Fig. 8. PONTIANAK: An elementary teacher helps a forlorn student, waiting outside the schoolyard, arrange for a ride home. 
June 2010: photo by S. Chris Brown
BETWEEN THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: 
NEGOTIATING ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN PROVINCIAL INDONESIA

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After 9/11 many observers saw the sprouting of religious symbols in public spaces of Indonesian provincial towns as an indication that Islam was undermining the country’s secular democratic system. Some imagined a future as bleak as Pakistan or even Iraq today, countries that are gradually being sucked into a maelstrom of political and religious violence. But this alarmist perspective fails to capture the realities of post-Suharto Indonesia. The mushrooming of religious symbols is also coupled with the rise of a new middle class and the flourishing of democratic activities. Despite the fact that some sceptics still judge Indonesia’s emergent democracy as superficial and procedural rather than functional, one cannot deny that the electoral system evolving in Indonesia today is rooted in the opening of political opportunity structures, bolstered by social mobility, economic growth and broader participation in education and politics. The driving force behind this phenomenon is the middle class. Particularly in the provincial towns, its members have become active negotiators between the global and the local, and between the cosmopolitan centre and the hinterland. In their attempts to boost their identity and social status, the middle class is at the forefront of calls for the compatibility between Islam and modern values such as democracy, tolerance and human rights. They play a significant role in the way Islamization and democratization are interacting in Indonesia.

This chapter analyses the changing role of Islam in Indonesian provincial towns, as a new middle class is becoming more aware of the importance of religious identity for their social status and lifestyle. Focusing on developments in two medium-sized towns – Kebumen in Central Java and Martapura in South Kalimantan – it aims to show how two major transformations shaping contemporary Indonesia – democratization and globalization – are generating a public sphere in which politics and religion are subtly intertwined. Mass education and mass communications have facilitated an awareness in Muslims of the need to reconfigure the nature of religious thought and action, create new forms of public space, and

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