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En-Chieh Chao

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# 'Not Fanatical': The Evolution of Sociable Piety and the Dialogic Subject in Multi-religious Indonesia

En-Chieh Chao

*In Indonesia, the politics of 'sociable piety' has been reinvigorated by local Islamic sermon groups opposed to a range of public behaviours labelled as 'fanatik'. United by an intra-Muslim alliance self-identified as being 'not fanatical', members of urban middle-class sermon groups shrewdly redraw moral boundaries across the long-term 'traditionalist' and 'modernist' divides. As revealed by my fieldwork between 2009 and 2012, the improvisation of 'sociable piety' is so prominent that not only optional rituals such as tarawih but obligatory prayers such as salat can be negotiated contextually. Using the multi-religious city of Salatiga as a window to see the broader religious trends in many religiously pluralistic Indonesian cities, this paper contends that the general appeal of Islamic self-cultivation in Indonesia has been simultaneously an individual ethical cultivation and social, even national, improvement. Theoretically, this study of the everyday Indonesian strategies to deal with the tension between piety and sociality is a modest attempt to rethink subjectivity that moves beyond either the docile or the deliberative self and towards the dialogic subject in a world of conflicting heterogeneity.*

*Keywords:* Subjectivity; Islam; Indonesia; Piety; Sociality

## Introduction

As we took a rest in the teacher's office at the high school, Ibu Zulfa,<sup>1</sup> the chairwoman of the local reformist Muslim organisation and teacher of Islam, lamented that nowadays some people are *fanatik*, such as Indonesian followers of Hizbut Tahrir, the political organisation aiming to create a global caliphate. People would never dare to go this far during the era of Father Harto [President Suharto], she said, and now in her town people were getting less and less sociable. In fact, some 'fanatical' colleagues refuse to shake hands with those who are not members

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En-Chieh Chao is an anthropologist who is interested in cross-religious encounters, multi-linguistic performances, religious feminism, late Pentecostalism, Islamic civilizations, and the socio-cultural construction of gender and the body. Correspondence to: En-Chieh Chao, Academia Sinica, Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, RCHSS, Nankang, Taipei 115, China. Email: [zolachao@gate.sinica.edu.tw](mailto:zolachao@gate.sinica.edu.tw)

of their group. With great pride, Ibu Zulfa told me: 'In my neighbourhood, we don't see people as divided by Muhammadiyah or Nahdlatul Ulama. These are both Muslim organisations. I am not *fanatik* about organisations!' According to her logic, the once opposing 'reformist' Muhammadiyah and 'traditionalist' Nahdlatul Ulama were now in the same camp—the properly pious—whereas the political Hizbut Tahrir organisation and puritanical Salafists<sup>2</sup> were personifications of 'fanaticism'.

(Field notes, November 2009)

Interest in 'sociable piety' or how to reconcile contextual sociality with individual piety has recently been reignited among anthropologists. From Orthodox priests' dilemma over almsgiving to sinful beggars in post-atheist Russia (Tocheva 2011), Muslim Spaniards who wish to don the headscarf in a less visibly Muslim fashion in Andalusia (Rogozen-Soltar 2012) to Egyptian youths who play 'Ramadan football' to kill the time during the otherwise asocial and ascetic fast (Schielke 2009), the issue of 'sociable piety' is a recurrent theme. This theme studies a delicate situation whenever new religiosity meets old sociality, and is potentially applicable to many historical moments and cross-cultural circumstances.

Using the case of the multi-religious Indonesian city of Salatiga as an example, this essay argues that the form that piety takes is often beyond individual pursuit of virtue and involves complex forms of dialogic conscience. More specifically, Indonesian forms of sociality have influenced the recent Islamic movements and served to relabel specific Islamic expressions as 'fanatical' and non-Indonesian. Engaging with the narratives and performances of members of popular Islamic sermon groups in urban neighbourhoods, this article explores the cultural roots and social nexuses that generate the pervasive discourse of being 'not fanatical' among urban middle-class Muslims—a phrase that indexes an endorsement of social practices that preserve, and recultivate, 'sociable piety'.

By describing a coevolution of public piety and communal sociality, this article considers the configuration of human subjectivity that always has a meaningful history and an evolving roster of imaginary audience members. This consideration makes it difficult to reduce subjectivity to a prefigured scheme of self-cultivation or to the capacity of articulating deliberative politics in the public sphere. More often, the docile and the deliberative are mixed in dialogic ways. To illustrate this, I consider recent developments of local Islamic sermon groups in urban Javanese neighbourhoods, through which people skilfully meld intra-Muslims identities, long-term cultural sensibilities and Indonesian pluralistic ideals within a loosely shared project—everyday action against the behaviours considered to be *fanatik*. The word *fanatik* is locally used to mock religious behaviours that disrupt social harmony, which range from the overly puritanical conduct of neighbours to militant attacks launched by radical groups. During the time of my fieldwork, *fanatik* was one of the buzzwords that people repeatedly invoked in their comments on proper public piety.



**Figure 1** The circumcision ceremony started at 10 am on a Sunday morning. At the time, the road was already saturated with sounds of buoyant Arabic music.

### Act One: A Ritual Documentation of Complex Muslim Constituencies

On the Sunday morning of 31 January 2010, Ibu Eka's son had recovered from his circumcision and was ready for *khitanan* or the ritual celebration. The gathering started at 10am, when the road was already saturated with sounds of buoyant Arabic music (Figure 1). As people filled the outdoor tents and the seated areas surrounding Ibu Eka's and her neighbours' houses, the number of guests reached about 180, mostly married adults. Women, donning headscarves in a wide array of hues, numbered more than 100 and most were regular attendants of the women's Islamic sermon group. At the entrance to the tent also stood two Christians, the wives of the former heads of the official neighbourhood associations, as well as five teenagers who delivered snacks and tea to the guests.

