
HIERARCHY AND THE "UNMODERN"

Andrew Willford

Suzanne A. Brenner. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 301 pages.

Anthropological studies of the local have often been criticized for creating hypothetical isolates, as Eric Wolf charges in his magisterial *Europe and the People Without History*,¹ that ignore the ways that the local is created in relation to larger social forces. These critiques are implicitly political in their suggestion that anthropological models of the Other fail to recognize their complicity in naturalizing cultures within colonial and neo-colonial formations of the world system. While occasionally this caricature of anthropology has been justified, it is often forgotten how many ethnographies have opened windows of understanding upon seemingly "traditional" communities, showing how and why people have invested in certain representations of self and community—invariably, in interaction with larger economic and social forces. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*, by Suzanne Brenner, is a remarkable ethnography on many fronts. Not only does it show us the inextricable economic and cultural linkages between the local and national, indeed the global, it also challenges us to rethink conceptions of gender, hierarchy, and modernity that have permeated both scholarship of Indonesia and, more generally, scholarship within the social sciences. Moreover, Brenner provides us with a vivid and culturally rich account of a community of merchants increasingly at the margins of Indonesia's state-driven model of modernity and national culture.

When Suzanne Brenner arrived in the Solo suburb known as Laweyan in the mid-1980s, she was struck by the community's anachronistic self-image and sense of isolation from the juggernaut of modernity emanating from other urban centers. Laweyan had in fact become "unmodern," and a "signifier of tradition," according to Brenner. Solving the riddle of Laweyan's apparent decline became the focus of her

¹ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

ethnographic project. Interrogating notions of “traditional” and “modern” through the dialectical lens of political economy and cultural rationalization, Brenner argues that an ambivalence towards the modernity promoted by the Indonesian state produced a trajectory towards “traditionalization” in Laweyan, and, presumably, in other pockets within Indonesia. Her analysis adds weight to the notion that the “local” as a bounded and recognizable space is only realized through interactions with larger economic and social structures. In addition to adding yet another nail into the coffin of the now-certainly discredited (at least in academic circles) teleology of modernization, Brenner’s contribution to understanding alternative modernities hinges upon her analysis of gender relations in Javanese society—particularly among merchants.

In a remarkable analysis of status and hierarchy in Javanese society, Brenner sheds light upon the ways that status and value are achieved within merchant households through a domestic economy in which women play a pivotal role in “domesticating” the disorderly and potentially vulgar power of money and transforming it into signs of cultural value. In doing so, she shows how the cultural reproduction of gender and social hierarchies are fraught with the ambivalent and alienated expressions of competing ideologies. Moreover, a more general theoretical concern is raised through an analysis of contradictory gender and status hierarchies, particularly as they take on added weight within the state-sponsored discourses of modernity and gender. That is, ideologies of the nation and Islam, as Geertz noted back in 1960, provide new opportunities for both integration and conflict, as they facilitate new cross-cutting social affiliations whilst simultaneously leveling differences at some psychological and intellectual cost—a Weberian dilemma of modernity. But by putting gender at the forefront of analysis, Brenner forces us to recognize the implicit ways in which ideological rationalizations within New Order Indonesia belie a deeper ambivalence produced by alienated expressions of gender and elite/non-elite hierarchies of cultural and social refinement, spiritual power, and authority.

While the analysis is finely nuanced and context-specific, the issues raised invite comparative analysis elsewhere. As Brenner puts it when discussing the importance of gender relations in social reproduction and public ideologies:

. . . the public is always radically implicated in the private, and vice versa. . . . Lingering notions of the domestic sphere as a private, self-contained domain that stands at a complete remove from the public sphere have been exploded . . . domestic economies of production, reproduction, consumption, and affect are shaped through their interaction with larger political economies and ideological systems. (15)

In other words, in order to better understand the emergence of new public spheres, one must see them not only as intellectual rationalizations of competing ideologies brought together by the forces of modernity; rather, the categories within modernity themselves arise out of the tensions produced by competing sources of power and value within the social reproduction of hierarchy. As Brenner suggests, the New Order emphasis upon discipline, sacrifice, and order is directed at women, in part, due to (and representing an alienated expression of) the belief that women exemplify these traits within the household economy. This recognition, whether conscious or not, suggests an ambivalence and fear among men of the productive power of women, and their potential role in creating a modern entrepreneurial economy. Fear of a loss of control

and potential status inversion is thus common among Javanese males; this fear plays a role in the constitution of gender ideologies in modern Java.

