

supposition. Nonetheless, the book is a narrative that is certainly worth reading.

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***Regionalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia.* Edited by Maribeth Erb, Priyambudi Sulistiyanto, and Carole Faucher. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. Hardcover: 234pp.**

Indonesia is currently attempting to redistribute political power away from the unitary republic for a more decentralized system in which decisions would increasingly be made at the provincial and local levels. Progress towards that goal was the subject of a seminar in Singapore in May 2002 attended by a number of social scientists at universities and special research centres in Europe and Southeast Asia. Many of the papers presented at that seminar have been included in this anthology, with a third of the authors coming from Indonesia. Significantly, there are no weak articles in the anthology and they come together as a whole to give a good portrait of the Indonesian nation, which is unique among recent books describing the structure and policy formulations of that country.

Maribeth Erb, the lead editor of this anthology, sets the political tone of the anthology in the opening article, severely judging the New Order government for its authoritarianism, its paternalism, and its corruption. She notes that efforts at reform in the post-Suharto government have been slow, accompanied by considerable inefficiency, outright stalling, and attempts by some groups to bring the emerging decentralized system under the control of self-serving interests. She is particularly concerned about the manipulators whom she claims are closely associated with the New Order, who are portrayed as promoters of corruption and who thwart the growth of democracy in Indonesia. She makes clear that she sides with the reformers who are interested in devolution of power within the political system and she infers that the other authors of the various articles are in agreement with her viewpoint. This may well be so, but their presentations usually avoid such unequivocal judgements.

The articles fall into three general categories. The first category

deals with decentralization, usually the dynamics of the process. The strongest of these articles, by Muriel Charras, analyses the criteria used for restructuring the district (*kecamatan*) level of political administration and its meaning to the populations affected by those changes. She assesses that in most cases the new districts have been created to accommodate particular ethnic groups, but that such reconfiguration often have as many drawbacks as benefits in that many ethnic groups are often disadvantaged by the change. The article by Sukardi Rinakit is equally compelling, for he analyses the concerns of the military officer corps, about its long-held position as guardian of the state, and its wide-ranging economic interests that were a boon to many officers. He concludes that decentralization threatens the army politically and economically, and that any government in power would be tempted to appease those officers to gain protection for itself from the political power of street demonstrations. Other articles discussed particular provincial efforts to gain influence and curtail that of the central government, often by financing a large part of new development projects in their region. Overall, these articles on decentralization provide a portrait of a political system undergoing change and showing that altering institutions does not always produce the changes that are intended. Too often new political direction produces frustration and untoward consequences.

A large number of the remaining articles bypass the consideration of decentralization and move directly to the individual author's own anthropological and sociological research. These constitute studies of several important ethnic groups of Indonesia and how they coped in the last years of the New Order era and in the period since its departure. On this point, the great range of the anthology becomes apparent, as the articles describe a representative sample of ethnic groups throughout the archipelago, affording an overview of several key regions of the country. Key among them is the study by Michel Picard on the effect of the tourist trade on the Balinese and the massive assault it has made on traditional culture. He asserts that there has been a subsequent re-identification of the population with Balinese culture, which was marked by a sensitivity to any slights against it, real or imagined. In perhaps the most insightful article of the collection, Maribeth Erb describes the attempts of the Manggarai expatriate community in Jakarta to assert influence on its home area and the reaction to that intrusion by compatriots on Flores who did not immigrate. The issue centres on the performance of a traditional ceremony and its re-invention as a cultural extravaganza for the national cultural theme park in Jakarta, after which it was transported home to the Flores, where there was mixed reaction

to its use as a cultural feature of the region. Also important is the study by Jamie Davidson on ethnic conflict in western Kalimantan which illustrates the problems of ethnic divisiveness and stereotyping that occur in any society in which mutual tolerance is lost.

The final two articles deal with specific government programmes in pest management and forestry. Both assert that the New Order administrators did not resolve the problems that the programmes were created to address, but actually had a depressing effect by not allowing local target populations to contribute to decision-making. The authors contend that decentralization offers a new opportunity for popular input into the goal-setting phase of the programmes, and thereby are a means of allowing participatory democracy to develop at that level.

There are two significant omissions that might well have been addressed and which would have made the anthology much stronger. First, there is almost no discussion of the superculture described by Hildred Geertz a half century ago, composed of people in Jakarta and other key cities that identify more with the Indonesian nation than with their own ethnicity. That social grouping is much larger than it was in Ms Geertz's time and undoubtedly has its own views on the entire issue of decentralization now taking place. Even as the army was worth describing, so too are those urban, modernizing populations, which were such beneficiaries of the Suharto government, even if the views arising there might be contrary to the trends favoured in the anthology. The second omission concerns the position and role of Islam in the decentralization process, which was largely ignored. Muslims constitute large sections of the population and their identification with centre or periphery is a factor that will have some bearing on the success or failure of the decentralization scheme; in fact, many of the committed Muslims live in the very areas that favour decentralization. A correlation is possible.

The dynamics of decentralization described in the anthology will become dated as new events overtake the information described. However, the numerous cases studies — every article has one to three such descriptions — will give the anthology considerable staying power and it should have a good shelf life. Overall, the strength of the articles makes this anthology a worthwhile read for those interested in contemporary development in Indonesia as well as for political analysts attempting to gain a perspective of the entire decentralization process.

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