Unlike the 'men before women' spatial arrangement during *sholat* (Ar. *salat*, Indo. *sholat*, 'the practice of formal prayer in Islam'), some of the female guests were seated right in front of the stage, while the men mostly stayed in the back (Figure 2). Songs Exalting the Prophet or *shalawat nabi* opened the ceremony, followed by the opening speech given by local figures and more songs of *shalawat nabi*. Mbak Catur, the leading reciter in the neighbourhood women's Islamic sermon groups, was present from the beginning to the end and seated in a conspicuous place, despite some of her Muhammadiyah fellows' disdain for these boisterous songs. (Field notes, November 2009)

This ceremonial setting illuminates some of the key tensions within contemporary conceptions of 'ideal Muslim personhood' in urban Java during the past two decades. In light of authoritative ethnographic accounts of male-domination in Javanese communal rituals in the past (Geertz 1960, 12; Sullivan 1994; Woodward 1988, 62),



**Figure 2** The profile of the guest is heterogeneous. Muhammadiyah followers attend the ceremony although they discourage festivities. They show respect by being present and they preserve their integrity by being dressed in pure white headscarves and clothes.

two aspects deserve exploration: firstly, the shifting position of women alongside Islamic revival from ‘behind the scene’ to ‘right on the stage’ in public rituals such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies, funerals and collective worship (for similar observations, see Brenner 1998, 175–177)<sup>3</sup>; and secondly—the focus of this paper—the recent manifestation of intra-Muslim alliances in local Islamic sermon groups, where members of the ‘modernist’ organisation Muhammadiyah and those of ‘traditionalist’ Nahdlatul Ulama sit side by side each week, despite a history of uneasy rivalry.

Let me begin with a brief account of the two organisations and the two kinds of Muslim subjectivity they represent. Since the late Dutch colonial period, Muhammadiyah has remained the most influential ‘modernist’ organisation out of the wave of cross-continental Islamic reformism that had previously stirred the Middle East (Laffan 2003; Nakamura 1983; Boland 1982). These were Muslims who wished to ‘rationalise’ Islam, making modern education and universal ethics their primary concerns. They emphasised the transparency and perfection of the Qur’an and the Sunna, and strived to purge Islamic practices of what they considered un-Islamic local traditions, such as ritual meals, festivities, the recitation of a catechism to the deceased immediately after burial and pilgrimage to the burial sites of Muslim saints, among many other practices (Bowen 1993; Hefner 2009). The authorities that these reformists were challenging were ‘traditionalist’ scholars who were faithful to the

study of classical religious texts within the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence (Van Bruinessen 1996; Dhofier 1999).

In response, the 'traditionalists', usually school masters running Islamic boarding schools who also led social communities spiritually connected to them, reformed their curriculum by adding secular subjects and expanding their Islamic boarding schools in the 1930s, while reasserting the compatibility of 'traditional' ritual practices and the communal obligations they represented with Islam.<sup>4</sup> Their shared aspiration to revive Islam in society through education and charity has since become a contest between Muhammadiyah (literally 'the Followers of the Prophet') and Nahdlatul Ulama [NU] ('the Awakening of Islamic Scholars'). Due to their different approaches to Islam, the relations between the two have soured from time to time. With heightened population mobility and transmigration, many places started to have residents affiliated with either organisation living alongside each other. For example, in the coastal village of Karangagung in the 1990s, NU and Muhammadiyah followers lived side by side but went to separate mosques to pray; one on the west side, the other on the east (Syam 2005).

Recent studies have indicated that this century-long traditionalist-modernist divide has been downplayed with the rise of new Islamic identities and conscious reconciliation between NU and Muhammadiyah leaders over recent decades (Daniels 2009; Howell 2001; Barton 1997; Van Bruinessen 1996). Indeed, a few members of Muhammadiyah told me that they were MUNU, that is, a Muhammadiyah Muslim who gets along with NU, although in principle they still discourage ritual festivities as well as other ritual practices they consider to be *bida'* (un-Islamic innovation) (Beck 1995, 260–62; Woodward 2011, 170). This includes some extra repetitions of prayers (such as the *qunut* prayer) during obligatory *sholat* (*salat*), certain *shalawat* songs, and post-mortem rituals (see also Fananie & Sabardila 2000). Given this potential contradiction, it begs the question: if the discourse of MUNU could be supported intellectually, how is it practiced on the ground? In other words, how do reformists and traditionalists practice rituals together?

Recent scholarship in Indonesian Islamic piety has complemented previous approaches to Muslim public piety as primarily virtuous cultivation for self-improvement (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005) or as an avenue for participation in deliberative politics (Eickelman & Piscatori 2004; Mir-Hosseini 2006). This body of research suggests, each in its own way, the appeal of Islamic cultivation in Indonesia has been for simultaneous individual self-cultivation and social improvement (Jones 2010; Rudnyckj 2009; George 2009; Hoesterey 2008; Smith-Hefner 2007; Doorn-Harder 2006; Boellstorff 2005; Lukens-Bull 2005; Gade 2004; Hefner 2000; Brenner 1998). The vignette of the circumcision ceremony, strongly inflected by the Islamic turn in post-1990s Indonesian modernity, indicates such a complex mixture of the disciplinary-docile and rational-deliberative accounts of human agency at the grassroots level. Considering the heterogeneous cultural profiles of the guests—including 'traditionalist' Muslims, 'modernist' Muslims and Christian minorities—it is unlikely that all of them are docilely accepting the same kind of Islamic morality or

are all actively participating in the same kind of deliberative politics. Instead, the vignette begs the question: how is the diversity of piety organised and temporarily suspended in a singular social setting that is demanded by customs?

