

*Indonesia Beyond Suharto: Polity, Economy, Society, Transition*. Edited by Donald K. Emmerson. New York: Asia Society and M.E. Sharpe, 1999. 295 pp.

*Indonesia Beyond Suharto* is an edited volume that covers various aspects of the New Order Regime — the four words of the subtitle above constitute the four parts of this book.

Like a number other books published in the last few years on Indonesia, the bulk of the content is written prior to Soeharto's fall, in this case with an attempt to update the situation with two additional chapters at the end. One sympathizes with the editor and the various contributors, rapidly overtaken by events as the Indonesia they describe has changed markedly. Emmerson justifies the title on the grounds that much of Indonesian society was beyond Soeharto in the sense that "they lived their lives beyond him", further adding that "'Suharto's Indonesia' has never been more than a metaphor" (p. ix). The casual browser would assume that "beyond" Soeharto was chronological, rather than a description of limitations on the reach of the state. Would "Soeharto and Beyond" have been a better title? There are also a number of other smaller errors that have crept into this volume.

However, it is important not to dwell on these difficulties, as *Indonesia Beyond Suharto* is a very useful addition to the material on Indonesia. All of the contributions come from authors with considerable expertise in their particular field. A particularly attractive feature of this volume is that authors have included their own personal experiences and observations and, in some cases, personal interviews and conversations.

In the "Polity" section, Robert Cribb sets the scene with his sweeping chapter on the history of Indonesia, where he establishes many of the elements that characterize the political culture of Indonesia. He makes heavy use of the concept "exemplary center" to explain the relationship between the empires of maritime Southeast Asia and the influence of their prestige, which was more enduring than their physical boundaries. Cribb also gives a good sense of why federalism has not always met with a willing audience in Indonesia since the early days of

the republic when it was viewed as a divide-and-rule plot by the Netherlands. In note 9 (p. 28) Cribb makes a reference to the fact that “In this context ‘indigenous’ refers not to place of birth but to an ethnic background ...”. This comment is made in relation to the place of the Indonesian Chinese, particularly those who consider themselves Indonesian, who are “subjectively ... every bit as ‘indigenous’ as their ‘non-Chinese’ counterparts”. These sentiments are echoed by other contributors throughout the book. One has every sympathy for the Indonesian Chinese and their alienation, but this does not make the Chinese community an indigenous culture to the Indonesian archipelago. Surely the term indigenous is applied to a group who remain at the source of their cultural origins — and usually that culture would not be found anywhere else in the world. To suggest otherwise would be to deny the unique status of, for example, the Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, the Maori of New Zealand, or the Native American Nations of North America. That the term “indigenous” has been appropriated by more than one country to discriminate against more recent arrivals is besides the point.

William Liddle gives an outstanding account of the New Order regime, and the way in which Soeharto played off the various factions within Indonesia ensuring that none was too strong — leading to a leadership void after his departure. Michael Malley’s chapter on regional issues provides some excellent, and sometimes humorous, case studies of the New Order’s relationship to the provinces. Malley demonstrates the parallels between approaches to quelling problems in Aceh, East Timor, and Irian Jaya. In all three cases massive retaliation was enacted on the civilian population. In terms of moving “beyond Soeharto” a crucial subject for further research remains — what is the nature of the relationship between the provinces and the centre in a post-Soeharto era now that GOLKAR is a minority party?

The next three chapters — Anne Booth on “Development”, Richard Borsuk on “Markets”, and Ahmad Hadir on “Conglomerates” — form the “Economy” section. Booth demonstrates that development plans favoured the western side of Indonesia while largely ignoring the

east (despite the official rhetoric). She also concludes that aid money that did reach places like East Timor, Kalimantan, and Irian Jaya was largely “remitted back to other parts of the country” (p. 129). Borsuk and Hadir catalogue the level of corruption and graft amongst the Soeharto family and its closest supporters. Borsuk is able to draw on his journalism background to include interviews he has conducted, while Hadir presents a who’s who of family patronage, much of it gleaned from Indonesian language materials (it seldom ceases to be surprising just how far the links go).

In the section entitled “Society”, Robert Hefner brings his intimate and encyclopaedic knowledge on Islam in Indonesia to bear in the chapter called “Religion: Evolving Pluralism”. He coins a useful term, “Malayo-Indonesian civilization” (Huntington missed this one out), and chastizes Western scholars for their simplistic view of Indonesian Islam as a “thin layer” on the Hindu/Buddhist past (p. 207). His prediction of the emergence of political Islam has come to pass, but it would have been useful to include something on the role of Islam inside the military. Kathryn Robinson gives useful insights into the lives of women in Indonesia, and constructions of the ideal woman as foremost a wife and a mother. Her discussion on the role of women in parliament, however, fails to even mention the most significant woman political leader in the republic’s history — Megawati Soekarnoputri. Virginia Matheson Hooker’s hypothesis in her contribution on “Expression” is that cultural and artistic life were not defined by the dictates of the Soeharto administration, often being used for “counter hegemonic ends” (p. 281), while censorship “did not quell the wellsprings of variety and creativity in contemporary Indonesia” (p. 290).

The last section, “Transition”, contains two chapters lucidly written by Emmerson. The first deals with the “Exit and Aftermath” of Soeharto which shed some very useful information on the transition. Emmerson concludes that “Suharto’s insistence on modernizing his country economically but not politically is what, in the end, brought him down” (p. 299). The second chapter entitled “Voting and Violence: Indonesia and East Timor in 1999” deals with Emmerson’s experiences as an

observer at two historic polls — Indonesia in June 1999 and East Timor in August 1999. On the June national elections Emmerson concludes that while GOLKAR was able to secure an “effective monopoly” (p. 350) in outlying areas, the irregularities were not enough to question the overall outcome.

Emmerson then turns to his experiences as an observer with the Carter Center during the East Timorese referendum. He states that “The Indonesian authorities, who were supposed to assure the security of East Timor, were unwilling or unable to do so” (p. 355). This reviewer was also present in East Timor during the referendum, and based on my own experiences I would confirm the term “unwilling”. Emmerson’s account is important as not enough has come out about what happened in East Timor in the run-up to the ballot. He concludes that General Wiranto is guilty of more than “inaction” with regard to the massive violence that followed the ballot, and that the then armed forces commander was “proactively complicit in making it happen” (p. 356). Emmerson ponders a scenario that all of us thought during the referendum: “kill a few foreign workers working for UNAMET and thus stop the popular consultation from taking place” (p. 357). That this did not happen, the author concludes, demonstrates that some restraints were placed on the militia by the armed forces. It is a matter of record that wholesale violence occurred upon the announcement of the result. Why did this happen once the voting was all over? Emmerson offers as good a reason as any put forward so far:

The aim of the violence may have been to render the result of the vote null-and-void by assuring that it could not be implemented — or, failing that, to cripple the newborn nation by killing its prospective leaders, or forcing them to flee, while torching and looting the physical assets such leaders would need to make independence work. (p. 357)

In summary, this volume, despite some problems, is a very worthwhile addition to the body of material on Indonesia. Each contribution is well-crafted. The first three sections are essentially a survey of Soeharto’s Indonesia (metaphor or otherwise), which then dovetails into Emmerson’s

two final chapters on the aftermath — both of which combine both good story-telling and sophisticated political analysis. Overall, the great strength of this work is that it brings together scholars and writers who are leaders in their respective subject areas.

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