

THE INDONESIAN REVOLUTION: A REVIEW

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At a recent conference¹ Taufik Abdullah asked rhetorically "What is the difference between the Indonesian Revolution and Kentucky Fried Chicken?" The suggested parallel had immediate appeal for those familiar with the franchise system: a centrally conceived formula is made available to local entrepreneurs, who have freedom to innovate within the limits of the package, and exchange a proportion of their profits for the right to use the magic recipe. While no one took this joke too seriously, it did touch upon fundamental issues--the extent of central control and local obedience, the variable regional mixes of ingredients, and cost/benefit balance for head and branch offices, and the extent to which the parts formed a whole which could be analyzed as such.

These questions are basic to Audrey Kahin's *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity*,² for while the individual chapters can be read with great profit as contributions to local history, the book itself also addresses the issue of national unity within the Revolution. Aware from her own research in Minangkabau that general images of the Revolution, derived from the "national" level, did not fit local experience, Kahin organized a discussion of regional revolutions, which in turn led to this collection. Here I will consider the individual essays first, before turning to a discussion of the general questions raised by the book as a whole.

After a short "Introduction" by Kahin reviewing political events in the first half of the twentieth century, Part One, "Regions Free of External Authority," presents two essays on Java and one on Aceh. Anton Lucas's "The Tiga Daerah: Social Revolution or Rebellion" (on Brebes, Pematang, and Tegal) and Michael Williams's "Banten: Rice Debts Will Be Repaid with Rice, Blood Debts with Blood" both examine polarized local situations where a coalition of bandits, Islam, and Communists clashed with a Republican center (politicians and army) concerned with law, order, and a respectable international image. Both areas felt geographically and culturally isolated from the center, and were strongly hostile to the bureaucratic state and its representatives. Although each region had its special character (notably Banten's continuous tradition of rebellion and lack of a westernized intelligentsia), there are obvious parallels between the two, and these two clear and interesting essays provide a valuable insight into the political dynamics of rural Java.

1. "The Indonesian Revolution," a conference held in Utrecht, The Netherlands, June 17-20, 1986. Most of the papers have been published under the same title, and edited by J. van Goor, in the *Utrechtse Historische Cahiers*, jaargang 7 (1986), nr. 2/3.

2. Audrey R. Kahin, ed., *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

Eric Morris's "Aceh: Social Revolution and the Islamic Vision" emphasizes that, for the powerful *ulama* of Aceh, politics was a means to a religious end. He outlines the conflicts leading to the victory of the religious leaders over the territorial colonial chiefs or *uleebalang*. This victory was based on Aceh's cohesive nationalist leadership, deriving from a firmly grounded Islamic ideology and organizational roots going back through the 1930s. This is in remarkable, even painful, contrast to the following essay, Michael van Langenberg's "East Sumatra: Accommodating an Indonesian Nation within a Sumatran Residency," the first of two papers in "Part Two: Battlegrounds for Competing States."

Although adjacent to Aceh, East Sumatra was very different indeed: a multi-ethnic plantation area, exploited by European capital in alliance with well-rewarded "traditional" chiefs and Sultans. Once state control slackened, inter-ethnic tensions and class conflicts burst bloodily into the open. But whereas in Aceh the victors were able to create a relatively strong and unchallenged rural political organization, East Sumatra was divided between warlords and factions; by 1950 the army had taken over from the shattered colonial system to provide the main framework for stability.

Audrey R. Kahin's "West Sumatra: Outpost of the Republic" takes us another step to the south; here again the difference with East Sumatra is marked. After an initial year of chaos, the Minangkabau achieved a fairly stable revolutionary climate: loyal to the Republic, drawing its cohesion from an internal balance between adat, Islam, and intellectuals, the strength of the village, and political traditions of consensus, as well as from such circumstances as the strong Minangkabau representation in the central elite and a relatively positive political and military legacy from the Japanese occupation.

