Where Commons Meet Commerce: Circulation and Sequestration Strategies in Indonesian Arts Economies

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Abstract

Production commons require social maintenance or stewardship. Stewardship practices, meaning patterns of valuing and caring for cultural resources, often restrict or foster access to knowledge within or beyond a self-defined group. I term these two protective but seemingly oppositional strategies as "sequestration" and "circulation," respectively. How can we account for individual and group differences in the willingness to share knowledge and techniques for producing cultural expressions? To answer this question, I employ ethnographic narratives, mainly drawn from producers of Indonesian textiles (with comparisons to carvers, musicians, dramatists, and dancers), to construct typologies of informal stewardship rationales and techniques. Examples of circulation and sequestration strategies provide contextual data about what sways artisans' cooperative or competitive behaviors in "split economies." This term refers to industries where expressive cultural productions serve both internal, embedded social purposes, contributing to the cultural value maintained through delayed economic reciprocity, and external commodity markets. Untangling the economic, sociological, and identity boundary aspects of "value" helps clarify conundrums about when producers want to circulate versus sequester information. Sequestration strategies often protect inherited privileges or commercial market share of technologically vulnerable industries. Yet, the classificatory divide between community and market economy realms is shown to be subject to considerable slippage.

Keywords: commons, intellectual property, traditional arts, weaving, Indonesia

Introduction: Commons Stewardship for Regional Arts Economies

How can we theorize the sociality of increasingly interconnected economic labor spheres, where arenas of shared resource commons meet globalization? Practices, which generally serve to promote individual interests? Stephen Gudeman divides all economies into two realms, the community and the market. Whereas community refers to "real, on-the-ground associations and to imagined solidarities that people experience ... market designates anonymous, short-term exchanges" – in other words, impersonal material trades and the institutions of accumulation (Gudeman 2001:1). Gudeman’s community economy realm is comprised of the commons or "base" of all shared local interests – including natural resources, produced items, knowledge, and customary practices – as well as the social relations that create and allot those interests. The commons and social group relationships bear a heavy referential and theoretical load in this scheme. The commons base is a kind of Latourian assemblage of physical phenomena, human knowledge, and local practices, which are hinged together through the social relationships that Gudeman describes as "valued communal connections maintained as ends in themselves" (Gudeman 2001:8).

Although human relations become a suspiciously independent variable in this model, Gudeman frames sociality usefully in contrast to prior theories of the commons. He recasts the commons not just as the objective assets to be managed, but also as the relationships through which people share those assets: "taking away the commons destroys community, and destroying a complex of relationships demolishes a commons" (Gudeman 2001:27). Yet, we are still left to ask how the assets and boundaries of overlapping family, village, ethnic, and even national production commons are managed in practice. How do sharing and restriction figure in commons stewardship, especially now that market realms increasingly nip at the heels of older, locally embedded production processes that are aimed at community service? Working in the cracks between Gudeman’s categories, my primary concern here is with practices of production, rather than the allotment of products. I ask how arts production is informally managed within and beyond particular Indonesian cultural commons, and I find slippage between the community and market economy realms.

The cultural commons of any workplace requires ongoing social maintenance or stewardship because "vulnerability haunts shared assets" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2011). Yet, stewardship, the practice of caring for cultural resources, varies according to whether or not it is thought to be desirable to share work reduction knowledge within or beyond a self-defined commons group. If sharing is not advocated,
then production knowledge is regulated, restricted, or hidden to benefit certain individuals or groups. I refer to these two protective but seemingly oppositional strategies as "circulation" and "sequestration," respectively. I argue that the two approaches are engaged to address different kinds of vulnerabilities in cultural work processes. Below, I explore the logic of strategy selection through examples of Indonesian arts products and performances that are embedded in communities' rituals, festivities, or other public negotiations of social relations.1

Sequestration patterns often dovetail with assessments of cultural resources or creations as property to be claimed by individual or group owners. Such appraisals are inherent to conventional intellectual property law, and they drive recent international efforts to formulate national cultural property legal provisions for the developing world (Aragon and Leach 2008). As a result of the new legal rhetoric, for example, many Indonesian government leaders protest that Malaysia should not publicly claim cultural products such as batik to be "Malaysian heritage," even though the cultural commons of this ancient wax-resist textile technique long predates the two nations, their improbable postcolonial boundaries, and European copyright law itself. These disagreements hinge on claims of authenticity to matters of origin and exclusive rights.

But, sequestration, legal or informal, is not the only aspiration and tactic of cultural resource caretakers. Circulation, too, often through ethical forms of imitation, is considered to be a protective goal by stewards of some cultural resources. Their reasoning parallels those for the sharing and co-maintenance of natural resource commons. Through complementary work scheduling, crop rotation, voluntary extraction quotas, and local knowledge accumulation, people's working lives can build up the commons rather than just wear them down.

Contemporary scholars of the commons (Boyle 2008; Hyde 2010) often portray the informal or indigenous commons in wide-open or Utopian terms (Nonini 2007:4). Yet, comparative ethnography is well positioned to examine precisely how different kinds of cultural resource commons, as social networks negotiating work production practices, actually operate. What workplace knowledge is there that needs protecting, from whom, and how should it be done?

My goal in this article is to map what the informal stewardship of production looks like across a small sample of different Indonesian artisan livelihoods and economic terrains. Modeling the ethics of artisan stewardship, in terms of both justifying rhetoric and socioeconomic incentives, is the challenge envisioned, one complicated by interconnected regional, national, and international markets. The rationales and socioeconomic conditions under which workers decide to restrict or share local know-how reinforce situated cultural practices (Bourdieu 1977), which maintain a balance between self and other, internal and external commodity markets. My examples show that there is moral slippage between the community and market realms of the economy, and that these two realms can have mutually supportive relations. In Indonesia, for example, currency-based street market prices for food and other staples are negotiable according to degrees of acquaintance-ship between buyer and seller, relations that index the parties' estimations of their likely future exchanges and significant interactions.