In chapter one, Brenner introduces the reader to the city of Solo, a traditional "Javanese" city centered upon the royal palace, and the aristocratic networks of *priyayi* court culture that emanated from it. Though Solo was in many ways a city marked by this aristocratic high-culture, it also became an important center for the production of batik. The neighborhood of Laweyan, in particular, emerged as a batik production zone within the colonial and postcolonial economy. Thus Laweyan was thrust into a world economic system that ushered the arrival of modernity (as marked by entrepreneurial capitalism) there earlier than in most parts of Java. Yet when Brenner arrived in the mid-1980s, she found a community and neighborhood having all the physical signs of "tradition," including economic stagnancy and conservatism towards outside ideologies—particularly towards the state-sponsored projects of modernity. Brenner notes:

Oddly, while Laweyan was often said by outsiders to epitomize an old-fashioned way of life, its residents were also considered by some to be far outside the Javanese mainstream—not "typically" Javanese at all. . . . Like people of Arab or Chinese descent, some of whose families had lived in Solo for generations, the merchants of Laweyan tended to be perceived as marginal to the local society. (28)

Laweyan not only represented an anachronism within New Order Indonesia; it also, due to its merchant origins, was not quite "Javanese" in the *priyayi* sense: "They saw their own version of culture as a pale imitation of the real thing: they were 'just merchants', after all, and merchants didn't really have culture, as they understood the term." (29) In this we see an important foreshadowing of a profound ambivalence among Laweyan's residents that emerged in Brenner's fieldwork and analysis. That is, the productive capacity of this community—and the role of women within this economy—signified a challenge to the *priyayi* conception of hierarchy; however, the internalization of *priyayi* values (and gender hierarchies within them) among successful merchants, and conspicuous displays of wealth and cultural refinement, while ostensibly constitutive of symbolic capital, belied a deeper anxiety regarding a loss of status and the stigma of being at the margins within New Order nationalist discourses. Unraveling the dilemmas of a merchant community in decline took the author on an exploration of the ideologies of hierarchy, cultural memories, and nostalgia, and most importantly, prompted her to analyze contradictory or ambiguous constructions of gender among merchants.

Batik production within the colonial economy assumed importance during the nineteenth century. Solo, in particular, became an important site for its production both within a domestic economy and as an exportable commodity. By the 1920s, Laweyan had become the unrivaled center within Solo's batik industry. As a result of its economic importance, while "most Javanese were living in simple cottages with woven bamboo or wooden walls, many Laweyan entrepreneurs owned one or more large, lavishly appointed houses that were built to last for generations." (40) At its height, the demand for exotic batik designs in Europe prompted the colonial government to invest in the industry, sponsoring the "discovery" of this "ancient handicraft." Laweyan's vitality was thus determined by commodity prices and

demand within a global economy. Brenner suggests that wealthy entrepreneurs in Laweyan became increasingly wary of their dependence upon other regions and interests in the batik industry—particularly of their dependence on Chinese middlemen to procure raw materials, for under Dutch rule Chinese had grown influential in the colonial economy. As a result of Laweyan's wealth and its resentment of Chinese and Dutch control of the economy, political and religious organizations emerged that proved to be influential in the Indonesian nationalist movement. Of these, Sarekat Islam proved to be the most important. While Sarekat Islam championed merchant interests across Java, utilizing Islam as a common ideological banner, the later radical and more reformist-modernist strains of the movement never took root in Laweyan as it did elsewhere. Rather, Laweyan, increasingly turned inward, imagining itself as "traditional."

Because Laweyan emerged as a community out of the nexus of capitalism and colonialism, Brenner suggests that, "Modernity was, in short, the midwife of this community." (45) In its prime, Laweyan's self-made elites consciously fashioned themselves as "modern," choosing to build homes in a cosmopolitan European style. Yet, as the local batik industry assumed less importance in the postcolonial economy, Laweyan, rather than plunging into education in order to maximize advantages created within the new business and civil bureaucracies emerging elsewhere, became an anachronism, ever fixated upon its past glories. Brenner argues that the community became insular and bounded in its own and other's eyes because it was endogamous, family and household oriented, and out of touch with modernist Islam movements elsewhere. More fundamental in Laweyan's decline, however, was what Brenner calls a "cultural economy": the complex relationship between merchant and *priyayi* ideologies of hierarchy, status, and gender. Full examination of this complexity required an ethnographic lens with facets beyond those provided by the analytical categories of political economy. Therefore the rest of the text is highly ethnographic, probing the symbolic categories within which Javanese ideologies of self, hierarchy, and gender are produced within merchant households.

