

SOJOURN Symposium

***Producing Indonesia: The State of the Field in Indonesian Studies.* Edited by Eric Tagliacozzo. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2014.**

Review essays by John Sidel and Adrian Vickers, with a response from Eric Tagliacozzo

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Review Essay I: John Sidel

The essays on “Government, Political Science” in *Producing Indonesia* provide an interesting and illuminating discussion of developments and trends in scholarship on the politics of Indonesia. Thomas Pepinsky’s introduction to this section of the book reminds readers of the accelerating incorporation of this field of study into mainstream American political science, while Ed Aspinall offers an overview that is suggestive of the rich diversity and vitality of contemporary research on Indonesian politics by scholars who have little interest in linking the puzzles thrown up by developments and trends in Indonesia to the methods, buzzwords and debates dominating the pages of journals like the *American Political Science Review*. Bill Liddle and Don Emmerson add historical depth to the coverage. Emmerson’s lengthy discussion of debates over the events of 30 September 1965 is especially provocative, as it was clearly intended to be. But perhaps the editor should have included a “progressive” voice to complement and counter the conservative, Panglossian perspective so forcefully articulated in Bill Liddle’s rambling diatribe against “critical” scholarship on Indonesia. Coverage of the “state

of the field” is, after all, arguably enhanced through the analytical distance afforded by critical — and comparative — perspective.

Thus it might be useful to consider the study of Indonesian politics alongside the pattern of scholarly work on the politics of other countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand and the Philippines. Looking back over the past four decades, there are numerous striking parallels in the trajectories of research and writing on politics in these three countries, which — alone in Southeast Asia — have experienced transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy (albeit not without retrenchment in the case of Thailand). In the case of all three countries over these years, scholarship shifted from a narrow focus on authoritarian states to a broader interest in oppositional movements, “civil society”, and diverse social forces in tandem with the onset of transitions to democracy. It then turned analytical attention to the — local and national-level — pathologies and possibilities of formal democracy by considering longer-term struggles for popular empowerment, good governance, social justice, regional autonomy, the management of ethnic and religious diversity and the redistribution of the fruits of economic development.

In the case of all three countries, the same decades saw rising scholarly interest in patterns of economic growth, a flurry of scholarship on the Asian economic crisis of 1997–98, and then a marked decline in research and writing on “comparative political economy”. In all three countries, scholarship on politics traced an arc in which bitter political differences among scholars appeared to ease as authoritarian rule gave way to democracy, even as Southeast Asian scholars seemed to gain somewhat greater prominence outside the region over the same period. In all three countries, scholarship followed “real-world” levels of excitement and interest in politics, with these fields of study experiencing “booms” and “busts” as the high drama and grand narratives of democratization and development faded from view. Thus it is tempting to speculate that, if ongoing political change in Burma today produces a full-blown transition to democracy in due course, scholarship on politics in the country will follow a similar trajectory to that seen in the study of Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, albeit under twenty-first-century

circumstances that have been rather different from those found in earlier decades.

Against the backdrop of these parallels, there are at least two peculiar features of scholarship on Indonesian politics which stand out as meriting special scrutiny, especially insofar as they fall out of the overviews provided by Pepinsky, Aspinall, Liddle and Emmerson in their contributions to *Producing Indonesia*. First of all, compared to Thailand and the Philippines, the past thirty years has witnessed far greater expansion and encroachment of non-academic institutions in the production of knowledge on politics in Indonesia. The stage for this trend was arguably already set in earlier decades, as seen in the prominence of the RAND Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and, increasingly, the Asia Foundation in the field, and in the emergence and evolution of the conservative “think tank” CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) in Jakarta, for which there are no real parallels or counterparts in Bangkok or Manila. With the fall of Soeharto and the shift to competitive elections, moreover, major fixtures in the “democratization industry” (for example, the United States Agency for Development, the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute) began to expand their operations in Indonesia. They were accompanied and in due course overshadowed by outfits interested in inter-religious conflict and Islamist terrorism, most obviously the International Crisis Group (ICG). Indeed, by the early years of the twenty-first century, the most prominent analyst of Indonesian politics was not a political scientist but the ICG’s Sidney Jones.