The theoretical backstory or policy foil for my inquiry concerns the World Trade Organization, the United Nation's World Intellectual Property Organization, and other advocates of top-down intellectual and cultural property initiatives. Their platforms in developing nations generally argue that the limited monopolies of formal legal protection will result in desirable economic gains for producers and cultural preservation (Taubman 2007; Wendland 2007). In these policy formulations, protection of cultural resources seems always to be a matter of restricting access, what I call sequestration. I have argued elsewhere that this perspective is more a function of extending developed world concerns and habits than attending to local producers' desires and models, at least in Indonesia (Aragon and Leach 2008). My research suggests that there are social conditions under which producers of cultural expressions, as stewards, seek to protect their traditions by promoting imitation and wider knowledge circulation. Below, I assess the conditions that distinguish when Indonesian artisans' pursue sequestration or the unexpected and seemingly generous strategies of circulation, sometimes in combination.

Although the Indonesian craft idioms discussed here are hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years old, there is ample local recognition and scholarly evidence of revitalized and revised work production methods. These include the hand-painted batik industry of Java, which was supplemented and semi-mechanized by the mid-1800's invention of the copper stamp printing block or cap (Brenner 1998:89-90), and the late 20th century reinvigoration of Javanese shadow puppet theater (wayang kulit), where new musical instrumentation, innovative puppet movements, colorful lighting, video recordings, and politically astute comic interludes attracted new audiences and fans (Mírak 2002). In short, these are vibrant cultural idioms, actively regenerated through revised production methods and partial commoditization processes.
A pivotal concept for my inquiry is what I term "split economy" productions. By this phrase, I mean local production processes that serve an internal ritual or embedded social purpose, entailing family or group-based delayed reciprocity, and an external commodity market, entailing monetary payment from "outsiders." Balinese dances, temple banner paintings, and ritual textiles; Toraja-ranked house carvings; Kalimantan ikat weavings for clothes; and Javanese shadow puppet performances held at life-cycle rituals illustrate the former. The same or similar productions repressed as tourist souvenirs or entertainments exemplify the latter. In such cases, an economy's "interlocked realms of communal and commercial value" (Gudeman 2001:81) are fused through single idioms of production. Yet, the social value and commodity value generated are not necessarily gleaned by the same individuals, and the local use value does not have the same quantifiable economic impact as the exchange value (Figure 1).

In reality, the material qualities, their social uses, and methods of exchange can overlap. Crafted objects and performances exist on a continuum between internal and external market economies, just as ethnic communities themselves can be fluid. For example, one group of Su’dan Toraja (Sulawesi Island) wood-carvers produced virtually the identical house plaques for a ranked village member’s house and for a nearby posh tourist hotel that offered foreigners the fantasy of living in "a traditional Toraja house," but with toilets and room service. Only the local villagers’ house carvings were ritually consecrated and changed the sponsor’s status within the social group whose identity was traced to the house. Similarly, a performance by Balinese dancers blessed a local temple community who attended the event without fees, but with social obligations to the event’s sponsors. The performance also accrued economic income for the dancers and some guides who delivered paying tourists to the dance. Such internal embedding linked to place or ethnic distinctiveness often leverages claims for "authentic" cultural productions, which are appealing for market to outsiders (Collorado-Mansfeld this issue). Here, we see mutually supportive relations between the internal commons and external market economies. The strength of internal practice bolsters tourism appeal, while outsiders’ interest in traditions such as Hindu dances, natural dyes, and distinctive symbolic motifs may support local practices. The market-based income, public attention, and resultant prestige can deter artists and artisans from abandoning older, socially embedded practices for newly imported, market-driven day jobs (Figure 2).

The commercial or market end of these split economies also can be divided, and the term “split economy” refers here to when creations are produced differentially for varied sets of paying audiences or consumers. For example, older kinds of naturally dyed cloths may be made for sale to a high-end tourist market, while the same artisans also produce cheaper and more rapidly manufactured chemically dyed textiles for a domestic clothing market.

Split economy and split market productions in Southeast Asia present an intriguing contrast with some other “native” heritage economies because producers do not invariably seek cultural resource sequestration to protect cherished expressive forms. Cottage industry batik producers in the province of Central Java and commercial textile producers in the district of Gianyar, Bali, for example, do not consider most forms of imitation by competitors to be disloyal.
Instead, they call their customary form of co-imitation a “win-win situation.” By contrast, in late-capitalist nations such as the United States, the desire for intellectual property legal protection seems to correlate rather simplistically with opportunities to market one’s products. What can best help us understand and account for these different ethics and impulses? In some cases, it may come down to the degree of economic commoditization and competitive trade throughout society (Gudeman 2008). In an alternative framing, different cultural views of personhood or individualism, and expressive creativity, emerge in different material and sociopolitical conditions (Strathern 1988, 1999). The technical parameters of different expressive idioms also create different capacities to enclose and protect designs or performances. Below, I approach these and related issues by constructing a typology of sequestration and circulation strategies to further comparative traction.

**Indonesian Textile Work, Earnings, and Markets**

Most of the ethnographic examples described here come from Indonesia, with a focus on two textile industries. The first is Javanese batik, which began as fully handmade but became partially mechanized in the 1800s. The second is double-ikat ritual weavings of Tenganan, Bali, which remain homemade on backstrap looms. One old center for commercial batik production is the Laweyan neighborhood of Solo, Central Java. Its producers employ mostly circulation strategies. By contrast, the makers of double-ikat, backstrap loom weaving of ritual textiles (geringsing) in Tenganan, Bali, employ sequestration strategies. I made initial observations of both production industries in the late 1980s and 1990s, with follow-up research during a 2005–2007 fieldwork project focused on intellectual property issues (Aragon and Leach 2008). I also returned to Tenganan in 2011 (Figure 3).

