates:

The main function of *rewang* is economic, and the main function of *kenduren* is ceremonial. *Rewang* relations and practices have important consequences for families and neighbourhoods. In *rewang*, labour and money are exchanged for ceremonial food...the economic contracts that women enter in *rewang* help redistribute scarce material resources throughout the community.

Indeed, the term *rewang* means 'to help' and, as Sullivan found in her field site, it also carries the specific meaning of women's cooking role at ritual, family or other community events.⁸ Sullivan (1994) argues that because of women's place in the household, they are essentially constructed as unimportant in contrast to men, who perform the religiously important prayer role. She concludes her analysis of women and *slametan* by arguing that *slametan* guides women's subordination:

Better than anything else, the *slametan* exemplifies the real but hidden subordination of women in kampung society, in the relationships between kampung men and women, and in the relations between their roles, functions and spheres of influence...The male masters of that world authorise women to manage the full ritual while they take over the starring roles in the short, highly visible, concluding ceremony (Sullivan 1994:171).

I do not follow Stoler and Sullivan by analysing women's economic roles here because I am concerned with examining women's religious roles at the rituals. As we shall see, my interpretation of women's roles is different to Sullivan's because it illustrates how women's religiosities contribute to village religious practice and its (re)production.

Sullivan (1987:266) argues that:

rewang is conceived as a situation within which females and supernatural beings interrelate. But the women's labour is emphasised as the unifying principle (rather than their religious consensus). In contrast, at *kenduren* the stress is placed on the religious consensus of the male celebrants.

While I agree that women's labour unifies *rewang*, my exploration here concerns the religious aspect of *rewang*. As I have argued elsewhere (Smith 2005), there is no absolute religious consensus at *slametan* between males or females, but there is, rather, a sense of an integrated religious diversity. There is consensus, however, on the purposive aspects of the rituals, being the aim to restore harmony and need for celebration or to express thanks to God, and this concerns both men and women.⁹

In their attempts to understand Java's religious environment, male ethnographers have spent much time examining the religious complexities of *slametan* by asking to what extent it is Islamic. Indeed, *slametan* are not only performed in village and palace environments, but also in cities, *pesantren* and mosques. This point illustrates that different types of Muslims practise *slametan* and *syukuran* as part of their Islamic identities. Beatty (1999) deals with this issue of religious diversity and *slametan* most appropriately where he describes the religious interrelation at *slametan* as a site where practitioners 'agree to differ'. The women with whom I worked integrate in the same way, and thus Beatty's theory is applicable to my field site in the context of gender. I now turn to a discussion of *slametan* as a frame for religious integration in the context of female community practice—that is, how women integrate village religion through ritual praxis. Through this integration women actively (re)produce particularised aspects of *kejawan* Islam.

The religiosity of *rewang* in Nurgeni

Through *rewang* women contribute to the continuation of their village religion and the gendered roles at *slametan* and *syukuran* integrate to constitute the village religion as *kejawan* Islamic. As *rewang* specialists Par, Siti, Natha and Anisah claim, women do not formally recognise the same kind of Islam or set of spirits for worship during *rewang*. And as Sullivan points out, in her field site labour unifies women at *rewang* just as the religious prayer unifies men at *kenduren*. In Nurgeni, men's practice of *kenduren* or *tahlilan* substantiates Beatty's observations because men privately disagree over the rituals' theological meaning, although they do express formal unity by attending for purposes of social harmony. Just because Sullivan does not consider women's religiosities as germane to understanding *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals does not mean that *rewang* is devoid of religious diversity and complexity.

Par and Natha in particular articulated their religious identities in contrast to women who self-identified with religious qualities that were different to their own, and revealed that in Nurgeni conglomerations of religiously and spiritually compatible and incompatible women merge to perform *rewang* as

part of the Islam of the village. Like men, women essentially perform *rewang* for community well-being and social harmony, as part of local discourses of *rukun* (social or personal harmony) and *gotong royong* (mutual help in the community or between neighbours). Because women know each other, they are aware of each other's religious orientations, an awareness that does not cause tension because they focus on the reason the event is being held for wider harmony in seen and unseen worlds. This reinforces Beatty's notion of 'agreeing to differ'.