Over the same years, moreover, the World Bank office in Jakarta emerged as a major sponsor of research and publishing on Indonesian politics, as seen in its huge investments in the study of conflict, corruption and “local governance”, and its growing apparatus for the promotion of “community-driven development” through the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP). The World Bank produced massive data sets, spawned or otherwise supported dozens of doctoral students and subsidized a steady stream of publications, including an award-winning book, *Contesting Development: Participatory Projects and Local Conflict Dynamics in Indonesia* (2011). By the mid-2000s,

moreover, Indonesian democracy had given rise to a highly lucrative polling-cum-consulting industry. In no other country in Southeast Asia has so much knowledge about politics been produced — and packaged — by (and for) such extra-academic institutions, providing an incomparably strong pull in the direction of policy relevance and pecuniary reward. Yet this aspect of the study of Indonesian politics is — perhaps understandably — passed over in silence by the contributing authors to the section on “Government, Political Science” of *Producing Indonesia*.

Secondly, compared with Thailand and the Philippines, the study of Indonesian politics is notable for the prominence and significance of concerns lying outside the field of mainstream political science, and of contributors working outside the discipline. Here it is worth recalling that the point of departure for post-independence Indonesian politics was a recent history of mass mobilization and messy multiparty parliamentary democracy, in sharp contrast with the “bureaucratic polity” entrenched in Thailand and the “patron-client relations” prevailing and preserving oligarchical democracy in the Philippines. The far greater complexity and significance of social forces necessitated some kind of *sociological* analysis, as seen in the importance attached to *aliran* (“currents” or “streams”), and the influence of the eminent anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in the study of politics in Indonesia.

When scholarly attention shifted to the growing strength and significance of “civil society” and social forces in the final decade of the Soeharto era (as in earlier, analogous, periods in Thailand and the Philippines), similar concerns resurfaced. This trend was most pronounced in the huge surge of interest in Islam and the rising prominence of anthropologists like Robert Hefner in the study of Indonesian politics. As the transition from centralized authoritarian rule to decentralized democracy unfolded at the turn of the century, moreover, episodes of inter-communal violence and a resurgence of separatist mobilization focused considerable attention on “identity politics” in various regions of the Indonesian archipelago, where the ethnographic experience and “local knowledge” of anthropologists provided a foundation for political analysis. Against the backdrop of

the 11 September 2001 attacks, the October 2002 Bali bombings and the “Global War on Terror”, interest in Islam in Indonesia continued to grow with the emergence of the shadowy Jemaah Islamiyah network, and then the rising electoral fortunes of the Islamist Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, or Prosperous Justice Party), with scholars working across a range of disciplines endeavouring to understand the complex, diverse trends in the practices, understandings and forms of mobilization associated with the faith across Indonesia.

Against this backdrop, what is striking about both the study of Indonesian politics and the account provided in *Producing Indonesia* is the neglect by political scientists of some of the biggest, most important puzzles of the country’s history, which arguably require tools from beyond their discipline. As in the study of Thai and Philippine politics, there seems to be an aversion to frontal debates over competing explanations for major turning points in Indonesian history. Even the long-running controversy over the events of 1965 focuses on the night of 30 September in “whodunit” fashion, rather than puzzling over the question of how the Partai Komunis Indonesia and Sukarno were so easily and effectively eliminated from Indonesian political life in such a short span of time. In more recent memory, specialists on Indonesian politics have avoided serious debate about the causes for the fall of Soeharto (and the subsequent transition to democracy), much like their counterparts in the study of Thailand and the Philippines. Even recent debates about “oligarchy” in Indonesia (as in the study of the Philippines and Thailand) are largely exercises in describing the glass as half empty or half full, rather than efforts to present rival explanations for specific developments, trends, and outcomes in politics over the sixteen years since the fall of Soeharto.