Textiles are Indonesia’s most widespread, diverse, and aesthetically elaborated two-dimensional graphic art form. Famously termed “splendid symbols” by the textile specialist Mattiebelle Gittinger (1979), Indonesian cloth not only makes functional apparel, but certain genres carry a heavy symbolic load as women’s marital exchange goods, class and clan identity markers, and ritualized protective power objects (Gittinger 1989; Taylor and Aragon 1991). Indonesian textiles have been produced by three primary techniques. The first, felted and painted bark-cloth, is now largely an abandoned industry (Aragon 1990) and is noteworthy here only as a baseline community economy without a market sphere. The second, ikat, is tied-and-dyed loom-woven cloth, which can be fully homemade on a backstrap or mechanical loom. The warp, the weft, or both skeins of thread can be dye-resist patterned prior to weaving.

![Figure 3. A double-ikat, handwoven geringsing cloth displayed on the wall of a house compound, Tenganan, Bali, July 2005. Photo by Lorraine V. Aragon.](image)

The third and most famed technique is batik, where wax is applied as a reverse design to cloth areas where dye is not wanted. This is followed by successive stages of dyeing, wax application, and boiling to remove the wax from a white base cloth that is now usually machine loomed.

Batik production evolved from a 17th century domestic art associated with noblewomen and sartorial splendor in the courts of Central Java to a booming, early 20th century apparel industry run by a savvy merchant class who built workshops onto their family homes. During the industry’s boom in the early 1920s, earnings for many workers were far superior to that of local rice farmers (Brenner 1998:40–41). By the 1980s, however, the formerly modern industry was considered in decline, and the women who hand-painted the finest quality cloth (batik tulis) sold in commodity markets often were paid little more than domestic servants, and considered accordingly by their merchant masters (Brenner 1998:112–113).

From a domestic female skill whose products marked high-class privilege, Central Javanese batik has become a male-dominated commercial industry whose products mark national identity and are being used for certain life-cycle ritual events. Successful Laweyan merchants now supervise teams of better-
paid male designers, dyers, and copper stamp (cap) printers, as well as hundreds of low-wage females, metonymically referred to as "hands." These women produce hand-painted (batik tulis) cloths either at home by the piece or in smoky factory rooms where they sit clustered on low stools painting presketched designs on loomed cloth with melted wax. Local plant dyes and homespun cotton thread have been replaced by synthetic and machine-made materials. Yet, the process of applying waxed designs to resist successive dye baths continues as the Indonesian criterion for what constitutes "authentic" batik, distinguishing it from fully mechanized "foreign" printing techniques (Figure 4).

Regional batik designs are strongly linked to Javanese cultural identity, an association that was supported first by the courts and later by the Indonesian government. Thus, batik production houses in Laweyan sell both to regional and distant markets. In the mid-1960s, however, technical and political shifts helped a few large corporations including Batik Keris, which mostly prints old batik-style designs without using wax-resist techniques, to dominate the domestic and export apparel markets.

By contrast, the other key idiom discussed below, the double-ikat ritual cloth (geringsing) produced in Tenganan, Bali, remains a family affair. The labor-intensive backstrap loom cloth is made in a small closed-membership community for local ritual use with an ancillary, but economically significant, sale of surplus cloths to neighboring Balinese villages and foreign tourists. For example, textiles used for funerary rituals, which may not be used again by

the community, are sold in local shops to tourists (Ramsay 1991:128).

A single geringsing cloth with its basic palette of natural red, black, and yellow/cream plant dyes can take up to 2 years to complete. The prices are accordingly high: hundreds or even thousands of U.S. dollars for a large, high-quality cloth bearing a handful of named designs. Most of the local dye production and design-tying stages of each ritual textile are carried out by a single skilled woman and her family members, although the final stage of weaving the dyed threads on the loom, considered the most trivial step, now may be done by a young girl. This is not wage labor for a largely commoditized fabric like batik, but rather a ritual textile considered to wield cosmic power. It requires highly skilled, locally authorized, and pedigreed workers, who are enriched by their ability to sell these scarce items to wealthy neighbors and tourists.

In the sections below, I consider stewardship schemes, such as that of some batik producers, which seek to protect and regenerate idioms or styles of cultural expression by active replication or circulation. To enlarge the comparative frame, I include references to other Indonesian products and foreign examples, such as the case of "the last British lead-workers" living in Wales who are eager to share their inherited knowledge but lack willing successors. These cases suggest that economic commoditization is not always a sufficient condition to foster informal steps toward sequestration.

In trades where producers do sequester knowledge, I consider how economic actors protect aspects of their culturally embedded industries through informal social or technical devices. Highlighted elsewhere (Aragon and Leach 2008), the distributed nature of authority over cultural production and repertoires will not be the focus here, although certain examples below illustrate the important message that control over cultural resource production often rests with neither one particular individual nor a clearly bounded group. In short, audiences, consumers, and seemingly minor contributors working at different stages of production influence outcomes, and so are integral to the stewardship picture.

A simple question that motivates this inquiry is whether informal practices in local arts industries are harmonious or discordant with various emerging intellectual and cultural property models. More broadly, the analysis implicates larger anthropological issues of values, sources of creativity, and variegated interests in workplace commons. In the conclusion, I turn to reconsider the concept of value because the circulation and sequestration rationales described, like much anthropological research on this topic, often fail to disentangle the multiple values that guide art producers' practices. A clearer analytic separation of
economic, sociological, and linguistic (the "difference-
that-makes-a-difference") meanings of the term
"value" offers some purchase on confounding ques-
tions of why some producers want to share knowledge
of their cultural expressions while others, employing
comparable rhetoric, do not.

Protection by Circulation

Protection through active circulation of cultural
expressions is a notion that initially seems counterintu-
tuitive to those who consider intellectual property
discourse a matter of human rights ethics to protect
the fair attribution and compensation deserved by
individual or group creators. As with sequestration,
protection by circulation encompasses a range of
technological and social methods, which are accom-
panied by several potentially overlapping rationales.
Below, I describe and exemplify five general rationales
for protecting knowledge through circulation: (1) idiom
guardianship by sharing; (2) open access; (3) co-
imitation; (4) group benefits of idiom promotion;
and (5) individual benefits of idiom promotion. These
are summarized in Table 1.

