

Book Reviews

DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-SUHARTO INDONESIA. *Edited by Marco Bünte and Andreas Ufen.* London and New York: Routledge, 2008. xix, 323 pp. (Tables.) US\$150.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-415-43893-3.

This is one of the most comprehensive and well-edited collections of readings on Indonesian politics that I have come across. The volume is almost as diverse and complex as the society it endeavours to explain. The book is international in character, with German connections, written in near flawless English, mostly by Europeans with good Indonesian language skills and demonstrated knowledge of the Indonesian and international scholarly debates about what has been achieved and what remains to be done in democratizing Indonesia.

There is space here for only a few comments and criticisms. Therefore, what I propose to do is to challenge one of the key concepts, democratic transition, that guides the authors' vision of Indonesian politics and political change.

First, I should point out that democratic transition is an essentially contestable social construct. As a social construct the idea of democratic transition suggests that there are various obstacles that societies need to overcome and various stages they must pass through along the path to democracy. It is essentially contestable, which means that it is impossible to conclusively prove or refute. An example would be that Indonesia should be given a score of 8 and Thailand 7 (out of 10) on an index of social capital. People may agree or disagree about either the relative merit of the various indicators used to measure social capital or the decision about Indonesia or Thailand's score for each indicator, or both the merit of indicator and the assigned scores. For two decades or more Thailand has been seen by almost everyone as the most consolidated democracy in Southeast Asia. Now it is at best considered a partial democracy not consolidated at all.

What follows is a criticism of the lens or filters through which the editors and authors are inclined to view the Indonesian political economy. I argue that like all good authors this lot has been able to squint and see well beyond the limitations of their approach.

Definitions of transition include a process or period in which something undergoes a change and passes from one state, stage, form or activity to another and a change between phases such as solid to liquid or liquid to gas. The core word "transit" is defined as the act of travelling or being transported through or across an area or from one place to another or a particular route or method used in travelling through or across an area. Thus we have transit lounges at airports for people who at least think they know their destination, their flight number and their route.

My contention is that we need to be careful about assuming too much and particularly about assuming that Indonesia will follow, must follow or even should follow, a particular path toward democratization, development

or regime change. Neither democratization experts (such as Larry Diamond) nor specialists in Indonesian politics (such as R William Liddle or Don Emmerson) nor, for that matter, Indonesia's own political leaders and civil society activists can tell us—beyond a reasonable doubt—which “stage” or “transit lounge” Indonesia and its people are “waiting in” or passing through, or what needs to be done to become “modern” or “democratic” which usually turns out to mean a bit more like north-western Europe—or the US or Japan—in the twenty-first century.

It seems unwise then, or at least immodest, to propose what kind of transition Indonesia—a nation of 232 million people living in more than 471 districts and cities across 13,000 islands with one of the most diverse populations on the planet—is having or whether it is stuck in a “pre-transition phase.” I don't have a problem with advising Indonesians in or out of government about development strategy and about the likelihood that particular political party systems, constitutions, electoral laws and legal systems will have certain effects. However, that advice needs to be tempered by the realization that the histories, cultures, governments, institutions and civil society organizations of the West and the rest of the world can provide more lessons about what has been done badly elsewhere than suggestions about how to make sustainable development work in Indonesia.

As we learn more about local state–society relations in neo-patrimonial *kabupaten* (district) Indonesia we will be better positioned to see where the regime is going. I am not as concerned about whether we label Indonesia as a “low-quality democracy” a “partial democracy” or a “neo-patrimonial regime” as I am about the need for further studies of local governance. This volume, like works edited by Aspinall, Warren and vanKlinken, is a good beginning.

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THE ANXIETIES OF MOBILITY: Migration and Tourism in the Indonesian Borderlands. By *Johan A. Lindquist*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. viii, 193 pp. (B&W photos.) US\$22.00, paper. ISBN 978-0-8248-3315-2.

Johan A. Lindquist's lucidly written work is part of a new wave of ethnographic writing that approaches the complexities of globalization through the stories and experiences of the peoples whose lives it has touched. Like some other recent anthropological writings emerging from Southeast Asia, Lindquist relegates many of his theoretical engagements with others' work to endnotes, thereby keeping his prose flowing and accessible to general readers. His book offers textured portraits of the lives of working-class Indonesian migrants drawn to Batam, an island in the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle. He also spotlights the stories and experiences of working-