

***Surviving against the Odds: Village Industry in Indonesia.* S. Ann Dunham. Edited and with a preface by Alice G. Dewey and Nancy I. Cooper. Foreword by Maya Soetoro-Ng. Afterword by Robert W. Hefner. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. 407 pp.\***

Reviewed by Kenneth M. George

Economic anthropologist and rural development specialist S. Ann Dunham passed away in 1995, never having found sufficient opportunity to revise her 1992 dissertation for publication (“Peasant Blacksmithing in Indonesia: Surviving and Thriving against All Odds;” two volumes, 1043 pp.). Her daughter, Maya Soetoro-Ng, approached Dunham’s friend and former graduate advisor at the University of Hawai’i, Alice Dewey, with a plea to trim and edit this exceedingly long manuscript on village smiths in the Yogyakarta region of south-central Java so that it might be brought out as a book. Their intensive labor, affection, and hope found congenial support from colleagues at the University of Hawai’i, the American Anthropological Association, and Duke University Press as Dunham’s son, Barack Obama, ascended to the office of President of the United States. We are lucky that political tides and the perduring affection of Dunham’s family, friends, and colleagues have brought this carefully wrought study of Indonesian village industry into print.

It is, of course, a little tricky to assess a work that has been posthumously trimmed and edited in so dramatic a fashion (my estimate is that nearly 500 pages of the thesis manuscript were set aside), never mind one that has been released in explicit tribute to the author and her career. Dewey and co-editor Nancy Cooper do not say what they cut out, corrected, or reorganized, although Cooper does say they followed Dunham’s own instructions to herself for revisions (p. xxii). To use the metalworking metaphors at hand in the book, Dunham was the *empu*, or master smith, while Dewey and Cooper served as *tukang kikir*, the workers who trim, file, and polish a tool. The author had previously prepared a study on “Women’s Work in Village Industries on Java” during the 1980s, and perhaps for this reason she or the editors opted to keep women largely to the wings in *Surviving against the Odds*, and to bring the predominantly male world of blacksmithing center stage. In any case, it will take a more earnest reviewer to go discover what is published in her earlier study and in the original dissertation, and to assess this book in light of those works. Those readers with especially keen interest in the political economy of craft industry and material culture may want to find a copy of the thesis.

Readers of *Museum Anthropology Review* can turn to this book for insights into how a peasant or village “craft world” is organized and propelled by political economic factors. Dunham was out to challenge the prevailing portrait of Indonesia’s rural peoples as peasants whose livelihood was narrowly agricultural and without the capacity for economic growth or resilience in non-farming endeavors (Chapter 1). She makes a very persuasive case that social scientists throughout the colonial era and the first three decades of Indonesian sovereign rule had largely overlooked the dynamism and promise of Java’s village industries—bamboo-, clay-, metal-, fabric-, and leather-

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working to name a few. Conducting her 14 years of fieldwork on the project (1977-1991) during the heyday of Suharto's authoritarian, pro-development regime, Dunham witnessed a time when shifting development policies and macroeconomic concerns posed new challenges and prospects in village industries. She herself worked in the Indonesian development sector as an advisor and consultant, especially in the field of microfinance and microcredit. Refreshing, then, is her nostalgia-free sensibility about traditional material culture: it is not on the wane, it is not divorced from broad political economic forces, and it is not an obstacle to prosperity. The smiths of Java are not destined for poverty or struggle by virtue of their culture. They are acutely discerning commodity producers, open to technological and economic opportunity, and alert to the political circumstances, regulatory environments, and policies that too often yield a problematic allocation of resources and support.

Readers of this journal of museum anthropology will be drawn principally to Chapters 2 and 3, the first on "The Socioeconomic Organization of Metalworking Industries" and the latter on "Kajar, a Blacksmithing Village in Yogyakarta." These are wonderful chapters, loaded with empirical detail on the organization of labor and the workplace; the trade in scrap metal resources and finished products; social stratification; and the on-the-ground economic calculations of smiths, metal suppliers, and partners. Dunham enriches these chapters with notes on some of the rituals, taboos, and dreams through which Javanese smithing knowledge and authority were sustained and reproduced. Dunham's focus is always on how things get done, how economic challenges are surmounted or managed, and how the enterprise relates to village-level welfare, social stratification, and political office. Quite reasonably, ethnographic emphasis falls on the *empu*, the master smith, and *empu pedagang*, the trader in scrap metal and finished tools; we see less through the eyes of the *tukang* (workers) who assist with hammers, bellows, and files. Museum anthropologists may miss description of the *arts* of metalworking, but that lack is well compensated by the lavish attention to the labor and economic judgment that goes into sustaining a livelihood as a blacksmith or trader.

The remaining three chapters offer, first, a nuanced and discerning reading of patterns in the economic macrodata from the 1970s until 1991, data which were painstakingly compiled by the author from an array of sources; a history of government regulatory and development interventions since 1965; and a set of conclusions and policy recommendations that urge further and deeper attention to the allocation of resources to village metalwork industry in light of shifting profitability, and to socioeconomic stratification and differential access to and use of money capital. Dunham was superbly positioned to understand this larger picture because of her experience at village, regional, and national institutional levels. It is unlikely that museum anthropologists will read these three chapters, but a rewarding macroeconomic portrait of village industry awaits them should they do so.

Robert Hefner supplies a splendid and very instructive afterword to Dunham's book, noting some of the changes that have taken place in Indonesia and in the fields of anthropology and Indonesian studies in the 20 years since the author completed her fieldwork. I would add one observation only to his overview: Ann Dunham's work preceded the discipline's critical turn in development studies, a turn sparked by readings of Michel Foucault on power and governmentality. Museum anthropologists, too, have explored questions of power, representation, and governmentality in their own precincts of work. For this reason, Dunham's

book may strike many readers as theoretically or analytically behind the times. We indeed may read and work with a different analytic sensibility these days. Yet Dunham's painstaking and passionately engaged research offers enduring lessons for those of us who wish to leave a legacy as pragmatic and compassionate problem-solvers, be it in a village, a government office, an NGO, or a museum.

*Kenneth M. George is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a specialist on Indonesia, and Past Editor of the Journal of Asian Studies. His most recent book, Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), combines ethnographic and art historical research in a look at the cultural politics of contemporary Indonesian Islamic art. His work also has appeared in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Material Religion, and Cultural Anthropology.*