"Idiom guardianship by sharing" concerns the
cross-generational transmission of moral lessons and
identity-based heritage techniques. The cases here
often involve a conscious effort to perpetuate old and
sometimes dwindling cultural idioms that are recog-
nized as core group traditions. This rationale high-
lights the importance of passing along cultural
education, moral lessons, or any useful heritage skills
thought necessary to reproduce the commons.
Apprenticeship and youth tutelage are seen as the key
to cultural asset regeneration, the natural antidote to
knowledge extinction.

Indonesian regional artists provide many
examples of the guardianship by sharing rationale.
The routine rejection of legal copyright models heard
from Central Javanese puppeteers and Balinese clas-
sical dancers often is phrased in terms such as "we
want and need to freely share our knowledge or else
our cultural traditions will not flourish; the next
generation will be impoverished without these teach-
ings and arts." In fact, most Indonesian arts producers
who want to circulate their production knowledge to
an in-group are not particularly concerned with for-
mally sequestering it from outsiders. Questions about
whether they mind outsiders studying and copying
their dance, music, drama, puppet, or carving tech-
niques were generally met with welcoming invitations
and positive examples of where outsiders, including
foreigners, had learned local cultural skills and spread
the work practices elsewhere.

In 2010, I encountered a comparable rationale,
described with similar claims, from a family of British
architectural "lead workers" (their term) living in
Wales near an old Roman roadway. Two brothers now
in their 60s had learned architectural lead work – the
cutting, shaping, and installation of lead roof orna-
ments, turrets, weather vanes, and the like – from their
now deceased father. They showed me their tools and
materials, stating that their production techniques
were essentially the same as those used in ancient
Roman times. The two men described themselves
to cheerfully as lucky and well-paid tradesmen, upscale
"plumbers really," who never lacked for work and
remuneration their whole lives. They said they never
needed to advertise or haggle over their charges. They
simply name the costs per job to their clients, who
hear them by word of mouth. No one balks at their
fees because they have virtually no competitors.

Yet, the brothers commented somewhat wistfully
that "we are the last ones doing this. It will end with
us." Neither has children, and no others had com-
pleted an apprenticeship training that they freely
offered. Speaking virtually the same lines that I had
heard in Indonesia, one of the brothers said, "We
don't want lead working to die out, so we are happy to
show others what we do." They had tried to teach
some local Welsh lads their trade, but the fellows gave
up along the way. Apparently, the youths shunned the
hauling of heavy rolls of lead sheeting up ladders
to daunting heights and the "dirty" manual work
involved. In short, the procirculation commons
guardianship rationale can be encountered in indus-
trial nations among the preservers of diminishing
technical idioms from lead work to folk singing to
quilting. Thus, commoditization is not a sufficient
condition to end the impetus for sharing commons
knowledge.

A second rationale, "open access," emphasizes
the need by all group members to have ready access to
old cultural repertoire elements for reuse and creative
recycling. A good example is seen in the Laweyan
batik industries clustered near Solo, Central Java.
Laweyan batik producers describe how they often look
through records of old designs made by their past
family or group members. Then they change the color
scheme and perhaps a few line details to formulate a "new" fabric design model. They advocate this normative form of imitation of competitors' products. They oppose emerging intellectual property claims to particular named batik designs by large companies because they say that their individual livelihoods, cottage industries, and common Javanese cultural traditions depend on open circulation.

One middle-aged Lawayan man said that his family batik business was begun by his great-grandfather. Formerly, up to 20 members of his family would work together to produce the core batik stock. They would then collect and sell additional kinds of batik cloth made by their neighbors. The company's signature designs come from their deceased grandparents, but the father also formulates new designs by combining various elements of distinctive regional patterns. Holding up a classic Solo-style shirt steeped in rich brown dyes, the Lawayan batik maker said that old patterns and colors were recycled regularly. If they sold well, he and his brothers made more. Thus, they "returned anew to the old" through keeping the local commons repertoire open for selective reuse.

A third rationale, "co-imitation," endorses the benefits of cross-fertilization through borrowing of others' emerging ideas. Both repertoire recycling and co-imitation techniques attract customers by using other's work. The Lawayan producers, like many Indonesian artisans, proved complacent about the issue of imitation, but they also clarified their ethical norms for co-imitation. They said that local competitors often copy trends in designs and colors, but always add small changes of their own.

The batik makers explained that it is fairly easy for batik designers to replicate each other's graphic motifs just by visual inspection. Given the ease of copying, a complementary sequestration solution was sometimes used: producers kept one set of family dye formulas a secret, which made it unlikely that outside competitors could quickly create exact color imitations of the family's newest designs.

Another solution to discourage exact imitation was simply to keep the prices and profit margin low for local people. They said that if prices are high and a batik model sells quickly, competitors have an incentive to make exact copies. If the prices are kept low with small profit margins for local sales, neighborhood customers are appreciative, and become more loyal, while rivals are less inclined to make exact copies. In these ways, the sales themselves are organized to limit violations of the Lawayan batik makers' "unwritten rules" (peraturan yang tidak tertulis). This looks like a marketing strategy aimed at long-term economic stability and positive social relations among a guild-like commons group rather than a quick buck (or rupiah) for an individual. Here, again, we can see that sharing is done to keep certain commons values, processes, and social relationships healthy, despite some short-term sacrifice of economic gain.

The Lawayan batik makers added that higher fees are charged to foreign customers because they know that maybe a Korean or Japanese buyer will reproduce their colors and design exactly for bulk sale in, say, Peru. They interrogate foreigners about their production capacity and intentions. Then they charge them accordingly, knowing that they may have little control over foreign imitations past the initial transaction of goods. Several of the Lawayan batik makers expressed concern that, allegedly, some Malaysians hired Indonesian workers to make batik in Malaysia, and the fabrics then were sold and labeled with the now literally accurate but undeserved tag, "made in Malaysia." Here, we see the local procirculation inclinations increasingly bounded by global market vulnerabilities and emerging national rivalries.