Meanwhile, there are other important questions which merit further discussion and debate in the study of Indonesia. How can we explain the apparent rise and decline of Islam as a force in Indonesian politics? Why has inter-communal violence disappeared from Indonesian politics, rather than becoming entrenched in “institutionalized riot systems” as in India? How has Indonesia’s

ethnic-Chinese “pariah entrepreneur” minority come to enjoy greater freedom, security, and political influence? What should we make of the unprecedented prominence of businessmen in political life? How can we explain the diverging trajectories of social movements in different sectors of society and diverse settings across Indonesia? How can we understand the varying success of different “populist” and “reformist” politicians in the country?

Today as mainstream political scientists continue to narrow their assumptions, methods, categories of analysis and conception of “politics” to dis-embedded individuals and formal institutions, such questions about Indonesian politics remain unanswered and unanswerable within the discipline. Against this backdrop, it is worth recalling how knowledge about Indonesian politics has historically been produced: Indonesian politics, it seems clear, has been too interesting and important to leave to political scientists alone.

Review Essay II: Adrian Vickers

In Australia we are used to discussions about a “crisis” in Indonesian Studies, as indicated by declining numbers of students studying the language. In other parts of the world there have also been major discussions about the state of the field, prompted usually by the departmental amalgamations and wholesale cuts in programmes that are a feature of global approaches to university systems. The new book edited by Eric Tagliacozzo, the key figure in the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University, is the first recent global attempt of which I know to survey “The State of the Field of Indonesian Studies” — the title of Tagliacozzo’s introductory chapter.

The book is organized in disciplinary sections: Anthropology, Art History, History, Language and Literature (the state of the field being such, alas, that the latter does not merit its own section), Government [and] Political Science, and Ethnomusicology. Most of the chapters are far-ranging surveys, although a few are more focused essays. Some attempt to offer definitive surveys on recent publications in

their field: Natasha Reichle on old and new art history, Astri Wright on recent art writing, Marc Perlman on ethnomusicology and the study of the performing arts. Others concentrate on a few significant works. There are absent disciplines, notably cultural studies, to which Ariel Heryanto and Melani Budianta have made important contributions, or social theory, where work such as that of Michele Ford deserves appreciation.

Producing Indonesia is the product of a conference held at Cornell in 2011, and as such this book is partly a global survey, and partly an assessment of the role of Cornell University in the field. Although the introductions to the book and its various sections indicate that this is a set of studies on the study of Indonesia in general, individual authors focus on the future of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project. This background accounts for both the strengths and weaknesses of the book. It deals with the central issues of knowledge of Indonesia, but its perspective is partial and highly filtered. A disclaimer: I was invited to the conference, but was unable to attend because of other teaching and research commitments, meaning that I have nothing personal for or against Cornell, despite never having been there. (I did intend to go once, but was prevented by heavy snows.) I suspect that others were also invited and could not attend, and thus criticisms of who was missing are too easily made. Nevertheless, some of the gaps could have been filled by inviting submissions from those not able to attend the conference in person.

Many of the writers represented in the volume are Cornell products. The majority are based in North America, and here it is clear that Canada also has its centres of Indonesian Studies, as shown by the contributions of Tineke Hellwig and Astri Wright. The writers range from distinguished and now retired academics to those still in earlier stages of their careers. A few of the authors are Australian or from Australian universities: Edward Aspinall, Jean Gelman Taylor and Kenneth George, the latter moving to the Australian National University after the conference. But only two are Indonesian. One, Sumarsam, has long taught at Wesleyan University; the other, Bambang Kaswanti Purwo, teaches at Atma

Jaya University. In addition, E. Edwards McKinnon lives on Java. There is little Dutch representation. Hellwig was trained in Leiden but has long lived in Canada. Patricia Spyer is from Leiden but at the time of the conference had a position at New York University. And there is no one from Britain, France or Germany. So immediately we have the question of “who is producing Indonesia”. There is a lot of speaking for Indonesia, but not much in the way of Indonesian voices. This would have been a very different volume if Bambang Purwanto, Hilmar Farid, Enin Supriyanto, Melani Budianta, Daniel Dhakidae, Paschalis Maria Laksono, Dede Oetomo or Goenawan Mohamad had been present at the conference in Ithaca.