Chapter two, "Hierarchy and Contradiction," explores the paradox that lies at the heart of Laweyan's "involution" to tradition. While the merchant community gained considerable economic power through the batik industry, and thus posed an economic and political challenge to the legitimacy of Java's traditional elite, the community apparently had internalized and reproduced *priyayi* values of hierarchy. This interpolation of Javanese aristocratic values, and subsequent disavowal of radical modernist Islamic movements, Brenner suggests, created a culturally conservative ethos within Laweyan—one that ultimately produced an ambivalent relationship with both *priyayi* values and with highly centralized, modern Indonesian politics, which had usurped the *priyayi* discourse. At the heart of this tension were different conceptions of gender and the household.

Geertz's classic, *The Religion of Java*, theorizes three ideal-types for social and religious orientation in Java: the *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*. In a classic archaeology of Javanese selfhood, the political implications of these three types are discussed in their interaction and rationalization within modern Java.² Among other things, Geertz

² Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

suggests that *abangan* values are egalitarian, as exemplified by the subtle rituals of the *slametan*. Yet within *priyayi* conceptions of spirituality, the diffuse feelings of *slametan* produced within ritual, informed through Hindu categories and disciplines, become inward-directed, or mystical powers to be cultivated. This, in turn, leads to a more hierarchical or "organic" (i.e., caste) theory of human spiritual "potency." That is, some are more spiritually powerful than others, and hence, command loyalty—a theory of Divine monarchy. What is relevant here about Geertz's account is his suggestion that *abangan* notions of spirituality—though a "peasant" construction (reminiscent of "little" and "great tradition" formulations)—are still implicit within the Hinduized hierarchical values of the aristocratic *priyayi*. Conversely, Geertz suggests that such "organic" values are also internalized by villagers. As a result, Javanese conceptions of hierarchy are complex, contradictory, and ambivalent. Even the *santri*, which of Geertz's three "types" has been most influenced by modernist and rationalized forms of Islam and thereby stripped of its cultural accouterments, has not totally purged from itself these earlier layers of Javanese ideology. Though the subtlety of Geertz's analysis is not the object of Brenner's analysis, much of what she observes within Laweyan's merchant community speaks to a similar syncretic process between Islamic modernist ideas, more diffuse and egalitarian conceptions of spirituality, or Geertz's *abangan* category, and notions of power and spiritual potency as manifested in the ideology of natural hierarchy, as exemplified by *priyayi* thought and practice. The situation is complicated by the fact that *priyayi* hierarchies have been borrowed by the state for their own purposes and sharpened by increasingly gendered discourse. Moreover, while Laweyan's merchants distrust the *priyayi*-dominated Indonesian state, they in turn have internalized *priyayi* ideologies to the effect of reinforcing and distinguishing their own status relative to working-class women in the market.

Laweyan's merchant community, as mentioned, was an important locus for Islamic or *santri* movements. Rather than pursuing a radical critique of aristocratic legitimacy from an Islamic perspective, the community continued to practice a "traditional" Islamic-Javanese hybrid, in which *priyayi*, *abangan*, and Islamic value-systems operated syncretically—though not without tension and contradiction—and dialogically.

The chapter begins with an ethnographic account of a prominent merchant family from Laweyan visiting the royal cemetery of Kotagede, near Solo. Brenner observes how prostration before the shrines within the mausoleum represent both a desire for blessings from the dead (in this case, the very spiritually powerful Javanese royalty) and an acceptance of *priyayi* values. An ambivalent subjectivity is produced and reflected through this ritual act: on the one hand, the merchants ("*saudagar*") of Laweyan openly express disdain for the hierarchies and privileges that the *priyayi* obtained through colonial patronage and postcolonial dominance of the civil sector; and on the other hand, the ideology and logic of hierarchy appears to have been internalized by merchant elites, perhaps through the cultivation and production of symbolic capital (i.e., refinement and spirituality, or *alus*)—a kind of practical investment that over time became "tradition"—and as a "resistance," of sorts, to the colonial discourse surrounding merchant culture and dispositions. The question of merchant alterity is addressed first by Brenner.