In 2005, the Lawayan batik makers said that, thus far, they never did more than get "upset" when someone from another batik house "pirated" their special new designs or resold them to a large production house that undercut their prices and profits. When asked if they, too, ever copied or pirated from those who copied them, one man laughed saying that, yes, through this process of mutual imitation, "we develop continually!" (ya, kita berkembang terus!). One said that design innovations and directions came roughly 50 percent from their "feelings" (perasaan) and now about 50 percent from the market, meaning the interests of their customers. In Indonesia, such narratives about "feelings" refer to the way traditional practices are melded and enlivened through the skills and accomplishment of the producer. By valuing personal feelings in manufacturing, they reinforce narratives about the ethical way for a producer to work, making small changes in any designs or colors that are imitated.

One exception to the local prohibition on exact copies was when the batik makers explicitly commissioned an admired design from another designer. In such cases, they said they make a small payment, roughly the equivalent of a day's labor or the cost of a restaurant meal in exchange for a drawing of, say, a single bird or fish motif that the creator agrees for them to use in a given batch of fabrics. In this case, certain kinds of knowledge circulation are regulated through what they consider to be respectful requests and honorarium payments that acknowledge individual contributions. I argue that the modest sums involved represent more of a recognition and one-time
payment for labor and expertise than an ongoing royalty characteristic of Euro-American intellectual property ownership systems.

Overall, the small batik producers in Laweyan said that there is no need to register designs with the government because everyone knows whose designs are whose, and they tend to circulate mainly among family members. Others can try to copy the designs without special permission or fees. That is accepted, as long as the local competitor’s imitation is not exact, which can lead to verbal ridicule or objections because the original designer would feel “upset” (kesel). The Laweyan batik makers said that they are careful to keep good relations with their competitors. One explained that they avoid taking too much business from others through crass imitation or underselling tactics because “there still is custom” (maah ada adat) to backstop the Javanese desire for public harmony and preservation of the commons community.

The fourth rationale, “group benefits of idiom promotion,” involves the assertion of group prestige and economic advantages when local cultural expressions are promoted to new audiences, generally through free or low-cost sharing. Many Indonesian artisans spoke of gaining local pride and economic benefits through promoting knowledge of their local cultural expressions to new audience groups. This rationale for circulation seemed especially prominent when an arts idiom was just being introduced to a new foreign market. Producers often said that they were happy to share local cultural knowledge or sell an item such as a carving or textile at a reduced price in order to find favor with a new set of consumers. For example, upland Sa’dan Toraja of Sulawesi incrementally gained national ethnic prestige and economic clout relative to neighboring lowland Bugis and Makassar groups through their welcome of foreign tourists to their funeral rituals and the subsequent marketing of their wood carvings (Adams 2006).

The fifth rationale, “individual benefits of idiom promotion,” concerns the parallel idea that individuals, skilled masters who generously share their knowledge with apprentices or audiences, gain increased reputation and personal prosperity through promotion of their cultural expressions. This rationale is more readily observed than explicitly stated by arts practitioners in Indonesia because master gamelan musicians, puppeteers, classical dancers, and choreographers in Java and Bali tend to downplay both their special genius and any mercenary goals of individual fame or wealth (Aragon and Leach 2008:618). The apparent sublimation of selfish interest in favor of the sharing of workplace knowledge seems useful to both skilled masters and their groups. The formula helps keep cultural assets locally viable and valued. It also defuses the potential conflict engendered by unseemly personal gain in Indonesian societies, which have egalitarian as well as hierarchic impulses.

One Solo-based conservatory performer explicitly described the potential unity of cultural group and individual gains, noting how local commons norms come into play to maintain the balance. He spoke with pride about Central Javanese music and drama traditions as “our wealth” (kekayaan kita), and said that any student was free to “just borrow” (pinjam aja) masters’ arts techniques. “This is what happens in traditional society,” he said “to keep the stage drama tradition alive, artists feel proud to be imitated.” Even borrowing and reproducing shadow puppet drama (wayang kulit) scripts with photocopy and computer technologies was still “no problem” locally because properly raised artists would never be audacious enough to steal, that is, to claim others’ work as their own without giving proper honor to the earlier producer. That would be “sinning” (berdosa). Any decent local artist, he said, would “ask permission” (mintah tain) before performing someone else’s work. And, ideally, borrowers would voluntarily give some kind of economic compensation (memberi imbalan) relative to their own earnings from the performances, which usually are sponsored by local individuals or community groups.

Here, commons sanctions are claimed to effectively inhibit unethical (exact, unacknowledged, and uncompensated) imitations. At the same time, an originator’s economic and social demands on an imitator are limited by the imitator’s own potential meager financial gain. Insistence on higher payments also would jeopardize the social premium accorded to Javanese masters who exhibit modesty and asceticism, culturally recognized signs of spiritual power and inner virtue. And yet, the fact that the performer was discussing the group’s open “common wealth” in the same breath as individual misbehavior or “sinning” suggests that an informal and ideologically generous approach to shared culture has vulnerabilities. In sum, although locals may not be able to influence or sanction the behavior of outsiders, a diminishment of reverence for art idioms in the homeland would be a far greater threat to both the cultural idiom and its practitioners.

Undoubtedly, technical features of a cultural expression shape some circulation practices. For example, members of one Central Javanese performers’ group noted that it took about 3 months for them to prepare a shadow puppet performance, so the lengthy production time frame effectively prevented any rapid copying or unauthorized reproductions of their works. As with some epic genre painters encountered in Kemasan, Bali, the Javanese master puppeteers felt unthreatened by the prospect of imitation.
because their core narratives are drawn from ancient epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. They also added that exact imitation was technically unlikely. In short, the graphic or technical nature of some idioms is important because the media through which social (and economic) values become realized vary according to the degree those values can be stored (Graeber 2001:78). The intensive labor and skills required for many arts and crafts often is enough to inhibit imitation without additional sequestration measures (Chibnik 2003; Little 2004).

