

Plays of Hierarchy and Spontaneity in Everyday Social Gatherings of the Javanese

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The Javanese interaction is often extremely formalized. The way they speak and behave is regulated by their collective ideal of refinedness which is based on a set of oppositional ideas, i. e.; highly valued refinedness (*alus*) versus degrading coarseness (*kasar*). This value system is not just a matter of personal aesthetics of action but also implies a Javanese ideal of social hierarchy, for those who are more refined exert socio-cultural and even political authority over those less refined. Then, we have to ask to what extent the everyday acts of the Javanese are constrained by this notion of hierarchy; and where we can find rooms for free plays and spontaneity. The material for these questions are taken from two forms of customarized social gatherings in a Central Javanese village. One is the communal feast, or *jagong*, which is occasioned by a wide variety of family rituals, where people try their best to achieve the ideal of refined action. The feast produces to us a scene of collective subjugation of the people to the whole order of cultural hierarchy. The other form of the social gatherings, called *jagongan*, contrasts to this rigid subjugation. It is an informal and casual gathering taking place almost every evening in front of village houses. People in the *jagongan* enjoy refined action as a form of playful performace, even as a parody. Creativeness, variation, surprise, and above all a sense of pleasure is appreciated in it. Though the hierarchical notion permeates deep into everyday interactions of the Javanese, anti-hierarchical elements operate like parasites from within the hierarchy itself.