

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EAST TIMOR

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George J. Aditjondro, *In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau: The Impact of the Occupation of East Timor*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Indonesian Documentation and Information Centre, 1994.

Amnesty International, *Power and Impunity: Human Rights Under the New Order*. London: Amnesty International, 1994.

Human Rights Watch/Asia, *The Limits of Openness: Human Rights in Indonesia and East Timor*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch/Asia provide a valuable service to observers of current Indonesian politics and to political activists both in Indonesia and abroad. They prepare detailed and reliable reports of violations of human rights, mostly by the government, but also by opposition groups such as Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh), the OPM (Free Papua Organization), and Fretilin or the CNRM (National Council of Maubere Resistance) in East Timor.

Power and Impunity and *The Limits of Openness* are summary volumes released shortly before US President Clinton's visit to Jakarta to attend the November 1994 summit of APEC (Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation). They are clearly designed to have an impact on that visit by raising public awareness in the West in general, and in the United States in particular, of the extent and seriousness of human rights violations by the Soeharto government. *Power and Impunity* is also available in ten languages, including Indonesian, and has presumably been distributed in Indonesia. *The Limits of Openness* was written by Sidney Jones and edited by Michael McClintock. No author is given for *Power and Impunity*.

The argument of the two volumes is remarkably similar. They both assert that violations are serious and frequent, that they have continued throughout the New Order from its bloody inception in 1965–66 to the present, and that the root cause of the problem is the arbitrariness of a regime based on an all-powerful military. In the words of the Amnesty report:

The armed forces, and particularly military intelligence and counter-insurgency units, have enormous influence. Counter-insurgency strategies in Indonesia entail both

deliberate and unintended violations of human rights. The President and the executive have virtually absolute power which is used arbitrarily, without any effective domestic check. Ideological conformity is enforced at gunpoint. The legal system reflects and reinforces executive and military power, and the judiciary is neither independent nor impartial. (p. 3)

The Limits of Openness states that it is "the arbitrary exercise of power . . . more than anything else, that affects Indonesia's human rights practices. . . . [Human rights violations] are fundamentally caused by a government that is not accountable for wrongdoing and a legal system riven by corruption and political pressure." (p. 2)

Power and Impunity also explicitly faults the international community for deliberately acquiescing in human rights abuses. During the Cold War, perceptions of Indonesia's strategic location astride critical sea lanes combined with its economic potential for foreigners (the country is "a vast store of natural resources and a huge supply of cheap labour") to produce a Western, and particularly United States', policy of support for the Soeharto government regardless of its human rights record. In the post-Cold War world more attention is paid to human rights, but Western governments still sell arms, provide large quantities of economic assistance, and turn away refugees from Indonesian repression. Finally, the international community has focused almost exclusively on East Timor, especially since the Santa Cruz massacre of 1991, and hardly notices equally serious violations elsewhere.

Both reports conclude with similar recommendations. *Power and Impunity* lists thirty-two recommendations directed at the government of Indonesia and at United Nations member states. The former are divided into three groups: nine intended to redress past or continuing violations, ten to prevent the occurrence of future violations, and five to demonstrate Indonesia's commitment to the promotion of human rights. *The Limits of Openness* lists eight recommendations to the Soeharto government and seven to the international community. Examples include urging Soeharto to issue a public statement outlawing the use of torture, to ban interrogation in military commands, to release prisoners arrested for non-violent beliefs and activities, and to repeal laws and regulations that restrict basic freedoms. On the international side, the Consultative Group on Indonesia is counseled to tie human rights to aid, APEC members are requested to express concern over rights violations, foreign companies are asked to make rights "a key element of corporate responsibility," and the US Trade Representative is told to return to the early Clinton administration policy of closely monitoring labor rights practices.

There are two major differences between *The Limits of Openness* and *Power and Impunity*, one in content and one in tone. The evidence in *The Limits of Openness* consists of a series of six recent cases of flagrant abuse: the government's closure in June 1994 of the weekly news-magazines *Tempo* and *Editor* and the opinion tabloid *DeTik*; the case of Marsinah, an East Java labor organizer who was brutally murdered in May 1993; workers' demonstrations in Medan in April 1994, which ended in race riots; military intervention against workers at a plywood mill in West Kalimantan in April and May 1994; military intervention from 1992 to the present in North Sumatra in a conflict between two factions in Indonesia's largest Protestant church, the HKBP; and the 1993 killings of villagers protesting the construction of the Nipah Dam in Madura. The book also has chapters on the human rights situation in East Timor in 1994 and on the activities of the new government-created National Human Rights Commission.