The religiosity of the man or woman holding the *slametan* or *syukuran* ultimately determines the religious particularities of the event—in both male and female spheres. Religious particularities that separate orthodox Muslims from *kejawan* Muslims in female spheres concern interaction with spirits and *sajen* offerings. Sullivan's ethnography notes the presence of spirits at *rewang*, although she does not note which spirits or their significance to women or the event at large. Women of *kejawan* Islamic devotion with whom I lived elucidated that spirits are always present at *slametan* and *syukuran*. First, the deceased's spirit embeds itself in the ritual upon being called to attend. Second, local village *danyang* and ancestral spirits are omnipresent: they do not make a special appearance, unless called upon, because they are part of village ethereality. Allah, the Creator, is always present, because Allah is everywhere and in everything.

These beliefs and knowledges belong to a particular group of *kejawan* Muslim practitioners. This is their religion of *rewang*. They perform *rewang* based on their perspectives of the universe for a community event. *Kejawan* Muslim women are aware of how *rewang* fits into the cosmos and how metaphysical notions of energy transference from women to food, food to spirit and spirit to cosmos power it. The women have an inherent understanding that prayer imbues food with power in its symbology of the cosmos.

Although *kejawan* Muslim women work alongside orthodox Muslim women at *rewang* for the same reasons, subjectively they hold differing views on how it fits into theology. Indeed, different women emphasise different religious and spiritual dimensions of *rewang*. The distinction between orthodox Muslim and *kejawan* Muslim women is particularly marked where *sajen* offerings are concerned. *Kejawan* Muslim women celebrate the use of *sajen* and orthodox Muslim women usually shun it because it engages the spirit world through prayer.

My argument that *rewang* serves as a frame for religious integration, and that women strategically construct their Islamic identities through a distinction between modes of Islam, implies that *rewang* hinges on cosmologies, which reveal emic (insider) and etic (outsider) divisions between orthodox Islam and everyday village *kejawan* Islamic religiosity. My descriptions of their *rewang* practices has shown that, for *kejawan* Muslim women, reality consists of different dimensions with

which they interact or are exposed to at *rewang*, which makes particular women essential to the ongoing religious life of the village. Here I want to elaborate on these worlds to illustrate how particular women's practices (as orthopraxis) embody the ways in which they understand the world and their place in it.

Managing the cosmos: specialist women

Village agriculturalists including Par, Siti, Natha, Anisah and their daughters attended almost all *slametan* and *syukuran* in Nurgeni because they know how to make special foods, *sajen* and create ongoing dialogue with spirits. I refer to them as *rewang* specialists. They are a group of kinswomen headed by Par, the grandmother, who knows special prayers to invoke relevant spirits for *sajen* at *rewang*. *Sajen* cannot be handed over to *Pak Kaum* for male prayers before Par prays over them. Siti, Natha and Anisah also possess specialist knowledge about *rewang*, which other women lack. Despite the women's lack of formal religious education, their knowledge of local ritual generates for them a status in the religious life of the village, which is crucial to its maintenance. These are particular women who know how to communicate with forces in the otherworld, and villagers understand that without their knowledge of ritual practice, *slametan* and *syukuran* would not be successful.

This means that village religion, as popularly expressed through *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals, cannot continue without women's contribution. Women, then, are crucial to its (re)production. Yet these women's religious importance extends beyond *rewang* and into local practices more broadly as essential to the (re)production of the life of the village. Indeed, *rewang* for *slametan* and *syukuran* is just one aspect of women's *kejawan* Islamic identities, and women are not just playing vital roles in village religiosity through *rewang* and other rituals; these roles embody a particular cosmology, which is core to village life. Therefore, women are not only participating in culture and cosmology, but they are creating it through constant strategising that employs a kind of knowing through praxis; it is not 'belief' because it is known, experienced and felt as part of an active process of creation and (re)production.

I use the example of a *mitoni syukuran* ritual to further demonstrate how individual women are not only crucial to village religion, but how they contribute to its (re)production because their execution of ritual embodies a particular village cosmology. *Mitoni syukuran* or *tingkeban* is a ritual held for the seventh month of pregnancy (for a woman's first child only) to prepare the baby's soul for a safe and healthy entrance into the world free from possession by evil lurking spirits (*setan*), as passing from womb to earth is dangerous for mother and baby. In Nurgeni *mitoni* is a *syukuran* and, as with other *syukuran*, it has male and female

aspects, which are crucial to the functioning of the ritual. For the female aspect, a female spiritual specialist called a *dukun bayi* (or traditional birth attendant) is called in to perform the ritual and to make it successful. Particular *dukun bayi* specialise in specific matters related to pregnancy, childbirth and the processes that follow. *Kejawen* Muslim *dukun bayi*, such as the one I describe here, possess high-level *kejawen* knowledge of mantras, spells, prayers and so on, and know the world of magic. They can repel lurking evil forces in the cosmos at *mitoni* by calling Allah, as by speaking Allah's name brings protection and safety. This knowledge of the otherworld and communicative praxis generates a status for such women in the village, and although *dukun bayi* are generally low class and elderly, they have a level of respect in the community because their expertise is essential to village religiosity.

