

Juliette Koning, Marleen Nolten, Janet Rodenburg, and Ratna Saptari, eds., *Women and Households in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, no. 27. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000. 354 + xiii pages, map, glossary.

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This comprehensive anthology makes a strong contribution to debates on the concept of the "household." It includes thirteen essays written by well-known and accomplished scholars in the fields of geography, sociology, history, area studies, and anthropology, with the balance tipping toward anthropology. In it we are treated to handsome theoretical essays and richly detailed ethnographic studies that combine to skewer the last remnants of support for either the domestic/public dichotomy or a universalist definition of the household. Indonesia proves an apt area with which to attack these topics, since the enormous variety and composition of the physical structures and social relations in Indonesia that come under the purview of the concept of household prevent any facile generalizations.

When I first received this book, I was not sure another discussion of households, domestic/public, and women's agency could add anything new to the literature. I was delighted, however, to find that the essays provide strong evidence for the importance of such discussions to an analysis of the complex and often contradictory meanings and practices of women's lives.

As the editors state in the preface, this book aims to "examine critically the usefulness of the 'household' concept within the culturally diverse context of Indonesia and to explore . . . the position of women within and beyond the existing domestic arrangements." (p. xii) The anthology was the result of a conference held in the Netherlands in 1995. The editors did a wonderful job of choosing a selection of essays from the conference that represent a range of ethnic groups in Indonesia (although five on Java was a bit too many for my taste) and that address a wide range of issues related to the problematic household concept. As Nolten notes in her introductory chapter, the essays in this book make it impossible to speak of "the Indonesian household." (p. 8)

The essays do not simply address local social relations, but for the most part examine the interface of local practices and dominant state ideology in the constitution and transformation of households. Particular attention is directed to the way women accommodate or challenge these forces as they recreate household relations. I think the most compelling essays in the book are those that refuse the household as a valid conceptual category, or that at least refuse the boundaries that the concept imposes on ethnographic data (Beckmann and Beckmann, Jenneway, Reenen, Tiwon). A key contribution of the book is the insistence on the importance of kinship to understanding relations in houses by looking beyond individual units to the social ties that construct particular places of residence (Beckmann and Beckmann, Elmhirst, Reenen, Wolf). Although others have also argued for the importance of ties "beyond" the household, the insistence on factoring in kinship (and community) relations helps to dissolve the boundedness of the household.

Other contributors attempt to understand household relations through the use of dichotomies such as ideology vs. social practice or formal/informal, which, however, tend to limit rather than deepen the analysis. The greatest disagreement among the contributors concerns representations of the domestic/public dichotomy. Although some dispel any notion of its usefulness, others still find that representation of the world useful.

The range of topics covered in this anthology includes: the tension between colonial/nationalist representations and local discourses on households and family forms, the effect of state institutions and labor migration on the form of the household, women's agency in and beyond households, women's networks, and women's productive activities and household relations. I cannot adequately cover all the essays in the book or present the depth of the issues addressed, but I will briefly comment on each essay.

Nolten's introductory chapter lays out the range of issues being addressed in the book, while Saptari's provides a good overview of the history of the debates about the household concept, an important addition for those unfamiliar with the field. Her insightful review of the "domestication of women" through colonial and state interventions in Indonesia stresses the ability of women to recreate their own lives in the face of a state gender ideology that is becoming "more rigid and inflexible." (p. 15) Although several of the chapters repeat Saptari's historical overview, I found it was not overly redundant because each one then takes a different perspective or addresses a different implication of the household concept.

Locher-Scholten's essay examines the colonial attitudes toward the Javanese and its effect on household formation. She does an excellent job of pointing to class differences in colonial attitudes toward Javanese women. The elite (*priyayi*) women were educated and pushed toward a Western style middle-class nuclear family, while peasant women, seen as important to economic production, were largely left alone. Thus the cult of domesticity that the Dutch fostered was aimed primarily at elite women. This raises an interesting question of how and when the colonial ideal of the proper housewife trickled down to the lower classes.

Hatley and Blackburn's essay actually provides some answers to that question as they explore the writings of Indonesian women in the 1930s. The writers, primarily urban, educated women eager to bring the "benefits" of modernization to Indonesian households, encouraged formation of "modern" nuclear households. Although not directly geared toward household issues, their writings made clear that education and modern methods were important for raising a healthy family. The authors see these women as "actively involved in redefining their roles in the households, in marriage and workplace" (p. 64). Such writings certainly reached a larger pool of women beyond the upper class elites of Java, but given the low percentage of women who were literate at that time, it would be interesting to see what routes this information took to the villages, if it arrived there at all.