It is my argument that the heterogeneous composition of the circumcision ceremony captures the ongoing struggle of neighbourhood communities to grapple with the tension between customary sociality and different paths to piety. As noted above, many 'modernist' Muslims continue to regard certain kinds of festivities as 'un-Islamic' social obligations and obstacles to a purified Islam. This ritual documentation is a concrete example of how in a community the formal trends of convergence between NU and Muhammadiyah are enacted (see also Daniels 2009). The Muhammadiyah family of thirty-year-old Mbak Catur attended the circumcision ceremony to show their solidarity with the community. Yet, Mbak Catur and her mother also preserved their integrity by being dressed in pure white costumes in order to distinguish themselves from other people (see Figure 2). 'It is okay [that other people enjoy the festivity]', Mbak Catur told me afterwards, 'but other than prayers and chanting, we do not sing.'

This local mix of supporters of the 'traditionalist' Nahdlatul Ulama and those of 'modernist' Muhammadiyah, according to the hostess of the circumcision ritual, Ibu Eka, was more explicitly reinvigorated by a sense of moral crisis following national events such as the 2002 Bali Bombings, the 2003 Marriott Hotel bombing and the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing, as well as the appearance of alien groups such as Hizbut Tahrir and other Salafist sects in the neighbourhoods. On 20 February 2010, Ibu Eka shared with me the album of photos taken during the circumcision ceremony and pointed out the silhouette of her 'Salafist neighbour' in one of the photos. She remarked in a cautionary tone,

[He was] so *fanatik!*...Before, he wouldn't even shake hands with us!...If the rest of us do not stay together, what would happen to us? Later people would say Islam is fanatical (*fanatik*) and fragmented (*dipecah-pecah*)...In the present era, [some] people are *fanatik*...Well, maybe now it has improved...before, bombs!...Actually [I think] some of them [the 'fanatics'] are not really Indonesians. Some are from Malaysia or elsewhere. They are not *true* Muslims! Precisely because they aren't really properly Islamic (*Islam yang benar*), they could easily become lost...You see, Abu Bakar Bashir [widely believed to be the mastermind behind the 2002 Bali Bombings] was already caught, there won't be any problems...Luckily in our place it is good. Even though I am *Islamic*, the family of the heads of the [former] Harmonious Citizens [who are Christians] must be invited [to public rituals]...how can it be otherwise? I do not favour one over another (*pilih kasih*). Even the Christians are also friendly (*akrab*) with me! I am not *fanatik!*

Ibu Eka's narrative bespeaks a persistent surveillance over 'the *fanatik*' in Java, but the focus on puritan Salafists is relatively new, and the Salafists are sometimes lumped together with militants. Like the older resistance to a 'modernist' Islam on the basis of its incompatibility with local customs, the discourse of the 'foreign' has again been held responsible for the origin of all things 'fanatical'. In the 1980s, wearing a headscarf was still uncommon and was mocked as 'going Arab' (Brenner 1998;

Smith-Hefner 2007) and therefore *fanatik* (Maryam 2012). As recently as the 1990s, Nahdlatul Ulama followers in Salatiga were still mocking some Muhammadiyah neighbours for their puritanical behaviours. In this recent past, Muhammadiyah members were criticised for being taboo-saturated sociopaths, who stayed away from neighbourly obligations and swept the floor after their ‘unclean’ neighbours’ visits.

In the latest wave of resistance to the ‘fanatical’ in post-Suharto Salatiga, however, there has been a much greater need to deride and exclude Salafists than to emphasise the difference between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in urban neighbourhoods. Salafists have now become the target of public mockery and source of urban legends, to an extent that I have heard many almost identical stories about the unfriendliness of ‘the Salafist family in our neighbourhood’ throughout Salatiga and in Yogyakarta. The naming of the social exotic persists, but the target of labelling has changed, as ‘traditionalists’ and ‘modernists’ now join in execrating the Salafists-next-door and militants on the television news.

In Ibu Eka’s sentences, the new social exotic is foreign and inauthentic in an idealised Indonesia; therefore, without much evidence needed, they must be coming from outside Indonesia. What is unspoken here is an inclusive Indonesian ‘us’, which now includes sociable Muslims of all stripes and sociable Christians, while excluding a distasteful un-Indonesian ‘them’, which encompasses both militants and puritans. Meanwhile, the cause of the fanatical era is attributed to identifiable social agents or to particular individuals, such as Abu Bakar Bashir, who can be duly captured, jailed and negated.

In mapping out the moral demographics of her neighbours and national fellows, Ibu Eka imagined an unnamed *super-addressee*—the higher authority that a speaker or a writer addresses beyond an immediate audience. To borrow Bakhtin’s (1986, 126) words, a super-addressee can be ‘God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, [or] science’, or in this case, the fellow citizens, Christians, the nation, as well as the world. Before speaking, Ibu Eka already assumed the presence of a super-addressee who reserved the right to judge her Muslim community as ‘fanatical’ and ‘fragmented’. Responding to that super-addressee, she preemptively redrew the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by conflating religious militants and puritans, while stressing the social tie between her and her neighbours, even Christian ones. Through displaying unambiguous confidence in naming the fanatical and showing allegiance to the ‘not fanatical’, Ibu Eka claimed her Indonesian authenticity and asserted control over the ‘fanatics’.

Such ‘fanaticism talk’ exemplifies the built-in dialogic constitution of social identity. The speaker’s anticipation of a super-addressee’s reaction and the responsive readjustment of the utterance are predicated upon the very possibility of crossing social stances. Following Holland et al.’s (2001) reformulation of Bakhtin’s ([1981] 2008) theory, I use the concept of heteroglossia as an index for multiple social existences often reflected in taking social stances. An analysis of heteroglossia emphasises that the social world is fundamentally lived by different social actors who acknowledge divergent voices and who are capable of representing and manipulating



these different worldviews. In this manner, sociable piety is simultaneously an achievement and ongoing challenge that urges pious people to improvise within heteroglossia and sympathise beyond individual cultivation in order to forge desirable social relations among heterogeneous interlocutors in daily life.