Brenner suggests that "Laweyan's ambivalent relationship to the state and modernity itself can be traced in part to the peculiar configuration of power, wealth,

and hierarchy that characterized colonial Javanese society.”(56) The “involution” to tradition that came to signify Laweyan was produced within a discourse in which merchants were derided as lacking refinement and as being prone to avarice and greed. Part of this stereotype was directed against the Chinese merchant community as a way of appearing to champion the interests of the Javanese. More importantly, Brenner argues, the discourse was produced within a political economy in which Javanese elites were elevated in status as they came to occupy important positions within the emerging civil bureaucracy of the colonial state. *Priyayi* values and hierarchies, therefore, acted as an ideology to suppress the social mobility and commercial independence of the merchant entrepreneurs. Central to this ideology of hierarchy is a conception of power and status and its relationship to wealth.

Brenner notes both Geertz’s and Anderson’s³ analyses of Javanese conceptions of power and status in which wealth serves as a sign of spiritual potency and cultural refinement. Merchants, in contrast to aristocrats, produce their wealth through commercial behavior, and therefore their wealth signifies greed and ambition (*kasar*), rather than refinement, detachment, and equanimity (*alus*). But Brenner adds a practice-oriented approach to the production of values, thus arguing that the “organic” theory of hierarchy—a Hinduized accretion in Geertz’s analysis—assumed greater significance within the political economy of Dutch rule, and, later, in *priyayi*-dominated rule. If we reconsider Geertz’s ideal-types (*abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*), discussed above, we see that Brenner adds an important new dimension to the analysis of competing value systems in contemporary Java. That is, whereas Geertz presented his model of Javanese subjectivity and ideology as a kind of evolutionary and temporal gradation between so-called “little” and “great traditions,” and between the traditional versus the rationalized and modernist, Brenner shows these ideal-types to have, in part, been produced ideologically within a political field. From Brenner’s analysis, the contestatory and ambivalent nature of Javanese hierarchical values take on a political and economic hue that was undeveloped in Geertz’s classic study and its implicit Parsonian reading of Weber’s conception of religious rationalization. Islamist challenges to hierarchy and aristocracy, and Laweyan’s fetish with the traditional, and its simultaneous challenge and acceptance of *priyayi* values, must be understood in the light of political economy.

In one sense, Brenner is suggesting that Javanese “tradition” was an invention co-constructed by the Dutch and aristocratic elites when she argues that the ideological division between the merchant class and *priyayi* was made rigid through a colonial discourse: “The Dutch identified the *priyayi*, particularly those of the courts of Central Java, as the standard-bearers of high Javanese culture who were deserving of respect from their fellow Javanese.”(71) *Priyayi*, like Brahmins in India, were elevated into the ranks of the colonial bureaucracy in order to serve the interests of the colonial regime. In return, they were accorded symbolic gestures of respect by the Dutch, and offered subsidies with which they could ritualize and conspicuously display their refined court culture. However, the symbolic capital accrued through state-sponsorship did not legitimate *priyayi* political domination and conceptions of hierarchy entirely. Rather, Brenner suggests, the merchants of Laweyan inverted Javanese notions of hierarchy by

³ Benedict Anderson, “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” from *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990)

making money into a source of authority and status, whereas to the *priyayi*, money could only serve as a sign of authority, but not its source. But while—fatefully, as it turned out—the merchants resisted the ideology that placed them at the bottom of Java's social hierarchies, "they did not reject the notion of hierarchy itself but rather refigured the criteria on which status was determined." (57) The analysis sets into motion two competing hierarchies: that of the *priyayi* and merchant elite. Herein lies the source of Laweyan's fetish with "tradition," refinement, and conservative Javanese-ness—one that ultimately became anachronistic or "unmodern." Laweyan, in other words, remained trapped within the cultural logics of hierarchy, reproducing an elite/non-elite distinction within the merchant community, whilst simultaneously challenging the spiritual superiority of the *priyayi*. Rather than pursuing a radical Islamic or communist alternative to hierarchies being widened within late colonial and postcolonial Indonesia, the merchants of Laweyan became fixated upon "traditional" status concerns, even when these were detrimental to their economic well-being. While modernity had produced the conditions out of which Laweyan's merchants had become powerful, the nexus of power and status concerns, in part residual from the stigmas attached to merchants within colonial *priyayi* discourses, was to generate a fixation upon "tradition," and ultimately lead to a new stigma: the stigma of being judged backward and conservative by the "progressive" discourse of modernity generated by state ideologies.