**Protection by Sequestration**

Sequestration rationales for restricting circulation of cultural resources include: (1) seclusion for “cultural survival,” or group defense against demographic swamping, acculturation, and resource misappropriation; (2) “preservation of group economic privilege” by promoting a kind of ethnic brand name or geographical place indication; (3) “preservation of inherited privilege” for elite individuals in a local social hierarchy; and (4) “preservation of an individual’s achieved status” based on personal labor input and expertise (Table 2).

Well-described examples of sequestration for “cultural survival” include the efforts by many First Nations or American Indian groups, and by Aboriginal Australians, to keep their dances, religious rituals, ritual artifacts, painting motifs, and clan symbols under social restrictions, sometimes legally forbidding their use by outsiders (Coombe 1998; Brown 2003). I will not elaborate further except to note that secrecy is often the salient informal method of protection used, while intellectual and cultural property lawsuits in Australia and North America are the fashionable tactics of recent decades.

In Indonesia, defensive sequestration proved to be a markedly infrequent strategy of the artists and artisans observed during my 2005–2007 and 2011 fieldwork investigations. The only full-blown sequestration example that emerged was the production of a double-ikat ritual textile type called geringing (or gringsing) woven in the small Tenganan community of east Bali (Aragon and Leach 2008:621–622). Even here, though, producers blended several strategies: guarding dye secrets, promoting a distinctive ethnic economy, and enabling some design circulation. The focus of these efforts was a type of textile that is considered by Balinese, both inside and outside of Tenganan, to offer protective power. People require the cloth for various rituals, including the tooth-filing purification rite that many outsider Hindu Balinese undergo prior to marriage.

The “indigenous” or Bali Aga people of the customary village (desa adat) of Tenganan distinguish themselves ethnically and historically from the Balinese majority who live on the island. Only full-blooded members of the customary village are taught the complicated natural dye-production and thread-tying secrets of the geringing cloths, making this a well-enclosed industry. Like all who do not meet the criteria of customary village membership, which requires permanent residence and “indigenous” genealogical pedigree, other Balinese are not allowed access to the knowledge and materials of geringing production. Reserving the production of geringing textiles for themselves is a core means of preserving Tenganan people’s ethnic distinctiveness and “cultural survival” separate from other Balinese. As one ritual leader noted, “we don’t want to be naked [by revealing our secrets to outsiders]. We are a small republic.”

The sequestration practiced in Tenganan also preserves the group’s economic privileges, which, here, overlap with protection of weavers’ ascribed or inherited status. If non-Tenganan Balinese wish to perform certain standard life-cycle rites, they must buy the expensive geringing cloths in Tenganan or borrow them from kin. Foreign tourists, particularly Europeans and Japanese, also seek to buy the high-priced geringing because double-ikat techniques (where dye-resist patterns are applied to both warp and weft threads before they are matched together through the weaving) are difficult and rare in Indonesia, and worldwide. So, in Tenganan, a complex split economy with split markets makes products with different levels of quality. Generally, postritual discards, poorer quality, and newly made geringing cloths are marketed to outsider Balinese and tourists, while older, higher-quality cloths are retained for family use in village rituals.

The Tenganan data also provide an intriguing example of how the vulnerability of disloyal competition can be informally addressed outside of a sequestration strategy, even in an interethnic cluster market. Geringing “knock-offs” potentially sold as counterfeits became widespread in the east Balinese commercial textile markets in recent decades. Balinese commercial weavers in neighboring Gianyar produce attractive single-ikat imitations of the Tenganan
geringsing" named double-ikat designs (themselves imitated from ancient South Asian maritime trade textiles known as pada创业者). The Gianyar replicas, made with commercial dyes on mechanical looms, are manufactured quickly and sold cheaply, sometimes even purveyed as authentic geringsing cloths to gullible tourists.

Rather than turning to any state legal apparatus, the leaders of the customary village (desa adat) of Tenganan complained directly to the weavers in Gianyar about the unethical nature of their duplication scheme. The negotiated outcome seems ingenious. Tenganan leaders accepted that their clever Balinese neighbors were able to copy the ancient designs they saw, tapping into the symbolic capital of the Tenganan geringsing cloths. But they asked that they—the Tenganan weavers—also be allowed to retail the single-ikat versions from their looms along with real double-ikat geringsing cloths. In this way, (1) the Tenganan weavers reap financial benefits from the imitative industry of their Balinese neighbors, and (2) the co-marketing scheme puts the Tenganan weavers and vendors in a position to educate foreign tourists about the differences in quality between the real double-ikat cloths and the single-ikat knockoffs (although some may let tourists remain ignorant to gain quick sales).

The solution allows educated tourists to decide whether they wanted to spend several hundred U.S. dollars for a real geringsing cloth that uses natural plant dyes and is homemade on a backstrap loom by Tenganan women, or $20–30 for an also attractive, mechanically loomed version, fully cognizant of the differences. This is a case where old internal sequestration methods (secret dye-making and difficult double-ikat techniques) suddenly failed to prevent outsiders’ copying. Yet, the failure was accepted and transcended by stratifying the tourist commodity end of the split economy to establish a distinction between “authentic” first-class versus “copycat” second-class merchandise, made by “real” Tengananese versus “ordinary” Balinese. This made the copycats into useful wholesale suppliers instead of simply disloyal and detrimental competitors.

The case is interesting also because the geringsing imitation was enabled by the new technology of mechanical looms imported first in the 1970s, in conjunction with the brazenly taboo-violating idea that Tenganan people’s double-ikat weaving designs could be imitated by the much simpler and widely known single-ikat weaving method. I was told by the head of a Tenganan geringsing weaving household that they do not consider this as a matter of a counterfeits and infringement but simply as a matter of two different regions producing two different qualities of cloth for potentially different uses and markets.