It is also intriguing to see which Indonesian voices appear most often in quotation. While a number of the authors — for example, Aspinall, Taylor, McKinnon, Weintraub, Perlman — include serious discussions of Indonesian colleagues in their essays, there is surprisingly very little engagement with the major body of work in Indonesian in the fields of the various authors. Indonesian writers of fiction receive frequent mention, and a number of Indonesians writing in English are discussed — notably Ariel Heryanto, based in Australia, and Abidin Kusno, Canada. Only Wright really engages with what is happening in art history in Indonesia now.

Another Indonesian author mentioned in a number of the essays is Soedjatmoko, who was a practising diplomat and a follower of Sutan Syahrir, as well as being the editor of a major collection of historiographic essays from the 1950s. Soedjatmoko acted as a crucial intermediary between Cornell academics and Indonesia and, as such, was important in focusing attention on his fellow Western-oriented leaders affiliated with Syahrir’s Partai Sosialis Indonesia (PSI). The PSI connection was important in ensuring that the Indonesianists coming out of Cornell and related institutions in the 1950s and 1960s were not closer to the other political streams — the communists of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), the Sukarnoists or the major Muslim leadership. Soedjatmoko died in 1989 after he had fallen out with the Soeharto regime, which he helped to establish.

Soedjatmoko's role leads to what is the best and most important essay in the collection, by Rudolf Mrázek — Syahrir's biographer, amongst other things. Written in his usually engaging and idiosyncratic style, Mrázek surveys the key writings of George Kahin, Harry Benda, Oliver Wolters, Ben Anderson and Jim Siegel, the impressive, diverse and powerful set of works that has defined Indonesian Studies, or at least the Cornell version. In so doing, he calls for more eccentric and positioned writing on Indonesia. In particular, he puts his finger on something that was incipient in the period of Soedjatmoko's influence, and now endemic: liberalism. Mrázek expresses it much more elegantly than I could, and I leave it to readers to follow his elegant prose, except for this sample:

This liberalism is even more dangerous to encounter than its “neo” mode, because it is “so calm, so soft”.... Softly and calmly it overflows all liveliness, including the professional one — not really right, not really left, not really East and not really West, not really colonial, and not really free; instead, multi-cultural, ethno-musical, and global. (p. 147)

The liberal consensus that Mrázek identifies is one of low-risk research, undramatic, and therefore not daring to make the grand statements of the older generation. In the American context, it is important to know that Southeast Asian Studies never had the strong Marxist traditions of Europe or Australia, and so liberalism is something of a default position.

Nevertheless, Mrázek does see brilliance in the current generation, embodied in the work of John Roosa, and also in Roosa's active engagement with Indonesian researchers, in this case the Indonesian Institute of Social History (Institut Sejarah Sosial Indonesia) in Jakarta. Roosa invited Mrázek to speak to the members of that institute, who remain, alas, nameless in this chapter, but I presume that the meeting mentioned included Hilmar Farid, Muhammad Fauzi, Razif, Grace Leksana and others.

Mrázek gives a list of the brilliant new writers on Indonesia: Roosa, Eric Tagliacozzo himself, Karen Strassler and Andrew Goss, a list that I would strongly endorse, since all of them have introduced

new insights, often from what might be considered eccentric subject matter. Besides the Indonesian names above, there are members of an earlier generation who are not mentioned at all in the essays. They include at the very least Max Lane and Tony Day; as far as I can see, the book has no index. Both work on the margins of mainstream Indonesian studies, but both have produced important work that begs for debate and engagement. Indonesian Studies would be much richer if there were more robust debate around such works. (Another disclaimer: I was taught by Tony Day, and I have worked with Max Lane, not least by supervising his unusual doctoral thesis.)

This review is being written, and published, in Singapore, a long way from Cornell, but a place where many Indonesianists, including Indonesian ones, can be found, either based or passing through, as is the case with Day and Lane. Cornell remains important — it has a great library, and it has produced some of the great works in Indonesian Studies — and continues as a centre of scholarship and training of research students with impressive scholars such as Tagliacozzo and Kaja McGowan. This book is an important partial summary of the field and needs to be read by all those involved not just in Indonesian Studies, but in Southeast Asian Studies. My review cannot do justice to all of its essays, and there are many significant ones that I have not mentioned — for example that of Danilyn Rutherford, whose work is always thought-provoking. The book, however, should be read from alternative centres of Indonesian Studies, in Europe, Australia, not least in Singapore, and most importantly Indonesia, and it should be seen as a manifestation of a new, decentred, Indonesian Studies that is still coming into being.