Brenner alerts us to the importance of gender discourses in this process, for gender distinctions were used to sharpen the stigma attached to Laweyan's merchant enclave. Both the colonial and *priyayi* ideology of status derided merchant's (*sudagar*) work as the "trivial" work of women. Moreover, the market was a site where unrestrained desire produced "course" or *kasar* relations between men, and more significantly, between men and women. That is, the market became associated with "unrestrained female sexuality," (75) and thus aroused patriarchal *priyayi* fears, generating both fear and disdain: "The marketplace was the antithesis of the aristocratic home, in that it was a place where men could not control women . . ." (76) Conversely, and of course, relatedly, the response to this elite/colonial co-constructed discourse was ambivalent. On the one hand, Laweyan's merchants actively sought their autonomy from the *Priyayi*-led state and countered with their own usurpation of elite status through the attainment of wealth—and more importantly, through the cultivation of conservative hierarchical values. On the other hand, this interpolation of elite patriarchal ideologies produced an ambivalent *sudagar* community, as well as reproducing oppressive hierarchies to the detriment of female laborers. The ambivalence felt by lower-status members of Laweyan's community was poignantly suggested to Brenner by a trishaw driver when he offered this observation: "This is a place of kings. But the kings are all women. It's a place of rich people, but none of the men have any rank." (79) In sum, the resistance to *priyayi* and state ideologies took the form of an equally assertive ideology of autonomy coupled with an avoidance of authority. In more radical moments, this may have taken the form of Islamic political movements, such as Sarekat Islam; however, in the trajectory of "traditionalization" in Laweyan, this amounted to the creation of local forms of power that replicated the hegemonic logics of hierarchy. Brenner's contribution to our understanding of "tradition" in Java, through her complex interweavings of political economy, gender relations, and hierarchical ideologies, is substantial. Though she did not directly criticize Geertz, her analysis pushes us to

think beyond the non-dialectical presentation of hierarchy implicit within his classic analysis. While Brenner does show the widening of elite and non-elite distinctions as a result of colonial and postcolonial discourses and practices, it might have been useful to further probe the “invention” of *priyayi*⁴ values within a colonial imagination—even inviting comparison with similar constructs in South Asia (i.e., Brahmin/non-Brahmin distinctions).

Chapter three, “The Specter of Past Modernities,” simultaneously chronicles the economic decline of Laweyan’s merchant community and the nostalgia felt by the merchant elites for the community’s past, which, as argued in the previous chapter, has produced a “fetish” with hierarchy and status within the community. What made Laweyan unique were the “distinctive ways in which local economies of hierarchy and respect were intertwined with the material economies of commodity production and exchange.” (105) Brenner suggests that the arrest of capitalist development in Laweyan that accompanied the decline of the batik industry produced an obsessive concern with maintaining the appearance of prosperity and tradition. That is, cultural legitimacy became of paramount importance, but people did not seek to further legitimacy in the service of instrumental economic goals, but, rather, out of the unique logics of, and intermeshing between, Javanese notions of hierarchy and capitalism. Moreover, with the decline of the industry, the concern with hierarchy and status assumes even greater importance. That is, with less wealth to go around, maintaining the appearance of refinement and status takes on a new significance. While Brenner places much weight upon the notion of hierarchy as a Javanese cultural logic, one could also read Laweyan status concerns in a more universal light: the conspicuous display of wealth and taste becomes more salient whenever it is most threatened, particularly among entrepreneurs who seek to legitimate their labor practices vis-à-vis their subordinate workers.

At the heart of Brenner’s analysis of an “economy of deference” (103) is the suggestion that the *juragan* (merchant elite) require the ideological construct of natural hierarchy in order to encompass a relationship of wage-labor within a “moral community”—a naturalizing of exploitative practices. Euphemizing wages as “gifts” creates, on the one hand, a reconstituting of *priyayi* hierarchical logics and moral bonds between employer and employee, and on the other hand, “stultifies” capitalist logics of commodity production and fluid labor practices by fixating upon hierarchy and deference. Hierarchical discourses are, in other words, ideologically employed in extracting surplus labor from working-class women within Laweyan’s batik industry. This was illustrated clearly by Mas Budiono, an entrepreneur within Laweyan:

. . . his insistence that his workers be willing to get down on their knees before him “proved” that he was justified in paying villagers very low returns on their labor, for as poor village women, they had neither the need nor the right to be paid more, as far as he was concerned. By using “human relations,” as he put it, and obscuring to both the worker and the consumer the true value of the labor that went into making the batik, he could extract a higher profit from the sale of his commodities . . . (118-19).