In the most scintillating piece of the collection Sylvia Tiwon draws on Ben Anderson and Judith Butler to examine how the Indonesian nation was the materialization of a *male* imagination fearful of the power of an "inchoate" matrifocal household. Many scholars have shown that women were marginalized in the

development of the Indonesian nation. But Tiwon brings this discussion to a new level. Arguing that the household-family-nation interface was problematic to nationalist aspirations, she documents a national shift from matrifocal households to nuclear male-headed households. She argues that matrifocal households are antithetical to nationalist and capitalist aspirations because the women of these households maintain communal land rights that keep ancestral land out of the hands of individual men and thus out of commodity circulation. Matrifocal households thus quelled the spark of capitalism in the nationalist mind. Consequently the state shift toward nuclear families, according to Tiwon, is in part an effort to rid women of their power in matrifocal households.

In one of several discussions of Javanese households, Wolf argues that greater attention should be granted to intra-household relations in assessing households and less attention paid to economic and legal factors as sole determinants of household relations. In attacking the household concept, Wolf rehashes the debate about women's "status" and "autonomy" (both problematic terms) in Javanese households and the ideology of spiritual potency. She divides women's financial control of households into subsets of "managing" and "budgeting" to argue that women are not the domineering figures that they are so often assumed to be. She goes so far as to suggest that "women are forced to earn much of what they then can manage or control" (p. 93), which seems to imply that if women were not "forced" to work, they would happily lay down their burden and let men rule the roost. This debate has been laid to rest hopefully in Suzanne Brenner's excellent work *The Domestication of Desire*.¹ In contrast to Wolf, Brenner argues that alternative gender ideologies in Java underscore women's power in households and call attention to men's inability to control their desires.

The remaining chapters in the anthology provide us with rich ethnographic studies that address specific household issues. The case studies cover Ambon, Bali, West Sumatra (Minangkabau), Lampung, Toba Batak, Flores, and Java (four), giving the reader an impressive range of material on household and family relations in ethnic Indonesia. Keebet and Franz Benda-Beckmann show that for the Ambonese the household concept may not capture the relevant social units or property-holding units. Drawing on Yanagisako's formative critique of family and household,² they recommend moving beyond households and even "inter-household" relations to focus on strands of relations or networks that structure residence, including kinship, affines, inheritance, rights to property, descent, and rank. Jennaway's discussion of Bali focuses on co-wives' agency in polygynous households, in the process revealing the instability of the household term. Reenen argues against the usefulness of the "one cooking pot" definition of households by showing the multiple forms of Minangkabau matrilineal houses. In a society where kin ties crosscut households, assertions about their boundedness are problematic. Although her point that matriliney makes a difference in household relations is a good one, her analysis is weakened by use of the "domestic/public" dichotomy as a framework for understanding women's lives.

¹ Suzanne April Brenner, *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth and Modernity in Java* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

² Sylvia J. Yanagisako, "Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8 (1979): 161-205.

Koning tackles the question of the "nuclearization" of households. Pointing to the impact of male labor migration and availability of wage labor on household social relations, she shows that Javanese households are not necessarily becoming more nuclear, but that couples are moving out of parents' houses sooner. While she provides good details on shifting patterns, some greater attention to the relation of New Order ideology to couples' decisions would have been helpful. Elmhirst looks at the different strategies of daughters of Javanese transmigrant families and Lampung families in South Sumatra. Drawing on the concept of moral economy in households, she argues for the importance of cultural factors in household decision-making and relations with daughters. While the author clearly shows that Javanese and Lampung ideas about prestige, power, and morality affect daughters differently, Elmhirst needs to situate daughters' desires for economic independence as well.

Rodenburg's study of Toba Batak households investigates the implications of primarily male out-migration on gender and household relations in a patrilineal society. Refusing simple answers, she does a good job of showing the complexity of women's relations to husbands and parents. Although women as wives have few options and a weak bargaining position in this patrilineal system, a woman's assistance to her husband and sons creates a dependency that she can use to maintain her security in the household.

The final three chapters in the book examine women's productive labor from the context of household relations. Jong discusses women weavers in Flores and the impact of their weaving on intra- and inter-household relations. Saptari looks at Javanese women factory workers and their exchange networks. Weix takes a different angle of approach, examining the role of elite women in their husbands' firms in Java. Challenging the identification of households with a domestic domain, Weix argues that elite women firm managers produce prestige and maintain patronage ties through their actions as matrons of the family and household. Her discussion of the concept of patronage adds an important new dimension to these essays on households. Jong and Saptari have different takes on the domestic/public dichotomy. Jong argues that cloth production crosses the boundaries of the domestic without, however, refusing the dichotomy altogether. For her part, Saptari insists on the importance of the "domestic" unit in contra-distinction to an "extra-domestic" domain, arguing that within poor households, the domestic division remains intact.

Overall, the book raises a number of important questions about the concepts of household, domestic/public, and women's agency. Uniformly well-written and well-organized, it deserves serious attention from Southeast Asianists as well as other scholars interested in historical, cultural, and economic changes in households and household composition. Because it is easily accessible, it also makes a good text for a number of courses at both the graduate and undergraduate level. By encouraging scholars to give priority to the cultural matrix within which any type of "household" is embedded, this anthology ensures that "households" will always be viewed with necessary caution, even skepticism, in the future.