To call for a theoretical sensitivity to sociable piety in analyses of the Islamisation of social life in particular, and heteroglossic ethnography in general, I draw on fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2012 with two middle-class Muslim-majority neighbourhoods in Salatiga which I call Sinaran and Graha. The following analysis consists of two parts. Act Two discusses the recent transformation of Islamic sermon groups in Javanese communities. It reveals that the cultural process from which the Islamic sermon group was born is dependent on both long-term cultural inclinations and creative social interactions. In this process, 'Islam' and 'culture' are not two singular entities but heteroglossic flows in a loosely unified universe within communities' dialogic imaginations. Act Three features a *maulud* or the celebration of the Prophet's birthday and ends with an Islamic sermon given at a regular meeting right before the fasting month of Ramadan. These examples are selected to illuminate the ways in which middle-aged Indonesian Muslim women accomplish Islamic virtues through their improvisations of sociable piety.

### **Act Two: The Previous Life and Reincarnation of Indonesian Sociality**

Salatiga is a hilly city surrounded by volcanic ridges and situated 40 km south of Semarang, the provincial capital of Central Java. Like Bogor near Jakarta in West Java and Malang near Surabaya in East Java, Salatiga was a colonial town built for military bases, plantations and resorts. It is renowned for being home to the Christianity University of Satya Wacana, whose students come from all over the country. Today the city has about 170,000 residents, with 21 per cent of them being Protestants and Catholics (BAPPEDA 2011). Other major cities in the country are often comprised of 10 to 15 per cent citizens who are Christian; however, contrary to the impression of many insiders and outsiders, the urban concentration of Christians is not unique to Salatiga. Despite its strong colonial legacies and Christian-friendly atmosphere, Salatiga is a Muslim-majority city. Since the 1980s, the city has experienced an unprecedented Islamic revival, characterised by the mushrooming of shops displaying vast collections of headscarves, veiled women heading towards Islamic sermon meetings and the rapidly growing number of mosques, just like many other places in Indonesia. (There has been a 642 per cent growth in mosques since 1980 from 26 to 193 buildings, compared to that of Protestant churches from 22 to 72 (BPS Kota Salatiga 1980; BAPPEDA 2011).) While having its own style of multi-religious environment, Salatiga should not be regarded as a special case, but rather a window that allows us to see more clearly the common dilemma between Indonesian sociality and the growing interest in public piety.

*The 'Harmonious' Project*

Classic ethnography long ago demonstrated that the Javanese neighbourhood is a community defined by spatial proximity and internal reciprocity (Jay 1969). The current formal units of neighbourhoods, Harmonious Citizens (*rukun warga*, or RW) and its sub-units, Harmonious Neighbourhoods (*rukun tetangga*, or RT)<sup>5</sup>, are legacies of the Japanese wartime administration (1942–5), which were adopted and modified by post-Independence governments.<sup>6</sup> Both administrative units currently include a number of unsalaried local office-holders led by the head of RT and RW who are elected locally. In post-Suharto Salatiga today, the officers of RT and RW are still authorised to 'register and monitor residents and visitors, collect demographic and economic data, disseminate state directives, promote government plans and policies, extend local infrastructure, administer social welfare services and generally help to advance national development' (Sullivan 1986, 37).

Relying on unpaid labour, the 'Harmonious' project has been conceptualised as 'genuinely indigenised notions of moral obligation and generalised reciprocity' (Bowen 1986, 546). The 'Harmonious' project represents the permeability between the political implementation of self-governance and the cultural notion of 'harmony' (*rukun*). Robert Jay's (1969, 66) classic study, for example, emphasises the key role of close residence in Javanese villagers' moral obligation of cooperation and trust (see also Koentjaraningrat 1985). Such a cooperative community defined by spatial proximity is based on *rukun*, a 'state in which all parties are at least overtly at social peace with one another' (Jay 1969, 66) and summarised in the still pervasive usage of the slogan 'mutual help' (*gotong-royong*) among the Javanese (Bowen 1986). More recent works (Hawkins 1996; Guinness 2009) also note that Javanese communities continue to idealise the concept of *rukun*, despite dramatic socio-economic changes and diversifying religiosities.

In today's middle-class neighbourhoods of Sinaran and Graha in Salatiga, Muslim residents frequently conceptualise the social actions that contribute to *rukun* and *gotong-royong* as exemplified by acts of *bersilaturahmi*, an Arabic-derived Indonesian word, meaning 'to socialise and reciprocate'. Neighbours should *bersilaturahmi*—attend important rites of passage—and fulfil the obligation to organise and witness public rituals. Attendees validate the reiterated intentions of a host and are crucial to the completion of a collective prayer (see also Woodward 1988, 80; Beatty 1999, 34). The neighbourhood heads and the closest neighbours always assume greater degrees of responsibility to organise life-cycle ceremonies, particularly funerals and weddings. Women determine the guest list and prepare the food through the network of women's *rewang* (also meaning 'mutual help'), particularly referring to the preparation of foods for ritual meals, and *arisan*, the credit lottery clubs, which show a particular feminine aspect of Javanese customary sociality (see also Sullivan 1994; Newberry 2006). The communal characteristics of urban neighbourhoods in Salatiga, as well as in other Javanese cities, in sum, seem surprisingly more durable than some earlier predictions.<sup>7</sup>

It would be impossible, however, to overlook the fact that Javanese communal rituals have undergone significant changes in the last few decades. Clifford Geertz's (1957) classic piece 'Ritual and Social Change' sharply snapshots the ideological divides in the 1950s that undermined Javanese communal solidarity: these lead him to stress the importance of larger socio-political contexts for understanding how social communities change. After Geertz, anthropologists and historians have considered the complexity of Javanese society in a more *longue durée* approach and highlighted the constantly diverse religious profiles that undercut the 'harmonious' image of the Javanese community in the centuries-long evolution of Islam in the archipelago (Hefner 1987a; Ricklefs 2007; Van Bruinessen 2002).