⁴ Perhaps the best example for Java of such an analysis is found in John Pemberton’s *On the Subject of “Java”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). A number of works on South Asia have appeared during the last twenty years that address the dialogic production of the “authentic” and “traditional.”

Reading the localization of power within the internal hierarchies of deference in Laweyan in a Marxian light, the ideology of status difference has acted hegemonically in constituting an ambivalent internalization of *priyayi* values—a mode of simultaneous incorporation and resistance among the merchant elite, ultimately benefiting the *priyayi*-dominated political order. While “traditionalization”—and the stigmas associated with it in New Order Indonesia—may have thwarted the advancement of the entrepreneur community, the same ideologies allowed the *juragan* to mystify and rationalize their own exploitative labor practices. The sophistication and detail of Brenner’s ethnography and analysis allows the reader to see how these “contradictions” work in a complex dialectic with capitalism and state-sponsored visions of modernity. At all levels, ideological closure is never attained, as the *juragan* challenge discourses of the state and *priyayi*, and workers in Laweyan similarly see the irony in the merchant elite’s fixation upon tradition and past glories. Moreover (and here she partially answers my earlier recommendation that the “invention” of the *priyayi* could be further elaborated), Brenner suggests that the logics of hierarchy cannot be reduced to the processes of commodity production, as the latter was itself molded or “indigenized,” and “ultimately impeded, by other kinds of cultural considerations, and by a history that continued to exert its force upon the present.” (119) While a convincing point, Brenner’s implicit argument that the *priyayi* logics of hierarchy can only be understood if one studies a fair portion of influential history begs for the near-impossible in an ethnographic writing today: an exploration of competing, yet fundamentally comparable, cultural logics in Java’s pre-modern history. Once again, a comparison of merchant, priestly, and royal conceptions of hierarchy in South Asia might have also shed light upon the Indicized layers of Javanese culture that Geertz so richly (and problematically) explores in *The Religion of Java*. Of course, in opening this Pandora’s box one risks opening oneself to charges of essentialism, and of reifying and thereby legitimizing culturalist discourses that are often used for nationalist ends. In this sense, though the apparent hegemony of *priyayi* ideologies seems paradoxical (deriving much salience through the colonial encounter) in that the “indigenizing” of capitalism is “indigenized” through the elite-driven ideologies that were at least partially invented, albeit dialogically, under Dutch rule, Brenner does an admirable job showing how and why various agents invest in, and thereby naturalize, a particular Javanese logic of hierarchy and deference. This process, Brenner argues persuasively, is influenced by ideologies of class and gender.

As gender ideologies are employed by the merchant elite, as illustrated in the quotation above, the exploitation of working-class women is rationalized through stereotypes that localize *priyayi* patriarchal ideologies within the moral economy of *juragan*-labor relations. These stereotypes assume a decidedly class-based form, thus producing a gendered stereotype for working-class women. While Brenner skillfully explains how ideologies of deference are related to alienated forms of working-class subjectivity, it also would have been useful to explore the extent to which the *juragan* experience ambivalence whenever they recognize how this ideology of theirs has been fashioned from the very ideology they have resisted in their opposition to the *priyayi* and the modern Indonesian state. If the logic of hierarchy is hegemonically “thin” to the *juragan*, then a great deal of cynicism or repression and denial would accompany the *juragan* stereotypes of the working class, whom they exploit, apparently aided by

"traditional" Javanese notions of deference and patriarchy. In any event, Brenner's meticulous analysis invites further cultural critique along the lines suggested here.

Given the contested yet ambivalently internalized notions of hierarchy among Javanese merchants, it comes as no surprise that gender ideologies are equally complex and contradictory. Just as fear over the productive power of merchant elites created an ideological response among the *priyayi* attempting to secure their positions within the emerging nation-state (hence, the stigma attached to non-*priyayi* communities), within Laweyan's merchant community, the productive power of women within the domestic economy appears to have generated contradictory ideologies of gender that assume alienated forms within notions of spiritual potency and bodily control. In both cases, the phantasm form in which the subordinate group (i.e., non-*priyayi* and working-class female) is both threatening and powerful belies an awareness, at some repressed level, of the ideological edifice that separates the dominators from the dominated. While Brenner does not speculate in a universalizing psychoanalytic vein in an attempt to explain gendered and class-based othering, she convincingly demonstrates how the logics of hierarchy in terms of gender, class, and status are problematic when viewed from a static, patriarchal elite perspective. Having carefully mapped out how hierarchy is dynamically produced and contested in the previous chapters, chapter four, "Gender and the Domestication of Desire," shows how contradictory conceptions of gender lie at the heart of cultural reproduction among Javanese merchants.

