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anthropologist by training, I can understand this. But the literature on nationalism, resistance, separatist movements, rebellions, elections, and other topics that concern him goes well beyond that discipline. His analysis, especially when relating his findings to larger debates, could have benefited from going further than he does into that wider literature.

Neither of these limitations detracts significantly from this outstanding book.

Ben Kerkvliet
Australian National University


In this, his second monograph based on ethnographic research in a Negri Sembilan Malay community, Michael Peletz shifts his focus from kinship analysis to an examination of the diverse and sometimes conflicting representations of gender found both in official discourse and in daily life among Malay villagers. His goal is at once to analyze divergent views of gender and to explore the processes and contexts in which such representations are reproduced, challenged, or subverted. In a welcome contrast with many other authors, who often use the term gender as a code word for the study of women, Michael Peletz pays equal attention to the cultural construction of both masculinity and femininity, arguing that one cannot be understood apart from the other. Furthermore, he claims that the general patterns identified for the Negri Sembilan area, known for its somewhat unusual matrilineal kinship system, are broadly applicable to Malay society as a whole, and includes comparative data to support this view.

This book begins with an account of the strategies and dilemmas involved in two periods of fieldwork (1978–80; 1987–88), emphasizing how changes in the anthropologist’s personal status from bachelor to husband to father affected his social relations in the community and deepened his understandings of social nuances and cleavages. The rest of the book is divided into six rather lengthy chapters that draw on historic and ethnographic materials to address a series of broader issues in anthropology and gender studies. Asserting that cultural constructions of gender cannot be understood apart from kinship structures, general systems of status and prestige, and the wider political economy, Michael Peletz organizes each chapter thematically around topics that range from political and kinship structures in nineteenth-century Negri Sembilan to concepts of sexual impropriety, patterns of spirit possession, and diverse interpretations of the moral and psychic components of male and female behaviors.

Michael Peletz employs the specifics of the Negri Sembilan Malay case to address several major theoretical issues. For example, he argues that Malay marriages in nineteenth-century Negri Sembilan, which entailed the exchange of men between matrilineal groups controlled by women, challenge Levi-Straussian kinship theory, which claims that the most fundamental rule of kinship involves the exchange of women in marriage between groups controlled by men. Considerable attention is also devoted to Sherry Ortner’s controversial nature/culture theory, which links the relative subordination of women to conceptual systems that associate males with culture and females with nature. Acknowledging previous critiques of the universal applicability
of this theory, Michael Peletz nevertheless demonstrates that the nature/culture theory provides a useful analytical tool for explaining aspects of Malay Moslem gender asymmetry.

Perhaps the most interesting issue addressed in this monograph concerns the origins and significance of the diversity of views surrounding gender constructs among Negri Sembilan Malays. Chapter 6 presents data from interviews with ten men and ten women on gender issues that reveal a combination of agreement on some issues and diverse perspectives on others. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of official and practical kinship to explain some of this divergence, Michael Peletz contrasts official views shaped by Islamic ideology that support male dominance with the practical views of daily life that are much more critical of masculine behaviors. While official views positively value male reason over female passion, daily discourse in some instances describes men as neither reasonable nor responsible. According to Peletz, these counter-hegemonic perspectives arise at least in part from the inability of some men to meet the cultural expectations placed on them by wives (and women in general). Finding the most critical views of male behavior among his poorer informants, he attributes their perspectives to economic disparities caused by colonial and contemporary state development policies that have made it difficult for certain classes of men to live up to more official cultural ideals. However, while there is a certain logic to this argument, the exact cause and extent of such inequalities are unsupported by any specific data.

Nevertheless, the strengths of this study, which combines rich ethnographic description with thoughtful theoretical discussion, far outweigh its weaknesses. And although materials from several chapters have previously appeared in earlier publications, their inclusion here adds significantly to the author's overall discussion. Finally, while the book's topics will appeal most clearly to anthropologically informed readers and those interested in gender issues, its wealth of ethnographic data should also make it valuable reading for anyone interested in Malay and Islamic societies.

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This small book is one of a series published by Oxford University Press entitled "Images of Asia." The purpose of the series in the publisher's words is to combine "an introductory text, written for the non-specialist reader by an authority on the subject, with extensive illustrations in both colour and black and white." That is exactly what this book accomplishes. The author provides background on the history and culture of Aceh followed by chapters on the art and architecture, literature, and the performing arts, as well a chapter on the "present and future" of the area. A concise bibliography covers most of the important sources in English and Indonesian languages.

The book presents a very sympathetic portrayal of Aceh, emphasizing the accomplishments of this most intensely Muslim area of Southeast Asia. The historical section begins with indigenous legends concerning the origins of the Acehnese followed by a brief summary of the archeology of the pre-Islamic period. The earliest written accounts start with the Chinese who in A.D. 500 describe the state of "Poli."