The Harmonious project hence should not be seen as a homogeneous ideology that dictates neighbourly solidarity. The Harmonious project is always a product of negotiations amid social change. One of the most perceptible changes in the socio-religious life of Javanese society is the decline of the *kendhuren*, the ritual meal sometimes called *slametan* ('safety', a Javanese ritual that symbolises social unity) (Guinness 2009, 158; cf. Geertz 1960, 12).<sup>8</sup> As in Yogyakarta during the 1990s and 2000s (Guinness 2009; Kim 2007), Salatiga residents also consistently reported in 2009 and 2010 that more consciously 'Islamic' forms of communal gathering have largely displaced *kendhuren* as the 'Islamic' style rituals have become more public and elaborate while *kendhuren* has become smaller and simpler. Communal ritual remains important, but what constitutes one has changed. One critical element in this scenario is the popularisation of Islamic sermon meetings or *pengajian* over the recent decades, which have reconfigured the outlook of Javanese socio-religious gatherings and reincarnated the nationalist notion of *gotong-royong* into a more accentuated Islamic-Indonesian notion of *bersilaturahmi*.

#### *Institutionalising Sociable Piety*

Since the 1980s, partially as a response to the Religious Department's *dakwa* (proselytising) policies, Islamic sermon meetings or *pengajian* have been implemented all over Java as a new type of proselytising activity operating in conjunction with formal Muslim interest groups. The proselytising groups included Golkar (the government-sponsored party during the New Order years), Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (Hefner 1987b, 545–547; Jones 1984; Weix 1998). Initially, *pengajian* was viewed by some scholars as an electoral stratagem designed to court Muslim voters (Baried 1986; Ward 1974, 82). It later became clear, however, that *pengajian* has proliferated and become integrated into neighbourhood communities, who organised their own *pengajian* independent of those held by formal religious associations.

As the *dakwa* movement was more dispersed and diversified in society, organising and attending *pengajian* became a defining marker of Islamic piety in neighbourhood communities. Particularly, women's *pengajian* have been more successful and better organised than men's. The members of women's *pengajian* are small entrepreneurs,

civil servants, teachers, petty vendors and housewives. Yet, regardless of their professions, women are said to be more *rajin* (diligent) than men in attending *pengajian*. This was, according to my respondents, because the traditional ritual network *rewang* has long bonded women together through exchange ties. The difference is that, whereas in *rewang* women work behind the scene, in *pengajian* women participate at the front alongside men.

At present, a women's *pengajian* in Sinaran and Graha includes around fifty regular participants and 120 less active members. The sermon meeting is held by an *emcee*, a reciter chanting in Arabic, a translator who reads the Koranic verses in Indonesian and a sermon preacher. Each time the group invites a different preacher drawn from local religious leaders, Islamic colleges, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and the Department of Religion in Salatiga. A *pengajian* starts with the customary brushing hands with everyone already on the scene. During this time, women chat about household affairs and health matters, while a box for donations for charity is passed around. The *emcee* announces news and reminds the members of the next meeting time and location. Then the group starts with chanting some Koranic verses, followed by a translation and then the sermon. The sermon lasts half an hour and is expected to include sufficient jokes to keep the participants engaged (see also Van Bruinessen & Wajidi 2006).

The evolution from women's *rewang* to *pengajian* in Salatiga is where Bakhtin's (1986, 87) concept of multiple 'speech genres' within the heteroglossic community is useful. Speech genres, to borrow Bakhtin's words, are 'relatively stable types' of utterances that have particular thematic content, style and compositional structure (Bakhtin 1986, 60). Speech genres encompass different activities such as greetings, small talk, military commands, poetry recitation, news reports, religious preaching and so forth. Each is different based on social, economic and political factors. Because each genre is subject to 'alternating with one another', Bakhtin calls for an analytical movement from 'a simple description of styles' of each isolated genre to 'a special history of speech genres' (1986, 65).

In the case of Javanese women's socio-religious life in the batik-selling community of Surakarta, Brenner's (1998, 177) remark offers a parallel to Bakhtin's insight: 'the immediate juxtaposition of *arisan* and *slametan* is not a bizarre shift from the profane to the sacred, or from the "economic" to the "cultural", because these sharp dichotomies ultimately dissolve under close scrutiny'. This concept of the fluidity and changeability of speech genres helps us to highlight the creativity of pre-existing sociolinguistic that have enlivened the Islamic sermon meeting. If women's collective cooking combines small talk and backdoor conversations behind ritual meals, Islamic sermon meetings traverse across backdoor friendships (Newberry 2006) and formal religious learning. As such, *pengajian* enables several pre-existing speech genres in neighbourhood communities to mix and popularise what would have been a less appealing religious event.

*Negotiating Sociable Piety*

The Islamic sermon meeting that brings together women of different Islamic factions in the neighbourhoods has replicated its outlook in important communal rituals. The following vignette of a holiday celebration selected from my field notes illustrates this point.

On the night of the Prophet's birthday or *Maulud* during the Islamic calendar year 1431 (February, 2010 AD), 120 women and sixty men from Sinaran<sup>9</sup> gathered in the neighbourhood mosque to celebrate. I had rehearsed *shalawat nabi* with the tambourine team or *rebana* the day before, and served as one of the players that night. Ibu Eka, our lead singer and conductor, admonished the men in the team to closely follow the tempo of her voice. That evening, Ibu Eka's enchanting solo in Arabic signaled the beginning of the celebration. Even though she was dressed in the batik uniform shirt worn by some fifty other members of the local women's sermon group, her strong voice and commanding presence made her stand out.

Not all households were represented in the celebration. Some members of Muhammadiyah who were uncomfortable with *shalawat nabi* were absent, but others, like Mbak Catur, figured prominently in the ceremony. In fact, it was she who performed the opening recitation (Figure 3). That night, her Arabic recitation was forceful and striking. As her voice diminished, we heard the Indonesian translation of the prayer, followed by the congregation singing the *Maulud* Song in unison in Javanese.



