

***State of Authority: The State in Society in Indonesia.* Edited by Gerry van Klinken and Joshua Barker. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2009. Softcover: 220pp.**

This book offers an engaging contribution to the study of the state and society in post-New Order Indonesia. It begins with an introduction that presents the editors' basic reasoning for the need to understand contemporary Indonesia by recourse to theorising about the state. It is followed by a densely written theoretical chapter which reflects on how the state has been understood in the existing scholarship on Indonesia, and places this in the context of state theory debates more generally. According to van Klinken and Barker, what binds the book together is the central argument that "the autonomy of the state is more limited than is often imagined to be", and that states may "portray themselves as generic and immensely powerful ... but in reality they are intimately embedded in their societies in historically contingent ways" (pp. 1–2). Another valid point the authors highlight is that analysts have tended to overemphasize the power and autonomy of the state during the New Order era by being taken in by the image of strength that it projected. Moreover, they suggest that analysts have been prone to mistake the diffuse and fragmentary nature of the Indonesian state for something resembling "failure" or "dysfunction" after 1998. The editors argue that the "patchiness" of the Indonesian state's "imprint" (p. 32) can in fact be traced back to the allegedly all-powerful New Order, which was never really able to exert full control over public life.

The editors of this book have followed the path charted by Joel Migdal in his *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (2001). Migdal described Third World states so fused with society that they were effectively "states in society". A former student of Samuel Huntington, one aspect of Migdal's conception concerned the ideological or discursive construction of state unity, prowess and strength. Another aspect regarded the actual practices of the multiple parts of the state as seen in struggles for authority with a melange of societal organizations. What the editors and the chapter contributors have taken from Migdal is a way to understand, through ethnographic research, the contradictions between state image-making and micro-level political practices in Indonesia.

This ethnography of the state is wonderfully presented in seven case studies. The first is by Barker, who discusses the relationship

between the state and the informal proletariat in the city of Bandung, where bureaucratization in a vast urban slum is counteracted by informal authority figures made up of local criminals (p. 71). The next is by Deasy Simanjuntak, who examines the making of “reputations” by local elites as well as state practices as they participate in a mid-morning meeting between local officials (over “milk-coffee”) rife with political gossip, bombast and deal-making (pp. 84–91). This is followed by John Olle’s chapter on the Majelis Ulama Indonesia which examines the post-1998 alliance between state religious bureaucrats and Islamic “radicals” once rejected by the New Order, but who now contribute greatly to the extension of religious authority. The fourth chapter, by Jacqueline Vel, identifies membership of the political class in Sumba by examining financial donors who contributed to the building of a church. She suggests that this reconstructs the local tradition of offering gifts as a form of political investment (pp. 136, 144). The fifth chapter, by Syarif Hidayat and Gerry van Klinken, analyses business-bureaucratic links in two provinces in Sumatra, and shows how the high cost of participating in elections has drawn more businessmen into electoral contests. This is followed by Dorian Fougères’ chapter on village level politics in Sulawesi since decentralization. Fougères describes new conflicts that have emerged as elected village heads have grown in power. A final case study, by Loren Ryter, examines how North Sumatran gangsters, linked to “youth organisations” cultivated by the New Order, are having a “moment in the sun” (p. 181) by becoming players in Indonesia’s democracy.

All of the case studies are very imaginative and rich in detail. While integral to the book, it could be said that the ethnography nevertheless tends to overtake the theory in the authors’ respective narratives. The result is that they do not always “talk back” directly or “loudly” enough to the theoretical problems outlined by the editors. However, the theoretical problems involved are presented sufficiently clearly in the first two chapters so that this may not be overly bothersome.

Nonetheless, it is interesting that the editors elected to pursue two rather conventional theoretical “story lines” over others: that of the development of the modern state and the legacy of the pre-colonial or colonial state. They dismiss the “political economy” or “class” story line because they argue it does not contribute strong new views (p. 29). The position seems contrary to the attention given to Poulantzas (p. 8) — who has influenced class-based analyses of the Indonesian state — in the theoretical discussion. The most well

known of the class-based analysts, Richard Robison, demonstrated in “Indonesia: Tensions in State and Regime” (in *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, 1993) that the workings of different parts of the Indonesian state have been dictated by discrete, competing interests and that Indonesian “civil society” is a site of political contention, rather than a homogenous sphere.

This reviewer wonders whether a more serious regard for political economy might have produced an even more stimulating examination of contemporary Indonesian state and society. Also curious is the failure to acknowledge the residual influences of Huntington’s revisionist modernization theory in Migdal’s conception of the Third World State: disaggregated, messily fused with society, and compensating for actual lack of capacity by creating a false image of institutionalization, strength and prowess.