The third Part of the book is concerned with "Regions of Dutch Dominance," and opens with Robert Cribb's "Jakarta: Cooperation and Resistance in an Occupied City." Cribb considers both the city and region of Jakarta, so encompassing such diverse centers of resistance as the symbolically important (if often ineffectual) Balai Agung, the town's Republican government, as well as the guerrilla warfare in Krawang. Like other areas, Jakarta experienced a heady, and violent, beginning to the Revolution, but from early 1946 on a peaceful Jakarta suited both Republic and Allies.

Barbara Harvey's "South Sulawesi: Puppets and Patriots" begins with the paradox that the region was both the site of the most fierce resistance to the Dutch outside the Republic, and was also the center of the strongest of the Dutch-sponsored federalist states, the NIT (Negara Indonesia Timur, State of East Indonesia). Here, as in Jakarta, urban institutional politics contrasted with rural violence, which in South Sulawesi was particularly bitter, as aristocratic rivals allied with the Netherlands or the Republic fought their unequal battle. Here too the Dutch counterrevolution reached the level of a calculated campaign of terror, leaving a blood-stained legacy to fuel future turmoil.

In Ambon, the last area to be discussed, the violent heritage of the Revolution emerged, ironically, in the Netherlands, where the heirs to the anti-Republican RMS continued their campaign for independence. In his "Ambon: Not a Revolution but a Counter Revolution" Richard Chauvel describes how the beneficiaries of colonial rule--the Christians, soldiers, and raja elite--were unable to defeat the Republic in elections, while on the other hand the unfocused popular support for the Republic was too organizationally weak to establish a clear predominance. Ultimately it was the soldiers who violently swung the balance against the unitary state of Indonesia; however, their brief period of power ended with three months' bloody warfare and incorporation into the Republic.

These eight essays are all of a high standard, using original source material (in most cases combining archive work with extensive interviewing) and placing complex events in both their political and social contexts. The publishers have also done their job well, producing a well-designed volume, with clear and useful maps, chapter bibliographies, and index; a general bibliography and photographs would have been welcome, if not essential. There is no doubt that this book will be used extensively, both for its cumulative insight into the local dynamics of the Revolution, and for its excellent introductions to the individual histories of the regions covered.

But the book is more than a collection of local studies, and in her interesting "Overview" Audrey Kahin considers the lessons to be drawn from the case studies. She concludes that the most important determinants of the course of the revolutions were "the relationship of the strongest political and social groups in the region to the local power-holders and the interaction of both with the Republican or colonial authorities at higher levels of government" (p. 265). She then reviews the papers grouped in each Part, noting similarities and differences. In four areas (Tiga Daerah, Banten, Aceh, and North Sumatra) the state was temporarily overthrown, while Jakarta, South Sulawesi, and West Sumatra were more stable; the two first under Allied/Dutch control, the last Republican. Kahin considers also the complex relationship between local and central aims, concluding that "In essence, we have been concerned with a series of largely autonomous regional revolutions in pursuit of a common formal goal . . . virtually all the major actors . . . saw their activities . . . as coinciding with, and an integral part of, a country-wide revolutionary process through which an Indonesia, independent of Western power and in tune with what they perceived as indigenous Indonesian cultural and religious values, would emerge" (p. 282).

Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution reflects the current state of Indonesian history writing. The essays reveal the awareness that an Indonesian perspective is appropriate, they combine colonial sources with local insights, and stress the constraints imposed by social structure and international politics. Given that the writers had less than thirty pages each to introduce their region and to explain and assess the complex events of a traumatic time, both editor and authors can be proud of the results. But at the same time, a feeling persists that this could have been a more challenging book, had it confronted some of the historiographical problems which accompany such themes as center-local relations in a time of political upheaval.

Anyone writing history has to make certain choices as to perspective, category sets, and units of analysis. In many cases choice is structured by external factors--the length of a grant, the organization of an archive--but also by convention. It is interesting to consider some of the implications of the choices made in this book, not because they are in any way invalid, but because such a consideration helps us understand the frameworks within which we work. First I will briefly look at "region" and "the revolution" as units of analysis; secondly at some biases which can be caused by our conceptual vocabulary; and thirdly at the logic behind the division of the book into its three parts.