**Figure 3** Mbak Catur, a member of the 'modernist' Muslim organisation Muhammadiyah, performed the opening Koranic recitation during the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, despite some of her Muhammadiyah fellows' disdain for the rest of the festivities in the ritual, including boisterous singing activities.

This *maulud* celebration reveals that the neighbourhood Islamic sermon group works as a social nexus for recreating sociable piety. In the complex religious topography of an urban milieu, the living forms of Islamic public piety are negotiated among residents who reside with people of different Islamic factions. Like other authors writing on the contemporary Islamic and Christian revivals across the globe, I contend that public religiosity involves complex compositions of morality that can never be exhausted by religious doctrines alone or a disciplinary pursuit of *a singular morality per se* (Soares & Osella 2009, 10; Schielke 2009; Robbins 2007). Morality is always generated out of heteroglossia. The way to become ‘the properly pious’ must partially lie beyond a single religious arena and cut across changing social relations as well as cultural tastes.

The crossing between sociality and piety is vividly captured by Ibu Eka’s social role in her Harmonious Neighbourhood. Ibu Eka was born in 1968 in Cebu, East Java, in a Javanese family that was affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama, although she was not educated in an Islamic boarding school. She thought of herself as a talented singer and was proud of her award-winning Islamic music or *rebana* band in Semarang some years ago. She relocated to Salatiga in 1995 after she married a municipal civil servant in the city. Her fame as a singer spread by word of mouth in Salatiga. A *rebana* group based downtown started to invite her as a guest singer at ceremonial events. Many neighbours found her outgoing spirit of leadership admirable, and many had asked her, not her husband, to be the head of the Harmonious Neighbourhood. She was certainly proud of this, but she reasoned that there was already enough work to do in the women’s neighbourhood activities, particularly PKK<sup>10</sup> and *pengajian*. For her, attending *pengajian* serves both the purpose of accruing religious merits for individuals and fostering the integrity of the community. By actively participating in the *pengajian*, she was already sufficiently fulfilling her duty.

Ibu Eka’s active ‘syncing’ between social relations and religious commitment testifies to the crossover between the conscious self-cultivation and collective sociality for participants in cultural change. In a different but relevant ethnographic setting, in the process of conversion to Pentecostalism among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, Robbins (2007, 295–296) persuasively argues that moral reasoning is not unconscious cultural reproduction but a sober process of choice-making among contradictions between values derived from different social spheres, old and new. This understanding of morality allows for the coexistence of multiple systems of moral reasoning cast in opposition to each other. Yet, the clear-cut distinction between the old and new, and the assumption that each value system is monologic, is questionable in this case. Ibu Eka’s commitment to *pengajian* is neither ‘traditional’ nor entirely ‘new’, but simultaneously generic (following the norm of the Harmonious project) and innovative (living as a ‘traditionalist’ but working together with ‘modernist’ Muslims to organise *pengajian* and religious ceremonies).

As is revealed to the Prophet’s birthday celebration, the configuration of public piety is the result of negotiations between different segments of a heterogeneous

urban population. 'Muslim subjectivity' in this particular sense is oriented towards the possibilities of sociable piety under particular circumstances. The evolution from the Harmonious project to women's popular *pengajian* groups and the cross-factional participation in communal rituals like *maulud* suggests that the diverse Islamic revivals have been accompanied by other strategies of sociable piety. As I discuss below, such negotiations for sociable piety are by no means marginal, but can even affect the performance of the core speech genres of Islam, namely the obligatory *sholat* prayer, known as one of the five pillars of Islam. Not only novel social existences but also essential religious practices are negotiated in a specific social context rather than being discursively predetermined. One must conduct a genealogy of dialogic religiosity that traces these dialectically formed layers of heterogeneous religious topography, which bespeak the evolution of customary sociality that is choreographed towards the potential super-addressee, be it God, local community or non-Muslim observers. In this framework, the genealogy shows people's shifting actions in response to their perceptions about what the community would think, and how the community would seem to the super-addressee.

### Act Three: Dialogic Piety—'It's Like Climbing Mt Merapi'

On a Friday afternoon in August 2012, the beginning of Ramadan was around the corner. Women from the Graha *pengajian* group were piling up snack boxes on the porch of the mosque. Fifty women eventually filed into the mosque, while three male office-holders from the Harmonious Neighbourhood and Harmonious Citizens were seated behind them. After the moderator's introduction and Koranic recitations—all conducted by women—the sermon started. Here is an excerpt from the sermon that day:

Preacher: That is the case for the angels...right?...So how many repetitions of *rakaat* (prayer-unit)? Eight times will do, twenty times will do. Even forty times will do, and even 100 times...well, please try.

Women: (laughed).

Preacher: For example earlier at noon you prayed 100 times and every time [you] read *Al-Fatihah*, just up to five times alone [you were] already tired.

Women: (laughed).

Preacher: This is because we are human. Last night I watched the World Cup from 1am to 4am, that [was] strong. Why? Because of passion. How enjoyable [watching football is]!...[We are] given reason and passion by God...

The twenty-five-minute sermon pivoted around the ways passion could hinder the ritual observance of both men and women. At the end, the preacher expressed his hope that everyone would maintain a high level of ritual purity (including physical and emotional fasting) during the fasting month, however challenging it might be.

Aware of the religious discrepancies among the listeners, the preacher skilfully dealt with the annual debate concerning the performance of *tarawih*, which is the set

of special prayers performed after the evening prayer *isya* during the month of Ramadan. It is conducted with a specific number of *rakaat*, the unit of prayer, consisting of a prescribed series of bows and prostrations. Supporters of NU usually do the *tarawih* with twenty repetitions of *rakaat* according to precepts of the Shafi'i school of law, while followers of Muhammadiyah do eight *rakaat* in accordance with other Hadith verses. Recognising the different practices but leaving the question of their legitimacy to the audience, the preacher's inclusive narrative did not gloss over this disagreement over practice,<sup>11</sup> but acknowledged the existence of differences while emphasising the common goal of ritual observance.