The first *mitoni* I attended was that of Sulastris, my 21-year-old neighbour. Both Sulastris's family and her husband's family were *kejawen* Muslims, and it was essential as part of their Muslim identities for Sulastris's *mitoni* to be performed by a highly sought-after *dukun bayi* from a neighbouring hamlet. The *dukun bayi* was known for her high-level spiritual powers and knowledge and, because of this, families had to book her services in advance.

Sulastris's *mitoni*

Female neighbours knew of Sulastris's *mitoni* at least three weeks in advance and began *rewang* three days beforehand. The lively occasion was fuelled by upbeat, modern Islamic music that streamed from music speakers that Sulastris's husband had installed throughout the house, ensuring the event reached into the far corners of the neighbourhood. Many young and old men joined in the festivities from the sidelines, eating *rewang* foods. *Rewang* finished at 2 pm, just before the *dukun bayi* arrived at 3 pm when female kin prepared the house for the ceremony.

The *dukun bayi* was an old woman from a neighbouring village, and I refer to her as *Mbah dukun* (as did village women. *Mbah* is from *Simbah*, which is a Javanese title for an elderly person). Par, as the most skilled *rewang* specialist, was not skilled in *mitoni* ritual practices and was thus unable to perform the ceremony. When *Mbah dukun* arrived at Sulastris's house, Sulastris's mother escorted her to the back room that was set up especially for the *mitoni sajen* preparations. She had with her a bag full with foods for the *sajen*, along with *menyan* incense, a razor blade, eggs, flower petals, seven sarongs and two coconuts.

Mbah dukun made the *sajen* offering on a table in the room from ingredients she brought with her to the ceremony. The *sajen* was a food doll (approximately 35 centimetres by 20 centimetres), which represented a baby. Its body was made

from sticky rice. *Mbah dukun* made the torso, head and limbs separately and then joined them together. She decorated and coloured the body with other foodstuffs and flowers, and finally attached a penis made from rice because Sulastris's *rasa* (intuition) informed her that the child was male (and Sulastris did give birth to a boy). After completing the *sajen*, *Mbah dukun* prayed to the baby's spirit and asked it to have a safe and healthy journey from womb to earth and asked Allah to protect it from *setan*.

Pak Kaum collected the *sajen* and took it to the front room of the house where *kenduren* would take place. At *kenduren* men also prayed to Allah, ancestors and village guardian spirits for the safe and healthy delivery of the child, free from disturbance. As *kenduren* began, Sulastris's kinswomen, close female friends and *rewang* specialists gathered at the wash area at the back of the house. The female aspect of *mitoni* was about to begin.¹⁰

Sulastris, her mother, mother-in-law, sister, close female friends, *rewang* specialists and *Mbah dukun* were present. First, *Mbah dukun* lit some *menyan* incense and placed it on the floor, as incense creates a line of communication to the spirit world, where Allah and the baby's spirit could be contacted. *Mbah dukun* prepared for communication by grounding herself with the help of the *menyan*, and lightly whispered mantras to invoke a connection with Allah. Simply by uttering Allah's name immerses one in Allah's presence and repels evil spirits that may seek to possess Sulastris as a pregnant woman.¹¹

Once connection with Allah and the baby's spirit was established, *Mbah dukun* began the first part of the *mitoni* called *mandiin* (bathing), which involves the use of seven sarongs and blessed water, which is specially prepared with petals from seven flowers. Before blessing Sulastris with sacred flower water, *Mbah dukun* wrapped a sarong around Sulastris's naked body. She then pulled the sarong down and wrapped another one around her, repeating this action seven times, during which she simultaneously poured the special water over Sulastris's head while blessing her. When she had finished, *Mbah dukun* smashed an egg on the ground beside the *menyan*, still uttering invocations. Sulastris then stepped out of the wash area and the *dukun* wrapped another sarong loosely around her breasts. She then dropped two baby coconuts, one after the other, through the loose sarong. As the coconuts fell through the sarong, Sulastris's mother-in-law caught them in another sarong she was holding.