Author's Response: Eric Tagliacozzo

I have read with both gratitude and interest the two commissioned critiques of *Producing Indonesia: The State of the Field of Indonesian Studies*, recently released by Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications. I have been asked to “respond to the responses” — a

difficult task, as this was an edited volume and not a monograph written by my own hand. Both of the critiques are incisive, and both point out things that are useful and perhaps also deficient in the volume. I will try to respond to them jointly, and also — briefly — individually, in the space provided by *SOJOURN* here. As John Sidel writes in his contribution, certain questions are “both unanswered and unanswerable”. He is referring to the portions of the volume focused on political science; I quote him here with reference to the entire volume. But I think that an initial, brief conversation can begin here and eventually continue in other places for thinking about Indonesian Studies as a whole.

Adrian Vickers rightly points out that the volume is both about Indonesian Studies as a concept and about Cornell’s place in that field of study — something that comes out in the book. Indeed, the volume is the result of a small conference held in Ithaca a few years ago, to mark the re-launching of Cornell’s Modern Indonesia Project after roughly a decade of relative dormancy. At that conference, six disciplines were staked out for discussion: anthropology, art history, history, language and literature, ethnomusicology and politics. Three senior figures from each of the six disciplines were invited to talk about Indonesian Studies as a field.

Perhaps the first thing to mention here, as both Vickers and Sidel touched on this in their reviews, is how this rubric was chosen — why certain disciplines and not others, why certain people (and not others)? There was some rhyme and reason to all of this, but only some — there were also some constraints. First, there was not unlimited funding to invite everyone who really should have been there — we had a budget. Flying in eighteen people from all over the world was expensive, and that factor limited some of our choices, including some intellectual ones — about what to represent, and what to leave out. Each of the six sections of the book is introduced by a Cornell faculty member working on Indonesia in the discipline in question. This is why some disciplines could not be covered, and others were. Sidel, for example, asks why economics was not given any space, but the veteran Cornell economist working on Indonesia,

Iwan Aziz, is no longer in Ithaca, and could not help with this discipline. Likewise, Vickers points out that cultural studies and social theory might have been represented, but we had no faculty or departments in those disciplines either. Decisions on whom to invite within each of the six sub-fields were left to the Cornell faculty in the disciplines concerned, in accordance with the proposition that they knew their own bailiwicks best. Not everyone who should have been there could be there, as three senior people per field was obviously only a very small sub-set with which to work.

A last suggestion, that perhaps more Indonesians could have been invited than those appearing in the book, was again down to each discipline itself, but is a fair question. The principal response to this question is that it was envisioned that this volume was only to be a start. Each of the six disciplines would then have its own stand-alone workshop and volume as well, with ten or twelve places then opening up to discuss each discipline vis-à-vis Indonesian Studies more thoroughly. It was — and is still — hoped that more Indonesian scholars will be brought in then. But we wanted “senior voices” represented for this first, small sampling, and a number of the main figures at the time of the evolution of these respective fields were (because of historical factors) in fact non-Indonesians.

Vickers rightly points out that all of this leads to a rather simple question: “who is producing Indonesia”? The introduction to the entire volume proclaims right away that the title is used with some irony. We as a scholarly collective of some twenty-five people — eighteen invitees, plus their six to seven Cornell counterparts — knew very well that we had not “produced Indonesia”. We say on page one that this was in fact done — and is still being done, on a daily basis — by Indonesians themselves, but that we as scholars also have a part in the production-of-knowledge enterprise that is “producing Indonesia”. Nothing is ever produced in a vacuum, of course, and Vickers again correctly points out that knowledge has viewpoints, and traditions, and orientations. He points to the “liberal but gentle” paradigm currently in vogue in humanities and social science scholarship on Indonesia, particularly in the United States,

and reminds us that there is less of a tradition of Marxist-tinged work in American writing on Indonesia than there has been in Europe and Australia. This may be so, but I would not say that such work has been totally absent. Nor would I say that the North American locus is always less “lefty” these days than its counterparts in those other places. In the age of “SBY” — former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono — and now in the emerging age of “Jokowi” — current President Joko Widodo — *most* foreign scholarship on Indonesia might conceivably fall into the “liberal but gentle” camp that Vickers identifies (and channels through Rudolf Mrázek’s contribution to the volume). This is, perhaps, a reflection of the age in which we live, one quite distant — a half-century! — from the rumbling explosiveness of 1965, and its attendant politics.