Although Sunni Islam or *Ahlul Sunnah wal Jamaah* alone has had a robust tradition of pluralistic jurisprudence exemplified by the four schools of law, the rivalry between factions and their possible collaborations on the ground are always an empirical question, as shown in the shifting relations between NU and Muhammadiyah. Likewise, the ways in which this sermonic acknowledgement of discrepant religious practices is translated into concrete social behaviours in neighbourhood life is an empirical question that only participant observation can help illuminate.

One night during the Ramadan falling in August 2010, I was seated on the floor of the mosque when I saw Ibu Siti arrive late for the *tarawih* (Figure 4). Her lateness, I discovered subsequently in our conversation, was a tactic to help her manage the different approaches to prayer rituals. Ibu Siti, aged fifty-four, is a mother of five children, an elementary school teacher, a cadre in the Salatiga branch of Aisyiyah (the women's wing of Muhammadiyah) and the head of the neighbourhood women's organisation Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK) in her Harmonious



**Figure 4** Ibu Siti was purposefully late to the *tarawih* prayer during Ramadan, because she wanted to miss the parts of the prayers she thought were redundant, if not un-Islamic.



Neighbourhood. She is from a Muhammadiyah family that has long engaged in trade and religious service in Yogyakarta. She has lived in Graha since 1986 with her husband, now a manager at the Coca-Cola factory in Central Java. The experience that Ibu Siti took the most pride in was the Haj pilgrimage she made with her husband in 2008, where she felt a profound connection to the global Muslim community.

This sense of the universal Muslim community has helped Ibu Siti to see Muslim diversity differently. She is always aware of the discrepancies between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah on topics including grave visitation and post-funeral rituals. The most obvious daily discrepancy in the neighbourhood lies in the recitation of *qunut*, the additional but not required verses, during the performance of *subuh*, the obligatory morning prayer. The *qunut* is often practiced by followers of NU but discouraged by Muhammadiyah followers because it is considered illegitimate *bidah* (innovation). In 2009, she told me how her '*qunut* issue' was resolved in Graha:

Even though we know who is Muhammadiyah and who is NU, Muhammadiyah and NU are still siblings. I am not *fanatik* about religion!...In the mosque here, usually the prayer leader (*imam*) in here would invariably do the prayer of *qunut* in *subuh*, which I don't do. I just stand there and wait. I don't read it. That's all. I still get up at four every morning, go to mosque and pray with other neighbours.

Ibu Siti understands religious difference through a popular metaphor in Java: it is like climbing Mount Merapi, a volcano that lies to the south of Salatiga; everyone has a different path (read: religions, factions and so on), but the goal is all the same. This mountain-climbing metaphor (shared by mainstream Muslims and Christians, but not evangelicals or Pentecostals in Salatiga) is nevertheless followed by a qualification by Ibu Siti. There are some people whose paths are simply 'lost' in the *aliran sesat* (heretical sects, literally 'misguided streams'). These are the zealots who disrupted social harmony with their violence, coercion and their 'over-displayed' religiosity. Ibu Siti reasons that collective worship in the mosque that crosses the lines between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama is an effective way to set examples of tolerance and offset such 'fanaticism'. Despite their differences, NU and Muhammadiyah work together to check the rising tide of those whose behaviours are 'over the top (*keterlebihan*)': as she said this, she pointed her finger towards the northeastern outskirts of the city where a secluded Jemaah Islamiyah community is located. 'There,' Ibu Siti said, while gesturing to indicate the figure of a woman enshrouded in a veil covering the entire body and face except for the eyes. In her moral map of religious pluralism, then, not everyone is 'properly Islamic'. In this new map, the 'fanatics' bring together the old enemies, the 'traditionalists' and 'modernists'.

Ibu Siti told me that she was late to the *tarawih* prayer because she was purposely missing the parts of the prayers she thought were redundant, if not un-Islamic. This strategic delay was not an index of the cultural impetus of a Muhammadiyah identity embodied in her, but a result of the possible contours of sociable piety created by her (Figure 5); it would have been easier for her to simply skip the collective *tarawih* at



**Figure 5** Ibu Siti's (right) lateness is exemplary of dialogic subjectivity since her behaviour is not dictated by the cultural tenets of Muhammadiyah but a compromise between sociality and piety.

the neighbourhood mosque and avoid different ways of conducting prayers. Similarly, her remaining present yet silent during the morning prayer when it came to *qunut* recitation was not a behaviour dictated by any tenet of Muhammadiyah, but again a compromise between sociality and piety. After all, as she told me, this was the way to *bersilaturahmi* and part of her social duties as an educated *hajjah* (female Muslims who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca). God and the community are all watching, and she must present the exemplary deeds that satisfy both.

In this vein, daily Islamic activities mobilised through the sensibilities of being 'not fanatical' across heterogeneous Muslim constituencies are made a powerful tool of reflexive identity-making and preservation of community. The new Islamic turn in 'Harmonious' social gatherings is hence not only to cultivate individual piety or to foster Islam's place in possible lines of public reasoning, but to recreate moral boundaries in relation to a rearranged spectrum of otherness before the super-addressee for whom one performs shrewdly.

### **Conclusion: Towards Sociable Piety and Dialogic Subjectivity**

The 'Not Fanatical' project in the coevolution of Islamic piety and Indonesian sociality suggests a complex interplay of heterogeneous Muslim identities with specific communal sensibilities in a particular time. It involves a dialogically imagined process of subject formation, a process made possible not by women consciously initiating the whole project, but by their continuous social labour enabled by the old communal sensibilities adjusted to a new landscape of religious heteroglossia. From

this perspective, the project of sociable piety blends a mode of subjectivity in which ordinary Muslims cultivate their individual ethics with another mode in which the idea of the common good intervenes in the contour of individual piety.