Within Javanese conceptions of refinement and coarseness, the market is a site where desires incite coarse sentiments (*kasar*). Status is a function of spiritual potency, or the manifestation of *alus*. The logic of the market contradicts the Javanese values of self-denial, modesty, and the detachment from desires necessary to cultivate ascetic spiritual power and refinement, or *alus*. Yet, paradoxically, one requires wealth in order to renounce the desire for it. That is, being poor does not generate *alus*; rather, being wealthy signifies one's spiritual potency whilst also allowing one to show disinterest in material desires. Therefore, the cultivation of symbolic capital within the status or spiritual economy requires a degree material wealth and comfort.

The prominent role played by women in the market fulfills two functions which maintain the status of the family. First, men are not sullied by the *kasar* language and transactions that are part of the daily competition within the marketplace. Even this gendered division of labor suggests, according to Brenner, contradictory gender ideologies regarding the control of *nafsu* (desire). While women, within this discourse, are considered as having less control over their desires, which makes them better suited for the vulgar money transactions within the market, their critical economic position within the family suggests that women, and not men, are best able to "domesticate" their inner impulses and desires. Brenner convincingly shows how the patriarchal gender ideology masks a fundamental fear among both men and women that men cannot control their desires, and because of this, threaten to destroy their status and that of their families. This leads to the second and most critical function of women's economic power within the family: women are able to "domesticate desire" and transform wealth obtained through commerce into signs of value. Importantly, in doing so they provide the time and freedom for men to cultivate spiritual practices and

cultural refinement, as well as the needed material prosperity which allows men to act without desire.

Brenner clearly demonstrates that women have obtained power through the pivotal economic role they play; but, at the same time she also reveals that women are mistrusted for this same power. A projection of this fear is manifested in the patriarchal discourse on the potential threat that women's "uncontrolled" sexuality poses to their husbands and families. Men fear a loss of control, knowing at some level, that their wives have some power to challenge their subordinate status within the status hierarchy. Therefore, as Aihwa Ong⁵ has also noted for Malaysia, this "danger" is addressed through the re-inscription of gender ideologies and disciplinary techniques over women's bodies. And, as suggested earlier, on the national stage in New Order Indonesia, the autonomy and power of women is "domesticated" by a disciplinary vision of the ideal female domestic partner, couched in Islamic and patriarchal ideologies. In both cases, the phantasm generated out of a projected fear of potentially "dangerous" and uncontrolled forces (both economic and sexual) threatens the patriarchal domestic unit and nation-state, respectively—the two spheres being linked, as Brenner persuasively argues. Lest I mislead the reader, it should be noted that Brenner does not employ the implicitly psychoanalytic vocabulary I am liberally adopting here with words like "projection." Rather, she illustrates the ambivalent and sometimes contradictory gender ideologies within Laweyan through the context-specific lens of participant-observation, while basing her interpretations from within the culturally specific logics of her informants. Nevertheless, the ideologies of "moralizing states," to borrow a phrase from Sally Falk Moore, be they cast in Islamic and/or *priyayi* terms, suggest an effort at containment, which, in turn, suggests increasing anxieties resulting from the commercial success obtained by women. In order to assess the uniquely Javanese features of this process, and to raise larger questions regarding gendered hierarchies within modernizing discourses of the state, it might have proven fruitful to have considered the ambivalent complicity that her informants displayed in the reproduction of patriarchal ideologies which compare with those that Ong has presented for Malaysia.