Much of the tension in discussion on the Indonesian Revolution is generated by the question of the regions' relative autonomy, the extent to which they had, and could pursue, their own aims. Was there, in fact, "a national revolution," uniting all areas, or was there simply a miscellany of local outbursts, capitalized upon (and often repressed) by the small Westernized elite in its

pursuit of recognition and power?³ Was this "national" revolution nourished or undermined by local initiatives? And vice versa?

In most cases, the debate focuses upon opposition, on center versus region. But center and region are often defined by the connection between them; indeed, a region is usually conceived of as subject to a center. The relationship between them is thus seen as hierarchical, an assumption which is strengthened when "regions" are given the boundaries of subordinate administrative units, such as the colonial residency. Against this background, it is understandable that the unequal power relations between local and central forces receive particular attention, as the capital opposes the centrifugal forces which threaten the state, while local groups struggle to maximize their autonomy.

In a revolutionary situation, such tensions are at their highest; existing hostilities are clearly revealed, and as polarization continues, new enmities emerge and the society is riven as accommodations and compromise collapse. Thus, on the one hand, a revolution reveals much, but it also presents a heightened view of the divisions in society. Choosing "the Revolution," 1945-49, as a time-frame, has thus both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, once the repressive cover of the state is removed, all sorts of forces break loose, so that trends obscured in calmer days are at last revealed. But, on the other hand, the situation is in many ways "abnormal," favoring the predominance of certain sorts of power and ideology, so that groups which may usually be marginal to a society can briefly occupy center stage. When placed in a longer perspective, both the continuities and aberrations in the revolutionary situation become more visible. Structural changes underlying social tensions emerge, and subsequent developments (such as regional rebellions) can suggest the relative significance of revolutionary events. The authors in this collection have done their best to place their revolutions in perspective, but the restricted space available permits no more than brief comment.

The lines of conflict between center and regions are clear enough, but can be over emphasized. The unity of the Revolution is more elusive; it can be sought either (as in this book, for example) by collecting common factors within the regions (bandits, army, Islam), thus demonstrating similarities, or else by concentrating upon the actual links connecting regions with each other and the center. While it seems clear that most of the state's integrating mechanisms had broken down, economic interdependence, ideological and personal ties continued to cut across boundaries. If research was directed towards the tracing of vertical or cross-residency connections we could gain a valuable additional perspective. Possible examples could be smuggling rings, currency questions, Chinese or Minangkabau circles, the remnants of established institutions (from policemen and lawyers to schoolboys and trade-unions), communications media, and the personal patron-client networks of leading politicians. If we investigated the "interface" between region and center, and region and region, the extent and nature of integration would be clearer.

The last example given above, politicians as patrons, can serve to illustrate my second point. One of the most useful and general distinctions used in talking about the Indonesian Revolution as a whole is that between "diplomasi" and "perjuangan" (struggle), that is, between the need to gain international support, which entailed the presentation of an acceptable (anti-Communist) image, and the fervent desire to pursue the revolution with an uncompromising

3. A. J. S. Reid, in his "The Revolution in Regional Perspective," published in van Goor, *Indonesian Revolution*, pp. 183-200, stresses "the extraordinary unifying power of the national revolution."

purity, until the Dutch (and in many cases the colonial/feudal society) were gone; at its most extreme, "perjuangan" merged with the social revolutions. The epitome of "diplomasi" were the pragmatic central politicians, while the informal guerrilla bands of the countryside embodied "struggle."