In both Ibu Eka's and Ibu Siti's narratives about their being 'not fanatical', there are multi-layered tensions between the 'is' of the recent chaotic years and the 'ought' of an ideal society, and between the 'is' of being Islamic in different ways and the 'ought' of practical pluralism. These ambivalences were manifest in the *denied* identification: the self-referential negation of using the phrase 'not fanatical' to modify the otherwise holy and highly desired Islamic identity. The modification seemed a voluntary burden, as if the fanatical inclinations of some in the community are so pervasive and nefarious that one needs a prefigured defence against the imagined judgement of the neighbourhood, the nation, the world or indeed any potential super-addressee.

This brief history of the coevolution between sociality and piety reveals that subjectivity is constantly reconstituted in the give and take through the complex social heteroglossia from which one yearns to create a noble sense of belonging. The process parallels what Bakhtin ([1981] 2008, 262) calls 'the higher stylistic unity': by defining the novel as 'the higher stylistic unity' of a diversity of social 'languages' ([1981] 2008, 262), each representing 'a world view' ([1981] 2008, 271), Bakhtin makes it possible to see the artistic creation of a novel similar to the narrative made about a community. His following description of the 'unitary language' ([1981] 2008, 270) that encompasses its sub-languages is comparable to a mainstream moral discourse imposed on heterogeneous voices, crying for a recognisable and manageable community:

It makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity. ([1981] 2008, 270)

Bakhtin's notion of the narrative unity of the novel resembles the conditionally 'unitary language' in the 'Not Fanatical' project. Members of the sermon groups celebrate holidays they disagree about and worship in the presence of prayers they do not believe in on a daily basis, not with 'a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication' but as social acts that insure 'a *maximum* of mutual understanding' (Bakhtin [1981] 2008, 271, original emphasis). In this case, the minimum of comprehension resulted in the conflicted discursive traditions of piety, but the maximum of mutual understanding yields to the unspoken consensus of anti-'fanaticism'. This achievement of mutual understanding is a major source for reclaiming a unified community in a potentially conflicted moral world. The method to reach the maximum is not dictated by possible interpretations of a set of doctrines or concluded by rational debate, but is at every moment situated in shifting social contexts and in the preemptive negation that invokes an immanent super-addressee—'I am not fanatical (*saya tidak fanatik*)!'

The socio-religious gatherings discussed in this essay entail behavioural creativity that responds to the locally perceived moral crisis of the Indonesian Muslim

community in a particular time. Because these public practices of sociable piety are subject to the shifting constellations of intra-Muslim identities and customary sociality, they defy any essentialist understandings of 'Islam', 'culture' or 'pluralism'. As I have shown, the evolution of Javanese sociable piety is predicated on both the generic and dialogic activities of the internally heterogeneous community.

The horizons of sociable piety remain contested and circumscribed in various ways, compelling engagement in the meaningful synthesis of practical pluralism, religious piety and customary sociality both in Indonesia and globally<sup>12</sup>, in the past and in the future. The struggle for sociable piety offers insights not only for scholars of Islam but to all who strive to grasp how piety and sociality play living roles in the ever-deepening history of subjectivity. Following Mbak Catur's chanting in the *Maulud* and Ibu Siti's silence during *subuh*, my analysis moves towards a dialogic approach to subjectivity.

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### Notes

- [1] Pseudonyms are used throughout, except where exposing someone's position would otherwise reveal their identity.
- [2] The actual compositions and possible orientations of each religious organisation named in this essay are far messier than the easy categories appearing in the article. My justification for this is precisely that this essay is primarily about my respondents' perspectives and the dialogic subjectivity that they possess in a shifting world, not about scholarly opinions on a proper categorisation of groups associated with Salafism, traditionalism, modernism or cosmopolitanism.
- [3] This will be discussed in more detail by the author in a book currently in progress.
- [4] In fact, prior to the twentieth century, *pesantren* were the only formal education institutions in Java, where an almost exclusively religious curriculum was offered to a mix of students including future religious leaders, court poets (Florida 1995) and members of the ruling class (Pemberton 1994, 48–49).
- [5] There was RK, or Harmonious Village, that supervised RW. In 1988–89 RK was abolished in favour of the smaller RW.
- [6] Ideally RT comprise no more than thirty households and RW three to seven RT. In Salatiga and other cities nowadays, however, these numbers are often far surpassed.
- [7] Clifford Geertz and James Peacock in the 1960s both suggested that urban neighbourhoods no longer represented corporate communities but administrative units (Guinness 2009, 169), and that ritual meals would soon lose their appeal.
- [8] In the 1950s, Geertz (1960, 12) described the *slametan* as followed: 'The ceremony itself is all male. The women remain *mburi* (behind—i.e., in the kitchen), but they inevitably peek through the bamboo walls at the men, who, squatted on floor mats *ngarepan* (in front—i.e.,

in the main living room) perform the actual ritual, eating the food the women have prepared'. As late as the 1970s and 1980s, the exclusively male *kendhuren* was still held on important occasions in the family life cycle, where all heads of households gathered together to distribute the ritual meal. In more rural areas near Salatiga today, the gender pattern of communal rituals still conforms to the 'men outside, women inside' spatial logic that was captured in previous ethnographic accounts.

- [9] Sinaran and Graha are pseudonyms referring to the research communities in this essay.
- [10] PKK refers to the nationwide, official, yet unpaid, adult women's neighbourhood organisations that were created during the Suharto regime (1966–98) to implement state policies regarding reproductive health, regulation of fertility and nutrition for mothers and children.
- [11] Bowen (1993, 318) characterises a local solution to similar issues in Sumatra as 'an economy of professed ignorance'.
- [12] For larger trends of shifting alliances and networks across Muslim communities globally, see Hefner 2005 and Rabasa 2007.

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