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Power, Change, and Gender Relations in Rural Java: A Tale of Two Villages. By Ann R. Tickamyer and Siti Kusujarti. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012. 246 pp.

This book is co-authored by a pair of sociologists who have done longitudinal work in two rural settings in Central Java. Its focus is women and their power within the household, in agricultural production, in state-ordered social welfare and in local leadership. The central concern revolves around contradiction between how women's power is understood locally and through state ideologies on the one hand and the practice of decision-making and local politics on the other. The authors draw on fieldwork beginning in 1993 and continuing until 2010. Their methods include survey sampling and interviews, and they provide both quantitative results on decision-making and some case studies of women, men and families as they negotiate change and stability in the countryside outside the large and growing metropolitan area of Yogyakarta. Because of the length of the research project, the authors are able to consider the developments that have occurred since the end of Soeharto's New Order and the advent of democratization and decentralization. This period corresponds not only to neo-liberal structural adjustment but to the refiguring of national priorities and the growth of global Islam. Ultimately, Tickamyer and Kusujarti argue that there has been more stability than change in the organization of gender and power in rural households and communities.

The strength of this book is the clarity of the writing, the long-term research, and the comparative sample of a poorer, rural setting and a slightly more prosperous peri-urban setting. The authors contrast the lived experience of women's power within their relationships, in the productive decisions of the household unit and in the context of local political leadership. They give the reader an accessible portrait of some of the complexities that face rural women in changing circumstances. Their attention to changes in local elections at the village level and to how social welfare is delivered after decentralization are welcome additions to the scholarship on post-Soeharto, *Reformasi* era Indonesia.

Yet this is an odd book. Odd not because it makes no contributions, but because the authors do not take what looks to be a very promising data set very far. They foreground contradiction and local understandings of *kodrat* — the nature — of men and women as a central point for analysis. Neither is necessarily a poor choice, but, like much of the book, these matters are under-theorized and presented without sufficient context. As such, they come across as superficial rather than as forwarding the argument. In the case of *kodrat*, the old, essentialized Java reappears, along with quite outdated discussions of women in agriculture. One wonders if this book was not started some time ago, as it is situated in a scholarship from the 1970s–1980s with much less attention to more recent work. Work on agriculture has perhaps seen less dynamism in recent years, but this cannot be said of the scholarship on gender and women in Indonesia.

Those with interests in development and agricultural economics might be less interested in postcolonial critiques of power and the colonialist nostalgia for authentic Javanese culture, but surely questions about the invention of the Javanese “village” are appropriate here, as is the construction of elite urban and middle-class gender ideologies as against those associated with the poor and rural areas. The authors make some nods to these issues, but generally these are not integrated into the sociological analysis or the questions being asked. Instead issues seem to be accepted rather than questioned. For example, the existence of a public/private divide is one to be interrogated, not accepted as a condition. More research is needed on how this putative divide is produced socially and how it changes across settings: rural, urban, lower and middle class, state and non-state and so forth. Indeed, the issue of how domestic production and the informal economy constitute and are constituted by public and private spheres, resource allocation and gendered power is left significantly under-analysed. Class in general is underplayed, and this is problematic because it overlooks how power is differently shaped and experienced in

various settings, including gendered power. That is to say, some women have more room to challenge arguments about *kodrat* than others. In some cases, it is middle class and elite women who are more constrained by considerations of status and prestige. In others, lower-class women are constrained by lack of opportunity and resources. These are substantive issues with tremendous import in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Perhaps the biggest concern here is the significant lack of attention to scholarship on how gender and power have been theorized since the year that this research began; indeed, the connection to scholarly literature is generally thin. The literature on gender and power is immense, and the longitudinal research presented in this book could allow the authors to make a real contribution by bringing it to bear on their data. The rather facile attention to contradiction is an example. Details are needed on how contradictions are constituted socially and how they drive and constitute not only society but gendered experience. Description of the contradictions between local ideology and experience is insufficient. These authors clearly have an enormous amount of data, including ethnographic interviews, of which they do not make full use in the book. They are not ethnographers; fair enough. And yet, attention to the strength of local women's voices about their circumstances, the obstacles that they face, and the means by which they manage the contradictions that the authors foreground would have made this a much more powerful piece of scholarship.

This book will be most appreciated by those who are new to thinking about women in rural settings in Java. Those who are interested in post-Soeharto changes in local-level politics may find the attention to gender in these contexts useful.

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