The style of "diplomasi" seemed to dominate the center, "perjuangan" many of the regions. We tend to place each in what is seen as its appropriate cultural and political context: the center is associated with rational political strategists, rural regions with Oriental bandits, spontaneous guerrillas, and extreme ideologies. We also tend to ask different sorts of questions about the aims and social bases of each, which can lead to self-fulfilling hypotheses. The result is that we know relatively little about the actual mechanics of the elite's power base, and so might be missing similarities and connections between various levels within the revolutionary forces. Was elite influence derived from an "Emperor's Clothes" syndrome, based on ideological hegemony alone, or was it based on more substantial organizations? If we knew more of the connections between figures such as Sutan Sjahrir or the intriguing Tan Malaka with elite factions and local leaders, or if we could trace the lines of Republican intelligence and patronage, then we would better understand the sources of their power, and hence also the relationship center-region.

In *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution* Kahin groups the eight case studies into three parts, according to the extent of external control. Thus, the common denominator between Banten, Aceh, and the Tiga Daerah is their "freedom" from this control; East and West Sumatra, on the other hand, are contested areas, while the Dutch had the upper hand in Jakarta, Sulawesi Selatan, and Ambon. The crucial variable is held to be the extent to which the Dutch could reestablish themselves. However, their priorities and assessment of what was possible (and hence their policy) during the Revolution reflected the degree and nature of their prewar involvement, an involvement which, in its turn, was a major source of social and political tension, division, and bitter competition within the Indonesian communities affected. The relative urgency of Dutch aims and the resilience of local societies interacted to determine the extent of Dutch control during 1945-49, which was thus both a product of, and a factor in, the development of regional politics.

When reading the eight essays in this book one is struck by the incongruity of some combinations within the parts. Aceh and West Sumatra seem so different from the Java cases and the chaos of East Sumatra, yet had a certain stability and clarity in common. As Kahin notes, the towns (such as Makassar, Jakarta, and Medan) shared certain characteristics, but there were also similarities between Krawang (seen here as part of Jakarta) and the situations described by Lucas. The differences are not attributable to anything as simple as the length of Dutch rule (compare Aceh and South Sulawesi, both twentieth century conquests), but rather to the extent to which a relatively integrated society had been created, with an ideological coherence that could provide a basis for compromise if not consensus. Aceh and West Sumatra had been tempered in the fire of long wars against the Dutch, and each had acknowledged leaders and common political values. South Sulawesi had also experienced a violent anti-colonial struggle, and had retained her own political dynamic; but in her rural areas this was based on competition for status and family conflict, which were exacerbated by Dutch manipulations. This fragmentation, combined with the strong Netherlands' commitment to the NIT, led to South Sulawesi becoming "a region of Dutch dominance."

In trying to understand the regional dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution it might have been useful to give more emphasis to the nature of the local

political dynamic and its social roots (which Kahin does consider in her "Overview") rather than the more short-term variable of external control. In that case, the case studies would have been grouped somewhat differently. Selection of the units for analysis could also have been more critical, concentrating on regions as defined by their patterns of interaction and behavior rather than following the convenient residency borders. The very attempt to map out politically relevant boundaries would be fascinating, leading to an examination of local cultural identities and social relationships. A comparison of towns could be interesting, or of the ways in which colonial territorial officials tried to mobilize their followings (for example, Acehnese *uleebalang*, or local *Karaeng* in South Sulawesi, or Javanese *bupati*), or of the ideological content of Islam in various regions.

Among recent works on European history there have been some almost literary attempts to recreate corners of lost worlds, thereby revealing their "realities." National political chronology and the activities of recognized institutions become marginal, the experience and perceptions of ordinary people central. While such a past may appear formless, the detail is in fact embedded in deeper and evolving structures. The combination of human detail, slow processes of change, and skepticism towards formal attributions of significance are appealing, particularly when considering something as apparently anarchic and emotional as a revolution. We historians of Indonesia have a long way to go before we can afford to be dismissive of chronology or formal narrative, but this book is an indication of how far we have come already. The essays combine an awareness of structural change, an attempt to understand the human perspective, while at the same time they have to concentrate on establishing the basic chain of events and causation. All authors--and the editor--are to be congratulated upon their contributions, which together make a book which is accessible to the student, and thought provoking for the specialist.