Power and Impunity is organized differently. A background chapter on the history of repression is followed by thematic treatments of: armed opposition and counterinsurgency in

East Timor, Aceh, and Irian Jaya; judicial repression; extrajudicial execution; torture and ill-treatment; political imprisonment; the death penalty; and human rights initiatives undertaken by the Indonesian government.

The evidence presented in both books strongly supports the argument of serious, systematic, and continuing violations caused by an all-powerful military. But I was more persuaded, or perhaps just more moved, by the Human Rights Watch version. Sidney Jones is a brilliant reporter, skilled in organizing a complex narrative of events as they appeared to the participants and in assessing the proximate causes of those events. Most importantly, she has the good reporter's eye for the telling detail, the specific incident that most effectively displays her larger point. For example, the chapter on military intervention in North Sumatran church politics begins with a powerful account of the torture in May 1994 in Tarutung of four church activists arrested for holding an illegal meeting to discuss church affairs. The whole intervention story, from its beginning in 1992 until today, is an absurdity worthy of a Putu Wijaya play, a case of unaccountable political power serving no possible national security interest and truly running amuck. Jones' graphic description of what happened to the activists in their cells makes it crystal clear just how devastating to ordinary citizens the consequences of that unaccountability can be.

The difference in tone between the two books is small but real. *The Limits of Openness* is a bit more balanced, less judgmental, less tendentious in its overall view of the New Order. The stance of *Power and Impunity* is apparent in its very first sentence, which claims that a "military coup" brought the New Order to power in 1965. This argument is developed further in the historical chapter, where the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) is absolved from any responsibility for the October 1, 1965 murder of six senior generals. "Although a handful of PKI leaders may have been aware of the plan, historical evidence shows that the vast majority of PKI members and supporters had no knowledge of it, and played no role in it." (p. 16) While the main body of this sentence is undoubtedly true, the initial clause is an awkward attempt at sidestepping the still unresolved and highly contentious issue of just how deeply Communist leaders were involved. The effect is to raise—unnecessarily, since the evidence of current government violations of human rights is so overwhelming—a question about *a priori* bias on the part of the author. By contrast, *The Limits of Openness* sticks to the present and leans over backward at several points to give the Indonesian government credit for positive actions. Nothing in its argument diminishes the force of the book's negative conclusions.

Finally, both of these books share flaws common to the human rights literature. They are at best only partial guides to action, either by Indonesians or by foreigners who want to influence the policies of their own or of the Indonesian government. Their arguments and evidence need to be put in two larger contexts, one that connects their concluding recommendations to some theory or understanding of how the world works politically, and one that relates human rights policy to other government policies, particularly with regard to the economy and social welfare.

In both studies, the plausibility gap between description of the human rights situation and the recommendations, particularly those addressed to the Indonesian government, is glaring. Do the authors of either report really believe that the Soeharto government, as they have described it (and as it in fact is), is likely to begin doing the opposite of what it has been doing for nearly thirty years? Will the armed forces give up their interests and values, or their monopoly over the use of coercion to achieve them? What changes in circumstances or motivations, or what new political calculations might make this a realistic possibility? Are the authors really hoping for a democratic revolution, since only a democratic govern-

ment is truly likely to reform the New Order's human rights practices? Nothing is said on these points, and the recommendations therefore appear highly unrealistic, an exercise in moralistic idealism.

Similarly, the authors of *Power and Impunity* and *The Limits of Openness* do not attempt to relate the New Order's repressive human rights policy to its economic and social welfare policies that have produced a quarter century of steady growth, structural transformation from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy, a new middle class, and declining poverty. Their implicit position is either morally absolutist, assuming that human rights matter above all else, or compartmentalizing, assuming that policy arenas can be treated as though one did not affect another. Neither position seems to me sustainable. To be sure, there can be no acceptable justification, in terms of modern Indonesian as well as modern Western values, for most of the behavior described in these studies. Moreover, after reading of so many incidents of killing, torture, false arrest and imprisonment from Sabang to Merauke, it is hard to talk about a bigger picture in which human rights policy is only one element interacting with others. Nonetheless, it is necessary to do so.

What if, for example, armed forces' authoritarianism were simultaneously a necessary condition for continued economic growth and an inevitable source of human rights violations? Further, what if authoritarianism were temporary, required for only another twenty years or so until, along the lines of Korea and Taiwan, a modern social consensus is established and the civilian middle class grows strong enough to take over? That is, in fact, the argument made today by many conservative Indonesians, and it is echoed in the academic theories of scholars as penetrating and as different as Samuel Huntington and Barrington Moore. There may be empirically sounder and more morally satisfying frameworks that persuasively link a democratic government or at least a more pro-human rights one to the requirements of development, but there is no hint of them in either of these reports.