Next, *Mbah dukun* took a razor blade and cut a piece of Sulastris's hair from above her ear. She threw the hair into the *menyan* to burn. *Mbah dukun* accidentally cut Sulastris's face and caused bleeding. The women found this funny, but *Mbah dukun* continued her utterances and maintained her concentration while giving Sulastris's face a quick wipe. The ritual was over at this point. Sulastris quickly

disappeared into her house to look for clothes, relieved the whole process was over. Meanwhile, the men had finished *kenduren* and were making their way home. Sulastris and her husband sat down to eat *rewang* food with their families. *Mbah dukun* joined them, was paid and then left the village.

Sulastris and her female kin did not know the symbolism of the seven washes, the flowers, the egg or the hair cutting. They did know, however, that dropping the coconuts through the sarong symbolised a smooth and easy birth, and that it was important for them to continue the way of the ancestors by practising particular rituals. Even more importantly, the women understood that by partaking in this particular ritual with *Mbah dukun*, a spiritual expert, they would have done all they could to secure a safe delivery of the child from the mother's cave (womb) into the physical world.

The fact that low-class families are willing to invest large amounts of money in the services of a spiritually powerful woman suggests that women religious specialists significantly contribute to the (re)production of village religiosity through their knowledge of ritual execution, magic and spirit worlds, which affords them a particular status not only in their natal villages but also further beyond. Ordinary women contribute to the maintenance of the *dukun*'s status by employing her services and in doing so actively (re)create a particularised practice of *kejawan* Islam for their village. The rituals and practices embody a cosmology, which women strategically interact with and give meaning to. In this way women's participation in the daily religious life of the village as *rewang* specialists, *dukun bayi* or ordinary participants significantly contributes to the (re)production of Nurgeni's religiosity.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the traditional Western focus on rational and scientific modes of interpreting religion as 'belief' has led to a conceptual separation of modes of practice in religious societies, which in turn has created the notion of a 'real' religion. This focus on religion as 'belief' has led to the (rational) invalidation of 'the otherworld' as false because it cannot be empirically proven. The notion of religion as 'belief' contrasts with the idea of 'practice' or 'praxis', which emphasises knowingness or direct experience of 'the otherworld'. By understanding that 'the otherworld' is real for my female informants, I am better able to interpret the roles they perform as gendered agents at particular rituals that rely on contact with spirits in these unseen worlds.

As explained, Geertz's ethnography in particular paved the way for a more general approach to understanding Javanese Islam as being either 'pure' or 'nominal'. Yet by demonstrating how Islam is a set of discursive practices, this

chapter has shown that Javanese Islam is diverse in practice and thought, and has asserted that at the level of religious praxis there are distinct differences between different kinds of practising orthodox Muslims and *kejawan* Muslims as representatives of two major modes of Javanese Islam.

The chapter has also demonstrated how *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals are key to *kejawan* Muslim religious praxis in Nurgeni, and that women's role at *rewang* is integral because without it the rituals could not exist. My observations contribute to understandings of village religion that have traditionally been based on male accounts of perceived male practices. Not only has this chapter demonstrated the importance of women at the rituals, because their cooking of sacred food and assembly of *sajen* is essential to establish contact with the spirit world, but it has shown how women's knowledge and religiosities also contribute to the religious identity of the rituals.

The rituals serve as frames for religious integration in male and female spaces as part of the Islam of the village, because varying Muslim practitioners come together to perform the rituals as part of village social life. They do so with the same intent of seeking *slamet* for the reason the event is being held or to express *syukur*, and participate in wider *gotong royong* and *rukun* discourses by doing so. Indeed, my informants interpret the rituals as Islamic and their varying understandings of Islam reflect the nature of Islam in Java more broadly, where a difference in opinion and practice confirms varieties of Muslim practitioners. Yet this chapter has illustrated how these rituals integrate these practitioners, and that gender is significant to this integration.

Beyond this, *rewang* is core to women's contribution to the religious constitution of the village and its (re)production because they perceive it as an integral religious activity in community life. Their notions of womanhood are also constructed through *rewang* praxis: women understand their roles are important because they cook religiously powerful food for the wider village. My descriptions bring a different perspective to *rewang* compared with those of Sullivan, who argues that labour unites women at *rewang* but *slametan* essentially guides their subordination. The women with whom I lived understand that their role at *rewang* is religious because they are cooking special foods that not only have contact with the spirit world, but also implicate the entire village in an essential performance that contributes to the life of the village. Both *dukun bayi* and *rewang* specialists perform vital roles for village religion and these roles indeed embody the cosmology of the village because, as cosmology explains the existence of different forces in the cosmos, these women perform rituals that deal specifically with these forces and in doing so (re)produce them as a mode of *kejawan* Islam.