Chapter five, "The Value of the Bequest," explores the process whereby economic capital becomes "spiritual" through the practice of sacrifice. Brenner here completes her argument regarding the conversion of wealth into objects of value, and hence, into things constitutive of status and hierarchy. The riddle of conservatism and "tradition" in Laweyan is answered with precision through an exploration of "sacrifice" and its relationship to spirituality in Javanese thought. The uniqueness of the batik industry in producing items of cultural (and economic) value, paradoxically, led to its "ossification and decline as its inheritors became unwilling or unable to adjust to the changing economic and political climate of New Order Indonesia." (171) Brenner further shows the distinction between economic and religious spheres to be problematic through her exploration of the role women play in generating the family inheritance (*warisan*), which, aside from its economic function, "ties" the generations together spiritually. Not only do the valuable goods that are passed down through the

⁵ Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia," from A. Ong and M. Peletz, eds., *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

generations indicate a bond with one's ancestors, but also the personal sacrifices entailed in preserving and enhancing the *warisan* signify the spiritual strength of those who passed it down. Brenner thus proposes that the objects themselves assume a magical or sacred significance, embodying the spiritual essence of those who passed them down. Given the centrality that women play in preserving the *warisan*, Brenner shows how closely intertwined the sacred and economic are in the production of value and status. Due to this nexus of commodity and spirituality, it is understandable that Laweyan's merchant elite are reluctant to abandon the *warisan*-generating production of batik—a commodity which in and of itself connotes *alus* values. In that sense, at the core of "tradition," is a resistance to state-sponsored *priyayi* (or neo-*priyayi*) ideologies, and a deeply wedded desire to maintain the *warisan* for future generations. As Brenner explains:

By locating the origins of their commodity in the imagined ancestral past—that is to say, in the sphere of high culture—Javanese batik merchants have drawn on commonly recognized sources of cultural legitimacy in their endeavor to establish a claim to high status in the wider society. . . . The value of batik lies in its signification of an unbroken continuity between past, present, and future, generated as a residue, one might say, of the historical process.(202)

Of course, the production of any spiritual artifact (temples, texts, icons, art, music, etc.) in many societies (and presumably in ancient Javanese society, as well) has involved status-claims by merchant elites who subsidize and/or commission cultural works as a principal source of legitimacy. Similarly, in many such cases, competing, ambivalently complicit, and appropriated hierarchies have also produced tensions between merchants, priests, and royalty. But Brenner has in fact shed important light upon something far less obvious: the interconnections between the nostalgic memory of "modernity" as it was manifest within a colonial economy, and the ongoing interest in "traditions" and "spirituality" which are continually realized in a social reproduction of status—and more significantly, through commodity production. What's more, the author has made clear the critical role of the domestic sphere within this process.

The book ends with two short chapters entitled "The Mask of Appearances" and "The Modern Family," respectively. Both elaborate on themes raised throughout the text and mentioned in this review. The first further explores the process of Laweyan's decline and "ossification." The focus here is on the denial of change and decline that prompts many to maintain the façade of "appearances" in spite of the clear signs of the community's marginalization within New Order Indonesia. The "mask" of continued "tradition" and prosperity is not simply a performance for others, but rather, also represents a repressed fear of slipping into the abyss of "backwardness" and urban decay. Signs of distinction and conspicuous consumption are thus also signs of fear, paranoia, and distrust—not to mention competitive envy. Finally, the concluding chapter analyzes the increasingly intrusive Indonesian state during the later New Order years. Brenner briefly discusses how the modernist nationalist discourse has reconfigured conceptions of gender, Islam, and family within a theater-like neo-*priyayi* ritualization of status hierarchy emanating from the state. While women in Laweyan are hardly the docile bodies that the state seems eager to produce, the "home is being transformed into the site of a reified domesticity where loyal and docile citizen-consumers are produced."(238) In this discourse, as mentioned earlier, the

moralizing state needs to produce its Other—that which is out of step with the modernization regime, consumerism, and rapid urbanization. Laweyan's women stand to lose much in this nationalist ideology, particularly as it devalues the productive significance of the so-called domestic sphere. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, such moralizing ideologies, Brenner warns, belie a deeper anxiety that is masked within the "rationalistic" discourse. That is, specters haunt those in power due to their recognition—albeit repressed—that the oppressive hierarchies they attempt to legitimize politically are challenged by others who have appropriated them to their own ends (although with limited success and ambivalence). While such specters loom large in the provocative and challenging recent works by James Siegel on Indonesian nationalism, Brenner, in her own important way, has shown how thoroughly intertwined the national and the "domestic" are, and in so doing, has unmasked much of the patriarchal ideology within New Order discourses.

On a final note, Brenner's book, in addition to the substantial ethnographic and theoretical contributions her study provides, is written with great clarity, aesthetic grace, and a precision that is uncommon in anthropological writing today. This excellence in writing, no doubt, contributed to her being recently awarded the Benda Prize for this book. But more importantly, the clarity and skill of her prose allows her analysis and ethnographic commitment to detail to shine.