Having raised these questions, let me quickly return to my starting point. These are summary reports of hardly more than 100 pages each, compiled by human rights organizations in the heat of a struggle for attention from the international community. We should therefore be grateful for the high quality information and analysis they contain, and not ask their authors to solve all the problems of Indonesian development.

George Aditjondro, the author of *In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau*, is himself a victim of government repression. A lecturer at the private Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW) in Salatiga, Central Java, he is one of a very few Indonesians who combine academic social science training and skills, first hand knowledge of East Timor, and a willingness to speak out on behalf of the East Timorese. Of this very small group, he is the only one, to my knowledge, who also publicly rejects his government's claim that the East Timorese freely chose integration with Indonesia in 1975–76. So far, the price of this apostasy has been relatively low—stones thrown at his house and other forms of *teror mental*—perhaps because of his high international visibility.

In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau contains an introductory historical survey written by the Dutch editor, Rudie Trienes, and three connected Aditjondro essays, originally prepared for a seminar, a conference, and a course all held at UKSW between 1992 and 1994. The first essay describes the culture and ecology of East Timor, which Aditjondro argues are much more diverse than the culture and ecology of West Timor. Analysis of the impact of the Indonesian occupation must take this diversity into account. He also shows that the cultures of the two halves of the island overlap to some extent but have a number of distinctive features as well. His political point is that the legitimacy of the East Timorese demand for

independence must be judged, not on purported cultural similarities or differences, but rather on the desires of the East Timorese themselves.

The next two essays are the heart of the book. They chronicle five environmental problems confronting the people of East Timor: the environmental consequences of the war; the impact of the division of land, both before and during the occupation, into large tracts controlled by absentee owners; the effects of the transmigration program and of spontaneous migration; the repercussions of the Indonesian army's program of housing construction; and the potential impact of petroleum exploitation in the Timor Gap.

The consequences of the war include human casualties, which by 1979 in Aditjondro's estimate may have totaled 300,000 (p. 39), the high cost of maintaining the Indonesian army in East Timor, the decline in agricultural production and numbers of livestock, and social and psychological problems, such as the fostering of a culture of violence among the East Timorese themselves and the sexual harassment of local women by Indonesian troops. The section on ownership of productive resources and the export economy contains a useful table listing military-controlled companies and their monopolistic activities in coffee, sea-freight, tourism, retail sales, sandalwood oil, marble, hotels, a cinema, and civil engineering. Aditjondro argues that, while it is true that billions of *rupiah* have been pumped into East Timor by the Jakarta government's development programs, billions more have been sucked out by these companies.

In at least two districts, the official transmigration program has had the effect of dispossessing East Timorese from their land and also of attracting the spontaneous migration of Tetun-speaking West Timorese, who intensify the competition for scarce agricultural and other resources. The forced village resettlement program of the late 1970s led to the deaths of many East Timorese, who were given insufficient land to farm, and has left an ugly monument in the form of row upon row of disused non-traditional houses along the main roads. Aditjondro projects that drilling in the Timor Gap will have further negative consequences for the East Timorese, who are disadvantaged in many ways to compete in the coming scramble.

Two additional chapters describe conflicts between the Catholic church in East Timor and the Indonesian government, and compare East Timor's social and economic condition with that of other former Portuguese colonies. Church concerns have included the destruction of Catholic religious symbols, the closing of the Portuguese-language high school, government-controlled disbursement of famine relief, a range of violations of human rights, the radical change in legal status of church lands from ownership to use-only, the government's family planning program, and military manipulation of traditional cultural and religious ceremonies. In the comparison with other former Portuguese colonies, Aditjondro writes that "the condition of those not bordering upon aggressive and expansionist neighbours is far better than that of East Timor." (p. 77) In a brief final chapter, he calls upon his government to accept the East Timorese independence movement's call for a United Nations-supervised referendum.

The editor's introduction to *In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau* claims that its principal value lies in an original treatment of the "ecocidal onslaught" conducted by the Indonesian government against the people of East Timor. Aditjondro himself, as we have seen, stresses the environmental impact of the occupation, an issue with which he has been concerned in his writings about Irian Jaya and other parts of Indonesia as well. To my mind, however, his book's considerable merit lies elsewhere. It is a powerful personal witness, a first hand, succinct but comprehensive, account by a thoughtful Indonesian scholar distressed and

angered by his government's denial of the right to independence of a small and nearly defenseless neighbor. As such, it is another stone—and a rather large one—placed on the pro-referendum side of the scale in the ongoing struggle for the future of East Timor.