Notes

- 1 Koentjaraningrat (1985:324) describes the *kejawen* Islamic belief system as consisting of 'beliefs, concepts, views, and values. These are, for example, the belief in Allah, in Muhammad the prophet, in other prophets, in saints, the cosmological concept of creation, and the cosmological view of nature and the world, eschatology, the belief in deities, the concept of death and the afterlife, in ancestor spirits, in guardian spirits, in ghosts, spooks, and giants, and the concept of magical power.'
- 2 For more on cosmology see Stephen Headley (2004).
- 3 Ranges of meanings given to the term religion exist and are still debated today in the anthropology of religion. See for example Geertz (1966); Klass (1999). Durkheim viewed religion as a collective organisation like a church and its surrounding religious community, and saw magic as self-motivated practice (Tambiah 1990). Malinowski, however, defined religion by 'function, primarily psychological and secondarily sociological, and in terms of a means (instrumental) and ends (ultimate) distinction'. Malinowski also separated magic from religion: 'religious action was not like magic a means to an end, it was an end in itself and it celebrated ultimate values' (Tambiah 1990:69).
- 4 Early anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871) generated the idea that religion was the belief in spiritual beings (Barfield 1997).
- 5 Two major volumes about women in Indonesia (Errington 1990; Sears 1996) do not explicitly address the nexus between women and Islam.
- 6 I note here that the ethnographies I analyse do not refer to *syukuran* rituals because in those field sites the term *slametan* covered all rites of passage as well as other celebratory events that in Nurgeni were referred to as *syukuran*. Although I examine the differences later in the chapter, during my analysis of ethnography I refer to *slametan* only.
- 7 In Nurgeni *kenduren* is performed for *syukuran*, and *tahlilan* is performed for *slametan*. I examine these later in the chapter. I note here that villagers also refer to *tahlilan* as *tahlil*.
- 8 Berninghausen and Kerstan (1992) also note that in their Central Javanese field location *rewang* was the term used to describe women's process in *slametan*.
- 9 Although *kejawen* Muslims are the dominant practitioners of *slametan* and *syukuran* rituals in Nurgeni, Muhammadiyah Muslims and *kejawen* Muslims with different religious interpretations often participate in the rituals together.
- 10 'Traditionally' the female aspect of *mitoni* was performed at the front of the house (with one's husband also joining in the bathing ceremony) before all present guests, male and female. Sulastri felt uncomfortable with this practice and instead chose to experience it in a female-only environment. No-one objected. See Geertz (1960) for more on this.
- 11 Newland (2001) points out that in different parts of Java *setan* has different meanings. Usually *setan* is seen as evil spirits in contrast to 'dead souls'. In her field site *setan* referred to spirits of deceased who sought to trouble the living.

chapter five

Negotiating public space: three *nyai* generations in a Jombang *pesantren*¹

Eka Srimulyani

In this chapter I argue that the construction of gender relations is a continuing process. Through the study of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), I examine how female figures from a *pesantren* background have negotiated gender positions imposed on them by society or by institutions such as a *pesantren*. I argue that it is more than a simplistic dichotomy of public and private spheres in which men are associated with public space, power and authority and women with the private sphere and a subordinate position. Rather, the negotiation takes place not just in relation to the men in their lives, but also in relation to the changing position of education for women in Islamic schools in Indonesia, and to the global influence wherein a range of feminisms continue to debate women's place in the workforce and in the domestic sphere. The public/private spheres dichotomy has been the predominant discourse in the West in the discussion of Muslim women's lives in Middle Eastern and other Muslim societies. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that research on Muslim women based on a strict division of public and private is 'superficial and conditioned by Western presupposition' (Smith 1998:90). In fact, women's private and public lives have been gradually changed by globalisation and social changes in various Muslim countries, such as better access to education and employment for women. According to Afsaruddin (1999:6), 'social class, economic status, and educational attainment are variables that profoundly dilute the traditional dichotomy between the public and private spheres'. Kandiyoti (1988:275) promoted the idea of 'patriarchal bargains', which she said are 'not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders'. Similarly, Nazareh Tohidi, as quoted by Moghadam (2002:26-7), challenged the assumption that women are powerless and repressed: instead, she recognised the spirit of empowerment and resistance among Iranian women, arguing that women can 'renegotiate gender roles and codes and find a path of compromise and creative synthesis'.