The third sequestration rationale is the preservation of inherited kinship-based privileges, especially for elites. It is exemplified by many ikat weaving communities in Indonesia, including the ones in Tenganan, Bali, in Desa’ (Ibanic Dayak) communities of West Kalimantan, and many others living on eastern Indonesian islands such as Sumba (Forshcer 2000), Timor, and Flores (Hamilton 1994). In one ethnic Desa (Kalimantan) weaving village, master weavers say that they are able to weave their group’s most advanced or dangerous designs (such as the snake king, raja ular, and crocodile, buaya) only through aid from their ancestral spirits. The spirits are said to visit the elite weavers in their dreams when the women place food offerings at the base of their looms before going to sleep. The self-ascribed, and conventionally recognized, instruction dreams from ancestors are accompanied by the weaver’s subsequent pronouncement and mastery of ascetic food taboos. These distinctive behaviors, in conjunction with extraordinary and publicly recognized design accomplishments, mark a weaver’s position in the local social hierarchy. They also demonstrate the weaver’s exceptional individual achievement (Figure 5).

Indeed, the personal restrictions among elite Desa weavers also illustrate the fourth rationale for knowledge sequestration, the preservation of monopoly by recognized individual experts. In recent years, the older ritual behaviors and stratified cultural skills have led to some weavers winning festival trophies, name recognition, and increased cloth sales in local galleries that market “Dayak tribal textiles” to

Figure 5. A Desa woman sits among children in her longhouse weaving ikat cloth with a back-tension loom, Sintang region, West Kalimantan, September 2006. Photo by Lorraine V. Aragon.
outsiders, particularly Europeans. Here, the commodi-
ty end of the split economy, driven by the primitive art market, elevates individualism, although individual achievement claims generally are twinned with inherited rank claims. In Flores, Roy Hamilton (1994:136–137; 2010) also describes the aristocratic individual inventor of a new cloth design format, whose exceptional weaving achievements and knowledge have been carried forward mainly by close relatives and associates.

A final non-textile example from Sa’dan Toraja, South Sulawesi, encompasses all four sequestration rationales. The case incorporates the issues of migration and socioeconomic change while focusing on product uses. The tourist market for Toraja wood carvings illustrates the way inherited status privileges can evolve to cultural branding claims. In the past, sequestration of high-rank Toraja carving designs was maintained by cosmic sanctions against improper use, where violators were thought to be punishable by imminent misfortune and by a linked set of socioeconomic constraints. Only nobles had the animal wealth to perform the pig and buffalo sacrifices required for ceremonies that allowed their ancestral houses to be festooned with high-status carvings.

Toraja commoners traditionally are not permitted to incorporate high-ranked carvings, including images of buffalo and roosters, on their house sidings. In recent decades, however, ethnic Toraja out-migrants returning with newfound wealth have done exactly that to raise their family status at home (Volkman 1985; Waterson 2009). These nouveaux riches, who commission carvers to produce designs to which the sponsors are not entitled by pedigree, generally are Christian converts who can jettison their forbears’ fears of cosmic retributions for getting uppity. Additionally, their migrant travel experiences help them understand and participate in tourism enterprises, which now market lavish Toraja funeral rituals, ancestor effigies, wood carvings, and miniature houses as generic Toraja ethnic symbols rather than rank-specific ones (Adams 2006).

We see that compliance with the inherited rank-based sequestration of house carvings broke down, under new sociopolitical conditions, in favor of a broader Toraja ethnic commons indexed by the same regional arts. This now largely Christian Toraja commons also gets pitched symbolically against the adjacent Muslim Bugis and Makassar ethnic commons, as well as the national Indonesian one. Here, migrant wealth, democratic reforms, and the tourist-commodity end of a split economy spurred a transformation of the formerly embedded social uses for expressive heritage idioms. These factors unsettled local hierarchies and fostered new ethnic commons in ways characteristic of expressive industries born and bred in a Southeast Asian maritime crossroads undergoing nationalistic transformations. In sum, sequestration strategies are often deployed to protect inherited individual or group privileges, but the class basis or regional parameters of those commons groups may shift over time.

Commons Stewardship: Untangling Economies, Values, and Circulation Vulnerabilities

The Indonesian arts and artisanal idioms described emerged hundreds of years ago in less commodified, community economies. They served a variety of ritual, recreational, and economic exchange values as well as functional use values such as clothing. Many still do. Despite recent and growing sales at the market end of these split economies, at the noncommodified end, these idioms rely on Maussian types of delayed reciprocity. I argue that these are not just transitional work forms, marching toward full commodification, but, in some cases, socially instrumental activities that are sufficiently weighted with cultural meaning to be normatively protected from what Marx might anticipate to be their inevitable dissolution into fully alienated labor.

We can appreciate the faded glory, gender inequities, and literally “post-Modern” aspects of the Javanese batik industry (Brenner 1998), which accommodates mechanization and handmade techniques at different phases of production. Yet, the idiom’s aesthetic multiplicity and its stratified domestic and foreign markets are remarkable. By contrast, with antecedents traced through mythic heritage back to the Majapahit kingdom era in the 14th century (Ramsay 1991:133), the more localized double-ikat textiles of Tenganan have retained their tricolor palette, handful of named designs, and relatively precise formulae for ritual production. Despite Tenganan people’s acknowledgement that they thrive economically with tourism, they insist that what they do is not just a business to produce for outsiders but also a critical community activity weighted with religious significance and performative power (Aragon and Leach 2008:621–622). Indeed, such claims of authenticity and mystic power are an essential part of their products’ caché.

These long-lived Indonesian examples model a range of informal stewardship strategies: from closed-fist sequestration by pedigreed elites to an insouciant willingness by many artisans to circulate production knowledge; from altruistic strategies serving a set group to rather crass self-promotion by individuals. The extremes can appear together as layered strategies for insider and outsider groups, or for technically different phases of production and distribution. What I have sought to ask here is: “Why prefer one work
strategy over the other to get to the same apparent place — stewardship of cultural expressions?"

One requirement is that we unpack the various meanings of the term "value." Clyde Kluckhohn noted that values are not just what people want, but "ideas about what they ought to want" (Kluckhohn 1951; Graeber 2001:3). As Colloredo-Mansfeld (2002) notes, even when groups rhetorically embrace individualistic industry and market competition, they still may advocate contrapuntal social values that promote wealth redistribution, or praise the "externalities" of individual accomplishment that benefit their larger social network. So, multiple values and ethical obligations often are served by the same work productions or performance activities. But it behooves us to tease the forms of value apart even as we note how they interact.

