Women of Fire, Women of the Robe:
Subjectivities of Charismatic Christianity and Normative Islam in Java

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ways changing Muslim-Christian relations and new gendered norms constitute the identities of orthodox Muslims and charismatic Christians in Java, Indonesia. The research is based on 12 months of fieldwork between 2009 and 2010 in the multi-religious city of Salatiga. Working with middle-class Pentecostal congregations, with memberships of 400 and 150 individuals respectively, as well as two middle-class Muslim women’s Koranic sermon groups that involved about 70 households each, this research expands the ongoing discussion of gender politics and religious movements in modern pluralistic societies, and suggests we re-examine religious identities through the lens of inter-religious relations, particularly the role of women in them.

The dissertation begins with ethnographic scenes where women and Christians figure prominently in Muslim-majority public rituals, in order to highlight the centrality of women and minorities in constructing religious pluralism. Chapter 1 presents a history of religious diversity in Java, and argues that over the last three decades, children of Javanist Muslims have become orthodox Muslims, while the offspring of mainline Protestants have become born-again Christians. Chapter 2 elaborates on the transformation of Salatiga’s landscape characterized by the proliferation of worship facilities and ascendant inter-religious tensions. Building on this foundation, Chapter 3 focuses on women and neighborhood sociality. Here I argue that an
unexpected outcome of recent religious change has been women’s expanded public roles and a re-alliance of traditionalist and modernist Muslims in the presence of a strong Christian minority. Chapter 4 explains Muslim women’s choices of embracing veiling and de-legitimizing polygamy in the context of cultural change, and demonstrates the social and political nature of the changing interpretations of religious knowledge. Chapter 5 turns to Christians’ congregational lives, and illustrates the Pentecostal training of “sacrificial agency” among both men and women in order to fulfill “successful families.” Finally, Chapter 6 examines the routine interactions between Muslim and born-again Christian women, and discusses their unequal social footings in Salatiga’s pluralism. In conclusion, this dissertation contends that pluralism in Salatiga involves unequal power relations and dialectical negotiations between religious communities, in which gendered identities and cross-religious relations are integral components of religious subjectivity.