It is certainly the case though, as Vickers tells us at the end of his essay, that Indonesian Studies has become more and more de-centred away from one place, that place being Cornell for a long time. There are many regional variants of study now, some of which have also existed for many years, and the genealogies of the ways in which we all look at this country have become more diverse over time. This is healthy and a good thing, both in Vickers’s assessment and in fact in my own.

John Sidel’s critique focuses more narrowly on the section of the book treating politics and — like Vickers’s contribution — offers some interesting lines of thought for us to consider as a collective. One of the most important of these concerns is thinking about Indonesia comparatively in the region — Sidel emphasizes Thai and Philippine referents — especially vis-à-vis the ways in which politics has been enacted and seen in Indonesia over the past several decades. This seems like a very promising approach. Sidel also points out that, despite comparative similarities with the two aforementioned nation-states, Indonesia has been singular in how vigorously knowledge has been produced about the country by non-academic actors — institutions both inside and outside of Indonesia such as the RAND Corporation, the Ford and Asia Foundations, CSIS, USAID and the ICG. This continues a tradition

whereby scholars, not just institutions, outside of political science have been main players in interpreting the country's politics, and here Sidel identifies the anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Robert Hefner by name, and others by implication, when he writes of the now very visible sub-field of "Oligarchy Studies". Sidel feels that a relative tilt towards these factors and people, alongside a relative tilt away from serious engagement with trying to explain specific, salient issues — the fall of Soeharto, the role of Chinese business, the relative failure of political Islam — is now a noticeable hallmark of studies on Indonesian politics generally. It is hard to disagree with this, and Sidel's call for more critical voices to better represent a wider political spectrum might be useful. One wonders if this call jibes with Mrázek's statement — and Vickers's nod to it — that Indonesian Studies generally has become more liberal and gentle, and is still in need of some shaking up. Perhaps. I should point out that the second volume in this proposed series — focused on Indonesian politics, edited by Tom Pepinsky and Michele Ford, entitled *Beyond Oligarchy* (Pepinsky and Ford 2014) and also published by Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications — recently came out, and that it features much more of this kind of critical exchange.

The critiques presented here are very useful because they highlight a central issue relating to the verb/action implicit in the book's title, "Producing Indonesia". That is, who gets to speak? And what do "they" say when they do speak? There are many possibilities: Marxist and/or critical views of the politics of the country, nativist views versus the views of outsiders, the "thought-prints" of various "schools", etc. These are just three of the notions brought up in the two reviews, but there are of course many other angles from which to express a viewpoint. In laying out a spread of opinions, we privileged "seniority" as an overriding concern. We primarily sought people who had been in the field for a good while, and who would thus be able to provide an overview of the developments that they had seen as Indonesian Studies in their own disciplines had grown and changed. It is hoped that future volumes — again we envision six more in total, to represent the six disciplines represented in this

initial book — will include all of these rubrics, in fact: the critical and the leftist, indignant perspectives, the sense of scholarly *aliran* thrown into focus, precisely for their differences. These *aliran* might include Aussie schools of knowledge-production and Dutch ones, Cornell and other U.S. traditions, and Indonesian streams such as those of the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and the Universitas Indonesia (UI). To reiterate Sidel's assertion that some issues may be "unanswered and unanswerable", we see the volumes as an attempt to sketch out possibilities through a conversation on what "producing Indonesia" has come to mean through academic writing over the past several decades. We certainly will not find all the answers. But if a start towards self-reflection as a community of scholars can be made, drawn from across the continents and from across ideological cadences and disciplines, then this will be a good first step. It certainly seems like one worth taking.

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