Any theory of stewardship will benefit from a clear analytic separation of economic, sociological, and identity meanings of the often vaguely used term "value." Not surprisingly, artisans make certain decisions that are less directly concerned with a cultural expression's immediate market value than its sociological or community identity values. The stakes of the latter help clarify the conundrum of why Aboriginal Australians, North American Indians, and Tenganese want to sequester, while Javanese and Balinese more often want to circulate.

The former are embattled political or demographic minorities, seemingly an obvious point. The latter, by contrast, are members of ethnic or political regional majorities whose old traditions and local commons are declining with the advent of technological developments and globalization. Javanese and Balinese gamelan musicians, classical dancers, and puppeteers routinely mention the insidious influence of television and imported pop music, just as other indigenous activists might. But striving to restrict or sequester their indigenous arts knowledge for particular ethnic groups or social classes would only decrease the local audiences that they are trying to augment, often with new staging techniques and hybridized stylistic elements that allow them to compete with popular idioms of national appeal.

Those minorities who fear demographic and cultural dissolution want to impound "their" cultural resources, to keep pernicious influences at bay. Sequestration serves this boundary maintenance. By contrast, members of political majority groups, who are unable to fend off outside influences, fear the extinction of their "authentic, old culture" among themselves. Extinction in the homeland would result in the idiom's disappearance in the universe, the ultimate loss of the commons itself. Thus, sharing knowledge of those cultural expressions enthusiastically, even promiscuously across identity boundaries, as in Indonesia with big-nosed foreigners, offers more chances for their narratives and moral values to endure somewhere. Moreover, many Javanese and Balinese artists who have traveled abroad through educational and arts exchange programs have found inspiration and novel performance ideas that they incorporate for Indonesian audiences upon their return. In keeping with their long maritime trade history, Indonesians do not inevitably feel threatened by the thought of incorporating outside influences. The identity boundary value of their arts is not pressed to do that kind of cultural work.

At times, expressive productions aid negotiated claims to individuals' elevated social rank within or beyond the group. "I (not you) can weave the crocodile design because I (not you) belong to the illustrious descent line of those few who master this design, and the powers it represents. That is why I win the first-prize trophy at the weaving festival, which brings further honor to me and to my family." As the narrative hints, indexical difference is perhaps less an ultimate value in itself than a mechanism that facilitates other values: the sociological and economic kind. Here, again, we see that material interests arise interactively within the community and the marketplace.

When artisans advocate knowledge circulation, either of old repertoire elements or imitated novelties, they are seeking the means to facilitate new creative production for either familiar audiences or new consumers. Production and potential consumption are seen as taking place in a fairly open and porous cultural commons. By contrast, when artisans advocate knowledge restrictions, they presumably feel that they have all the means of production and consumption at their disposal (heirloom design examples, technical formulas, skills, ancestral permissions, targeted audiences), and they seek to preserve their economic and social status within a scale of exchange that is bounded by a seemingly vulnerable identity value.

Uses of tangible property resources, such as land or tools, are often rivalrous. Objects, most notably money, can be asocial, hidden, and hoarded. But the expressive cultural idioms described here are fundamentally social, as are all forms of creativity. This is something the Romantic "solo genius" authorship model and recent U.S. intellectual property laws encourage us to forget. All three kinds of value (economic, sociological, and identity boundary) can be fostered through the production of cultural expressions, and those values can be realized, or made visible, only through circulation. Sequestration then, perhaps, is properly viewed as a stratifying management tool, a means to define a cultural resource commons' "outside."

Small and squeezed groups, whose vulnerable cultural or class identity markers suddenly are appro-
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proprietary for market, can be expected to sequester. Competitive commodity production zones at the commercial end of a split economy also can be expected to advocate sequestration in service of producers’ financial interests. In Indonesia, however, there are still many socially instrumental reasons to contain the growth of the market end of split economies, or for that matter, certain prongs of a split market—generally those mobilized by global markets or foreign trade over which producers have less social control. Moreover, artisans have many informal techniques—both technological and social—for pursuing at least partial enclosure. This explains why most Indonesian arts producers remain uninterested in imported legal sequestration measures that would disrupt producers’ flexible authority over their local production commons.

Notes

1 This article draws on several periods of research related to the production of Indonesian textiles, including Central Sulawesi barkcloth and double-ikat weaving, between 1986 and 1989 (Aragon 1990), museum collections in 1990 and 1991 (Taylor and Aragon 1991), batik in Jambi, Sumatra, in 1997 (Aragon 1999), and intellectual property law and Indonesian traditional arts 2005 to 2007, and 2011 (Aragon and Leach 2008; Jaszi n.d.). For funding support on this writing project, I am indebted to the National Humanities Center and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I also owe a large debt of thanks to Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld for his superb editorial work and to the journal reviewers for their insightful comments.

2 The exact amount said to be paid for such a motif drawing was Rp25,000, about US$3.50 at the time of the 2005 interview.

3 Proprietary sentiments and claims are advanced by certain textile producers in eastern Indonesia. There, the boundaries of specific cloth motifs, dyes, and weaving techniques that once indexed hierarchical social classes and insulated clan identities increasingly are transcended by migration, democratic policies, and the market pressures of export and tourism. See, for example, Jill Forshee (2000) on cloth designs and dyes secret in Sumba.

4 It is often maintained that Tenganan and a few other Bali Aga villages are inhabited by the remaining descendants of Bali’s autochthonous population, while those who now are called Balinese, the island’s majority population, include descendants of Javanese nobility who fled Java after the fall of the Majapahit Empire, which was sacked in CE 1478.

5 This motivation for cultural resource protection is portrayed by some Westerners as the negative dimension of indigenous commons management. Indigenous sanctions that perpetuate traditional nobilities or semifodal economic inequities are considered antithetical to the equality and democracy imagined for these developing nations or groups by foreign investors and, increasingly, lower-status insiders.

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